

# SUGAR RUSH: HOW UK SUPERMARKETS DRIVE HIGH SUGAR SALES

- Despite efforts to reformulate certain products with less sugar under the voluntary Sugar Reduction Programme 2015-2020, supermarkets' total sugar sales have increased over the last 5+ years [1]. This highlights the need for stronger policies to reduce overall sugar sales and consumption.
- Excessive consumption of sugar is a major cause of diet-related ill health in the UK: oversupply of cheap and highly available sugar contributes to food environments that generate unhealthy diets and contribute towards obesity, type 2 diabetes and tooth decay [2,3].
- Supermarkets create and curate our food environments, using their retailer power via stock choice, store layout, product placement, pricing and packaging to direct the public towards foods with the highest profit margins. These products are generally highly processed from cheap ingredients including sugar, thus fostering excessive sugar purchasing and consumption [4].
- The top 5 supermarkets hold 75% of the retail market share, rising to over 95% for the top 10 [5]; as the gatekeepers between producers and consumers they hold considerable power and influence over even the largest manufacturers [6].

## OUR RESEARCH

### Supermarkets are failing to set appropriate targets to curb high sugar sales.

Feedback and Action on Sugar surveyed the UK's 10 biggest supermarkets (Aldi, Asda, Morrison's, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Co-op, Lidl, Iceland, Tesco and Marks & Spencer) to find out if their policies are fit for the task of reducing total sugar sales.

- Our survey found that nine out of ten UK supermarkets lack any policies to measure total sugar sales across all products.
- No supermarkets are yet willing to publicly support mandatory reduction targets to reduce the absolute volume of sugar sold across all product categories including bagged sugar.
- Supermarkets are not taking full responsibility for all products they sell, instead seeing themselves responsible only for the sugar in their own brand products.
- Despite supermarkets' total sugar sales increasing, supermarkets have been publicly celebrating their sugar reduction efforts. Promoting the perception that they are helping to solve the diet-related health crisis, while deflecting attention from the way their stocking choices and sales tactics contribute to it is 'leanwashing' – and all the supermarkets are doing it.

## ACTION NEEDED

Despite a decade of voluntary action, including the Sugar Reduction Programme, retailers are not using their considerable market power effectively to substantially reduce public sugar consumption and support better health.

Instead, they are using ineffective action and overly optimistic public relations, which distracts from a grave lack of progress, with deleterious impacts on public health. Regulation is now needed to ensure that supermarkets play their role in addressing high sales of sugary goods.

- **Supermarkets** should commit to publicly disclosing and reducing overall sugar sales by 50% by 2025 and by two-thirds by 2030.
- **Government** should implement corresponding mandatory targets to halve total sugar sales, alongside a new, improved Sugar Reduction Programme with specific, upper limits for all contributing categories of sugar to the diet, requiring that supermarkets reformulate across their entire product range.

### **About Feedback Global**

Feedback is an environmental campaign group working for food that is good for the planet and its people. To do this we challenge power, catalyse action and empower people to achieve positive change.

### **About Action on Sugar**

Action on Sugar is a group of experts concerned with sugar and obesity and its effects on health. It is working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high calorie diet, and bring about a reduction in the amount of sugar and fat in processed foods to prevent obesity, type 2 diabetes and tooth decay.

### **References**

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