

Useful Free Booklets Series

# Feeding You Lies

## The Great Supermarket Scam

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This booklet has been created to encourage open discussion, thoughtful study and careful critical enquiry. It is intended as a resource that invites readers to question, reflect and explore ideas deeply, rather than accept them without consideration. Permission is given to reproduce the content of this booklet for any purpose.

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## **The lie you live by**

Step into a supermarket and you are stepping into the future, though not the bright and hopeful vision once promised by science fiction, but a sterile, controlled and corporatised reality where every choice you think you are making has already been made for you.

The shelves stretch endlessly, filled with plastic-wrapped abundance, each item placed with machine-like precision beneath the cold glare of fluorescent lighting, creating not a scene of natural plenty but an environment meticulously engineered to guide your behaviour.

The air smells of nothing real, the music is a quiet force nudging your mood in a direction you never chose, and the experience is not shopping but submission. You have not entered a place of freedom but a space built to shape your desires, where your needs are not fulfilled but deliberately moulded. The supermarket is not a convenience, it is a trap disguised with a smile and a name badge.

This booklet tells the true story of what happened when supermarkets seized control of the food supply, which is not a tale of progress or ease but a chronicle of decay, coercion, and betrayal.

Supermarkets did not grow because they offered better food or lower prices, but because they destroyed everything that stood in their way by undercutting independent grocers with prices too low to survive. They forced farmers into contracts that stripped them of independence and lured customers with illusions of savings. Once the competition was eliminated, they rewrote the definition of food, turning it into something cheap, bland, artificially long-lasting and depressingly uniform. You were not given better options; you were taught to forget what better once meant.

Take fruit, for instance. There was a time when you could tell a peach was ripe from its smell alone, but now they arrive hard as stone, dry as chalk and begin rotting from within before they ripen. Strawberries shine with perfect colour but deliver no flavour, while apples are no longer bred for sweetness or crunch but for their ability to endure six months in cold storage.

This transformation is not coincidental but the outcome of relentless pressure from supermarkets on growers to favour durability over taste, size over nourishment and

appearance over honesty. What you are purchasing is not real fruit but a product engineered to survive lorry journeys and look presentable on shelves, even if it tastes like damp paper.

Consider bread. The loaves in supermarkets are not truly bread but soft, chemically altered imitations produced without fermentation or proper heat. What once demanded hours of attention and care is now churned out by factory lines in under an hour. Sourdough is no longer the result of slow, natural processes but white bread doctored with vinegar and yoghurt powder to fake the flavour, while croissants, once crafted with real butter and patient folding, are now filled with margarine and sugar, then branded “French-style” as if the label could excuse the insult. Children grow up believing this is what bread should be and worse still, they defend it, accepting week-long shelf lives and croissants that taste like cake as normal. The sabotage is complete.

As for meat, supermarkets do not sell meat in the traditional sense but a sanitised imitation of it. Mince is often a slurry of discarded cuts barely fit for pet food, chicken breasts are pale and waterlogged, sometimes thawed from frozen even when labelled “fresh”, and steaks glow an artificial red thanks to gas treatments that preserve appearance long after flavour has faded.

These products come from animals raised in cramped conditions, slaughtered at scale and sealed in trays that leak pink liquid and sell a false sense of quality. Ask a supermarket employee to explain the difference between “premium” and “standard” beef and watch them struggle, because there is no real difference, only price tags designed to suggest distinction where none exists.

Every element of the supermarket is a performance built on deceit, from the prices and layout to the packaging and labels, all carefully designed to mislead. “Special offers” frequently cost more than last week’s regular prices, “multi-buy” deals encourage wasteful purchases, and “loyalty” programmes do not reward you but monitor your habits.

Brands do not compete for your attention but for shelf space, purchased through slotting fees that keep small producers locked out. What appears to be a marketplace is in truth a tightly controlled display, and what feels like freedom is in fact a well-rehearsed script.

You are not being served, you are being trained. Trained to see frozen pizza as dinner, sugary yoghurt as health food, vegetables sealed in plastic as fresh and

heavily processed convenience meals as genuine choice. You are made to believe that shopping elsewhere is inconvenient, expensive or eccentric, when in reality buying from local producers, small grocers or real markets offers better food, fairer prices and a connection to your community that supermarkets actively want you to forget. Their survival depends on your ignorance.

This is the lie that has become routine. Every week, millions step willingly into this illusion, spend their money on synthetic sustenance and support a system that undermines farmers, compromises nutrition and hollows out communities. In some areas, people have no choice: it is supermarket A or supermarket B.

The supermarket model is not failing, it is functioning precisely as designed. What has broken is the public's awareness of what has been lost under its cold, glaring lights. The following pages are not a nostalgic reflection or abstract theory, but a clear, detailed account of how the trap was constructed, and how its grip tightens year after year including what it will cost to keep living within its bounds.

## **From corner store to corporate giant**

Once, buying food meant stepping into a place where someone knew your name, where the grocer, the butcher and the baker were not just service providers but neighbours who lived nearby. They participated in the same community and depended on trust, quality and personal reputation to keep their businesses alive. A poor batch of tomatoes would not be forgotten and an incorrect price would be questioned, not ignored. Though far from flawless, this was a system based on human interaction. Local shops were part of a local economy, offering food shaped by region, culture and season. What they lacked in size or convenience, they made up for through familiarity, accountability and a genuine sense of belonging.

Those who are old enough to recall what it was like to visit the shops as children will understand the difference. Our parents would stop by the local store, asking for just five slices of ham, yet spend a good fifteen minutes chatting about life, sharing stories, and catching up on neighbourhood news. The people behind the counters were not faceless workers with name tags. They were familiar, part of the fabric of our daily lives. These shopkeepers were more than just business owners; they were neighbours and friends. We knew their families just as they knew ours. At school, we played with the baker's son and the butcher's daughter, forming friendships that extended beyond the classroom. When a shop was struggling, it was not a secret. The

community rallied together, showing up to buy a little more than needed, not out of necessity but out of care. We were not just individuals living side by side. We were a true community.

