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SUPERMARKETS

JASON SMITH



DEBATING MATTERS
**TOPIC
GUIDES**

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MOTION:

**“SUPERMARKETS
ARE BAD FOR LOCAL
COMMUNITIES”**

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INTRODUCTION

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Residents of Dundee - known to locals as Trolley City – are about to get their 26th supermarket. [Ref: [Channel 4 News](#)]. As many retailers struggle in the current recession, particularly small businesses, supermarkets appear to be weathering the storm and in recent years have announced record profits [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. In a recent trend to defend local high street services [Ref: [Federation of Small Businesses](#)] many blame supermarkets for undercutting other, smaller retailers with loss-leader promotions and 24-hour convenience, resulting in the death of local communities as local high streets struggle to compete [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. Critics of supermarkets also argue that their pricing and ubiquity has seen a rise in binge-drinking teenagers and damage to the environment [Ref: [What Price?](#)]. But supermarkets also create jobs in these same areas [Ref: [BBC News](#)] and provide a wide range of easily accessible services. Supermarket are also often responsible for developing large areas within towns and cities, creating new leisure facilities for communities that would otherwise remain under-utilised or derelict [Ref: [BBC News](#)], and to blame supermarkets for broader social problems, or indeed to argue they have a broader societal responsibility other than the business they provide, is simply wrong [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)].



In the 1950s, supermarkets as we know them today had only 20% of the grocery market, while small shops accounted for 80%. By 1990, this situation had more or less reversed and today 76% of our food shopping is done in the big four supermarkets: Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrison's [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. It's argued that these four retail giants have such tremendous power that they are responsible for the destruction of the high street, and turning communities into 'clone towns' [Ref: [New Economic Foundation](#)]. Others counter argue that they have changed the face of shopping in the UK by responding to market demand and the way people live today, more so than their smaller, high-street rivals [Ref: [Guardian](#)].

Too powerful?

The consequences of supermarket domination of food retailing go beyond the effects on local traders, with critics widening their range of attacks. One of the most controversial elements of supermarket dominance of the grocery sector, for example, is its impact on food producers. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) has warned that UK farming incomes have seen a massive slump since 1995 and are now at their lowest for 60 years [Ref: [IIED](#)]. The buying power of large supermarkets has allowed them to disregard the normal practices of the free-market, and the needs of farmers, rural communities and other businesses, in their bid for greater profits [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Others also highlight that the products supermarkets provide are often sourced from abroad, adding millions of 'food miles' and associated carbon emissions to the average shopping basket. As a result of all these criticisms of the big supermarket retailers, a 'supermarket tax' has been proposed

to offset their negative impact on society [Ref: [Guardian](#)].

What the customer wants?

But while supermarkets do have real purchasing power over their suppliers, and are in a position to determine prices, is that not the reason 76% of groceries sales takes in the big chains? Critics of this approach to British farming argue that it's up to the farmers and suppliers to negotiate with the purchasers, rather than the consumer's role to subsidise British farming. And aside from price, as the way we live has changed so, too, have our demands on when we can shop and what we buy when we do [Ref: [Observer](#)]. It has been suggested, for example, that along with contraception and home freezing, supermarkets made a huge contribution to changing the relationship women had to the rest of society, particular the ability to work full-time outside of the home in the period after the Second World War [Ref: [Guardian](#)].

Rose-tinted high streets?

When small shops dominated the high street the choice on offer to consumers was limited. Exotic and foreign foods stuff and things we take for granted today like olive oil, Mediterranean vegetables and tropical fruits simply weren't to be found locally. Shops closed in the afternoons on Wednesdays, butchers closed on a Monday, all shops closed by 5pm, and none opened on a Sunday. That retail market also served an older society where a housewife was at home in a majority of homes to shop and cook and provide for her family whilst her husband went to work. Even those who wouldn't want to return to that restricted past argue that supermarkets turn us all into automaton shoppers



DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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and in turn help destroy our once vibrant high streets [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. But if smaller stores are unable to offer people what they want and are uncompetitive, should we really bemoan their demise?



