

# **Profit Over Purpose**

**Why supermarkets will make the  
Food Strategy fail**

**FOODRISE**

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# Executive Summary

The UK government's Food Strategy states that it is relying on industry and the private sector to drive the transition to a food system that will provide healthy, sustainable and affordable food for communities across Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Given the control that supermarkets have over our food system, we would expect the largest supermarkets – which control over 95% of all UK retail food sales – to be spearheading this transformation.<sup>2</sup>

Instead, supermarkets are doing the opposite: harming the health of our communities and the livelihoods of British farmers, whilst contributing to climate breakdown, species extinction and jeopardising the UK's food security.<sup>3</sup> Why? Because the ownership structures of these supermarkets lock them into one overriding goal - maximising profit above any other consideration, including public health, food security and the environment.

We are therefore calling on the UK government to:

1. **Recognise that the current ownership structures of UK supermarkets cannot support the action needed to achieve the priority outcomes of the Food Strategy.** The government should facilitate a shift towards regulatory and financing arrangements that enable supermarkets to become part of the solution in the short term, while working longer-term to dismantle their hegemony within the UK's food sector.
2. **Champion alternative food networks, which have greater potential than supermarkets to deliver in the face of health, environmental, and food accessibility challenges.** The government should increase support and financial flows to help sustain and proliferate these networks.



*The Queen of Greens: A mobile greengrocer providing access to fresh, affordable produce for residents across Liverpool and Knowsley.*  
Credit: Rob Battersby

# Our food system is controlled by supermarkets

Groceries account for 11% of total household spending in the UK, making it the third largest area of expenditure after housing and transport.<sup>4</sup> With over 32,000 supermarket outlets across the UK, combined with the rise of online grocery shopping, the food retail market is currently valued at £195.3 billion and is forecast to grow to £214 billion by 2028.<sup>5</sup>

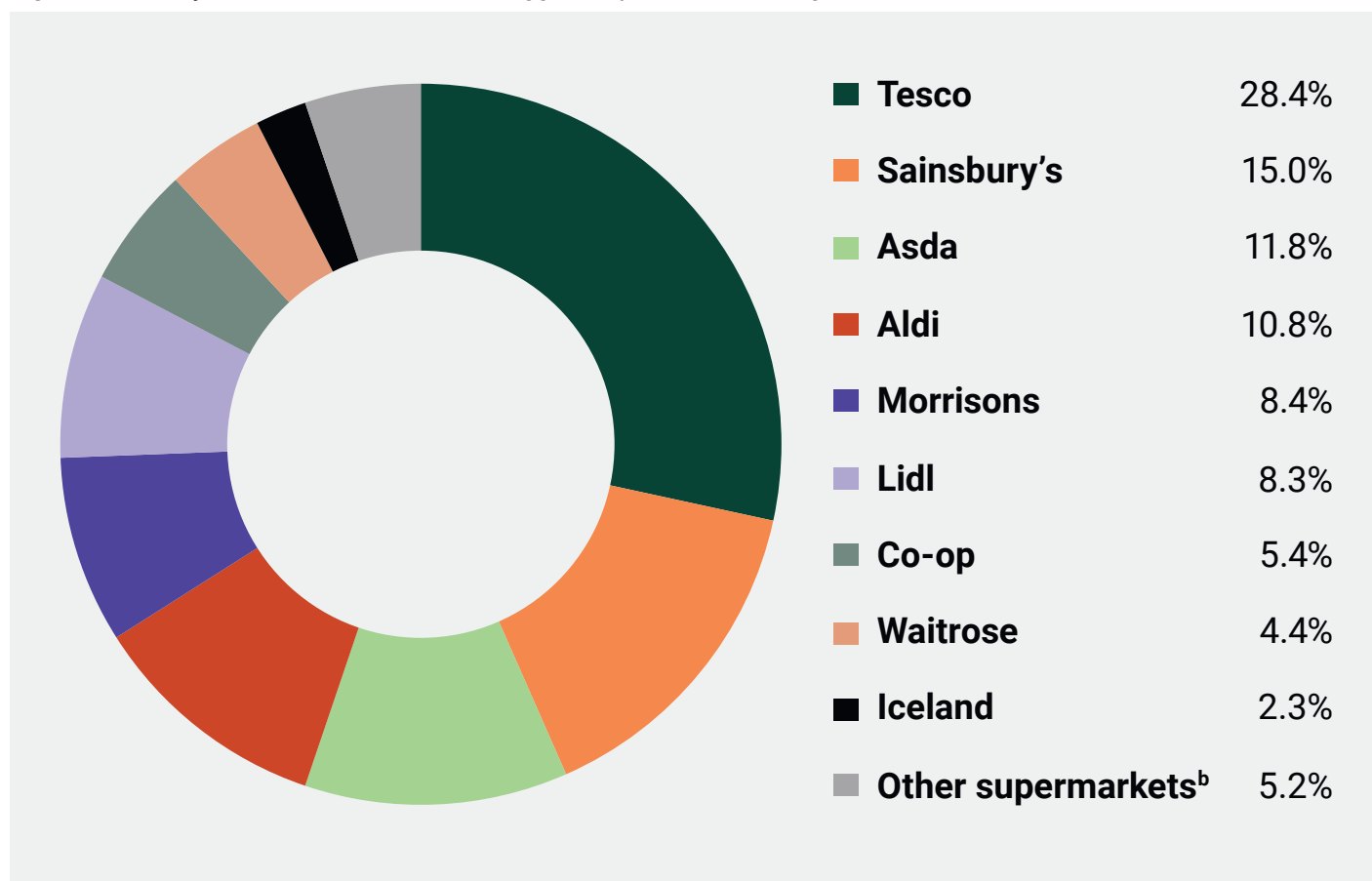
Polling commissioned by Foodrise reveals that 90% of adults shopped at one or more of the UK's 10 biggest supermarkets over the course of one week.<sup>a</sup>