Then came the supermarkets.

They did not arrive to share the landscape but to dominate it, dressed in the language of innovation and backed by industrial-scale logistics and heavy investment. They entered neighbourhoods with an appetite for control, offering something that seemed new and exciting: a vast range of goods, long opening hours and consistent pricing. To many, this felt like progress. Local councils welcomed them, enticed by promises of jobs and business rates, while the public, drawn in by scale and novelty, stepped through their doors with curiosity. Behind the polished store fronts, however, was a brutal strategy carried out with precision and intent.

Using their vast size and financial backing, supermarkets cut prices aggressively, sometimes selling essentials at a loss for long enough to drive nearby independents out of business. A corner shop, no matter how committed or well-liked, cannot survive against a global corporation prepared to lose money on bread and milk for a year just to gain control. Once the competition had disappeared, prices crept up, the once-vaunted variety diminished, and the promise of lasting value revealed itself to be a calculated hook designed to create dependency.

Some did not even wait for their rivals to fail. They simply bought them out, folded them into their operations, rebranded or closed them entirely. Names that once stood for local tradition and independence became ghost brands, printed on packaging but stripped of meaning. Their production was moved to distant factories and their recipes redesigned not for flavour but for profit.

Land became another instrument of dominance. Supermarkets began acquiring plots not for immediate use but to prevent others from using them. By sitting on land, lobbying councils and bending planning laws, they stalled or blocked any development that might pose a future threat to their dominance. This was not open competition but strategic control veiled as economic growth.

Local producers were drawn into the trap as well. With supermarkets holding a monopoly on distribution, suppliers were given unfair contracts and harsh conditions. They were expected to meet artificial cosmetic food standards that had little to do with flavour or nutritional value, while payments were delayed and terms changed without warning. Imported produce was used as leverage, displacing local goods to

punish those who failed to comply. Many small farmers, unable to sell directly to the public, were forced to enter a system where every route led to the back of a supermarket.

Alongside the economic campaign, there was a psychological one. Advertising worked to portray small shops as outdated, inefficient or overly expensive, while supermarkets were framed as the cleaner, smarter and more modern choice. Consumers were nudged into accepting that driving to a shopping centre and walking slowly through aisles of artificial lighting and background music was a better way to feed their families. The idea of choice was reduced to multiple brands of the same product, and price became the only measure of value. Meanwhile, quality, service and integrity were quietly pushed aside.

Small shops folded one by one.

Now, entire towns have been reshaped around supermarkets. The corner store survives only as a memory, the butcher has been reduced to a refrigerated aisle, and the grocer has become a wall of plastic crates beneath a cheerful sign reading “fresh”. What was once a network of interdependent businesses, each with its own character and contribution, has become a single centralised depot stocked with thousands of standardised products and staffed by temporary workers who scan items under the eye of surveillance cameras.

This transformation does not represent an organic shift in consumer preference but a deliberate colonisation of the food landscape. Supermarkets did not improve food retail but dismantled it, replacing a diverse and resilient ecosystem with a monoculture shaped entirely by the interests of a few powerful corporations. The cost was not paid just in closed shop fronts and lost employment but in the erosion of culture, the degradation of food and the slow, quiet disappearance of genuine choice.

## **The myth of choice**

Stand still in the centre of a supermarket aisle and turn slowly. You will find yourself surrounded on all sides by tall shelves packed with items, an overwhelming display of colours, logos and slogans that all seem to promise endless possibilities. At first glance, it resembles freedom and feels like abundance, yet it is neither. What surrounds you is not true variety but a carefully orchestrated illusion, designed to overload your senses and dull your ability to question what you see. The products may appear diverse, but in truth, they are variations of the same few items, repeated

under different packaging to maintain the illusion of choice. You are not selecting between meaningful options. You are deciding between different versions of the same factory-produced products.

Let's start with cereal. A single aisle might offer dozens of brands and more than fifty variations, giving the impression of limitless choice. Yet almost all these boxes come from the same small group of global companies and contain the same basic ingredients: corn, wheat, sugar and oil. Whether the packaging presents itself as healthy, indulgent, organic or suitable for families, the contents are nearly identical. The difference lies in the branding, not the food. This same pattern continues across other sections, including bread, dairy, drinks, cleaning products and snacks. What appears to be a competition between many producers is in fact a carefully managed display, shaped by corporate deals, exclusive contracts and tightly controlled supply chains.

This restriction of genuine choice is not accidental. It is built into the structure of the supermarket itself. Shelf space is sold, not earned, and the most visible spots, especially those at eye level or in promotional areas, are bought through expensive agreements. Smaller, independent producers, no matter how fresh, ethical or sustainable their products might be, are pushed out if they cannot pay. These shelves do not reflect customer needs or public interest. They function as profitable real estate, rented out to the highest bidder.

Even the fresh produce section is subject to the same manipulation. You might see a selection of apples, but nearly all have been chosen for their resistance to bruising and long shelf life, not for their flavour or nutritional worth. The vast range of taste and texture once offered by traditional orchards has nearly disappeared. Tomatoes are bred for transport, not enjoyment. Bananas are all genetic copies, ripened with artificial chemicals in sealed rooms. The fruit and vegetables you buy are picked not for their connection to the land or the season but for their compatibility with a logistical system that values predictability above all else. If a crop cannot be easily shipped and sold in uniform quantities, it does not make it through the system.

Packaging adds another layer of confusion. Products are divided into endless formats such as snack size, jumbo, family pack and value, with differences crafted to shift your perception rather than to meet real needs. The larger pack may cost more per unit, while a cheaper version may be identical to the premium one except for its label. Phrases such as farm fresh, homestyle, crafted or natural are not backed by

legal standards. They are marketing devices used to cover the industrial nature of what lies inside.

