



The Waitrose Small Producers Charter

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An Introduction

The Waitrose Small Producers Charter sets out our policy towards developing working relationships with potential suppliers - committing it to constructive advice even to people who may wish to go elsewhere.

Steven Esom, Waitrose managing director, said: 'The future of British food depends upon long term, positive contact between supplier and retailer. But if you have never dealt with a supermarket before, you need considerable reassurance that your potential business partner has your own best interests at heart. The Waitrose Small Producers Charter demonstrates that you can get trust, commitment and support from a supermarket. If you don't like what you see you can walk away. But we want to hear from people with good food to sell - and we want to taste what they have to offer.'

The charter sets out the Waitrose approach to its supply chain for the particular benefit of small scale and regional producers. Waitrose has always aimed to source products from the areas in which it trades, and is encouraged by the recent interest shown in this aspect of British food.

The Waitrose Small Producers Charter

(i) Our Objectives

We want to celebrate real food, great recipes and traditional methods.

The true taste of British food should recognise the variety and glory of all its regional differences.

People should have easy access to food from their own region that they can be proud of, and which supports the region's economy.

We want to encourage the production of good quality food, regardless of scale and whether those who are producing it wish to supply us.

We take the long term view and will work with producers to help them reach their objectives, not just ours. We do not want to dilute the integrity or quality of their products.

We won't expect producers to change overnight, or even change at all, if that is your wish.

We want to help producers reach more consumers, and introduce more people to great food from their neighbourhood.

As co-owners of our own business, and as part of the John Lewis Partnership, we believe in treating one another with decency and respect. We also believe in extending that same courtesy to our suppliers and producers.

Large or small, our producers are partners in a long term relationship founded on trust.

(ii) Our Difference

We want to bring the best food in people's local areas into their favourite local supermarket, and the new Waitrose Locally Produced range is a good start.

We guarantee that our producers can enter partnerships with us in full confidence, founded firmly upon integrity and trust.

What we don't have are shareholders demanding quick and constant change. But we do have a demanding customer base, who expect great things from us.

We want to build on our levels of traceability; the quality of our products and levels of service in branch; and our long term relationships with producers.

Only by working together with the right producers and best quality produce, can we build consumer confidence and celebrate the rich variety and splendour of our country's food.



(iii) The Waitrose Buying Approach

Our expert buyers care deeply about the quality and value of the products they buy. Their food expertise is founded upon the long term approach that they take to sourcing the best quality food available, reflected in the fact that many of them specialise in particular areas for extensive periods of their careers - ten, twenty, even thirty years in some cases. We have suppliers who have worked with us for just as long.

We have always looked to source products from areas within which we trade, but we want to work with more small, local and regional suppliers.

Waitrose Locally Produced demonstrates how we source the finest local food and drink sourced from the region.

We want to talk to more small scale producers with strong links to the local economy and make their products available in branches within a 30-mile radius of production.

Thirty miles is a significant figure, because this is the distance that most people consider local. Travel any further and you feel out of your area - and the word 'local' becomes meaningless. It is also near enough for some producers to supply our branches directly.

(iv) The Importance of Locally Produced Food

Consumer awareness about the way food is grown, processed and distributed has risen dramatically. Farmers' markets are more popular than ever. Farm shops and box schemes have given many consumers more choice and information about how their food is produced and delivered.

In January, the significance of local sourcing was acknowledged in the Policy Commission's 'Farming & Food - a Sustainable Future' report. Incidentally, the report only referred to one supermarket specifically by name, praising Waitrose as an example of best practice for its livestock schemes.

And this is only just the beginning, because we want to work in partnership with more small-scale producers, helping them to meet their commercial objectives on a local and regional basis.

No one has to supply all our branches if they do not want to - nor do they need to grow their business any larger than they want. If a producer can only supply one Waitrose shop, that's fine: product integrity and producer choice are key.

Notes

Definitions

It is important to be clear in what is meant by 'Locally Produced' and 'Regional'. Waitrose has kept to a brief aligned closely to those of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and other recognised supporters of Local Foods.

Waitrose already offers some examples of the very best of locally produced foods, by adopting a flexible approach to working with even the smallest of suppliers.

Locally Produced Foods

- Locally produced food will be supplied to branches within a 30 mile radius of production.
- The producer will not be wholly dependent on Waitrose as a primary customer.
- Products from Local suppliers will most likely be delivered direct to Branch; any alternative distribution route will be arranged with the full agreement of that supplier.
- The foods will most likely be made by small craft producers (employing less than 10 full time staff) but may come from a suitable medium sized supplier (employing up to 250 staff).
- Waitrose already sells distinctive quality foods with provenance and integrity. The recipe should ideally have provenance or tradition in the area and 'wave the flag' for the locality.
- Recipe/further processed foods will be made with the best quality ingredients, where possible sourced from the area (for example, in a clotted cream ice cream from Cornwall, the clotted cream and eggs should also be sourced from the same county).
- Ingredients should be simple and recognisable - not a list of chemical additives, such as stabilisers, emulsifiers, preservatives, etc.
- Organoleptically, the foods should be at least as good as if not better than a Waitrose own label equivalent (if there is one). The exemplary taste will come from the quality of ingredients combined from the very best in preparation and cooking skills.
- The producer will have strong links with the local economy.

Regional Foods

- The same criteria for Local will apply with the exception of the geographical locations, hence products may be available in more branches.
- Waitrose classification of Regions will follow existing defined Food Groups which are all part of Food from Britain.

The Small Producers Awards

To reinforce its ongoing support for small producers, and commitment to quality produce, Waitrose teamed up with The Times to create The Small Producers Awards in 2001.

If you are a small producer and you employ fewer than 10 permanent, full or part-time employees, you are eligible to enter. First year category winners received £7,000 in cash plus access to Waitrose business and marketing expertise, including advice on packaging and getting your product to market. The overall winner received a further £3,000.