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Groceries code adjudicator outlines powers

By [footprint](#) on December 9, 2013

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FARMERS HAVE welcomed the new Groceries Code Adjudicator's (GCA) powers to investigate, enforce and penalise supermarkets suspected of breaching the Groceries Supply Code of Practice (GSCoP – Code).



The new GCA Christine Tacon CBE told Hampshire NFU members that the Code requires the 10 retailers of groceries with a turnover of more than £1bn to deal fairly and lawfully with suppliers of food.

The GCA is the result of more than a decade of lobbying by the NFU for legislation to prevent excessive risk being passed down the supply chain to producers.

Hampshire NFU chairman Julian Gibbons said: "We were very privileged to have a fascinating address from the Groceries Code Adjudicator herself and heard first hand about the role. We welcome the fact that that the GCA can take complaints from a third party and can clamp down on sharp practices by retailers, such as making suppliers use chosen packaging or asking suppliers to fund promotions. NFU members really look forward to seeing the GCA using its teeth in the future."

Christine Tacon told the meeting: "As the Adjudicator I can guarantee anonymity and I can launch an investigation in response to complaints. I will expand an issue and broaden the scope of an investigation if I need to protect my sources. I cannot get involved in price negotiations but I can get involved in unfair practices."

The GCA has been working to ensure that Code Compliance Officers employed by the retailers fully understand the Code. She has been warning retailers of trends in complaints and is proposing remedies for agreement. She has recommended a maximum level of fine of 1% of a UK retailer's turnover. This has to be agreed by Parliament and the GCA expects this to be during the first quarter of 2014.

The GCA is determined to improve retailer practices and wishes to avoid damaging confidence in the sector, saying the UK's supply chain is one of the best in the world.

"I have been telling the retailers that I don't want to fine anyone, but if they breach the Code in the same way a second time I will investigate and they could be penalised."

Christine Tacon pointed out that the Code does not apply to plants and flowers sold in stores but advised growers to contact the OFT if they felt that the Code should be extended in scope. The GCA is also talking with the European Union and European farming unions as the EU has introduced a voluntary code and is considering regulation governing the European food chain. The GCA spoke at a seminar in the European Parliament on December 3rd on this issue.

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