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# 'Deafening silence' from retailers as farmer petition hits milestone

7 October 2023 | by FarmingUK Team | [Finance](#), [News](#), [Politics](#), [Supermarkets](#)



Guy Singh-Watson, founder of Riverford Organic, has warned that British agriculture is 'on its knees'

**A survey calling on retailers to provide a fairer deal to the UK's struggling farmers has reached over 50,000 signatures, but supermarkets are yet to respond.**

The petition, addressed to the CEOs of the nation's 'big six' supermarkets, has also been signed by over 100 leading figures and industry bodies.

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The letter was sent to Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Morrisons, Aldi and Lidl just over two weeks ago asking them to treat farmers fairly, warning that the farming industry was 'on its knees'.

It is part of the new #GetFairAboutFarming campaign launched by organic farming firm Riverford, calling for better business practices to safeguard the future of British farming.

But sixteen days on, there has been a 'deafening silence' from the high street giants to the campaign.

It comes as half (49%) of British fruit and vegetable farmers say it's likely they will go out of business in the next 12 months.

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The shocking statistic is included in new research by Riverford, with many farmers blaming supermarkets and their buyers as a leading threat to their livelihoods.

Supermarkets and their buyers are accused of not paying on time, pursuing cheaper food alternatives from overseas, and cancelling or changing orders at the last minute.

Three quarters (75%) surveyed say the behaviour of supermarkets is a leading concern within the industry.

According to the research, one in five farmers (22%) say they have suffered a wasted crop due to cancelled orders from supermarkets, 29% have also received a cancelled order from supermarkets with no explanation.

And just under a third of farmers (29%) say they have seen supermarkets failing to pay them within 30 days.

However, 70% of farmers agreed it would have a positive impact if buyers paid the amount initially agreed, and did not then slash prices after the initial agreement.

A further 64% agreed it would have a positive impact if buyers bought everything they committed to buy.

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Guy Singh-Watson, founder of Riverford Organic, warned that British agriculture was 'on its knees'.

"From the backing of our open letter, it is abundantly clear that this is an urgent issue which needs to be addressed," he said.

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“However, the silence from supermarkets is deafening. British agriculture is on its knees, with research showing that many farmers attribute their fear of closure to the behaviour of supermarkets.

"And yet not one of the ‘Big Six’ has responded to our calls for better business practices, to safeguard the future of fruit and veg farmers in this country.

“The supermarkets must act now. This marks a critical moment where we can take a stand against harmful practices, and create a better, fairer future for British food and farming. "

Riverford’s new research also showed farmers are currently being squeezed from all angles, including the impact of climate change, the loss of post Brexit subsidies and rising input costs.

In the face of these pressures, 67% of growers surveyed agree that making a living through farming has never been harder and 61% fear that they won’t have a farm to pass on to future generations.

And it’s not just supermarkets; over half (54%) of horticultural farmers believe farming sits on the bottom of the government’s list of priorities.

Current government policies in place to protect farmers from supermarket buying behaviour are inadequate and rarely enforced, says Riverford.

Fruit and veg farmers agree, with 69% saying tougher regulations are required to redress the imbalance of power between farmers and the supermarkets and their buyers.

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For example, 64% of farmers surveyed said that having a commitment for the long-term would have a very significant positive impact on their business.

The public can show their support for the campaign by signing an [online petition](#).

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