These supermarkets – which account for over 95% of the grocery market – have immense control over the UK's food system.<sup>6</sup> Their decisions shape how nearly all food sold in the UK is produced, distributed, and consumed.

On the supply side, supermarkets set the terms of trade with farmers, suppliers, and processors, and their vast buying power enables them to dictate prices and contractual conditions. They can influence what products succeed or fail in the marketplace – determining everything from which fruit and vegetables are grown, to whether plant-based options are stocked, and how much shelf space is given to healthier or more sustainable foods.

On the demand side, supermarkets shape people's food options through pricing strategies, promotions, marketing, and product placement. This has significant knock-on effects for public health and inequity on a national scale.

**Figure 1:** Grocery market share<sup>7</sup> of the UK's biggest supermarkets – August 2025



<sup>a</sup> Survey conducted by YouGov plc on behalf of Foodrise. Total sample size was 2,193 GB adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 2nd-3rd September 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). The UK's 10 biggest supermarkets are Aldi, Asda, Co-op, Iceland, Lidl, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, and Waitrose.

<sup>b</sup> Marks & Spencer does not have a grocery market share figure as it falls outside Worldpanel's definition of a grocer, due to its clothing and home divisions. M&S's food and drink market share was 5.1% in the 52 weeks to 13 July 2025, according to Worldpanel.



# Supermarkets are failing people and the planet

Whilst supermarkets hold enormous potential to transform the UK's food system, they are instead delaying and derailing progress through a combination of **greenwashing**, **leanwashing**, **greedflation** and **farmwashing**.

## Greenwashing

The food sector accounts for around 35% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, supermarkets have a vital role to play in transitioning away from practices that entrench environmental harm within supply chains.<sup>8</sup>

However, analysis by Foodrise and the Food Foundation reveals that, despite making hundreds of voluntary commitments to improve climate and health outcomes over the last decade, supermarkets have failed to deliver meaningful progress or public transparency.<sup>9</sup> Voluntary agreements and individual supermarket pledges are fragmented, inconsistent, and poorly enforced, enabling supermarkets to make public commitments without any guarantee of adequate or timely action.

This is 'greenwashing' – a deceptive tactic used by companies to suggest they are doing more to protect the environment than they are. For instance, nine supermarkets have set Scope 3 reduction targets for 2030, but as of May 2025, only four were publishing UK specific progress updates, of which only three (Co-op, Morrisons and Waitrose) showed progress in the right direction.<sup>10</sup>

Most supermarkets are also signed up to WWF's 'Basket' initiative, signalling a commitment to deforestation-free sourcing of select products by 2025.<sup>11</sup> Supermarkets have an opportunity to make real progress on tackling deforestation; yet currently, only 4.5% of soy and 0.3% of cocoa entering the UK food supply chain are verified as deforestation-free.<sup>12</sup> One year before the deadline, WWF stated that supermarkets are far behind achieving these goals.<sup>13</sup>