ESSENTIAL READING

Supermarkets are evil...

Sam Leith *Telegraph* 1 November 2008

Supermarkets are not the root of all evil

David Hall *Telegraph* 31 October 2007

FOR

Supermarkets kill free markets as well as our communities

Peter Wilby *Guardian* 3 May 2011

Bristol City council must support the community and reject Tesco

Sam Allen *Guardian* 22 April 2011

Mary Portas: Supermarkets are killing local communities

Mary Portas *Telegraph* 1 June 2010

Supermarkets: the inconvenience stores

Alex Renton *The Times* 27 March 2009

These invasive species are ruining the retail ecosystem

Andrew Simms *Guardian* 22 March 2007

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AGAINST

Tescophobia: a new middle class malady

Brendan O'Neill *spiked* 27 April 2011

Supermarket Shopping

Simon Majumdar *Observer* 11 August 2009

Tesco is a supermarket, not the guardian of our livers and morals

Liz Jones *Daily Mail* 24 February 2008

Be honest - supermarkets have made our lives better

Jay Rayner *Observer* 17 February 2008

Why I love Tesco

Julie Burchill *Guardian* 19 December 2007

IN DEPTH

Supermarket rooftop gardens: an exercise in community building

Eifion Rees *Ecologist* 26 July 2011

Supermarkets: good or bad?

Dr Dobbin *Nutrition* 25 May 2011

A nation of shopkeepers

Bagehot's Notebook *Economist* 19 May 2011

Supermarkets dont regenerate communities - they Hoover money out

Andrew Simms *New Economics* 8 June 2010



BACKGROUNDEERS

Supermarkets: changing market share
Guardian 16 August 2011

Supermarket sweep
John Harris *Guardian* 5 August 2011

Productivity loss from town centre policies
ESRC 11 May 2011

Love-hate affair with supermarkets
Guardian 6 May 2011

Are the supermarkets killing British food?
Rob Lyons *spiked* 7 October 2009

No going back to post-war shopping
Richard Hyam *Telegraph* 1 November 2007

Clone Town Britain
New Economic Foundation

Supermarkets and The Environment
What Price?

Bad Food Britain
Joanna Blythman *Observer*

Keep Trade Local
Federation of Small Businesses

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RECOMMENDS:

• 'Food Inc' (PG), 2009

• 'Wal-Mart: The High Cost of A Low Price' (PG), 2005

• Find out more about our partnership with the education charity FILMCLUB, how you can bring the power of films into your school debates, and this autumn's recommendations from the FILMCLUB team for Debating Matters!

ORGANISATIONS

• British Retail Consortium

• Competition Commission

• Federation of Small Businesses

• Institute of Grocery Distribution

• Tescopoly

• The Office of Fair Trading



IN THE NEWS

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Supermarkets get the blame for boarded-up market towns

BBC News 25 August 2011

Supermarkets guilty of fixing milk price

The Times 11 August 2011

MPs want tougher regime for supermarket 'bullies'

The Times 28 July 2011

Supermarket plans for Oswestry Smithfield site approved

BBC News 22 June 2011

Co-operative creates 2000 jobs with apprenticeships

BBC News 9 June 2011

Supermarkets set to expand by 20% by 2014

Channel 4 News 19 May 2011

New supermarkets ombudsman may not start work until 2013

Independent 9 May 2011

Tesco rings up record profits

Guardian 20 April 2011

Farmer left with field of giant cauliflowers after supermarkets say they're too big to sell

Daily Mail 12 April 2011

Demos sees big role for supermarkets in regenerating poor communities

Guardian 7 June 2010



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- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
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Surname

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organisation

Professional role
(if applicable)

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Postcode

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School/work phone

Mobile phone

**“TEENAGE CITIZENS
THINKING DEEPLY
ABOUT...SOCIAL
ISSUES”**

IAN GRANT, CEO, BRITANNICA