The illusion of variety is further strengthened by duplication. You may see twenty kinds of shampoo lined up on a shelf, but almost all are produced by just two companies using near-identical ingredients. What seems to be a range of competing products is simply a single operation wearing different faces. The choice becomes a matter of design and branding, not substance. Supermarkets rely on this approach, flooding shelves with repeated offerings to give the impression of freedom while steering all decisions into the same corporate channels.

Real choice would look entirely different. It would mean having access to goods shaped by different values and food grown nearby instead of flown across continents. It would mean items made in small batches with care rather than churned out by machines. The packaging would tell the truth, and prices would reflect the real cost of labour and materials. Such variety would be incompatible with the supermarket model, which depends on scale and efficiency. Anything too local, too original or too unpredictable is either kept out, altered beyond recognition or hidden behind layers of better-known alternatives.

Consumers have been trained to see this system as ordinary. They stand before a wall of toothpaste and believe they are in control. They choose from half a dozen types of cheese without questioning whether they all come from the same place. They feel clever for spotting a deal among dozens of nearly identical snacks, yet they are not engaging in freedom. They are participating in a performance, a script written by marketing teams, rehearsed through advertising and monitored through data.

The supermarket has not broadened your options. It has buried them beneath an avalanche of duplication, distraction and noise. The true richness of the food world has been concealed under layers of artificial variety. What remains is not real choice, but a carefully managed simulation of it, designed not for your benefit but to keep you in their game.

## **How they destroy real food**

Supermarkets do not simply sell food. They transform it completely. They determine how it should look, how far it must travel, how long it must last and, most crucially, how cheaply it can be made. Over time, this kind of control has reshaped the entire supply chain. Food is no longer grown for its flavour or nutritional benefit. It is



grown to meet the needs of a system built entirely around logistics and efficiency. If a product cannot survive long-distance transport, meet strict appearance standards or be priced according to boardroom calculations, it is cast aside. What reaches the shelf is not selected for health or taste but for low cost, easy handling and minimal damage.

Fruit and vegetables are the first to feel this pressure. Supermarkets demand visual uniformity, forcing farmers to produce crops that are identical in shape, ripen all at once and pack neatly with no waste. This leads to genetic repetition, as only a few hardy varieties can meet these demands. Flavour becomes an afterthought and nutrition is reduced. Tomatoes are pale and watery, bred for storage not eating. Peaches are picked before they ripen and rot before they taste sweet. Bananas are harvested green and artificially ripened, resulting in fruit that looks ready but tastes like starch. The typical apple sits in cold storage for months before it appears in the shop, losing much of its natural crispness and flavour long before you bite into it.

Even food labelled as organic does not escape this process. Supermarkets impose the same requirements on organic growers as they do on conventional ones. Organic food must still be packaged, shipped and displayed under artificial light. The idea of organic shifts away from healthy soil and biodiversity and becomes just another marketing term. Though it may carry the right label, the food often travels thousands of kilometres, is handled by machines and is wrapped in plastic. This is not a return to nature. It is industrial produce repackaged to satisfy customers looking to make ethical choices.

Meat is subject to similar compromises. Animals are not raised to develop natural flavour or live well. They are raised to grow quickly and fit narrow size specifications. Beef cattle are fed grain and kept alive with antibiotics in overcrowded lots. Pigs live in dark, filthy spaces with no room to move. Chickens are slaughtered while still young, long before they resemble mature birds. Cuts of meat are chosen for appearance, not tenderness or taste. Mince is made from fat, sinew and scraps. Sausages are padded with fillers. Chicken breasts are injected with water and chemicals to make them appear fuller. Everything is vacuum-packed and labelled as fresh, even when quality has long since been lost.

The dairy section tells the same story. Milk is processed until it loses nearly all flavour. Cheese is produced in industrial plants where machines replace traditional care. Yoghurt is sweetened with large amounts of sugar and sold as a health product. Butter is bland and pale because it has been over-processed. Cream is thickened with

additives so it can sit on the shelf for weeks. Even eggs, which seem wholesome when marked as cage-free, often come from barns filled with thousands of hens kept in stuffy, windowless conditions. Better food is suggested through clever wording on packaging, not through better treatment of animals or more thoughtful farming.

Processed food shows how far the transformation has gone. Frozen meals, snack bars, biscuits, sauces and breakfast cereals are not cooked in the way people understand. They are built from ingredients selected for cost and shelf life, not taste or freshness. Sugars are renamed to confuse buyers. Salt is added to make up for lost flavour. Fats are chosen to create a pleasant texture, not to nourish. Colours and preservatives create the illusion of freshness. These items are not meals. They are copies of meals, shaped to taste like real food without ever being fresh or made by hand.

At the heart of all this is the supermarket's power over its suppliers. A farmer who refuses to follow the rules is dropped. A meat producer who asks for fairer prices is replaced. Product recipes are changed quietly to cut costs. The supermarket does not adapt to the needs of food. Instead, food is reshaped to meet the supermarket's demands. The priorities of the store dictate what is grown, how it is processed and what ends up on your table.

Real food does not vanish through any single dramatic act. It slips away through an accumulation of minor compromises, each one seemingly harmless in isolation but collectively destructive. Flavour is slowly traded for shelf life, ingredients are chosen for cost rather than quality, and traditional methods are replaced by quicker, more profitable alternatives. With each adjustment, the connection between food and its origins grows weaker. In time, people cease to notice what has been lost. They no longer wonder how something was grown, raised or prepared. They accept uniformity as a sign of reliability and confuse sweetness with nutrition. What was once rich with place, season and care is now disguised beneath packaging and price, the confusion achieved by marketing and repetition.

## **Bastardising the classics**

It is not enough for supermarkets to stock their shelves with manufactured junk. They also target what was once real, the result of time, skill and tradition. They alter it until it is barely recognisable. Recipes that took centuries to refine are reduced to bland copies, filled with low-cost ingredients, watered down and repackaged until

only the name remains. The outcome is a counterfeit display of croissants that crack but do not flake, doughnuts that are spongy and stale, pizzas that slump under their own weight, and sauces loaded with sugar. They are all presented as if they are genuine. Shoppers often pick up these poor imitations thinking they are choosing the real thing, unaware that they are eating processed versions that barely resemble the originals and quietly insult tradition.

