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Media statement

Embargoed until 00.01, Wednesday 26th November 2003.

Multiples fail local food economies.

Local economies are being badly let down by the sourcing strategies of the multiple retailers. That was the conclusion of an investigation into food sourcing by multiple retailers released today (Wednesday) as part of a major investigation by the Race to the Top initiative.¹

Sustain² and the National Federation of Women's Institutes³ who worked on the local economies part of the investigation, welcome the publication of the Race to the Top results today. But they are saddened that the initiative revealed a very low general rate of local sourcing, and a somewhat higher but still low level of locality⁴ food sourcing, by the ten retailers surveyed. Only one retailer was able to provide guideline figures which revealed that the proportions of local and locality foods stocked is very low relative to overall food lines stocked – less than 5% for local food and less than 10% for locality foods. Whilst the companies often had admirable policies and publicity on how they supported small producers and local and regional foods, in reality few had any figures on stocking levels and only a tiny number of stores showed any evidence of local food 'promotion' such as point of sale advertising, sampling stands or local food information leaflets.⁵

Vicki Hird, policy Director of Sustain said '*Despite a high level of interest by consumers in local and regionally specific food, and a large amount of hype by most of the companies, the supermarkets are clearly not doing enough. Less national PR on this issue and more support for local supplies would do wonders for local food economies and would help reconnect consumers with the food they eat. We will continue to monitor what the multiples are doing to support local food economies.*'

Barbara Gill, NFWI National Chairman said, '*WI members want to see local choices as the rule rather than the exception. NFWI has long supported local producers, and understands the vital role that sourcing locally can play in vibrant local economies. We want to see supermarkets' PR spin on this issue matched by a real commitment to local sourcing*'

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Contact Vicki Hird w: 020 7837 1228 or m 07903 478 249

¹ See How ethical are our supermarkets?? We can't tell you. Race to the Top press release 26th November 2003. Contact Bill Vorley or Tom Fox, IIED 020 7388 2117. www.racetothetop.org

² Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming represents over 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level. www.sustainweb.org.

³ NFWI is the largest national organisation for women in the UK with 230,000 members in England, Wales and the Islands. <http://www.womens-institute.org.uk/>

⁴ 'local' means local to the store, eg within a certain distance; 'locality' (or 'regional') is generally defined by its origin in UK regions but not necessarily local to the store.

⁵ Profiles of all supermarkets are available at www.racetothetop.org/results