



This week I'm mostly exercised by food miles. I don't specifically mean the amount of CO₂ emitted by flying food from far-flung places to our tables here in the UK – although, to be honest, I thought The Flying Horse was a pub.

No, I'm more concerned about the distances being clocked up by TV chefs in the pursuit of items of confectionery that would cause a nutritionist to cringe (and hit the chocolate, possibly).

For example, in the trail for United Cakes of America, his new series on the Good Food channel, James Martin says: "I've been consumed with two passions in my life: cakes and cars. And finally, I've found a way to combine the two..."

I've got a lot of admiration for James Martin; he is without doubt my favourite of all the celebrity chefs and given the fact he's a Yorkshireman, that is some accolade. His Saturday Kitchen programme showed me the error of my ways when roasting duck and allowed me to produce a bird that now draws compliments rather than criticism. I've even forgiven him for serving peas with Lancashire hotpot, despite the fact he admitted it was wrong in many ways.

However, James seems to have joined a growing trend among chef-ery in general to extol the virtues of anything gooey and full of calories. Even the people behind Comic Relief had a Bake-off, for Goodness' sake! And all this is at a time we are supposed to be in the grip of an obesity epidemic!

It must be the recession – we've got a modern version of the "Let them eat cake" epithet. I suppose it's preferable to bread and circuses, the kind with wild animals at least.

- Two issues that have been getting environmentalists of various persuasions hot under the collar recently have been the possibility that the production of biofuels could do more harm than good, and the issuing of patents for genetically modified animals. Browsing through the latest issue of the online public sector newsletter Science Omega I came across a story that could be good news on both fronts. Scientists in Sweden are claiming to have found a way of producing a hydrocarbon-like fuel, butanol, from genetically modified blue-green algae, known as cyanobacteria.

Although the goal of most environmentalists is to actually reduce the amount of energy being expended rather than replace one fuel with another – and any kind of genetic modification is anathema to some – the prospect of blue-green algae forming a major debating point in international energy politics is quite attractive.

- On St Patrick's Day, the world was awash with all things green – from lighting up buildings in Italy to the 'greened' London Eye and a competition run by Tourism Ireland. Completely co-incidentally, it seemed a very apt way to celebrate the 40th anniversary of what became the Green Party.

In 1973 the concept of environmentalism was still in its infancy in the public imagination. Ecology was a branch of biology (my late brother studied the subject as part of his degree) and the way to trade ethically was via the Whole Earth Catalog. As a fresh-faced radical teenager I was going to save the world by living in a squat in Wales.

So, happy birthday Green Party!

- Anyway; got to go now – I've got a lovely pie in the oven. What??

Chris Stokes