Take the croissant as an example. In France, it remains a pastry made with cultured butter, expertly folded dough and the careful attention of traditional bakers. A true croissant is the product of patience and technique. On the supermarket shelf, however, what passes for a croissant is merely a crescent-shaped bread roll, overly sweet, glazed with synthetic shine and churned out by machines in enormous volumes. Butter is replaced with margarine, the lamination process is faked, and the final result is chewy, bland and lifeless. Yet this version has become the norm. For many, it is the only croissant they have ever known. As a consolation, they can head to YouTube and watch how French master bakers make their croissants. The only common link between a supermarket croissant and a real croissant is the name.

The doughnut has faced a similar decline. Once fried fresh and filled with simple ingredients, it is now a pale disc containing synthetic gel in place of jam, with chocolate coatings that mimic taste but offer none of the richness. Sugar is dusted on so thickly it clings like glue, and many of these treats are not even fried but baked in industrial moulds and shipped in plastic to sit on shelves, stiffening over time. What was once a small delight has become an artificial, sugary mass that offers little joy.

Bread, once a cornerstone of daily life and a point of cultural pride, has been reshaped into something unrecognisable. What should be a nourishing staple is now a soft, spongy loaf pumped full of additives and produced in under an hour from chemically enhanced dough. Even sourdough, once a symbol of patient, natural fermentation, has been reduced to a marketing tool. A proper sourdough takes more than a day to develop, using wild yeasts and no added commercial yeast, allowing time and temperature to shape its complex structure. Supermarket sourdoughs, by contrast, are made quickly using shortcuts, with regular yeast added for speed and substances such as vinegar or yoghurt powder used to simulate flavour. What results is a loaf with the appearance of tradition but none of its depth, sold under a label that evokes care while delivering little more than factory fluff. Here too, the consolation is to go to YouTube and look for French artisan bakers who make sourdough bread and cook it with century-old wood ovens.

Tomato sauce, once made slowly from fresh tomatoes and herbs, is now a sugary blend thickened with starch and masked with artificial flavour. Even pasta, once a simple mix of durum wheat and water or eggs, is processed to the point where it loses its identity. It is dried so aggressively that its texture is dull, and it often contains low-grade ingredients. No matter how many shapes it is sold in, it tastes of nothing but itself and the plastic that surrounds it. The same degradation affects Bolognese sauce. Traditionally, this is a slow-cooked blend of minced meat, onions, carrots, celery, wine, milk and tomato, simmered for hours until it reaches a deep, savoury richness. In the supermarket, Bolognese sauce becomes a jar of red sludge, sweetened to excess and thickened with starch, with barely a trace of meat or any of the subtle layering of flavour that defines the original. It wears the name, but none of the tradition remains.

Cheese has been equally degraded. Traditional cheddars, once rich with flavour and local distinction, are now lifeless blocks shaped to fit machines rather than appetites. Parmesan is replaced with dry, powdery substitutes. Mozzarella becomes bland and rubbery. Packaging promises tradition with names and imagery, but the product inside is engineered to deceive. Anything called tasty is often anything but.

At the centre of this decline is the supermarket's obsession with consistency and scale. Food is no longer prized for its uniqueness or depth but for how well it fits into a supply chain built around speed, durability and maximum profits. It must endure long journeys, remain shelf-stable for weeks and fit seamlessly into an industrial timetable. The result is a world of food that looks familiar but fails to satisfy. It has been stripped of history, drained of flavour and refitted for convenience and cost.

This process goes largely unchallenged because so many people have grown up with it. They know only these altered versions and accept them as standard. A chewy croissant does not seem wrong because they have never had one that flakes. Sour bread in plastic feels authentic because they have not tasted the real thing. A sweet tomato sauce from a jar appears normal because that is all they have ever known. When offered the genuine article, they often see it as overpriced, strange or inconvenient. The supermarket has not only altered what people eat. It has altered what they remember.

This shift is not progress. It is a slow, deliberate act of cultural erosion. Each time a food tradition is reduced to a shadow of itself, a part of our collective understanding is lost. Names remain, but meaning is removed. Cheapness is the rationale, convenience the excuse. Most people accept the outcome not because they prefer it,

but because they have been taught to expect nothing else. In this way, the supermarket does more than supply food. It rewrites culture, subtly and continually, to serve its own model.

## **The price lie**

Supermarkets love to claim that they are saving you money. The message is printed on receipts, splashed across signs and repeated endlessly through advertisements. Shoppers are praised as smart, savvy and economical. In truth, they are being misled. The supposed savings are largely an illusion, and the pricing system is a calculated design intended to confuse, mislead and extract. The supermarket does not lower your expenses. It redirects them to places you are not expected to notice, disguises them with deceptive labels and ensures that by the time you realise, you have already paid more than you intended.

Begin with the prices on the shelf. Walk down any aisle and try to make a fair comparison between similar products. The labels are inconsistent, switching between price per kilo, per hundred grams and per item with no reliable pattern. The cheapest options are usually tucked away on lower shelves, while the most expensive are placed at eye level and surrounded by signs suggesting urgency or special deals. Many of these promotions show an old price beside a new one, yet the higher price may never have been charged at all. This is not clarity. It is performance. You are not being offered a real deal. You are being steered towards the price they intended you to pay from the outset.

One of the most common tactics is the illusion of a half-price offer. A product's price is raised gradually until it is double what it once was, then advertised at half price with a flourish. Shoppers believe they have spotted a bargain, unaware that the "discount" is merely a return to the original cost, dressed up as a reward. The same cycle repeats again and again. The product rarely, if ever, sells at the inflated full price, but the illusion is maintained. It becomes known as something that is often on offer, which encourages customers to wait for the next round and feel clever when they buy. This is not generosity. It is psychological control.

