

by Rose Prince

I remember the event well. It was a debate in a packed hall. The audience, mainly food obsessives and the food press, were there to hear a debate on the pros and cons of organic food.

On the panel was Sir John Krebs, now Lord Krebs, head of the newly created Food Standards Agency, which had been established after British industrial farming and the then Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) shamed themselves over BSE. During this debate, Krebs made it clear that he could not see why organic food should be considered any better than non-organic. The audience clapped disapprovingly.

This was some 10 years ago and Krebs was out of line with a fast-developing trend. Since that time, the organic food sector in the UK has enjoyed extraordinary growth – an average of 26 per cent each year. Each of the big four supermarkets has embraced organic food, making it more affordable to the less well-off. Organic vegetable box schemes have taken off and natural food stores selling mainly organic produce, such as Fresh & Wild and Planet Organic, have thrived, mushrooming into chains. IKEA – and this is a little-known fact – is the latest buyer of organic ingredients, for its cafés.

So what has the Food Standards Agency got against the organic sector, to make it commission a review such as that published this week into the nutritional benefits of organic versus convention-



Consumers who have converted to organic will often report that they feel better for a diet of organic food, or that their children thrive on it.

Still better to buy organic

al food? Using analysis of some 50 years of research into organic food, the report's authors could find no reason, in nutritional terms, why anyone should buy organic rather than conventionally farmed foods.

Interestingly, nutrition is an aspect of organic

food that holds little interest for the Soil Association, the charity that campaigns for "planet-friendly" food and farming. It is more preoccupied with food production that promotes good standards of animal welfare, a chemical-free environment (clearly a human health benefit,

since no sensible person wants to ingest hormone disruptors) and the encouragement of larger areas of pasture. It has also campaigned vociferously against genetically modified food.

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Extract from coral helps nerve pain

A chemical extracted from coral could provide new hope for sufferers of chronic nerve pain, it has been claimed.

Neuropathic pain, which follows damage to the nerves, can be debilitating and is hard to control even with morphine.

It can result in the slightest disturbance producing intense pain, for instance a cold draught or light brushing of the skin. Extreme cases are known as hyperalgesia.

The newly tested chemical, capnellene, was first isolated in 1974 from *Capnella imbricata* – a soft coral from Green Island, Taiwan. Capnellene has a structure very different from other pain-relieving drugs.

Scientists at the National Sun Yat-sen University in Taiwan

“ Today there are few pharmacological agents that can help people suffering from neuropathic pain, but we believe that these marine-derived compounds could lead to the development of a new range of drugs of great potential. ”

The research is reported today in the *British Journal of Pharmacology*.

found that the chemical reversed hyperalgesia in laboratory rats.

The study leader Dr Zhi-Hong Wen said: “To provide better quality of life, we need new drugs that can act rapidly and have specific functions with low side effects. Moreover, we need better management for chronic pain conditions.

“Today there are few pharmacological agents that can help people suffering from neuropathic pain, but we believe that these marine-derived compounds could lead to the development of a new range of drugs of great potential.”

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MIAMI PEACH
A colorful Katy Perry works the stage Saturday during a private concert for 800 fans at the Fontainebleau Resort in Miami Beach. During her pool-party show, the lights at the resort's pool were all turned pink and beach balls with her name on them were being thrown around.

SIGNING STAR
Penélope Cruz glows while signing autographs for adoring fans at the German premiere of her new film, *Los abrazos rotos*, in Berlin on Monday.

SINGLE IN THE CITY
Jennifer Aniston lets her killer physique do the talking Monday while shooting *The Bounty* on location in Harlem, N.Y. Though Aniston isn't one to kiss and tell, her former *He's Just Not That Into You* costar Bradley Cooper and current costar Gerard Butler have both recently denied a romance with the actress.

FRESHMAN YEAR
Spotted: Hilary Duff on the New York City set of *Gossip Girl* on Monday! The actress is set to play a famous film star who ends up studying at New York University with some other Gossipers when the show returns for its third season on Sept. 14.

SMOOTH LANDING
She knows how to travel in style! A casually chic Rihanna arrives at a New York City heliport on Monday after spending her weekend in the Hamptons.

PET PROJECT
Who's a good dog? Jessica Simpson shares a tender touch with her canine companion during an afternoon walk with her hairstylist pal Ken Paves (not pictured) and his four legged-friends at a Los Angeles park on Monday.