

READING PASSAGE 2

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 14–26**, which are based on Reading Passage 2 below.

The True Cost of Food

A For more than forty years the cost of food has been rising. It has now reached a point where a growing number of people believe that it is far too high, and that bringing it down will be one of the great challenges of the twenty first century. That cost, however, is not in immediate cash. In the West at least, most food is now far cheaper to buy in relative terms than it was in 1960. The cost is in the collateral damage of the very methods of food production that have made the food cheaper: in the pollution of water, the enervation of soil, the destruction of wildlife, the harm to animal welfare and the threat to human health caused by modern industrial agriculture.



- B** First mechanisation, then mass use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, then monocultures, then battery rearing of livestock, and now genetic engineering – the onward march of intensive farming has seemed unstoppable in the last half-century, as the yields of produce have soared. But the damage it has caused has been colossal. In Britain, for example, many of our best-loved farmland birds, such as the skylark, the grey partridge, the lapwing and the corn bunting, have vanished from huge stretches of countryside, as have even more wild flowers and insects. This is a direct result of the way we have produced our food in the last four decades. Thousands of miles of hedgerows, thousands of ponds, have disappeared from the landscape. The faecal filth of salmon farming has driven wild salmon from many of the sea lochs and rivers of Scotland. Natural soil fertility is dropping in many areas because of continuous industrial fertiliser and pesticide use, while the growth of algae is increasing in lakes because of the fertiliser run-off.
- C** Put it all together and it looks like a battlefield, but consumers rarely make the connection at the dinner table. That is mainly because the costs of all this damage are what economists refer to as externalities: they are outside the main transaction, which is for example producing and selling a field of wheat, and are borne directly by neither producers nor consumers. To many, the costs may not even appear to be financial at all, but merely aesthetic – a terrible shame, but nothing to do with money. And anyway they, as consumers of food, certainly aren't paying for it, are they?