Research by Foodrise also identifies the systemic role that supermarkets play in the overproduction and subsequent waste of food produced on UK farms.<sup>14</sup> Common supermarket practices, including order cancellations, retrospective changes to supply agreements and the use of cosmetic specifications to reject produce, all result in food waste at the farm level.<sup>15</sup> At the supermarket level, supermarkets increasingly redistribute surplus food to charities and food aid organisations. However, 91% of food aid workers surveyed by Foodrise have had to discard food donations from businesses, usually for being damaged, inedible or unsuitable.<sup>16</sup>

## Leanwashing

Supermarkets are also heavily engaged in 'leanwashing', which involves misleading people around the action they are taking to improve health outcomes. Foodrise's analysis in collaboration with the Food Foundation found that supermarkets have made 57 individual commitments related to healthy and sustainable diets, but only just over half of these include measurable targets with a target percentage and year.<sup>17</sup> While best practice is to set volume-based (tonnage) sales targets, only four supermarkets have done so.<sup>18</sup>

In 2023, research conducted by Foodrise and Action on Sugar found that – despite the UK sugar supply exceeding 3 times the per capita recommended daily allowance, and contributing significantly to the public health crisis – nine of ten UK supermarkets lack any policies to measure their sugar sales across all products, or to ensure they are consistently reducing sugar sales.<sup>19</sup>

The cost of buying healthy foods at a supermarket makes these options inaccessible for many people.<sup>20</sup> 41% of supermarket price promotions are on high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) food and drinks, while just 3.3% of price promotions are on fruit and vegetables.<sup>21</sup> 2023 research by Obesity Health Alliance and Food Active found that some supermarkets were still displaying HFSS foods in prominent locations, in breach of regulations introduced by the government the previous year.<sup>22</sup>



Shelves of snacks in a supermarket. London, UK.  
Credit: Jack Lee (Unsplash)

## Greedflation

Food prices have soared in recent years, driven by extreme weather and climate events, both in the UK and around the world, and global conflict including the war in Ukraine. While this can have a knock-on effect on the price of products on supermarket shelves, 'greedflation' describes the act of businesses raising prices more than is necessary, in order to boost their own profit margins. Analysis conducted by Unite found that huge increases in the cost of food for people in the UK between 2019 and 2021 were accompanied by Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda nearly doubling their combined profits over the same period, to £3.2 billion.<sup>23</sup>

**"The Cost of Living crisis has allowed the big supermarkets to push their profits back up to the high levels seen over a decade ago."**

Unite, the union<sup>24</sup>

A report by the Food Foundation highlights a stark contrast between the 7.2 million adults living in households that experience food insecurity, while UK supermarkets continue to record healthy profits.<sup>25</sup> Supermarket bosses pocketed upwards of £1 million each in 2024 – with Tesco boss Ken Murphy's pay more than doubling to £9.9 million, while M&S CEO Stuart Machin's pay increased by over £2 million compared with the previous year.<sup>26</sup> In July, ShareAction asked Tesco to justify this pay out – which works out at 430 times the average Tesco employee's pay, while their contract cleaners and security staff are paid less than the Real Living Wage.<sup>27</sup> The response from Ken Murphy was to admit that he is "well paid".<sup>28</sup>

## Farmwashing

'Farmwashing' has been specifically coined for a third form of deception practiced by UK supermarkets.<sup>29</sup> This refers to supermarkets' use of misleading labelling which suggests that products are locally grown or reared, when they are in fact imported or produced on large-scale, highly intensive farms.

This practice erodes trust and transparency across food supply chains, including with farmers and the public. Research by Riverford found that 67% of shoppers felt distrustful and annoyed when they learned that the word 'farm' can be used by supermarkets without the product being from a real farm.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, only 1 in 4 farmers believe supermarket claims to support British farmers are credible and backed up by their buying behaviour.<sup>31</sup>

**"The public cares deeply about where their food comes from, the supermarkets know this, and they are using that trust to steal farmer stories and to hoodwink shoppers into thinking they are buying from those small-scale, traditional British farms."**

Guy Singh-Watson, British farmer and founder of Riverford<sup>32</sup>

The livelihoods of British farmers – and the longevity of Britain's farming industry – is at stake. In 2024, 61% of farmers stated they were likely to give up their farms in the following 18 months.<sup>33</sup>

These harmful practices are the symptoms of a system that is built for a single purpose – profit.

