

Who Pays?

Campaign guide - summer/autumn 09

Every week 32 million of us shop in British supermarkets. But in developing countries supermarket price wars are having a devastating effect on the lives of women workers who produce the food and clothes we buy. It's the poorest people who suffer most from low wages, job insecurity and poor working conditions.

Take action! Your guide to help make sure UK supermarkets play fair overseas.



Why are we campaigning?

Our research shows that women workers around the world who pick, pack and stitch the goods we buy in UK supermarkets face long hours, poverty wages and appalling working conditions.

- In **Costa Rica**, banana price wars between UK supermarkets have meant that women working on plantations earn wages so low, they are forced to stay in the fields during aerial pesticide spraying to earn enough to live on.
- In **Bangladesh**, young women work for as little as 5 pence an hour to make clothes for Asda and Tesco while being forced to work up to 14 hours a day for weeks on end.
- In **India**, pressure from UK supermarkets to drive down prices has led to an explosion in black market cashew nut processing plants where women earn as little as 30 pence a day and suffer permanent damage to their health through squatting for long periods, and by being exposed to smoke and corrosive acids.

UK supermarkets could be a force for good in developing countries – bringing much needed trade and jobs, boosting the economy and bringing about opportunities for women. But currently, the way that UK supermarkets do business with developing countries has a devastating effect on the lives of workers in their supply chains.

It doesn't have to be this way.

What are we calling for?

Ten years of voluntary initiatives by supermarkets have failed to solve the problem – now it's time for the government to take action.

We are calling for binding rules and an independent watchdog to ensure that supermarkets play fair in the developing countries they do business in ... **and we've already made huge progress!**

We are **not calling** for a boycott of supermarkets. We need people to join our campaign and take action as consumers and citizens to make the government bring in new rules to ensure that supermarkets do not abuse their power. That way, we can all be sure the goods we buy don't come at the cost of workers' basic rights.

What's happened so far?

The *Who pays?* campaign launched in spring 2007. Our initial target was the Competition Commission, a government body undertaking a huge inquiry into the way supermarkets do business with their suppliers.

To demonstrate that people really do want supermarkets to play fair overseas, we asked ActionAid supporters and the general public to sign a loyalty pledge – calling for regulation to tackle the problem. An astonishing **42,000** people (including comedian Bill Bailey and actress Emma Thompson) pledged their loyalty.

The Competition Commission got the message – and agreed with our demand for a new independent watchdog in April last year! Over the summer of 2008, ActionAid campaigners persuaded over 160 MPs to lend their support to the campaign too.

Who are we campaigning with in developing countries?

Gertruida Baartman is a 41 year old mother of three, living near Stellenbosch in South Africa. She earns 38p per hour working as a farm labourer, sorting apples, pears and peaches that end up on the shelves of Tesco.

In 2006 and 2007, ActionAid hosted Gertruida in the UK to attend Tesco's AGM. She told Tesco's Board and Chief Exec:

"I don't get paid enough to feed my children and I have to work with pesticides with my bare hands. I don't get the same wages as other men even if I do the same work."



Following the AGM in 2006, Tesco decided to change the way it inspects conditions on the fruit farms that supply them throughout South Africa with a new scheme of ethical checks.

The brave and courageous campaigning by Gertruida and other workers in South Africa has made this change happen, supported by ActionAid campaigners in the UK.

However, life for the majority of women has yet to improve. If Tesco ensured that workers like Gertruida were paid just 5 pence more per kilo of apples, their lives would be changed.

Since December last year, over 10,000 of you have sent Tesco 5 pence to show them you expect them to ensure workers are paid a living wage. Nearly 600 of you handed in your 5 pence at your local store, and several MPs lent their support to the campaign by doing their own hand ins.

In May 2009, ActionAid Ambassador and actor James Purefoy visited fruit pickers in South Africa to see for himself what pay and conditions were like. He took the message for the need for greater action from Tesco to the media ahead of their AGM in July.



We're keeping up the pressure by asking Tesco to take the next step and set up a pilot project to bring pay and conditions up to acceptable standards on an initial group of farms. This would be a first on any African farms supplying UK supermarkets. We'll let you know how you can help with this soon.

Supermarket power in action – how does it work?

Suppliers in developing countries tell us UK supermarkets demand:

- Lower prices
- Faster delivery times
- Greater flexibility

Suppliers pass down these costs and risks onto workers. Workers tell us this leads to longer hours, lower pay and a lack of basic rights in the workplace.

