

Supermarkets

It is believed that the idea of supermarkets first belonged to an American businessman who opened a self-service grocery store in 1916. The main advantage of the new American store was that the goods were stocked on the shelves, so the customers could take their own goods and bring them to the front of the store to pay for them. Although there was a high risk of stealing, the owner found the new shop's organisation more effective because it allowed him to reduce the number of shop assistants. Later the new shop organisation spread widely throughout European countries.

Nowadays supermarkets are as British as football and cricket. In the UK 90% of all food is bought at five different supermarket chains. That makes these companies extremely powerful, especially when they deal with small businesses, for example farmers. Milk is a good example. Supermarkets like to use things such as milk and bread, which are at the top of almost everyone's shopping list, to attract customers. To offer the lowest price the supermarkets need to buy milk from dairy farmers very cheaply, so big supermarket chains agree on a very low price and dictate it to farmers. If the farmers don't agree to that price, supermarkets start to look for the cheapest possible products abroad instead.

The consumers are of course happy to get cheaper products, but they should also keep in mind the influence supermarkets have on the environment. First of all there's packaging. Supermarkets like all the products to be packed because it makes it easier to put them neatly on the shelves. Consequently, supermarkets produce nearly 10 million tons of waste packaging in the UK every year, less than 5% of which is recycled. Some supermarkets put large recycling bins in their car parks, trying to create the image that they are environmentally friendly. However, that is just an image.

To reach the supermarket shelves the products often have to travel half the globe. Due to preservatives even milk products can stay unspoiled for months. It's a great advantage for the supermarket as yoghurt bought from a farmer can't be kept for longer than 2 days. That is why many small farmers do not even get a chance to compete with long-lasting imported goods.

When a new supermarket is planned, everyone says that a lot of new jobs will be created. In reality the number of jobs lost in the area is greater than the number of new positions in the supermarket. Within a 15km radius of every new supermarket that opens the number of people working in the food business goes down. It happens because all the small shops nearby are forced to close.

New supermarkets reduce the number of jobs in the local food industry.

- 1) True
- 2) False
- 3) Not stated