

wh@ pays?

Campaign guide - summer 08

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 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.

We're campaigning to make sure no-one suffers producing the goods we buy.



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 long hours, 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 a consumer and a citizen to make the government bring in new rules to ensure that supermarkets do not abuse their power. That way, we can all be sure that 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 who were undertaking a huge inquiry into the way supermarkets do business.

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 Bill Bailey and Emma Thompson) pledged their loyalty.

The Competition Commission got the message – and agreed with our demand for a new independent watchdog in May.

Who are we campaigning with in developing countries?

Gertruida Baartman is a 40 year old mother of three, living near Stellenbosch in South Africa. She earns 38p per hour working as a fruit picker, picking apples, pears and peaches that end up on the shelves of Tesco in the UK.

In 2006 and 2007, ActionAid has 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 independent scheme.

The brave and courageous campaigning by Gertruida and other workers in South Africa has made this change happen, supported by Target poverty campaigners in the UK. However, life for the majority of workers has yet to improve, so our campaign continues.

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.



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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.

Government action is needed to make sure the watchdog gets up and running – and fast. It must have teeth so that it can make a difference for workers in developing countries. As Liberal Democrat MP Andrew George has said, "The government must now honour the Competition Commission's firm recommendations."

You can help by asking your MP to put pressure on the government to quickly establish the watchdog to make supermarkets play fair overseas.

What you can do:

1. Get people to send a postcard to their MP

Getting as many people as possible to take action is a really vital way to increase the impact of the campaign and it's also a good opportunity to get more people involved with ActionAid. We can give you postcards and support to help you spread the word.

Top Tips

- All MPs can be found at www.theyworkforyou.com
- 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.
- Encourage people to take the action there and then. We all lead busy lives and the best of intentions can often go astray! You may need to take along a few pens and offer to post the cards back to ActionAid for them afterwards.
- Request a free copy of our Who pays? DVD to help explain the campaign before getting people to sign up. Why not organise a showing at your trade union, church, mosque, community group, university or workplace?

How do I explain the campaign?

- Supermarket price wars are having a devastating effect on the lives of workers in developing countries producing the food and clothes we buy and it's the poorest people who suffer.
- We're not calling for a boycott – people need these jobs. However, we should be able to shop in supermarkets knowing that all workers have been treated fairly. We have a great opportunity for the government to bring in a watchdog to ensure that supermarkets play fair overseas.

What are people signing up to?

- We're asking as many people as possible to send a card to their MP, who can then put pressure on the government to make sure the watchdog happens. Many thousands of people have done this, but we need more, so as many MPs are contacted as possible.

How can people stay involved?

- At the bottom of the postcard there is an option people can tick to become a target poverty campaigner. If they do this, they'll receive 3 actions through the post and a regular campaigns email – with more in-depth actions, such as writing a letter to your MP. They will get a free welcome pack too.

2. Write a letter to your MP

For even more impact than a postcard, write a letter to your MP on this issue as well. Use our template on the following page as a guide, but do feel free to personalise it.

[Name of MP]
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear [insert MP's name here] MP

ActionAid's Who pays? campaign

The Competition Commission has released its final report following a two-year independent investigation into the grocery sector. The Commission found evidence that supermarkets mistreat overseas suppliers and has issued firm recommendations to help combat these abuses.

Over 42,000 people have supported the call of ActionAid's Who pays? campaign for a **new independent Ombudsman** to make sure UK supermarkets play fair overseas – and the Commission has agreed.

I believe this is a fantastic breakthrough that could help millions of women workers in developing countries who pick, pack and stitch the goods that come to our stores. ActionAid has found that women workers in supermarket supply chains in developing countries often live on the poverty line, earning wages as low as 30p per day in India processing cashew nuts for UK supermarkets.

This is an issue that I am very concerned about. It is now essential that the UK government demonstrates its commitment to delivering a fair deal for workers overseas by ensuring the implementation of the Commission's recommendations. A supermarket Ombudsman would make it possible for workers in developing countries to improve their wages and working conditions.

As my MP, please contact the Rt. Hon. John Hutton MP, the Minister responsible, and ask him to:

- ensure an independent ombudsman is established
- guarantee it is fully proactive and has the power to fine supermarkets when abuse does take place within the supply chain.

Please send me any response you get from the government about how they plan to respond to these recommendations.

Yours sincerely

[insert your name and address]

3. Write to your local paper about the campaign

Thousands of people read local newspapers, so getting a letter published is a really effective way to spread the word. Your local MP will also keep a close eye on constituent's views, so it's a good way to raise their awareness of the campaign. For the latest letter writing guide e-mail chris.jordan@actionaid.org or call 020 7561 7537.

4. Still want to do more?

We are still collecting loyalty pledges to present to government to demonstrate that people want change. Go to www.actionaid.org.uk/whopays to take the pledge and for even more actions and information.

If you have any other questions, please get in touch.

Thank you and happy campaigning!

www.actionaid.org.uk