

Question time

Are you being served?

Why is Tesco snubbing government-backed healthy eating advice labels – and what is it doing to recycle waste? We ask Chief Executive Sir Terry Leahy

Q Why has Tesco launched its own food labelling scheme instead of using the Food Standards Agency (FSA) 'traffic light' model?

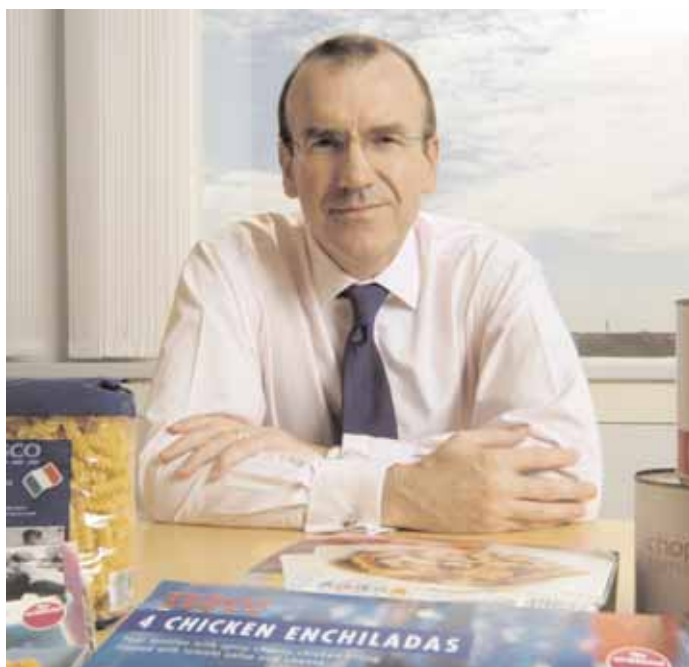
A We found that customers preferred our scheme because it provides more information and is less judgmental. So instead of merely commenting whether food was green, amber, red, it provides information about the proportion of the guideline daily amount of a key nutrient that each pack contains. If you're walking around the store and putting together your daily food or your weekly food, you're able to make decisions because you know 'this is 30 per cent of what you can have that day'.

Q Which? and FSA research shows 'traffic light' labels are more helpful than just giving guideline daily amounts. You believe the opposite?

A Overwhelmingly so. We're dealing with millions of customers and I know from experience that when you provide good, clear information to consumers, it changes behaviour.

Q What is your reaction to Tony Blair's statement that he may force food suppliers to adopt the FSA model?

A I don't have a reaction to it. Anybody who takes time to



Sir Terry Leahy: 'This is an industry where customers have a choice'

see what Tesco has done can only conclude that it is good for health, good for consumers and will improve people's diets. Now, I don't think any government is going to want to prevent that from happening.

Q Does Tesco own a lot of undeveloped land?

A We don't have big banks of land – land is expensive and no company can sit on an asset like that. All that we have is going through the process of gaining planning permission for a new store.

Q You have a range of green policies, including the plastic bag scheme. It's been welcomed by some people...

A It's been welcomed by the vast majority of people, and why wouldn't it be welcomed? If I go through some of the components of our community plan – a £100 million fund to invest in energy-saving and sustainable energy initiatives; Green Clubcard points to reward people for bringing back and reusing bags; millions invested in technology to double the amount

of recycling at the front of store. I could go on. You tell me what part of that plan somebody could have a problem with?

Q Well, for example Friends of the Earth criticised your plastic bag scheme...

A When you say for example, it's not for example, is it? It is specifically Friends of the Earth and it might be good if they were able to see the good in this initiative.

Q How concerned are you about the Competition Commission's probe into supermarkets?

A I'm not concerned. I think that this is a very competitive industry; it's an industry where customers have a choice and, because of that, they basically ensure that the retailers compete with each other for their business.

Q If you were king for a day what would you like to do for the British shopper?

A I'd give them more time. As life gets busier, one of the things that comes under most pressure is time.

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