

Supermarkets influence us in many ways. The supermarket practice of selling and promoting glossy, blemish free fruit and vegetables all year round has had a big impact on customers.

Student 2: High Merit
NZQA Intended for teacher use only

Consumer expectation has been altered to create a new 'normal' for the purchase of fruit and vegetables. As Dr Rosemary Stanton quotes: "supermarkets arrived in the 1960s... instead of walking to local shops with a list and asking for what you wanted, shoppers now drive to supermarkets and make their decisions according to the display on offer". Therefore supermarkets need to display items to catch your eye and encourage you to buy. A Consumer Report 'Supermarket Layout Tactics' April 2010 states "Fruit and Vegetables are always at the entrance – they display freshness and healthiness. Having fruit and vegetables at the entrance definitely isn't for the convenience of shoppers, as the fruit and veges are likely to get squashed at the bottom of the trolley." This is why the fruit and vegetables are uniform in shape, shiny and presented in even rows or stacks, no sign of dirt or bugs, and are sometimes misted with water to make them sparkle and increase the look of freshness.

1

When food was grown in the backyard or at home instead of buying from the supermarkets, fruit and vegetables came in many sizes, colours, and shapes. If the carrot had a knobble it was eaten, if the apple had a blemish it was eaten. However, supermarket now days have changed our whole perspective of what is "normal" and what is just plain ugly. Consumers now won't buy vegetables and fruits that aren't 'pretty' or don't look 'normal' and supermarkets won't sell them either. This attitude towards food of "if it doesn't look good, it won't taste good" has been influenced by supermarkets only selling glossy, colourful and unblemished produce on the shelves. This attitude starts from the picking of the produce. In 1968 there were 90 apple cultivators and 50 pear cultivators but by 1990 it had dropped to 27 apples and 9 pears. This is because of the technical specifications (source: Te Ara On-line Encyclopaedia). Most of the waste occurs due to the produce not meeting the "technical specifications". Many customers' link freshness to how good and 'pretty' the produce looks.

2

Based on our survey done at our school in the year 9-11 food technology class, we gave them a fruit labelled A and B. 'A' was the pretty, glossy supermarket fruit and 'B' was the fruit grown in the backyard. Most of them preferred the one labelled 'A' – this was because it was normal looking and it is what they're use to eating at home. Just because some produce is discoloured or is a different shape than usual, doesn't mean it won't taste the same to many others. There is a huge amount of wasted produce due to the technical specifications of supermarkets. Supermarkets have influenced consumers so much that they prefer to stick to what they're use to eating, than trying something new.

3

We now don't eat foods that are fresh and grown locally – instead we mainly choose foods according to cost. Health Sponsorship Council survey (2010) 'Shopping behaviours of New Zealand Households' "75% cost/price compared to 40% freshness, 40% quality, 39% Healthiness and only 16% seasonality. Before the 1960's when supermarkets such as the Foodtown "all convenience" store was introduced, people got their fruit and vegetables from either the local markets or grown at home in the backyard. People could only eat the fruit and vegetables when they were in season and fresh and grown locally. Now a days fresh produce is sold in supermarkets all year round having a big influence on consumers. 'Eighty per cent of shoppers believe the fresh vegetables sold in supermarket are less than 4 days old - in reality, they can be up to nine days old when they arrive, and remain on the shelf for a further four. Including the time these vegetables are stored at home before being eaten these fresh items can be more than 16 days old' (source Daily mail article UK March 2010).

4

Supermarkets have limited the knowledge consumers have of the availability and seasonal changes of fruits and vegetables. Based on a survey we did on year 9 to year 11 food technology students, only four students knew that kiwi fruit were grown in the winter and hardly any students knew when new potatoes were available. This clearly shows the impact of supermarkets importing fruits and vegetables so consumers can eat them all year round. For example, the apple season runs for three months of the year and the apple industry has perfected climate controlled storage so that the country can enjoy apples all year round. (Brigid Andersen, March 19, 2010, ABC News). Individuals begin to lack the knowledge of the seasons in which fruit and vegetables are available. This is then carried on through generations.

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Consumers are also unaware of the effects and storage conditions these produce are kept in to have them all year round to keep up with consumer's demands. "Some produce is up to 10 months old because of consumer demands" (The Sun Herald newspaper, Australia, Jan 20, 2008). Although there are no statistics for New Zealand, we assume this is the same. "Fresh vegetables can lose up to 45 per cent of important nutrients by the time they reach the dinner table. Time spent in storage, in transportation and sitting on the shelves means it can be more than two weeks from the vegetables being picked to being eaten." <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1255606/Why-frozen-vegetables-fresher-fresh.html#ixzz1tOwzcJ2C>

6

The importation of fruits and vegetables from around the world has also made consumers unaware of how the produce was grown, or what herbicides/pesticides were used because we are now disconnected to those who grow the produce. I believe that being able to buy produce all year round can positively affect our health because we are able to purchase a wide range of produce all year round, and thus, we are able to get the nutritional benefits of eating multiple different types of fresh fruits and vegetables. The Ministry of Health 2003 Report stated that only three out of every five children met the recommended 3+ servings of vegetables a day. I think being able to purchase produce out of season is both positive and negative for the health of our communities, but our demand for convenience comes at the expense of being disconnected with the grower and our fading knowledge of seasonal produce, and biosecurity risks.

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