

Tesco's Race to the Bottom

Written by Ray X

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As Tesco today reveals a new simplicity and transparency in its meat supply chain, the Ledbury Portal can reveal that the supermarket grocers were warned over four years ago about its cheap meat imports and the complexity and opaqueness of its meat supply chain.

[UK's biggest union Unite issued the warnings back in December 2008](#) :

"Tesco are using imported meat from countries like Thailand and the increase of cheap meat imports is contributing to the driving down of conditions for low-paid workers in Britain and Ireland, who are employed by companies in the meat supply chain."

"For consumers, they often don't know how long ago the meat product was slaughtered, where it was cooked, or whether it has undergone preserving processes such as chilling or freezing either before or after it has been cooked. The label often does not say.

"The union has presented Tesco with evidence that workers in its UK supply chain are experiencing harsh and divisive conditions that in some cases are abusive. Unite believes that structural discrimination exists in many parts of the supply chain that provides meat to Tesco.

"We believe the supermarket's desire to source meat more cheaply is contributing to a race to the bottom in the UK supply chain."

Is it possible that the drive to purchase cheap meat by supermarkets such as Tesco has resulted in the present situation where British and continental suppliers have adulterated meat products to order to compete with imported meat from Asia and South America?

A Tesco spokesperson has told Ledbury Portal that the fraudulent and criminal activity had nothing to do with the price of meat. Tesco said it had made a commitment to its Irish beef supplier that had been broken.

In 2008 Unite concluded with a plea to Tesco:

"Unite is calling on Tesco to use its influence to ensure companies in its meat supply chain sign a minimum standards agreement and to establish Tesco Ethical Model Factories."

Did Tesco require a minimum standards agreement with its suppliers?

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I asked the supermarket but it could not tell me whether it had or not. However, Tesco's spokesperson told me that the company was going to simplify its supply chain and make it transparent for the consumer.

However, Tesco could not explain why the supply chain had previously been so complex and opaque even to itself.