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Use the *academic address* when writing about **salt control**—see the panel on page 4.

## Your herb garden needs lovage

By guest contributor Dr Trevor Beard, Menzies Research Institute, Hobart

Salt skippers with a herb garden have several good reasons for growing lovage:

- it adds an aromatic savoury and slightly salty flavour to low salt foods;
- you can only get it if you grow your own—which is very easy;
- it's a hardy pest-free deep-rooted perennial needing little if any attention except adequate water, and thrives from Hobart to the sub-tropics.

### Seeds and seedlings

Plant nurseries and weekend outdoor markets sell potted seedlings in spring and early summer.

Buy one seedling and don't take any notice of books that tell you to buy seeds because they are not only hard to get (except by mail order), but a whole family needs only a single lovage plant—a perennial that may reach a height of 2 metres when well established in a good position.

It dies down every winter and disappears completely, so it needs a stake or a wire tree-guard to remind you never to use a spade at that spot. Next spring it returns vigorously, often with a small crop of seedlings that can be potted and given to friends.

It grows well in a large pot if you have a spot in full sun close to the kitchen door.

The leaves are used (finely chopped or minced), also the seeds and sometimes the root. Recipes are on this page and page 4. The leaves closely resemble celery leaves, to which the plant is closely related, and even the aroma is similar.

To get seeds cheaply for cooking you have to harvest your own, but they are large and easy to collect, and a teaspoonful of seeds goes a long way.

A salt skipper told me she forgot she had planted a lovage seedling until one day she noticed a vigorous new plant, about twice the height of the rhubarb.

Recognising the leaf, she tried it in a soup that needed more flavour. The result gave lovage a permanent place in her garden.

Hobart is home to a fairly large post-war migration of Dutch people, many of whom grow lovage and call it "the Maggi herb", as Maggi soup cubes have a similar flavour. The Maggi company will not confirm the source of the flavour (which is also very salty).

### A good canned soup recipe

1 can Heinz Big Red SR tomato soup  
1 canful of stock made with Salt Skip LS stock powder, or left-over vegetables or pumpkin or sweet potato to the volume of one can when blended  
1 can Coles NAS beetroot, with juice  
1 can NAS chopped tomatoes  
½ Tbs (10 mL) lovage seeds (optional)

Blend in a blender or food processor; add the whole contents of 1 can of Woolworths Select NAS lentils without blending. Serve hot. Any soup left over freezes well.

# Giving the food industry a fair go

Our last two issues (160 and 161) will give new readers “the story so far”. If you can’t get hard copies click [Newsletters](#) in [www.saltmatters.org](http://www.saltmatters.org). We now report that the government has invited submissions from the public to a *Food Labelling Law & Policy Review*. Three co-authors—Dr Trevor Beard (University of Tasmania), Professor Stewart Truswell (Sydney University) and Professor Michael Stowasser (University of Queensland) have said the food industry should be given a fair go. Here is an outline of our argument.

## **The three MUSTS**

- we MUST control preventable epidemics—obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and its complications (heart disease, stroke and kidney failure)—because obesity and type 2 diabetes *are commoner now than ever before* [1].
- we MUST have mandatory amber and green traffic light labels as soon as possible;
- but we MUST give the food industry a fair go (all the time they need to qualify for amber before throwing red lights at them).

## **The Kellogg revolt was understandable**

The UK government delivered two draconian threats to Kellogg (UK) in 2005 [2]:

- a red light for salt that would damage the image of corn flakes—advertised for over a century as “healthy”;
- a sudden stop to most of the company’s advertising if foods with red lights could not be promoted to children on prime-time TV.

In the breathing space while traffic lights were still voluntary the company seized the opportunity to invent an elaborate substitute front-of-pack label with no red lights, which the food industry has vigorously promoted in Europe and Australia.

The tidal wave of understandable revolt reached Australia, and the local food industry wants the government to settle a win-lose contest between the two main candidates for an FOP (Front-of-Pack) label:

- the evidence-based traffic light label [3, 4];
- the food industry’s substitute, known here as the %DI (Percentage Daily Intake).

A win-lose contest would look winnable because this enormous industry is a major employer of voters, a massive contributor to the national economy, and would be making the attractive offer of a front-of pack label already in wide use and available at no cost to the government.

The food industry’s substitute gives the Australian government a political dilemma.

## **The government’s political dilemma**

- the composition of modern processed foods requires drastic improvement [5, 6];
- drastic improvements will need the willing collaboration of the food industry for decades;
- losing traffic lights would rob us of the best evidence-based FOP label [3, 4];
- but lasting resentment over the early introduction of red traffic lights would damage good relations with an industry from which we will need decades of cooperation;
- reformulation of products to avoid red lights is expensive, time-consuming and risky;
- the industry needs time to produce marketable foods that would avoid red traffic lights;
- so mandatory red traffic lights at present would admittedly be premature.

## **Medicine needs green/amber lights**

Can you imagine the Heart Foundation asking the food industry to accept a “Cross” on foods not good enough for a “Tick”?

And would the “Tick” be any more effective if the foods not good enough for a “Tick” were given a mandatory “Cross”?