Such practices are so widespread that they have drawn legal action. In 2024, Australia's consumer watchdog brought lawsuits against Woolworths and Coles for using these tactics in a systematic and deliberate way. The supermarkets were shown to have inflated prices on hundreds of items before promoting them as discounted,

sometimes offering “sale” prices that were actually higher than the original. Serious penalties are being pursued, not because of occasional mistakes but because the strategy was planned and sustained. Similar actions have taken place in the United Kingdom, where Tesco was fined for presenting strawberries as half price after charging the full price for only a few days. These are not isolated incidents. They reflect a business model that depends on manipulation.

Another frequent trick is the difference between shelf price and checkout total. An item marked at \$2 may scan at \$2.75. Many customers do not notice, or only realise after they have left. Staff may apologise and offer a refund if asked, blaming outdated labels or technical errors, but the trend continues. The mistake never works in the customer’s favour. Across millions of purchases, these discrepancies add up to a reliable profit stream. This is not negligence. It is part of the strategy.

Multi-buy deals also create confusion. An offer of two for \$5 may appear to provide value, until you realise that each item cost \$2.20 the week before. Bulk options are no better. So-called value packs are often more expensive per unit than smaller sizes. Shoppers have been trained to assume that more is cheaper, and the supermarket relies on that reflex. It rewards haste and punishes attention.

Shrinkflation is even more subtle. A block of cheese shrinks in weight. A yoghurt tub contains more air. A packet of crisps holds fewer pieces. The price stays the same. The packaging looks unchanged. Unless you check the weight yourself, you are unlikely to notice. This quiet reduction happens across every category. It is not an accident, it is a calculated loss hidden in plain sight.

Loyalty cards strengthen the illusion. Customers scan them with pride, thinking they are earning points and making smart decisions. What they are really doing is handing over personal data. Every purchase is recorded and used to build profiles that feed into targeted marketing, tailored pricing and the resale of information. The discounts offered are minor compared to the value of what is collected. Loyalty is not rewarded. It is monetised.

Even when prices do appear low, they often come at someone else’s expense. Supermarkets force suppliers to lower their prices constantly. Farmers are instructed what to grow, how to grow it and how little they will receive in return. Bakers must deliver products at rates that do not cover basic ingredients. Meat producers are pressured to compromise on animal welfare and safety. Workers throughout the chain are underpaid, overworked and treated as expendable. The money saved at

the checkout has already been taken from those with the least power to resist.

The environment also bears part of the cost. Food is transported thousands of kilometres in fuel-burning lorries, stored in large warehouses consuming vast amounts of energy and wrapped in plastic that cannot be recycled. Products are overstocked and thrown away when they do not sell. These costs do not appear on your receipt. They are passed on to the public in the form of landfill, pollution and ecological damage.

Then, when smaller competitors have been driven out, the real prices begin to rise. An independent service might charge \$10. The supermarket undercuts it at \$5. The smaller business closes. Months later, the supermarket price quietly increases to \$12. There is no longer an alternative. This approach plays out across groceries, medicines, baked goods and other daily needs. The initial discount is bait, the price rise is the trap.

What supermarkets sell is not real value. It is the image of value. It is a carefully designed operation that persuades you to believe you are saving money, while delivering less, hiding more and steadily lowering standards. This is not a minor fault, it is a long-running deception. The question is not what you saved, but how much they convinced you to believe you did.

## **Rigged from shelf to scanner**

Supermarkets are not simply locations where goods are exchanged. They are finely tuned machines, designed not only to display products but to shape behaviour and increase profit. Every detail, from the floor beneath your feet to the lighting above your head, from the layout of aisles to the scent of warm bread drifting through the entrance, is part of a deliberate system. None of it is accidental. You are not moving freely through these spaces. You are being guided, nudged and influenced at every step. The supermarket is not a neutral ground for shopping. It is a controlled environment where psychology replaces service and where profit takes precedence over honesty.

The store's layout is its first method of influence. Essentials such as bread, milk and eggs are placed as far from the entrance as possible, ensuring that you walk through a maze of tempting products before reaching them. Items with high profit margins are placed along the main paths, while the most lucrative brands sit at eye level, directly in your line of sight. Cheaper or unbranded versions are placed lower, often

out of easy view. Near the checkout, impulse items are carefully positioned to catch you in a moment of distraction. Nothing in the arrangement serves your convenience. Every placement is chosen to increase the likelihood that you will make an unplanned purchase.

The physical features of the store reinforce these tactics. Narrow aisles slow your pace, encouraging you to spend more time inside. Shopping baskets have grown larger because when people carry bigger baskets, they perceive that they are buying less and tend to add more. Background music, warm lighting and mirrors are chosen to create an atmosphere of calm and openness. Free samples are not acts of kindness. Once you taste something, your chances of buying it increase sharply. Even the trolleys are designed with a slight tilt, which causes a subtle need for physical adjustment that keeps you alert and engaged. Your movements are influenced not by your needs, but by a system built on studying how you respond.

The shelves are not neutral displays. They are commercial battlegrounds where companies pay to have their products placed in prominent positions. Visibility is bought, not earned. Smaller producers, unable to afford the fees, are pushed to the corners of the store or left out entirely. Promotional spaces are dictated by contracts, not quality. What looks like variety is actually a carefully curated selection chosen to deliver the highest return, not the best value.

Price tags add yet another layer of influence. Bright labels and coloured signs are used to create a sense of urgency. Unit pricing is made deliberately inconsistent, switching between per item, per weight or per volume to make comparison more difficult. Large fonts highlight the supposed discount, while the actual cost per unit is printed in small type. Prices ending in .99 are used to make products appear cheaper, though the saving is negligible. Sale signs promise steep reductions, such as “Was ten, now five,” even if the higher price was never truly charged. These signs do not clarify. They are tools of distraction.

Loyalty cards are presented as a way to save money, but their primary purpose is to track your behaviour. Each time you scan one, your purchases are recorded, forming a detailed profile of your habits. This data is then used to tailor offers, manipulate pricing and is sometimes sold to other companies. The benefit to the shopper is minor. The advantage to the supermarket is vast. You are not receiving a reward. You are surrendering personal information.