# The Food Strategy for England sets out the government's priorities for a better food system

The UK's first ever Food Strategy was delivered in 2022, following an independent review by Henry Dimbleby which set out the plethora of challenges facing the food system, including worsening crises of health, climate breakdown and food security.<sup>34</sup> Following the general elections, the Labour government published a new Food Strategy for England in July 2025.<sup>35</sup> The new strategy sets out a vision 'shaped by over 400 expert voices' including farmers, businesses, and citizens consulted through the Citizens Advisory Council.<sup>36</sup>

Though lacking in detail, the Strategy clearly sets the ambition for the food sector for England. And with experts and citizens involved in its development, and civil society momentum behind it, the Food Strategy is a critical opportunity to reorient the nation's food system to support public health, the economy and the environment. The strategy states that delivering its outcomes 'will require action by industry, civil society, and individuals'.

The Strategy offers 10 priority outcomes that will help to achieve: ***"A healthier, more affordable, sustainable and resilient 21<sup>st</sup> century food system that grows the economy, feeds the nation, nourishes people, and protects the environment and climate, now and in the future."***

## The 10 priority outcomes of the Food Strategy for England

### Healthier and more affordable food

1. An improved food environment that supports healthier and more environmentally sustainable food sales
2. Access for all to safe, affordable, healthy, convenient and appealing food options

### Good growth

1. Conditions for the food sector to thrive and grow sustainably, including investment in innovation and productivity, and fairer more transparent supply chains
2. Food sector attracts talent and develops skilled workforce in every region

### Sustainable and resilient supply

1. Food supply is environmentally sustainable with high animal welfare standards, and waste is reduced
2. Trade supports environmentally sustainable growth, upholds British standards and expands export opportunities
3. Resilient domestic production for a secure supply of healthier food
4. Greater preparedness for supply chain shocks, disruption, and impacts of chronic risks

### Vibrant food cultures

1. Celebrated and valued UK, regional and local food cultures
2. People are more connected to their local food systems, and have the confidence, knowledge and skills to cook and eat healthily



# The ownership models of supermarkets cannot support the Food Strategy outcomes

The UK's largest supermarkets can be divided into four different categories of ownership structure: private equity, publicly listed, privately held, and beneficiary-owned.

Across ownership types, supermarkets have the scale, resources, and central role in the UK food system to influence supply chains, diets, and environmental outcomes. In theory, each model has unique levers which could support a transition to healthier, fairer, and more sustainable food.

But in practice, all ownership models prioritise profit over people and planet, whether through short-term shareholder returns, relentless price competition, or centralised decision-making that excludes workers and communities. This profit-first logic creates systemic barriers to the Food Strategy's objectives: unhealthy food environments, unsustainable supply chains, insecure domestic production, and erosion of local food cultures.

**Table 2:** UK supermarkets by ownership structure

	Supermarkets	Description of ownership model	Supermarket structure
Private equity	 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Companies are acquired by investment firms with the sole aim of increasing their value and selling for profit within a few years<sup>37</sup></li> <li>To maximise value quickly, private equity firms often load companies with debt, cut costs aggressively, and strip assets<sup>38</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since 2021, both Asda and Morrisons have been under private equity ownership models<sup>39</sup></li> <li>Asda is majority owned by TDR Capital, a UK-based private equity firm, while Morrisons is fully owned by Clayton, Dubilier &amp; Rice, a US-based private equity firm</li> </ul>
Publicly listed	  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publicly listed companies trade their shares on stock exchanges and are owned by a wide range of shareholders, from individuals to large institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tesco, Sainsbury's, and Marks &amp; Spencer are all publicly listed on the London Stock Exchange</li> <li>Their shares are owned by a wide range of institutional investors and individuals, with major stakes held by global asset managers such as BlackRock and Vanguard<sup>40</sup></li> </ul>
Privately held	  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Privately held companies can be owned by families, private entities, or foundations</li> <li>Shares are not traded publicly and ownership is concentrated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aldi and Lidl are privately owned by German family foundations, the Albrecht and Schwarz groups respectively</li> <li>Iceland is run by a private company jointly owned by the supermarket's CEO and founder</li> </ul>
Beneficiary-owned	 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beneficiary-owned describes companies owned by people who are directly affected by the business, such as employees, citizens, or members</li> <li>Under this ownership model, profits and decision-making are shared among the beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Co-op is owned by its members – customers and employees who hold a stake in the business</li> <li>Waitrose is part of the John Lewis Partnership, which is structured as an employee-owned trust where staff are partners in the business</li> </ul>



