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There is no escaping the so called "Horse Meat Scandal" which has played out in the media over the past few weeks. Causing shock, disgust, outrage and panic, here we sum up briefly why it happened and what we can do about it.

Why did it happen?

The food industry is not as benevolent as it may appear. Behind the seductive and 'ethical' packaging lies a powerful and often aggressive industry. In the face of recession supermarkets have been driving down meat prices for consumers, putting enormous pressure on food producers to provide meat at lower and lower prices or risk losing their valuable contract with the supermarket. Add to this the soaring cost of grain needed to feed cattle and we end up with the cost of beef reaching an all time high. The cost of energy needed to produce beef and processed meat goods has also soared at the same time leading us to a desperate situation, the result of which has been the current horse meat scandal.

The food inspection industry, originally linked directly to the government, has shrunk over the past ten years as a trend to deregulate it, together with budget cuts has seen increased privatisation and less stringent checks on how and where our meat is produced.

What can we do about it?

Ask questions! There really is no excuse for wilful ignorance where our food is concerned. Large supermarket chains have a great deal of control over their supply chains, particularly for their value and economy ranges sourcing ingredients from all over the world depending on where prices are cheapest but that 'added value' comes at a cost and always has, it just so happens that on this occasion we consumers are paying the price. Indications that a scandal of this magnitude could happen have been apparent for many years but as long as we are prepared to pay rock bottom prices for our food, particularly meat, the supermarkets will supply - no questions asked.

There is no excuse or justification for the current horse meat scandal but it is a sobering reminder that we as consumers must ask questions. Where does this food come from? How and where is it made? How on earth can value beef be so cheap? If you can't find the answer easily then ask your supermarket or food provider, hold them accountable. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to say one supermarket is better than another, none of them are perfect, but do your homework - it won't take you long to discover which supermarkets were more heavily incriminated in the current scandal and why.

On a more practical level you could always eat less meat as many of us eat too much anyway. Meat isn't required every day and fish, dairy produce, lentils, quinoa and even the humble baked bean all offer an alternative protein fix. This is also a perfect excuse to get to know your local butcher better (if you're lucky enough to still have one). Their produce is often sourced within a local radius and traceability is considerably easier to ensure. The same applies to farmer's markets which are enjoying something of a revival lately and by purchasing food from local producers you are doing your bit to support the local, and indeed national economy by refusing to buy imports.

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