The checkout is not a conclusion but a final stage in the process. Delays are not



only a result of inefficiency. They serve to increase exposure to last-minute temptations. Items like chocolate, chewing gum and batteries are placed within easy reach for this reason. Self-checkouts, marketed as modern and efficient, shift the burden of labour onto the customer while quietly tracking movement, hesitation and error. Any mistakes are met with polite apologies, but every action is recorded. The line between service and surveillance disappears.

Beneath it all is a network of predictive systems. Algorithms adjust stock based on weather, previous shopping patterns and upcoming holidays. Prices change in response to behavioural data. Mobile apps track location and habits in real time, feeding this data back into the system. The store watches, learns and adapts constantly in order to keep you spending.

None of this should be confused with efficiency. It is about control. Supermarkets have invested heavily in behavioural research to turn shopping into a controlled experience. You are not being helped. You are being observed. Every step, every glance, every pause is analysed to find new ways to increase spending while making you feel in control.

This is not shopping, it is a gradual surrender to a broader game of consumerism. Supermarkets do not rely on your trust, they rely on your distraction. They do not want you to think deeply. They want you to move along, to follow the signs, and to act without questioning. By the time you reach the till, your choices have already been shaped. All that remains is the payment.

## **Anti-competitive and proud of it**

Supermarkets are not participants in fair competition. They are instruments of dominance. Their success is not built on offering better products or superior service, but on ensuring that no one else can operate alongside them. Their business model has nothing to do with merit or innovation. It is founded on scale, aggression and total control. They exploit legal loopholes, manipulate supply chains and use their size to block potential rivals with the same precision they apply to product placement. They do not behave like ordinary retailers. They behave like cartels. The illusion of a free market disintegrates the moment a supermarket appears.

Their most powerful tactic is pricing, not in any honest or sustainable form, but as a weapon of strategic undercutting designed to eliminate competition. When a small business offers key cutting, fresh flowers or baked goods, the supermarket replicates

the service and offers it at a deliberate loss. Because of their vast scale and the financial support they receive, supermarkets can endure long-term losses. The smaller business cannot. It begins to lose revenue, and eventually it closes. Once the independent competitor is gone, the supermarket raises its prices, often beyond what the local shop once charged. The goal was never to provide better value. It was to remove choice.

This is not theory. It is routine. A neighbourhood key-cutting stand may charge \$10. The supermarket installs a machine and offers the same service for \$5. The stand begins to lose foot traffic and shuts down. Gradually, the supermarket increases the price to \$12. With the alternative gone, customers have no option but to accept it. This is predatory pricing. It remains legal because the system is structured to protect the largest players and penalise those who try to remain independent.

Control of land provides another layer of advantage. Supermarkets do not simply acquire property to build stores. They also buy additional plots to prevent competitors from gaining access to the area. They acquire neighbouring sites, leave them vacant, or insert restrictive clauses into lease agreements. A supermarket may open in a shopping centre and include a legal condition that forbids any butcher, baker or greengrocer from operating nearby. The result is not a landscape shaped by consumer demand, but one engineered through legal restriction, where a single company dictates the entire food supply for a community.

Their treatment of suppliers is no less severe. Farmers and producers are told exactly what to supply, how to supply it and how little they will be paid. Refusal often means immediate delisting. Many agree to these conditions because the supermarket is the only buyer with the capacity to sustain their business. Once they are inside the system, they are trapped. Prices are driven down, demands increase, and any failure to meet expectations results in exclusion. Whether the terms are realistic is not considered. The supermarket assumes total compliance and replaces those who fall short.

Coles in Australia was fined \$10 million for threatening suppliers under a scheme called Active Retail Collaboration, which required payments to maintain shelf space. This was not a negotiation. It was coercion. Tesco in the United Kingdom delayed payments to its suppliers for up to two years, using the withheld funds to polish its financial reports while smaller businesses struggled to stay solvent. These were not accidental lapses. They were part of a systematic pattern of exploitation, identified by

regulators as deliberate and sustained.

Even large-scale competitors face enormous obstacles. Independent grocers, regional chains and specialist shops must navigate a landscape filled with complex planning laws, exclusive supplier contracts and the overwhelming presence of supermarket advertising. Loyalty programmes, aggressive discounts and non-stop marketing campaigns create an environment in which no smaller business can compete. Supermarkets dominate media, fill physical space with their branding and shape consumer expectations so that anything unfamiliar is dismissed as overpriced or inconvenient.

In some cases, they do not destroy their rivals. They collude with them. In Canada, several supermarket chains were caught fixing the price of bread. Canada Bread pleaded guilty to criminal charges, confirming that what appeared to be competition was in fact coordination. Sobeys, a Canadian groceries store implicated in the scandal, denied wrongdoing, but the case exposed the underlying truth. These companies were not battling to lower prices. They were conspiring to raise them.

Pressure on suppliers does not always need to breach the law. Constant financial demands are enough to destroy. When Woolworths and Coles introduced their \$1-per-litre milk campaign, they devastated the Australian dairy industry. Many farmers were pushed out of business. Some declared bankruptcy and sadly the rate of suicides among farmers increased. Milk became a marketing tool to lure shoppers. Those who produced it were paid below the cost of production. They were not given a choice. They were presented with a demand.

Government resistance is limited. Planning approvals are often granted on the promise of economic benefit. Supermarkets present themselves as engines of growth, promising jobs and regeneration while proposing infrastructure that seems to serve the wider community. Councils, eager to show progress, tend to support these developments. Oversight bodies are slow to intervene. Regulatory penalties, when imposed, are minimal. Political will to challenge these powerful interests remains weak. In practice, policy serves expansion, not restraint.