**Table 3:** The opportunities and barriers of supermarket ownership structures

Ownership model	Opportunity to achieve Food Strategy objectives	Barriers to meeting Food Strategy objectives	Evidence
<b>Private equity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good growth:</b> PE firms sometimes inject capital and restructure businesses, which could be directed toward innovation or supply chain efficiency</li> <li>• <b>Resilience:</b> Scale of investment could theoretically be leveraged to shore up supply chain resilience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthier food:</b> Focus on rapid cost-cutting encourages promotion of high-margin, unhealthy, ultra-processed foods rather than healthier, sustainable options</li> <li>• <b>Good growth:</b> Debt-loading drains resources that could go into fairer supply chains or workforce development</li> <li>• <b>Sustainability:</b> Short ownership cycles prevent investment in long-term climate action or improving welfare standards</li> <li>• <b>Food cultures:</b> Asset-stripping and homogenisation undermine regional/local food systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TDR Capital and Clayton, Dubilier &amp; Rice each borrowed billions of pounds to acquire Asda and Morrisons respectively – as of March 2025, both supermarkets remained in billions of pounds of net debt<sup>41</sup></li> <li>• In 2024, unions accused TDR Capital of asset stripping and declining workplace standards across Asda stores<sup>42</sup></li> <li>• Both supermarkets made significant redundancies in the financial year 2024-25<sup>43</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Publicly listed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthier food:</b> Obligation to report publicly could create pressure to adopt voluntary health pledges or sustainability targets</li> <li>• <b>Good growth:</b> Can raise large amounts of equity for investment in innovation or skills development</li> <li>• <b>Sustainability:</b> International investor scrutiny could push companies toward climate or supply chain commitments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthier food:</b> Shareholder primacy prioritises profitable sales volumes, including unhealthy promotions</li> <li>• <b>Good growth:</b> Quarterly reporting pressures boards to squeeze suppliers and workforce costs</li> <li>• <b>Sustainability:</b> Detached, dispersed shareholders demand dividend growth over long-term climate or animal welfare goals</li> <li>• <b>Food cultures:</b> Lack of commitment to place undermines support for local food systems or cultural food diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional investors wield significant power over these supermarkets, controlling between 47% and 81% of each supermarket<sup>44</sup></li> <li>• US companies have disproportionate control within the institutional investor group – which is particularly concerning given the retreat from environmental policies by US-based companies<sup>45</sup></li> <li>• Blackrock and Vanguard (the largest asset managers in the world) are among the most powerful shareholders in these supermarkets; they have a record of consistently voting against resolutions that promote social and environmental action<sup>46</sup></li> <li>• Blackrock and Vanguard are also the world's biggest institutional investors in fossil fuels<sup>47</sup></li> <li>• Sainsbury's' biggest shareholder is the sovereign wealth fund of Qatar<sup>48</sup> – a country facing international criticism over human rights violations<sup>49</sup></li> </ul>

Table 3 (continued)

