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Following a career spanning some 44 years, and encompassing technical roles in the food industry and university teaching, Ralph Early is now retired and a part-time PhD student in the Centre for Global Ethics, University of Birmingham. He is a food scientist and food ethicist, with a particular interest in food policy and the moral conduct of the food industry.

**Abstract (302 words)**

**Title: Contested space of the human body as the embodiment of food industry profits**

**Key words**: food, food industry, contested space, human rights, social justice

Billions of people mainly in urbanised, industrial societies are fed by food businesses operating across the food chain, extending from agriculture to food retailing. A relatively small proportion of these businesses are global in their presence and are able to exercise significant degree of power over the international food marketplace, influencing consumers’ understanding of, and attitudes towards food as well as the food choices they make for themselves and their families. All food businesses, whether large or small, compete to gain access to the stomachs of people. In this respect the stomach and, in effect, the human body can be conceived as a contested space that food businesses want to fill for reasons of profit. Sophisticated marketing and advertising techniques are used by the largest food businesses to create imagined realities that entice consumers into buying and consuming their products, many of which are the empty calorie (high energy low nutrient) products now associated with the global, diet-related, non-communicable disease ‘epidemic’ challenging public health organisations world-wide. The human body today is being instrumentalised as a strategic business opportunity by many food businesses including some powerful global food businesses, and in this the human body itself embodies concepts of food industry competitive advantage and profitability. This phenomenon, however, raises many ethical concerns about the relationship between food businesses and people, not least in relation to moral concepts of human rights and social justice. This paper explores this relationship and analyses the moral status of today’s global food industry with reference to the market behaviour of selected food industry actors, with specific attention made to the behaviour of the so-called junk food sectors: fast-foods, convenience foods, snack foods, carbonated beverages and confectionery.