

Shoppers care more about animals than climate

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Animal welfare and fair trade are far bigger concerns to UK consumers than climate change, according to a huge new poll of UK shoppers.

Only 4% rate [climate change](#) as their top ethical priority, compared with 21% who think animal welfare is the most important issue and 14% who rate fair trade as their key concern.

The findings come from a survey conducted by the Co-op grocery business that has been used to draw up a "responsible retailing" policy, designed to reflect shoppers' concerns.

The Co-op claims the survey is the biggest poll of consumer ethics ever undertaken. The supermarket group analysed responses to a detailed, four-page questionnaire from more than 100,000 members and customers. It intends to use their responses to guide changes to the way it does business.

As a result of the survey the Co-op is halting the sale and use of eggs from caged hens with immediate effect. The 2,700-strong supermarket chain is also ensuring all its own-brand tea - including its 99 brand - becomes fair trade. The customer-owned grocery business, which made all of its coffee fair trade five years ago, intends to absorb the extra costs so that prices do not go up.

Three main categories emerged from the survey as the key areas of concern: ethical trading (27%), animal welfare (25%) and environmental impact (22%).

Shoppers' worries about the environment are focused on issues other than climate change. Twice as many are concerned about the amount of packaging on their food as think [global warming](#) is the most important issue.

As a result, the Co-op is changing the shape and weight of its 26 own-brand wine bottles to save 450m tonnes of glass a year. It has also increased its list of prohibited pesticides from 32 to 98.

Among those who believe ethical trading is the most important issue, 14% make fair trade their priority, with 8% supporting "general ethical trading" policies.

Some 4% pinpointed animal testing as the ethical issue they believe is the most important facing consumers - the same proportion as want more attention paid to climate change. Paul Monaghan, the Co-op's head of ethics, said the group believed that consumers' apparent indifference to [climate change](#) was likely to be the result of believing they have little

influence to force change: "They may believe they are powerless on climate change. People can choose to buy Fairtrade or Freedom Food labels, but there is no [carbon](#) label yet. We think shoppers see [climate change](#) as an issue for corporations and governments."

Peter Marks, chief executive of the Co-operative Group, said the organisation would not scale back its support for the global drive to reduce greenhouse emissions despite its members' seeming ambivalence to the issue. He said they needed more information, adding: "Over the next decade we will work even harder to help customers understand the threat we face and the actions we can take."

The Co-op launched its vast consultation exercise last September. It aimed to discover which issues meant most to its customers and to make it clear that some seemingly sensible changes had negative repercussions that it would not support. The grocer pointed to the aeroplane stickers used on air-freighted exotic fruit and flowers by Marks & Spencer and Tesco and accused its rivals of "lazy thinking".

The Co-op said it would never introduce such stickers because they could have a detrimental effect on growers in less developed countries and the [carbon](#) produced by importing from African farmers can be a fraction of that produced by farmers in Europe because of the heating and lighting required.

The Co-op has long been at the forefront of the ethical debate. It was the first major retailer to champion fair trade, when it put Cafédirect coffee on its shelves in 1992, and introduced the UK's first fair trade bananas in 2000.

In recent years, however, supermarket groups have increasingly been seeking to underline their credentials as planet-friendly businesses. Marks & Spencer has set out a 100-point Plan A eco-strategy while Tesco has set out a "community plan" and has pledged to "become a leader in helping to create a low-carbon economy". Tesco is also leading an initiative to come up with a carbon-labelling scheme and last year announced £25m of funding for a new Sustainable Consumption Institute at Manchester University.

Monaghan said the Co-op was now "raising the bar" with its ethics policy.