Consumers are not spared from the consequences of supermarket expansion. Although they are told they are being offered value and convenience, what they are actually being drawn into is a system of dependence in which meaningful alternatives are steadily removed. When the supermarket replaces the florist, the butcher, the bakery, the newsagent and the café with its own generic and often inferior substitutes,

the damage cannot be reversed. Costs for everyday goods eventually increase, the standard of available food and services steadily falls, and the money that once supported local economies is redirected into centralised corporate accounts, leaving behind weaker communities with fewer choices and declining prospects.

All of this is delivered behind bright signage and polished marketing. “Prices are down.” “Every day low prices.” “We serve.” These are not statements of principle. They are instruments of control. This is not free enterprise but a system of strategic dominance. Supermarkets do not welcome competition. They eliminate it, not through better quality or service, but through relentless expansion, legal manoeuvring and commercial aggression. In almost any other sector, such practices would be recognised for what they are. In retail, they are treated as achievement.

## **Eco-deception and fake ethics**

Supermarkets have perfected the performance of appearing to care. They scatter words such as sustainable, local, organic and ethical across their packaging with all the commitment of an election pledge that was never meant to be honoured. These labels are not signs of genuine quality or moral integrity. They are a form of camouflage, carefully chosen to reassure the uneasy shopper while allowing the business to continue exactly as before. The objective is not to create real change but to craft the appearance of it. As long as the customer leaves feeling virtuous, the supermarket can go on selling the same industrially produced goods, merely dressed in a greener and more appealing disguise.

Stroll down what is optimistically called the health aisle and you will find a token display of organic vegetables entombed in plastic, a few loaves of overpriced bread given the label artisan, and a neat row of fair trade chocolate bars. This is a stage set, arranged to lend an air of credibility to the entire store. Beyond that aisle, nothing has changed. The meat still comes from industrial farms. The fruit and vegetables still travel from far-off countries. The bakery still uses frozen dough sent from a central warehouse. That single aisle exists to shield the rest of the operation from close examination.

The claims printed on packaging are usually vague and unregulated. All natural carries no legal definition. Locally sourced might mean grown in a nearby county or shipped from hundreds of kilometres away. Free range may describe thousands of birds confined to a single shed with only token access to the outdoors. Sustainable

appears on seafood with no verifiable evidence to support it. Such terms are not designed to inform but to generate trust and comfort, which matters far more to the supermarket than accuracy. Many shoppers assume these claims are backed by strict regulation. That belief is misplaced.

Government oversight is feeble. Labelling laws are riddled with loopholes, barely enforced and often influenced by the very industries they are meant to control. Regulators are chronically underfunded and easily swayed by corporate lobbying. Supermarkets wield influence through political donations, media partnerships and industry connections. When caught misleading customers, the penalties are trivial. A fine is paid, a press release is issued and a new marketing campaign is rolled out. The core practices remain untouched. This is not an accident. It is how the system is designed to operate.

Such lack of accountability allows supermarkets to absorb genuine movements and strip them of substance. Organic farming becomes nothing more than a logo. Ethical sourcing is reduced to a slogan. Environmental responsibility is represented by a reusable bag bearing the company's brand. Real causes are not nurtured but swallowed, polished and sold back in diluted form. The business model remains as it always was. The language of conscience becomes another tool of persuasion.

The same pattern applies to their supposed acts of social responsibility. Donation boxes by the entrance, school voucher schemes, community event sponsorships, all are displayed as proof of corporate goodwill. Meanwhile, these same companies undercut small local shops, squeeze their suppliers and minimise their tax contributions. Staff are paid the bare minimum permitted, often less in practice through insecure contracts and reduced hours. Yet the advertising is filled with smiling faces and messages about giving back. These gestures are not acts of kindness. They are calculated marketing expenses.

Their environmental record is equally telling. Supermarkets create huge volumes of plastic waste, overpackage their goods, overstock their shelves and throw away tonnes of edible food every day. Their shops are cooled by open fridges. Their supply chains depend on fossil fuels. Their marketing encourages endless consumption with no regard for the planet's limits. Yet they run campaigns about reusable bags, plant-based meals and paper straws, hoping such gestures will overshadow the damage. They do not. The damage remains, barely hidden beneath a coat of green paint.

Shoppers often accept this fiction because it is easier than confronting the truth. It

allows them to believe they are making ethical choices without making any real changes to their own habits. The supermarket feeds this comfort, offering just enough visible virtue to hide the deeper reality. A recyclable logo here, a solar panel there, a seasonal campaign about bees or oceans. These are the distractions. The uncomfortable truth stays hidden.

Real ethics demand disruption. They require slower and more careful processes, closer and fairer sourcing, prices that reflect true costs and far less waste. Supermarkets cannot embrace this because their business is built on scale, speed and the relentless drive to cut costs. Greenwashing offers them the perfect solution, letting them look responsible while changing nothing that matters. As long as regulation remains weak and political will is absent, nothing will alter. The shelves will stay bright, the slogans will stay comforting and the deception will continue. For supermarkets, the aim is not to do good but to appear good. Accountability is nowhere to be found on the shelf. Only the image is for sale.

## **The death of the local**

When a supermarket arrives in a town, it does not join the community. It displaces it. It draws in shoppers, redirects local spending and gradually pushes out the small businesses that once gave the area its character, variety and resilience. The independent butcher, baker, grocer and florist are reduced to fading memories, replaced by a single vast building ringed with a car park and a few predictable franchise outlets offering the same generic products found in every other town. The local character is not strengthened. It is erased.

Supermarkets depend on uniformity. They do not welcome high streets filled with varied shops, regional flavours or independent competitors. They prefer spending patterns that are predictable, conducted in spaces that feel familiar. This is why a supermarket in Hobart is indistinguishable from one in Cairns. The colours, the layout, the brands, all follow the same script. This is not about convenience. It is about a deliberate flattening of culture, a carefully engineered sameness packaged and sold as progress.