Ownership model	Opportunity to achieve Food Strategy objectives	Barriers to meeting Food Strategy objectives	Evidence
<b>Privately held</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good growth:</b> Stable family or founder ownership could support longer-term planning beyond quarterly markets</li> <li>• <b>Resilience:</b> Independence from stock markets can shield companies from financial volatility, potentially supporting steady supply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthier food:</b> Price competition encourages lowest-cost, calorie-dense products, undermining healthier diets</li> <li>• <b>Good growth:</b> Aggressive cost-cutting pressures suppliers, limiting fair and transparent supply chains</li> <li>• <b>Sustainability:</b> Expansion strategy prioritises scale and price dominance, locking in high-emissions logistics and food production models</li> <li>• <b>Food cultures:</b> Centralised ownership offers little space for communities or local food identities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lidl has relied on significant external borrowing to fuel its growth, with the interest expenses of its parent company Lidl Stiftung &amp; Co hitting €1.025 billion in February 2024<sup>50</sup></li> <li>• In May 2025, the Department for Business &amp; Trade revealed that Lidl was failing to pay some of its workers the legal minimum wage<sup>51</sup></li> <li>• Iceland cut over 1,000 jobs in the financial year ending March 2024<sup>52</sup></li> <li>• In 2024, Aldi Süd (the parent company which owns Aldi's businesses in Germany, the UK and nine other countries) was found to be in violation of EU consumer law over discount pricing; it was accused of offering fake discounts on grocery items including bananas and pineapples, misleading people by advertising 'discounted' prices that were no different from the usual price in the previous month<sup>53</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Beneficiary owned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthier food:</b> Structures allow scope to prioritise member/employee preferences, including healthier, sustainable products</li> <li>• <b>Good growth:</b> Profits reinvested into business or members rather than external shareholders, supporting fairer supply chains</li> <li>• <b>Sustainability:</b> Potential alignment of values with environmental goals</li> <li>• <b>Food cultures:</b> Mission-driven ethos can foster stronger local connections and support for regional food identities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthier food:</b> Limited market share constrains influence on broader food environment</li> <li>• <b>Good growth:</b> Struggle to access capital compared with larger competitors, hindering innovation and workforce development</li> <li>• <b>Sustainability:</b> Centralised leadership limits genuine democratic decision-making, so sustainability commitments may remain top-down and limited</li> <li>• <b>Food cultures:</b> Employees/members have limited real say in decisions; model is not fully participatory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2023, Co-op members submitted a motion to its AGM asking the supermarket to sign on to the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC); 96% of the 32,000 members who voted did so in favour of the motion, but Co-op's leadership refused to honour a key element of the BCC (that they stop selling fast growing Frankenchickens)<sup>54</sup></li> <li>• The John Lewis Partnership has not paid out an annual bonus to Waitrose employees since 2022 – including in 2024, when it recorded soaring profits<sup>55</sup></li> <li>• The John Lewis Partnership revealed in 2024 that it had cut 3,500 jobs – mostly in Waitrose stores – at the same time as employing its first group chief executive on a salary of over £1 million<sup>56</sup></li> </ul>

Ultimately, every ownership model is hardwired to put profit before public good – creating deep structural barriers to delivering the goals of the Food Strategy.

At the heart of this profit-driven system are investors, which can exert huge influence over publicly listed supermarkets – including the two largest: Tesco and Sainsbury's.

Investors have the potential to be a force for good, steering supermarkets towards actions that support the outcomes of the Food Strategy. Three of the world's biggest investors,

Blackrock, Vanguard and Qatar Holding – which collectively control over 5% of the UK's food retail market – instead prove why the opposite is happening, and demonstrate how major shareholders systematically undermine efforts to build an equitable, resilient food system.<sup>57</sup>

Supermarkets cannot take transformative action while they're controlled by investors who block climate action, greenwash their portfolios and funnel profits offshore. These investors are interested only in maximising returns – not building an equitable, resilient food system.

## Blackrock and Vanguard

### BlackRock® Vanguard®

Blackrock, Inc and Vanguard Group, Inc are the two largest asset managers in the world, each with over \$9 trillion of assets under management.<sup>58</sup>

They are also the two largest investors across the publicly listed supermarkets in the UK. As of September 2025, each investor owns stakes of between 2% and 8% in Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Tesco.<sup>59</sup> Combined, this means that Blackrock and Vanguard control nearly 4% of the UK's food retail market.<sup>60</sup>

Research by ShareAction has found that across their portfolios, both firms have incredibly poor track records regarding shareholder proposals which relate to environmental and social action.<sup>61</sup> In 2024, both firms voted for fewer environmental and social proposals than ever, placing in the bottom ten in a ranking of asset manager voting performance. Vanguard voted in favour of 0% of these.<sup>62</sup>

Blackrock also faces serious allegations of greenwashing, with environmental law charity ClientEarth taking action against the firm for describing funds which pour billions into the fossil fuel industry as 'sustainable'.<sup>64</sup> Vanguard pulled out of the Net Zero Asset Manager's Initiative back in 2022 (followed by Blackrock in 2025), and the following year was criticised in a letter by 1,400 of its investors, accusing the firm of violating its fiduciary duty to mitigate the financial risks of the climate crisis.<sup>65</sup>

**"BlackRock published statements excusing their poor voting record by saying that the majority of resolutions are overreaching, lack economic merit or did not promote long-term shareholder value. These arguments do not stand up to scrutiny."**

