

SUSTAINABILITY

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Much room for improvement in supermarket sustainability

A transformation of the food system is urgently needed in order not to exceed the Earth's carrying capacity, and supermarkets are important partners if our food system is to be changed in the direction of sustainability. They have a responsibility to minimise the negative impact of their actions on the environment, for example with product range design and procurement policies. A study by FiBL Switzerland commissioned by the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA) shows that supermarkets have so far made insufficient use of their scope for action to make the food system more environmentally friendly. The study evaluates and compares the environmental performance of the eight companies with the highest turnover in the food retail sector in Germany (Aldi Nord, Aldi Süd, Edeka, Kaufland, Lidl, Netto Marken-Discount, Penny, Rewe), and reveals that they have so far not used their room for manoeuvre to achieve real sustainability.



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Especially in the areas of product range, design and consumer awareness, companies do not use their scope for action at all or only insufficiently. Advertising for environmentally friendly products is proportionally underrepresented in all supermarkets surveyed. In weekly brochures, foods certified with sustainability labels account for just under 7 per cent of the food products advertised.

On the other hand, supermarkets are making efforts in individual areas to reduce their negative environmental impacts. The companies score rather well in reporting on environmental targets as well as on energy efficiency improvements in the shops and production facilities. They also score well on environmental campaigns and

awareness-raising measures, as well as on setting science-based climate targets or targets for deforestation-free supply chains. Other positive examples are actions and campaigns to reduce food waste, especially in the area of fruit and vegetables; the large offer of organic food (62 per cent of organic food sales are achieved in conventional food retail) and numerous pilot projects on climate and environmental protection, such as the presentation of environmental costs in sales prices, and the increasing offer of plant-based alternative products.

For the study, FiBL developed a science-based assessment tool consisting of 22 fields of action, 43 indicators, and 112 sub-indicators, which will be available in the future for a regular comparison of the environmental performance of food companies. ■

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