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In praise of supermarkets [1]

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There's a certain sector of the chatterati that likes to slag off supermarkets. It's quite appalling how they ship food all over the place, how it's all the same bringly good quality. They set up out of town, the nasties, and thus drain the life out of the high street. We should all go back to patronising our local butcher and baker and sear never to have anything to do with a corporate behemoth ever again.

What these people don't seem to grasp is that there's a reason that we have supermarkets. And no, it's not because we all save time by going shopping in great big lumps rather than continually. Rather, it's because only in such a large and capital rich system can we have an efficient logisitics chain. And it's that logistics chain which is the real value to us all [3]:

> It hoped foreign supermarkets like Tesco and Walmart would come in and revolutionise India's backward agricultural sector. Forty per cent of all Indian produce rots on clunky bullock carts and rough baked roads before reaching the market. When they arrive, farmers get a tiny fraction on the retail price as as they pass through at least five agents, each taking their cut. Of the eighty rupees per kilo they were selling for last week, the farmer's share was just eight. India needs new smooth roads, cold-chain storage and modern transport logistics to replace sweaty bullock carts, and direct sales from farmer to retailer to stabilise prices, increase farm incomes and reduce food inflation - one of the country's most politically sensitive issues.

There have been other reports which make a very similar point. In the poor world, and one of the reasons these places are poor is because of this lack, some 50% of food rots somewhere between field and plate. In the rich world there is also waste, yes, but it's more that we consumers buy too much which we then don't eat. And let's be honest about it, having too much food in our fridges is a very much better outcome than having not enough food in the house. And that is the difference between having the supermarkets and not having them. Those logistics chains might mean that we ourselves are so inundated with food that we waste some portion of it. But that's a much better result than not having enough food to be able to waste it.

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