ShareAction, Voting Matters 2024<sup>63</sup>

## Qatar Holding



Sainsbury's' largest shareholder is Qatar Holding LLC – an investment house created and owned by the sovereign wealth fund (SWF) of Qatar, which has an estimated \$557 billion of assets under management.<sup>66</sup> Qatar Holding LLC owns a 10.14% stake in Sainsbury's – the largest single stake of any institutional investor in a publicly listed supermarket chain.<sup>67</sup>

While some SWFs adhere to voluntary guidelines promoting transparency and responsible investment, there is no legal enforcement, meaning that they can move billions around without disclosure. In a ranking of 64 sovereign wealth funds based on their governance, accountability and transparency, Qatar's placed in the bottom ten.<sup>68</sup>

A country's sovereign wealth fund is directly tied to its government, as it is state-owned, funded by national revenues, and exists to benefit the country's economy. The state of Qatar has long faced international criticism over human rights abuses and its highly restrictive policing of freedom of expression.<sup>69</sup> And in February 2024, Qatar announced plans to expand its liquefied natural gas production by 85%, despite global scientific consensus that we must rapidly shift away from fossil fuels.<sup>70</sup>



# Transforming the food system means regulation – and eventual dissolution

If it is to achieve the outcomes it has set in its Food Strategy, the government must shape the grocery sector through regulatory intervention: facilitating regulatory and financing arrangements that push supermarkets to play a more constructive role in the short term, while laying the groundwork for a long-term transformation of the food system.

## To curb harmful supermarket practice, the government must:

- Implement stronger regulation for supermarkets to mandate transparency and progress on health and climate goals
- Incentivise healthy and sustainable food purchases, by implementing a salt and sugar tax which finances subsidies for healthy and sustainable foods
- Introduce legislation to ensure that supermarkets pay farmers and suppliers fairly, and penalise unfair practices

Going beyond this, Foodrise's policy briefing '**Purpose Over Profit**' outlines how small and medium enterprises (SMEs), cooperatives and community-owned businesses are working to create fairer and healthier food environments.<sup>71</sup> This sector remains under-recognised and under-supported by national and local policy.

## To unlock the potential of independent retail, the government should:

- Support community-based food retail, through business rate relief and investment for community grocery initiatives
- Pilot a national voucher scheme for fresh produce via SMEs
- Establish and invest in Regional Produce Hubs to close the sustainable food accessibility gap in underserved areas
- Use planning powers to prioritise space for independent and community-based retail
- Facilitate public procurement of sustainable food through local SMEs

Over the longer term, systemic transformation of the food system will require dismantling the corporate structure altogether. This includes recognising the limits of shareholder primacy and limited liability in the face of today's public health, inequality and environmental crises. Whilst at the same time, redistributing control and resources toward models of food retail that are democratic, accountable, and genuinely aligned with the priorities of the Food Strategy.



Vegetables on sale at a market, London, UK.  
Credit: Kate Asplin (Unsplash)

# Appendices

## Appendix A

We combined publicly available data from MarketScreener and Worldpanel to calculate the ownership of major shareholders, according to the grocery market share of Tesco, Sainsbury's and Marks & Spencer.

**Table 4:** Individual shares of major shareholders (according to MarketScreener as of 15 September 2025)

	Blackrock (combined) <sup>c</sup>	Vanguard	Qatar Holding
Marks & Spencer <sup>72</sup>	5.457%	2.894%	0%
Sainsbury's <sup>73</sup>	2.144%	2.218%	10.24%
Tesco <sup>74</sup>	7.150%	2.929%	0%

**Table 5:** Individual shares of major shareholders, adjusted by grocery market share  
(% share as above multiplied by % grocery market share according to Worldpanel as of August 2025)

	Blackrock (combined)	Vanguard	Qatar Holding	Total
Marks & Spencer (5.1%)	0.278%	0.148%	0%	0.426%
Sainsbury's (15.0%)	0.322%	0.333%	1.536%	2.191%
Tesco (28.4%)	2.031%	0.832%	0%	2.863%
Total	2.631%	1.313%	1.536%	5.5%

## Appendix B

**Table 6:** Institutional ownership % by supermarket  
(according to latest available figures from Yahoo Finance)

Marks & Spencer <sup>75</sup>	79%
Sainsbury's <sup>76</sup>	47%
Tesco <sup>77</sup>	81%

c This includes shares attributed to BlackRock Fund Advisors, BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Ltd, and BlackRock Advisors (UK) Ltd.

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