

Short food chains in supermarket retail

Introduction :

A short chain is a sales mode that involves exclusively the producer and the consumer. They are the only two actors of commercialisation in a short circuit, in that the producer is also the seller and the goods pass into the consumer's hands without any such intermediaries as supermarkets.

However, there may be other types of short food chains : it is the case of short circuits in supermarkets. Although there is an intermediary, if the supermarket sells local products bought from a small local producer in order to sell them, it is also a short circuit - if a little longer - since these are local products and not goods from some multinational company or goods from abroad.

There are many examples : Spanish strawberries in our shops, exotic fruits (bananas, coconuts...). In other words, an external actor comes into play as an intermediary between producer and buyer, with a purely commercial role.

Since such short circuits have clearly different characteristics, we are entitled to ask ourselves a few questions : how does the sale take place, where does it happen and is it really beneficial for the producer?

How ?

Short circuits are more and more favoured by supermarkets simply to meet the consumers' demand. Indeed, these turn to local products for reasons of quality, price and ease of movement.

To do this, supermarkets buy directly from small local producers and retail the goods (at variable prices) directly under their store signs.

In that, the local product is in competition with imported goods even if these remain unavoidable simply because they are sometimes not produced locally. Imported goods may be more polluting (because of shipping and modes of production) but they still have an important place in supermarkets. Besides, consumers do not necessarily wish to buy locally or they do not wish to dispense with some items that may not be seasonal. People are now used to the luxuries of globalization and they do not necessarily care for the flip side of the coin.

Where ?

The sale takes place directly at the supermarket or mall. The products wear a label that clearly shows their origin on the packing, such as for instance the BIO label.

Beneficial ?

In some cases the short circuit can be profitable as long as the producer can go the distance vis-a-vis the supermarket. Indeed, the latter's aim is to make a profit rather than support local products, even if this harms the local commerce.

Since the main supermarkets are involved in a competition of their own, they are not genuinely concerned with supporting local commerce, however promising it may be.

The supermarkets accept first the climate risk and then the risk of choking, with a view to selling more at attractive prices.

In other cases supermarkets buy from the producer at very low prices and retail the goods up to five times as much. This means a profit for the supermarket but not for the producer. Especially as, if the products do not sell well, the producer will be returned his goods without any compensation.

Supermarkets are of far more importance in the world of trade and are thus harmful to the development of local commerce. Moreover, a local producer won't be able to do business with the supermarket unless the demand is high enough.

In other words, in the world of business, supermarkets are the real leaders and enjoy an enormous power over local shops, which they exercise in the form of pressure, by returning goods without any compensation, but they are a nearly unavoidable link for the small producers who want to break into the world.

This situation seems quite unchangeable, at least it will not be shaken, let alone turned around, as long as consumers don't turn massively to local producers and boycott supermarkets, which will then have to either make their products more acceptable, or be forced to close.

To conclude, selling in a short chain in the great distribution is highly hazardous because demand and offer are rather random and small producers get no guarantee from supermarkets. So, we are free to take a step towards a solution that is in fact greener, more convenient, to put it short : better. This would only cost us to abandon some global luxuries...

Source :

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