NEW REPORT: SUPERMARKETS GUILTY OF DECEPTION ON THE PLASTIC CRISIS

- First-ever European ranking of supermarkets reveals lack of action on plastic pollution crisis
- The average rating achieved by retailers was only 13.1 out of 100
- Although UK retailers achieved the highest ratings, report uncovered double standards across brands with outlets operating beyond UK borders

Retail giants across Europe guilty of promoting false solutions to the plastic pollution crisis and perpetuating double standards, a new report finds.

The first-ever analysis of the role European supermarkets play in addressing plastic pollution, “Under wraps? What Europe’s supermarkets aren’t telling us about plastic” is a result of collaboration of over 20 NGOs, members of Break Free from Plastic movement, from across Europe.

The specially designed ranking developed by The Changing Markets Foundation revealed a near-complete lack of ambition across three categories of questions on the topics of: Transparency and performance, Commitments, and Support for government policy.

The overall average score achieved by retailers was only 13.1 out of 100.

Of 130 retailers contacted, only 39 retailers (30%) provided a written response to the coalition’s questionnaire, but many of these responses did not provide meaningful replies to the questions. Further analysis of 74 retailers across 13 countries revealed a concerning lack of actions to tackle the plastic crisis.

Even within supermarkets performing well in the UK, the report uncovered double standards for brands with international operations extending across Europe. For example, Lidl, a brand from the biggest European retail group Schwarz with 125.3 billion EUR turnover in 2020, achieved 44.7% in the UK whilst only achieving between 13% and 23.7% in other countries such as Germany and the Czech Republic.

Similarly, ALDI Süd was the top performer in the UK and Ireland, with 65.3% and 61% respectively, but it only achieved 11% in Austria, where it operates under the name Hofer, and 25.7% in Germany. Aldi is the second biggest retailer in Europe with 106.3 billion EUR turnover.

Overall, retailers from the UK and France scored 39.6% and 23.3% respectively. No other country achieved a total average of more than 20%. The average score achieved by retailers in Spain, the Czech Republic and Estonia was below 10%.

Nusa Urbancic, Campaigns Director at the Changing Markets Foundation, commented: “Our report shows that even the best performers, such as ALDI and LIDL have double standards, when it comes to addressing the plastic crisis. They performed well in the UK and Ireland, but show abysmal results in Spain, Germany and other countries where they operate.

1 Food Retailers in Europe and worldwide (retail-index.com)
“Such differences cannot be explained through different national legislation and show that not a single retailer is responding to the plastic crisis with the urgency this situation demands. Instead of investing in systemic solutions, such as plastic reduction and reuse systems, retailers were found to be greenwashing and delaying legislation.”

WRAP have recently reported that more than one third of UK plastic packaging is not recyclable and only 5% was reusable. Instead of investing in systemic solutions, Under wraps report reveals that supermarkets are promoting false solutions, such as in-store flexible plastic take-back schemes. On top of this, plastic packaging waste that was marketed as being “recycled”, was often exported to countries that have much fewer resources to deal with this problem, and previous investigations have revealed that exported waste was dumped in nature.

**Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) Ocean Campaign Leader, Christina Dixon said:** “EIA and partners have been surveying UK retailers on their plastic use since 2018 and in that time we’ve seen a marked improvement in transparency, the quality of the data they provide and the targets they are setting themselves.

“That said, being European leaders when the bar is set so low is little cause for celebration. Ultimately, tangible reductions in plastic use and the pace towards a packaging-free future built around the concepts of reuse and refill is still far too slow to meet the scale of the crisis the planet is facing.”

Although overall current retailer performance is disappointing, the analysis also shows that such abysmal results do not have to remain the reality. Combining the best responses to each question created a fictional “best-in-class” retailer with the total score of 82.7%.

**Rosa Pritchard of ClientEarth commented:** “A number of the supermarkets included in this report are public companies and as such they have legal obligations to be transparent about their performance on plastics. But crucially, disclosure obligations are going to become much stricter for all companies in the coming years. That’s why those at the bottom of the ranking need to start preparing now to be able to adapt to tomorrow’s legal environment.”

Despite the urgency to act, the amount of plastic that the plastic industry is placing on the market is growing and on a “business as usual” trajectory is even projected to skyrocket. Supermarkets are very important actors when it comes to plastic pollution but have failed to take meaningful steps.

With a 2.4 trillion EUR turnover, the retail sector has the resources to act, and public opinion polls consistently show that citizens firmly believe retailers have a responsibility to address plastic pollution.

www.changingmarkets.org

ENDS

---

2 World-leading research will pave the way for mainstream re-use and refill shopping in UK supermarkets | WRAP
3 Food Retailers in Europe and worldwide (retail-index.com)
4 Recent IPSOS poll showed that 85% of respondents globally want manufacturers and retailers to be held responsible for reducing, reusing and recycling plastic packaging, up from 80% previously. | Reuters
Notes to editors

Media contact:
Ryan Seller
ryan@higginsonstrategy.com
+44 7464 630688

For a copy of the report in full or for a summarised breakdown of the findings please contact
ryan@higginsonstrategy.com

Changing Markets Foundation:

The Changing Markets Foundation was formed to accelerate and scale up solutions to sustainability challenges by leveraging the power of markets.

Working in partnership with NGOs, other foundations and research organisations, we create and support campaigns that shift market share away from unsustainable products and companies and towards environmentally and socially beneficial solutions.

For more information visit www.changingmarkets.org

Break Free From Plastic:

#breakfreefromplastic is a global movement envisioning a future free from plastic pollution. Since its launch in 2016, more than 2,000 organizations and 11,000 individual supporters from across the world have joined the movement to demand massive reductions in single-use plastics and push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis.

BFFP member organizations and individuals share the shared values of environmental protection and social justice and work together through a holistic approach to bring about systemic change. This means tackling plastic pollution across the whole plastics value chain—from extraction to disposal—focusing on prevention rather than cure and providing effective solutions.

For more information visit: www.breakfreefromplastic.org