

Letters

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* LETTER OF THE WEEK

Bottled water ban: sheer nonsense

James R Amoroso

Food sector analyst, Equity Research Helvea

The views of the Mayor of San Francisco and Professor Tim Lang are laudable, but a move to ban bottled water is naïve and far more 'nonsensical' than bottling it in the first place ('The true cost of bottling water', The Grocer, 14 July, p23).

A ban solves nothing, tries to solve the wrong problem, helps reverse a healthy consumer trend, is anti-competitive, creates a legislative nightmare and strikes at the heart of consumer freedom.

What will consumers will do when confronted with no bottled water in their food store, restaurant or take-away? They will buy something else: a fizzy drink, juice, energy drink,



Dissuading people from drinking pure calorie-free water is 'total insanity'

beer, wine, etc, many of which will be packaged in the demon plastic bottle. Dissuading anyone from drinking pure, calorie-free water is total insanity and a retrograde step. Health and wellness is one of the key drivers of consumption, not 'chic'.

Is Mayor Newsom also going to

ban PET bottles of soft drinks, juices, teas and the like? A logical next step. But before he does, he'd better lay down pipelines from the Coke and Pepsi factories direct to consumers' homes. Only then would we have a level playing field for bottlers of all beverage types. And what of 'near waters' that are flavoured or fortified? Should they be banned, too?

Regardless of the (non)sense of the ban, shouldn't the customer have the right to choose if he or she wants to pay for water or not? Are we also going to force consumers to buy organic meat, vegetables and eggs too by banning any foodstuff or feedstock sprayed with artificial fertiliser? However well-meaning such decisions might be, they smack of totalitarianism or communism and are unworkable.

Flooding will not hit ice cream supplies

Anuj Lal

Business director Ice cream, Unilever UK

SIR; Flooding to the Gloucester area has indeed forced Unilever to temporarily suspend production at our factory, but it has not caused any serious supply shortages, and is not forecast to ('Flooding causes havoc', The Grocer, 28 July, p4).

We were able to resume normal operations within our cold stores at both Tewkesbury and Gloucester shortly afterwards, while also moving stock to other distribution sites where appropriate. We have also been able to call on our comprehensive and flexible European supply network to meet our customers' needs. Working together with our retail partners, who also had some difficulties of their own due to the flooding, we were able to reschedule deliveries where appropriate.

The current plan is that production at Gloucester will recommence next week and we look forward to life getting back to normal, including for our employees who have in some cases suffered personally from the floods. We can assure all our customers, and the great British public, that now summer has finally arrived we have plenty of ice cream available.

Leave independent co-op stores alone

Colin Richell

Member, The Co-operative Group

SIR; Your article on the merger of the Co-operative Group and United Co-operatives was very thought provoking ('United at last... but will others co-operate?', The Grocer, 28 July, p24).

I have recently had a letter published in our own Co-operative News in which I expressed the view that the independent co-operative societies should be left alone and not coerced into merging with a larger society.

You quite rightly state there is no advantage in increased purchasing power, because most societies purchase through the Co-operative Retail Trading Group.

I am sure that most smaller societies fear that if they are part of a larger one, stores and subsidiary businesses that they have cherished will be closed because the trading strategy does not equate with their own.

Members of the Co-operative Group wonder why Peter Marks, the new society's CEO, is worrying about a single society, which will not happen in his or my lifetime, when he needs to concentrate on integrating the two businesses. He will have our full support to achieve this.

Buying practices must be rethought

Claire Melamed

Head of trade and corporates, Action Aid UK

SIR; In criticising groups such as Action Aid for not disclosing the names of factories where we have uncovered poor working conditions, Asda and Tesco miss a number of central points ('No detail provided of factory 'abuses'', The Grocer, 21 July, p10).

In our experience, if names are disclosed, there is a clear risk that workers may face retaliation from supermarkets or their bosses. Factories exposed in the past have been delisted, meaning that workers face job losses and even deeper poverty.

But there is a bigger issue here. The cases that Action Aid and others have highlighted are microcosms of a much wider problem caused to a substantial degree by the way supermarkets do business with their suppliers.

Dealing with poor working conditions on a case-by-case basis without addressing their root causes will not solve this problem.

There needs to be a full rethink on supermarket buying practices, beginning with improved standards and the creation of a watchdog to enforce them.

Now everyone will have to come clean

Jules Birch

Founder, Works With Water

SIR; Food and drink manufacturers are gearing up for the draft EU legislation on health claims that will lead to on-pack health claims being scrutinised. Works With Water welcomes the legislation because it will eliminate spurious claims that mislead today's consumer.

When the new European Nutrient Profile legislation is introduced in 2009, it will ensure that in order to make on-pack claims such as 'source of fibre' or 'low in cholesterol', each product will have to contain a specific amount per portion. Manufacturers, large or small, will need to manifest their intentions now. With this legislation, it will be extremely difficult to sell the customer short. Consumers will know exactly what they are buying.

Supermarkets have been integral in ensuring manufacturers come clean on their contents and on-pack health claims. This legislation represents definite progress for those companies who have agonisingly adhered to their own high standards for their customers. More veracity has got to be a good thing for consumers and the whole industry.

Let's see more pork in sandwiches

Jane E Conder

Chairman, Ladies in Pigs

SIR; We see the traditional BLT, roast beef or chicken on the sandwich and snack shelves, but what about the best and healthiest of the lot – good British cold roast pork? ('New frontiers for a classic staple', The Grocer, 28 July, p41) Pork is low fat, succulent, rich in vitamins and minerals and great value.

Pork tenderloin can also be used, and is delicious served in wraps and fajitas when stir-fried with a little chilli or BBQ spice and tossed with salad. Another healthy option is the sausage sandwich using British Quality Standard Mark sausages. These are high in meat and, with so many choices in flavour, there is something for all ages and tastes.

So let's see supermarkets, sandwich bars and petrol stations boost their sales, the health of the nation, and the British Pig Industry by using more pork.