

An A-Z of supermarket woes

Contributed by Jonnyboy

Some facts about supermarkets to end Local Shopping Week

A is for Advertising

A survey by Sustain in 2001 found that over 50% of the adverts shown during children's TV were for food & drink, of that nearly 100% was for 'junk food'.

B is for Bread

Flour, yeast, water and a little salt. Not anymore. The Chorleywood Bread Process invented during the 60's, mechanised and industrialised the baking process, eliminating the traditional proving and massively reducing the cost of bread. (see 'K') Unfortunately a cocktail of additional fats, additives and chemical oxidants are required to make the process work, turning our daily bread into a pale imitation of the traditional loaf.

C is for Chicken

The biggest loser to our desperate 'low prices only' mindset. Around 900 million are slaughtered and consumed in the UK each year, often in industrialised sheds that house 30,000 to 50,000 birds. Luckily the poor things only live about forty days before their slaughter and sale at £1.99 each. The industry standard for 2007 is to be a slaughter weight of 2kg in 33 days.

D is for Delisting

The constant threat faced by most supermarket suppliers, often given as the main reason why so few complain about unfair practices and forced price reductions. Supermarkets will often agree to take up to 100% of a supplier's product and then renegotiate the price just prior to delivery when alternative customers are unavailable.

E is for Energy

It takes 88 fuel calories to fly 1 calorie of carrot from South Africa to the UK.

F is for Food Miles & Fuel

Cheap fuel (and labour) in developing nations make it economically viable to transport fruit and vegetables vast distances more profitably than can be done within the UK, regardless of the environmental impact. Vegetables sourced from Africa travel around 4-6000 miles before hitting your plate.

G is for Greenhouse Gases

A government report on climate change estimates that the food chain contributes to 12% of the entire UK greenhouse gas emissions

H is for 'Hero Departments'

Areas within a store that have pulling power and create an illusion to the customer. The reason why all supermarkets have the fresh food section right at the main entrance.

I is for Independent retailers

A dying breed, reducing at the rate of over 200 per week. Between 1977 and 2001 independent greengrocers and butchers reduced by nearly two thirds. If this trend continues then all independent food stores will be gone by 2050.

J is for Junk Food

The 2001 government expenditure and food survey noted that whilst consumption of fresh, unprocessed food was reducing at a rate of 4-7 percent per year, processed food was increasing at a rate of 3.5 - 6 percent.

K is for Known Value Items

Typically the daily staples, bread, milk, baked beans, bananas etc. We subconsciously form our opinion on an entire supermarket's value for money through exposure to a few 'K's'. These items are often sold at a loss to generate an artificial feeling of value whilst many others in store items are sold at hugely inflated margins.

L is for Loss Leading

Deliberately selling a product below the price it costs to produce or purchase. Illegal in many EU countries and often used as a tool to force small, local suppliers out of business, often used when a new out of town supermarket opens.

M is for Modified Atmosphere Packaging

A process by which salads and other vegetables are put in packaging containing reduced levels of oxygen and increased levels of carbon dioxide. Whilst it can increase shelf life by up to 50%, certain studies have shown that it dramatically reduces antioxidant nutrients in the vegetables.

N is for NHS

The treasury estimates that the true cost to the NHS in treating diet related diseases is over £6.2 billion per year.

O is for Obesity

Industrialised, processed diets increase the consumption of refined sugars, fats and carbohydrates. Almost one third of all children are obese or overweight. Due to obesity, medical experts are predicting that for the first time in over 100 years, life expectancies in developing countries will start to fall.

P is for Pesticides

The Food Standards Agency advises that 40 per cent of fresh fruit and vegetables contain pesticide residues on consumption. A study in the University of Liverpool concluded that the average UK citizen contains between 300 and 500 chemicals in their body which were not present 50 years ago.

Q is for Quality

Anecdotal evidence from supermarket suppliers points to an ongoing drive to reduce to quality of ingredients and products to reduce costs and increase competitiveness, often called 'value engineering';

R is for Regional Distribution Centres

Massive warehouses located near to major conurbations and transport links. Not used for stock holding but for just in time deliveries who spend less than 12 hours in the RDC before being shipped to a store. It's estimated that 35% of the lorries on our roads are involved in food distribution. RDC's are one of the main reasons why small, local suppliers have no means of transporting their fresh goods to a store and why produce is often picked whilst under ripe.

S is for Slow Food Movement

Founded by Carlo Petrini as a celebration of good, traditional food and a revolt against the ever pervading presence of junk food and the effect on local economies.

T is for Tiger Prawns

A \$60Bn world wide business growing at the rate of 9% per annum. Mainly imported from intensive warm water farms in south and East Asia. Linked to environmental pollution, violence, illegal land seizures, child labour and wholesale destruction of mangrove swamps. In some countries less than 5% of prawn farmers are local.

U is for Unhealthy diets in the UK

We currently consume around 16 times more unhealthy Omega-6 fatty acids (from soy, corn and palm oil) than we do from healthy Omega-3 (from game, fish, green leaves etc.). 100 years ago the ratio was roughly 1:1

V is for 'Vendor Managed Inventories'

A process by which suppliers have to keep known values of stock available for the customer to call upon if they see fit, with no contractual obligation. All the risk falls to the supplier. One of the reasons for high waste factors in the supermarket supply sector.

W is for Water

Now routinely injected into pork alongside sweeteners 'to maximise flavour and succulence'; A consequence of pigs being bred as long, fat free baconers rather than the traditional, slow growing, fatter breeds.

X is for X rated

The scene inside most factory slaughter houses, where chickens are hung up by their legs before being electrocuted and eviscerated via machine with no human involvement. Intensively farmed meat is often flooded with adrenaline as a result of the highly stressful slaughter conditions

Y is for Yoghurt

Once a traditional product but now adulterated with gums, thickeners and starches as its delicate structure cannot withstand the pressure from high speed industrial pumps used in manufacture.

Z is for Zimbabwe

Just one of many countries supplying cut flowers for supermarkets, it supplied over 10% of cut flower imports to the UK in 2000. Are 5,000 air miles really the best way to say I love you? Have a look at this article from The Ecologist.