Now we have reached a critical point in the campaign. Lord Mandelson must make a decision about whether the watchdog should go ahead. We need to show him just how many people want him to take action and get the watchdog up and running quickly.

What's next?

With the Competition Commission recommending that a watchdog is needed, we've had a fantastic breakthrough that could help millions of women workers get a fairer deal. But the job isn't over yet.

Except for Waitrose, none of the supermarkets agreed to sign up to the watchdog voluntarily. So now it's over to government. Business Secretary Lord Mandelson must decide whether or not the watchdog goes ahead. Setting it up as soon as possible is absolutely crucial, and it must have teeth so it can make a difference for workers in developing countries on the sharp end of supermarket power.

What you can do:

Get your friends, family and colleagues to take action

Getting as many people as possible to take action is a

vital way to increase the impact of the campaign, and it's also a good opportunity to get more people involved with ActionAid. The more postcards Lord Mandelson receives, the louder our message will be. We can give you extra postcards to help you spread the word. Just give us a call on 01460 23 8000 or e-mail campaign@actionaid.org.

Top Tips

- People are most likely to take an action if a friend or family member asks them to, so when you're distributing the postcards try and give them to people directly.
- People lead busy lives, and the best of intentions often go astray. If you can, get people to fill in the cards there and then, and offer to post them off for people if necessary.

How do I explain the campaign?

Supermarkets price wars are having a devastating effect on the lives of workers in developing countries producing the food we buy.

We're not calling for a boycott - we should be able to shop in supermarkets knowing that all workers have been treated fairly and earn a living wage. As the Minister responsible, we want Lord Mandelson to set up a new watchdog to prevent supermarkets from exploiting their suppliers. This will help ensure that workers around the world get a fair deal.

That's why we need to send him as many postcards as possible – to show him how many people want him to take action.

You can also request a free copy of our Who pays? DVD to help explain the campaign. Why not organise a showing at your trade union, church, mosque, community group, university or workplace?

Want to do more?

If you've already sent your postcard to Lord Mandelson, thank you. All the actions you take really make a difference in bringing about change.

If you would like to do more to support the campaign, please take the following actions:

1. Write to your MP

Business Secretary Lord Mandelson is deciding whether or not to bring in the supermarket watchdog recommended by the Competition Commission. To help increase the pressure on him to act quickly, you can write to your MP, asking them to contact him on your behalf.

Feel free to use the template below, but remember to personalise it for more impact.

You can find the name of your MP at www.theyworkforyou.com or by calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272.

Dear _____ **MP, (insert your MP's name here)**

The Competition Commission released the final report from its two year inquiry into the grocery sector in April 2008. It found that supermarkets mistreat overseas suppliers and recommended that an independent ombudsman is established to help combat these abuses. In a recent poll, eight out of ten shoppers backed the introduction of an ombudsman.

As supermarkets failed to sign up to an ombudsman voluntarily, the government must now decide whether or not to bring in the Commission's recommendation.

As my MP, please contact Lord Mandelson, the Minister responsible, and ask him to introduce the ombudsman as quickly as possible. Any further delay in implementing the Commission's recommendation is unacceptable.

I believe it is vital that developing country suppliers and workers get a fair deal from their trade with UK supermarkets.

Please also sign Early Day Motion 560 in support of the ombudsman.

I look forward to hearing when the government plans to introduce the watchdog.

Yours sincerely,
[insert your name and address]

2. Send a letter to your local paper

Let people in your local area know about the campaign by writing to the letters page of your local newspaper. Many thousands of people read local newspapers, so getting a letter published is a really effective way to spread the word.

Keep it short, simple and to the point. Try using the following template letter, but remember to personalise it to make it relevant to your area.

Dear Sir,

We all shop in supermarkets - but how much do we know about where our food and clothes come from? ActionAid's **Who pays?** campaign has uncovered women workers in developing countries who pick, pack and stitch the goods we buy, earning as little as 5p an hour.

Those workers need consumers here to keep shopping - but to also get involved in the campaign and call on Lord Mandelson to bring in a new watchdog to make sure supermarkets play fair in developing countries.

ActionAid is asking people in [name of your town/city] to join the campaign by visiting www.actionaid.org.uk/whopays. The message is simple - keep shopping, but never stop asking: **who pays?**

Yours faithfully,
[insert your name and address]

Please let us know if you receive a response from Lord Mandelson or your MP. Get in touch by calling 01460 23 8000 or e-mail campaign@actionaid.org.

To take action online and for further campaign info visit www.actionaid.org.uk/whopays.

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Thank you and happy campaigning!

www.actionaid.org.uk

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