

Corporate Watch

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Public Eye Application: positive category

Corporate Watch would like to nominate our Food and Agriculture project for the Public Eye Award, positive category, in relation to the work that Corporate Watch has done against the power of supermarkets, and against TESCO in particular, in partnership with our sister organisation, the activist group Grassroots Action on Food and Farming (GAFF).

Impact on TESCO

Corporate Watch has had a strong influence on Tesco. Not so much in changing the company's behaviour, but in strengthening and extending local campaigns against the supermarket. This we have done through making anti-Tesco arguments accessible, and sharing information between groups. We have also influenced major NGO's and Members of the UK Parliament -- away from trying to work with Tesco to realising that this is pointless, and moving them towards a strong critique of supermarkets and corporations in general. Tesco's response to this has been to increase its propaganda machine, through greenwashing PR, and 'corporate social responsibility', which we have shown to be a sham.

Context

Until very recently, the mainstream press, the investment community, and many major NGOs, had no problem with supermarkets -- seeing them as ethically neutral providers of food. Our work, with others, has totally transformed this. We have succeeded in *problematizing* supermarkets, and at the same time creating a wider debate about the unjust way in which our food is produced and consumed. Tesco is a particularly egregious example of this -- it is the entire food system that needs transforming in the long term. Corporate Watch would never be happy with supermarkets simply 'changing their behaviour' and selling more fair trade and/or organic produce, or with small bits of legislation; the whole structure of the corporation needs changing.

Methodology

We try to achieve this through research, developing a holistic critique (from supermarkets' impact on food quality, to market towns and the exploitation of labour), networking locally with a range of different groups, and developing national and international campaigning alliances. Corporate Watch and GAFF work closely together to complement each others' activities -- CW is a research organisation and GAFF is a networking and campaigning organisation. We are a tiny organisation, so by necessity have had to create alliances with groups to have more of an impact. This has also helped other small organisations punch above their weight.

Alliance building

This includes the creation of 'Breaking the Armlock', an alliance of environmental, consumer, farmer and development organisations calling for regulation on the way supermarkets deal with their suppliers, initially through a statutory Code of Practice. See www.breakingthearmlock.com for more info about this alliance. Also through the Tescopoly Alliance, which exists to highlight Tesco's poor practice across a range of issues. See www.tescopoly.org.

These alliances were both ideas that came from Corporate Watch and its sister campaigning

organisation, Grassroots Action on Food and Farming, although Friends of the Earth and Banana Link have also been closely involved. While other organisations and books (especially Felicity Lawrence's book, *Not on the Label* have been influential, these only really came to prominence in 2004 on the back, we would argue, of the work that Corporate Watch had already done.

Corporate Watch is also the European convenor for the Agribusiness Accountability Initiative.

Breaking the Armlock helped both big and small organisations, who had been previously working with Tesco on voluntary codes, to take an alternative position -- they could be part of a big coalition calling for regulation. Tescopoly takes this one step further. Many of the small organisations involved have come together through conversations that CW and GAFF has had with them. Lucy did a presentation in Manchester which brought Women Working Worldwide and the National Group on Homeworking onboard to this alliance, etc.

The development of our research and local networking, 2001-2005.

Our accessible and ground breaking pamphlet, *What's Wrong with Supermarkets?* was first published in 2001 and that year we also held our first meeting, 'On Common Ground' between farmers and activists to discuss the corporate control of agriculture and develop the critique of supermarkets. The aim was to get environmentalists to listen to the problems of farmers and begin to see them as the victims of corporate power, rather than a part of the problem. Friends of the Earth campaigners came to this meeting as well as some important farmers' organisations. It was a real launch point and encouraged a lot of farmers to come forward with tales of exploitation and environmental organisations to begin to take this seriously. From 2001 - 2003 we held nine forums across the UK bringing local farmers and environmental activists together to continue these discussions and to create local work.

With What's Wrong with Supermarkets? was the first credible critique of supermarkets to bring together all the different issues and make them accessible to the public. We were quoted extensively in a study by Colin Breed, Liberal Democrat MP, called 'Checking out the Supermarkets'. The longer briefing, *A Rough Guide to the Farming Crisis*, was also seminal in clearly defining the problem of the UK farming crisis as corporate power rather than subsidies and trade. This report also helped bring the development organisations on board.

The Tesco company profile was published on our website in 2002 (this was before FoE began writing its yearly profile of the company) and was subsequently updated in 2004. It consistently has amongst the highest number of hits on our website. In June 2005, Lucy wrote the Friends of the Earth briefing 'The Tesco Takeover' (www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/the_tesco_takeover.pdf), taking apart their Corporate Social Responsibility report, and this was handed out to MP's and shareholders at Tesco's AGM in June 2005. Tesco took the time to rebutt this briefing point by point, and Friends of the Earth have now rebutted this rebuttal

Supporting campaigning locally against supermarket developments has been another crucial aspect of our work. Besides writing *Checkout Chuckout: A DIY guide and directory to campaigning against supermarket developments*, we have done numerous talks and workshops, helped write leaflets and newspaper articles. We regularly field enquiries from journalists who are writing about the problems associated with supermarket developments -- problems that we were among the first to highlight.

Our successes

From looking at their CSR reports, we are convinced that Tesco has framed its discourse, as well as increased its sales of Fair Trade, organics and local products, based on the criticisms that we and others have levelled at them.

We can point to initiating and supporting a really extensive broad based movement in the UK,

demanding a rethink of our current unjust food production system, taking Tesco is a particularly pertinent example.