The Heart Foundation *Guide to management of hypertension 2008* asks doctors to prescribe *low-salt and reduced-salt* foods [7], requiring *green and amber traffic lights* for salt—a golden opportunity for a revolution in medical prescribing. Doctors could prescribe precisely the right food in one sentence:

*“You can eat any fresh food if you add no salt, but don’t touch processed foods unless they have a green or amber light for salt”.*

Those simple words would get measurable results, enabling many patients to stop their medication and others to reduce the dose, side effects—and cost—of medication [7, 8].

Doctors could get all the advantages of traffic lights if only green and amber lights were mandatory, while red lights remained voluntary.

# The food industry would win five times

## First win-win suggestion

A decade should be long enough for reformulation to save many foods permanently from red lights—especially the popular breakfast cereals. White (colourless) lights during the voluntary period would indicate “work in progress” for a large number of foods, which could bring credit to companies making claims to that effect.

## Everyone would win

### 1. the food industry would win five times:

1. it would avoid red lights for a decade without gambling on a win-lose vote;
2. most foods that would already qualify for the Heart Foundation “Tick” would get the equivalent (three or four amber lights) free of charge;
3. the healthiest processed foods of all [6] would get a novel bonus—green lights, equivalent to double “Ticks” from the Heart Foundation—and the free advertisement they need and have always deserved;
4. unlike a single “Tick” for the whole product (which may contain compromises) amber and green lights would be awarded predictably with precision for each of the four individual nutrients known to be dangerous in excess;
5. red-light foods that have been advertised as “healthy” could avoid red lights permanently, because the 10-year voluntary period would be long enough to allow them all to be reformulated.

- **the government** would win—there would be no political dilemma.

- **modern medicine** would win—patients with hypertension (30% of Australian adults) could usually reduce and often remove their need for drugs by *simply abandoning the diet that raised their blood pressure* [7, 8], with great health and economic benefits, both for themselves and for the national health budget.

- **consumers** would win twice:

1. simple food labels would give all shoppers—even schoolchildren—clear and instantaneous guidance regardless of their age, education, income, literacy or eyesight;
2. “healthy” foods would be more truthfully advertised.

## Second win-win suggestion

The food industry could keep the %DI, but it would be mandatory to add the colours amber and/or green to correspond with the concentrations reported in the NIP for fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt. The red colour again would be voluntary.

The NIP (Nutrition Information Panel) would report *sodium* as usual—it targets health professionals and well-educated consumers (who remember enough of their school chemistry to know what *sodium* is).

But Front-of-Pack labels cater for shoppers and the %DI should be required to use the language of the target group—it should report *salt* instead of confusing them with *sodium*, a word many shoppers don’t understand and *will never need to understand*.

This requirement would be problem-free because the Food Standards Code defines low salt foods by their *sodium* content.

## Mutual commitment

The first 10 years could be spent building a close, collaborative partnership between the public and private sectors to tackle the huge, needless and expensive burden of preventable disease.

Gradual removal of the primary cause—industrial food processing—will demand a strong mutual commitment for decades.

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# More lovage recipes

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Salt Skip News will  
continue to be distributed  
in hard copy in The BP  
Monitor (QHA newsletter)

## ***Lovage pesto***

3 cups fresh lovage leaves  
2 cloves garlic  
4 Tbs pine nuts  
1 Tbs balsamic vinegar (obligatory)\*  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup extra virgin olive oil

Blend all the ingredients together. Some palates may want 1–2 tsp of sugar to balance the vinegar. Store it in small jars in the fridge, where it will keep for a week or two.

The grittiness of salt in traditional basil pesto makes it easier to pound it into a paste with the traditional pestle and mortar, but a blender works equally well without any salt.

\*Note that traditional basil pesto has a salt content high enough to need no acid, but food regulations now require commercial producers to acidify foods when preserving them in oil without salt (for example add vinegar or lemon juice). This precaution prevents botulism, a form of food poisoning that is rare but dangerous and often fatal.

## ***Using finely chopped lovage and lovage pesto***

Lovage pesto is excellent in soups, gravies and salads, and makes a good filling for potatoes baked in their jackets. It can also replace Vegemite as a savoury spread on toast.

Jane Brown (Home Economist of the Salt Skip Program) uses lovage with fish, chicken and lamb—especially in Greek style marinades for kebabs—and in salads, herb breads and focaccia, scrambled egg, quiches and frittata, and in many soups. When you cook with lovage it doesn't need to be added late. In vegetarian recipes it adds the family of flavours you could otherwise get from soup bones and roast meat, and goes well with NAS sauerkraut (*Salt Matters* page 24).

## ***Carrot salad with lovage***

1 large carrot finely grated  
1 large peeled apple finely grated  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  Tbs (10 mL) finely chopped lovage or  
lovage pesto  
100 mL low fat yoghurt  
50 mL Mayvers LS mayonnaise  
lettuce leaves for serving  
1 white onion peeled and sliced

Mix the first five ingredients and serve  
on lettuce leaves with onion rings.

## ***Lovage during the winter***

Lovage is a godsend for the salt skippers who feel deprived at first—feeling they have lost nearly all the savoury dishes. It is therefore lucky we can do something about the complete disappearance of fresh lovage during the winter.

One answer is to harvest as many seeds as possible, and the other is to dry a supply of fresh leaves. They dry well and keep a light green colour in a very slow oven or dehydrator.

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