

ADJUDICATOR WARNS EXTENDING REMIT WILL NOT SOLVE FARMERS' PRICE WOES

NEWS

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SHARE

Christine Tacon has given her response to calls from farming organisations for her role as the Groceries Code Adjudicator to be extended.



Christine Tacon

Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) Christine Tacon has warned any extension of her role would not necessarily deliver the added support farmers are seeking in the midst of the industry-wide market slump.

With Mrs Tacon's role currently the subject of a statutory review by business Ministers, [farming organisations are calling for various measures to give the grocery watchdog 'more teeth'](#).

Demands include extending the GCA's remit to bring in more retailers beyond the 10 currently covered by the Grocery Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP), food service companies and processors who deal directly with farmers.

The Tenant Farmers Association (TFA) has called for [new powers for the GCA to launch OFSTED-style investigations into retailers and processors](#), including the ability to report on the 'balance of returns within the supply chain'.

BIG CHANGE

Speaking at a conference about the GCA's role, in Westminster on Wednesday, Mrs Tacon cautioned that extending her remit to 8,000 suppliers would require new legislation and a 'big change' in how her office was run, staffed and funded, currently by retailers.

In response to a question from Farmers Guardian, she acknowledged a way around this might be to deploy a threshold targeting only the biggest processors 'to try and limit it to where the harm is believed to be'.

Stressing any changes would ultimately be down to Ministers and Competition and Markets Authority, Mrs Tacon said she 'sympathised' with calls to extend the code to other retailers and big food service companies, pointing out how some smaller retailers were dominant regionally, for example, in Northern Ireland.

But she added: "I speak to lot of farmers and I very rarely hear of things covered in the code. They are generally looking for what they see as a fairer price.

"I have nothing to do with price and nothing to do with farmers in my remit. So I have this concern, if the code gets extended that won't address the issue they are campaigning for.

She revealed the CMA has told her a further investigation would be required for it to justify changing the GCA's remit to cover price. "This will not happen overnight," she said.

MORE TEETH

The NFU's head of chain Ruth Mason said union wanted to see the code extended 'with more teeth' to oversee voluntary codes between processors and primary producers.

She said voluntary codes intended to improve supply chain relations in the beef and dairy sectors had not had the take up intended and were frequently breached.

"In the last few months we have seen meat processor change the specification and give farmers a couple of days to make those changes, which is not enough," she said.

Mrs Tacon told the conference the UK was 'one of the leaders' in the area of regulating supply chain relations and countries around the world were 'watching what we are doing'.

She updated the conference on progress she had made in addressing abuses of power within the supply chain.

This included her successful investigation into Tesco, which, according to suppliers, has significantly improved its treatment of suppliers since she [found it guilty of breaching the code by delaying payments to suppliers](#).

Business

Policy