

# MY LIFE IN THE GROCERY TRADE

CHRISTINE TACON, GROCERIES CODE ADJUDICATOR

## WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

I am the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) and I regulate the 13 largest grocery retailers designated by the Competition and Markets Authority, I monitor, encourage and enforce their adherence to the Groceries Supply Code of Practice.

## BRIEFLY OUTLINE YOUR BACKGROUND

I started my career as a production engineer and have always been interested in efficient supply chains. I have worked in fast moving consumer goods (Mars, Anchor, Vodafone) and I ran the Co-op's farming business, the largest in the UK for 11 years. I could see that the food chain could work so much better and applied for the GCA role as I thought I could make a difference.

## WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE INVOLVE?

My statutory powers are to investigate breaches of the Code and to arbitrate when disputes over the Code cannot be resolved. I have adopted a collaborative approach, raising the issues that suppliers tell me about in regular progress meetings with the retailers' Code Compliance Officers. I have had over 250 of these meetings and additionally meet with the retailers' Audit Committee chairs every year and the CEOs when required. I attend many events for grocery suppliers to listen to their issues and encourage them to get trained in the Code. I also have an annual survey which is invaluable to identifying issues for me and the retailers to address.



## WHAT ARE THE BEST/WORST PARTS OF YOUR JOB?

I love efficiency, making systems work better. In 2014, my annual survey demonstrated that 80% of suppliers reported experiencing any Code issues; in 2019 that figure had halved. I am regularly told by suppliers that my work has made a significant difference to retailer behaviour and their trading relationships.

One of the challenges is suppliers don't tell me about their issues. I have a statutory duty of confidentiality, but I get less than a couple of suppliers a week contacting the office, so that's why I have to go out to supplier events, where people do tell me face to face. Part of the problem is that less than 50% of suppliers have been trained in the Code.

## BRIEFLY OUTLINE A TYPICAL DAY

The GCA role is three days a week. I tend to spend two of them in the office with my small team of five, preparing for and having meetings with retailers studying retailers' responses to issues I have raised and ensuring we are making good progress. One day a week tends to be out meeting suppliers at events at their premises or visiting retailers. However, when I have an investigation or arbitration, there is a considerable amount of reading and I conduct interviews and hearings, and this totally changes my work pattern.

## WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO TO UNWIND AWAY FROM WORK?

Growing vegetables, walking the dog, parkruns and narrow boating; all rather slow activities.

## TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF NOT MANY PEOPLE MAY KNOW

I am a veteran car enthusiast – an interest I inherited from my father. I own an Austin 7 Top Hat Saloon 1929, which is like a little box on wheels.

**GULSTER**  
**GROCCER**