

Survey reveals a trolley load of concerns

The way supermarkets treat their suppliers is top of the list of concerns for respondents in Traidcraft's detailed survey of consumer attitudes.

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An overwhelming majority (97%) want penalties imposed on supermarkets that pass unfair terms, conditions and costs onto their suppliers.

And 95% want fair wages and decent working conditions for producers to be a legally binding requirement on supermarkets.

Fiona Gooch, Traidcraft's expert on responsible purchasing said: "These results are impressive evidence of how concerned people are about supermarket behaviour.

"The fact that nearly all those who responded support legislation and penalties on badly-behaved companies should galvanize the government to look into the practices of the big four supermarkets."

An issue that's close to your hearts

The biggest surprise in the results is the strength of feeling they indicate. The survey, conducted online and by post, drew more than 1700 responses from Traidcraft customers, activists and others. The results will help Traidcraft to make a powerful case as we give evidence to the Competition Commission investigation into supermarket dominance in the UK.

The Competition Commission is an independent body that has the power to recommend changes to business practice, where it limits fair competition and harms consumer choice. It previously investigated supermarkets seven years ago, leading to the creation of a Code of Practice in 2004.

However, increasing concern over supermarkets' power and their ability to squeeze suppliers has prompted the Commission to look again at whether the Code is working.

Supermarket practices that attracted the most critical responses in our survey included:

- suppliers penalised for failing to deliver the full final order - even when that order was confirmed less than 24 hours earlier
- ending trading contracts with less than a week's notice
- charging suppliers for dealing with customer complaints, regardless of whether the complaint was the supplier's fault
- not paying suppliers in full.

Are they only providing what customers want?

The market dominance of supermarkets is also a major issue, with almost 90% of respondents concerned that aggressive pricing by the big chains threatens small, independent shops, and 73% believing it makes it harder for suppliers from developing countries to break into the UK market.

Another clear finding was that three quarters of respondents felt that supermarkets are not providing the kinds of fair trade products they want, and have been slow to react to customer concerns, despite supermarket claims to the contrary.

More than two thirds said that availability of fair trade affected their choice of supermarkets - an important finding that will strengthen the business case for fair trade.

The vast majority of respondents said they buy fair trade products from 100% fair trade companies such as Traidcraft.

Thank you once again for your continued support - with your help as consumers and as citizens we can really help to bring about change.