The effect on local economies is swift and enduring. Money spent in a supermarket does not remain in the community. It flows to head offices, distant shareholders and supply chains that overlook local suppliers entirely. An independent butcher reinvests earnings in the town. A supermarket channels its profits elsewhere. A corner grocer

builds relationships with nearby farms. A supermarket relies on centralised distribution hubs. Each pound spent in the supermarket removes value from the local economic cycle. Over time, the town not only loses income but also its identity.

Job creation is the familiar defence offered whenever a new store is planned. Supermarkets promise new employment and economic activity. In reality, they provide a handful of low-wage, part-time roles with little security or influence. Ten small businesses, each with experienced owners, skilled staff and deep community roots, are replaced by a scattering of casual shelf stackers and checkout operators. What is lost is more than just employment. It is independence, skill, knowledge and purpose. What is gained is fluorescent lighting and the monotony of scanning barcodes.

Planning systems are meant to protect against this, yet in practice they are no barrier. Councils are enticed with promises of investment and threatened with costly legal action if they refuse approval. Supermarkets exploit every weakness in the planning process, dominate applications and use their legal and financial power to silence opposition. Community objections are ignored. Viable alternatives are dismissed. Once the building begins, the harm is irreversible.

Governments could step in. They could strengthen zoning rules, support independent retailers and curb anti-competitive practices. They could demand thorough environmental and economic assessments before development is approved. They could use policy, not platitudes, to fund local markets, co-operatives and regional food hubs. Yet they rarely act. Their inaction is not due to ignorance. It amounts to consent.

Part of the problem lies in the narrative supermarkets construct. They present their arrival as a sign of progress, a milestone in development. Local newspapers print favourable stories. Grand openings are staged with ribbon-cutting and giveaways. Residents are encouraged to celebrate an event that, in truth, dismantles their independence. Conditioned to prize convenience above all else, the public applauds as the last corner shop closes its doors.

Resistance exists. Farmers' markets, food co-operatives and community-run food initiatives persist in some areas. Yet they operate within a system designed to keep them at the margins. They compete for visibility in a landscape dominated by supermarket advertising, discount cards and prime locations. They are dismissed as quirky, overpriced or impractical. Yet they are among the last remaining connections

to a food system that values people and place over profit.

What has been lost is hard to measure but easy to sense. Walk through a town hollowed out by supermarket expansion and you will see boarded shopfronts, identical chain logos and a community severed from its own food sources. People work in jobs they do not enjoy, selling food they do not trust, to customers who have no genuine choice.

The supermarket has not only dismantled the local economy. It has dismantled the local itself. Relationships, knowledge and a sense of place have been replaced by terminals, tracking systems and food stripped of origin or meaning. Unless this pattern is broken, it will continue unchecked. Town by town, suburb by suburb, community by community, until the entire landscape is uniform. A continent of branded boxes offering the same empty promise to everyone, everywhere, without end.

## **Break the chain**

By now the pattern should be unmistakable. Supermarkets are not providers of convenience. They are instruments of control. They have not lowered the cost of food, only refined the art of making it look cheap. They have not expanded choice, only standardised it. They have not supported communities, only dismantled them. Their entire model is built on illusion, manipulation and the slow erosion of quality, ethics and local independence. What most people consider an ordinary weekly shop is, in reality, a quiet act of surrender.

This is not the inevitable outcome of modern life. It is the result of deliberate choices made in corporate boardrooms and supported by policymakers too timid or too compromised to intervene. The supermarket flourishes because it does not obey the rules. It alters them, then finances the very systems that protect its advantage. It claims to serve customers, yet shapes their desires. It claims to be efficient, while generating waste on a massive scale. It claims to save money, while shifting the real costs onto farmers, workers, ecosystems and public health.

Consumers are not merely victims in this process. They are participants. Every pound spent in a supermarket is a signal of approval, a vote for more factory farming, more false savings, more hollowed-out high streets, more bland meals and empty promises. Most people do not recognise it this way because the system is designed to prevent such recognition. The language of convenience, value and choice



is repeated until it replaces critical thought entirely. Loyalty is not something supermarkets earn. It is something they manufacture.

Reversing this decline will not come from corporate slogans or mild reforms within the existing system. It will require refusal. That means avoiding supermarkets whenever possible. It means supporting genuine producers, even if it takes more time or costs more money. It means reviving the habit of asking difficult questions about where food comes from, how it was produced and what its price truly reflects. It means demanding that governments replace empty gestures with real action, enforcing rules that protect what remains of independent food culture before it disappears altogether.

It also means recognising what has already been lost. This is not only about taste or nutritional value, but about meaning. Food once carried with it stories. It reflected the place it came from, the season in which it grew, the people who shaped it and the care they invested. Now it reflects only the scale of the operation, the efficiency of the packaging and the priorities of shareholders. To eat well is not simply to eat for health. It is to reject the lifeless standard of the supermarket and to seek food that restores memory, celebrates effort and returns dignity to those who produce it.

The challenge is considerable. The supermarket has embedded itself in the daily rhythm of life. It has reshaped habits, lowered expectations and influenced the very infrastructure that surrounds it. For many people, there has never been another way. This is precisely why it must be challenged. What now seems normal is in fact a carefully constructed trap — a landscape designed for consumption rather than nourishment, where the food is a replica, the prices are illusions and the promises are printed in green across a lie.

Alternatives do exist. Farmers' markets, food co-operatives, independent grocers, direct-from-farm sales and bulk-buying groups are all imperfect. They can be disorganised, more expensive and occasionally inconvenient. Yet they are real. They reflect human labour rather than corporate design. They offer connection instead of control. The real choice is not between brands inside the supermarket, but between participating in its system or stepping outside it altogether.

Breaking this cycle does not require a single dramatic act. It begins with small, steady acts of defiance. Choose a different shop. Ask a different question. Stop trusting the label. Stop believing the discount. Refuse the claim that the supermarket is the only option. It is not. It never was. Its dominance exists only because too many

people stopped looking for alternatives. Begin again. See the system for what it is. See what it has taken. Then withdraw your support. Starve the machine that starves your choices. That is the first step toward food with meaning, communities with strength and a future not suffocated by packaging and deception.

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