

## [Not the NFS](#) [1]

Written by [Jan Boucek](#) [2] | Saturday 2 July 2011



There was an interesting [story](#) [3] in the Guardian this week about UK supermarkets' response to challenging trading conditions. Unsurprisingly for the Guardian, the article chose its theme for the story as 'Shoppers in a divided Britain compare supermarket deals'.

Despite that equality agenda, what the article really showed is why we're lucky there's no such thing as the National Food Service, modelled on the National Health Service, to ensure equal access to affordable food supplies.

The general squeeze on household incomes is playing out dramatically in the supermarket aisles. Not only are discount chains like Lidl and Aldi doing rather well, but the big four – Tesco, Sainsburys, Asda and Morrisons – are in a constant struggle to deliver what their customers want at the best possible price. Millions of individual decisions on what to buy and what to sell are made every day from Land's End to John o'Groats. Amazingly, but unsurprisingly to believers in Adam Smith's invisible hand, supermarket shelves remain fully stocked and there's no reports yet of starvation in the hinterland.

Arguably, food provision ranks ahead of health care in any society's top priorities and it's not hard to imagine the disaster befalling our kitchens and restaurants if the industry was organised into an NFS in pursuit of an equality agenda. GPs (Grocery Practitioners) would be the gatekeepers to food supplies, assessing everyone's basic dietary requirements and issuing coupons according to guidelines from Whitehall under budgets set by the Treasury. PCTs (Primary Comestible Trusts) would oversee the distribution of food parcels, adopting best practices as judged by NICE (National Institute for Cuisine Excellence). There'd be nationally set waiting-list targets to see consultants on wine and cheese.

Fortunately, nobody is seriously proposing a National Food Service – yet. But, equally, nobody is seeking lessons from the supermarkets on delivering efficient health care in rapid response to changing consumer demands. Which is too bad. The dwindling number of NHS dentists hasn't required a re-issue of *The Simpsons* – *The Big Book of British Teeth*?. Nor has the demise of NHS prescription glasses caused a surge in collisions with lamp posts.

Which reminds me – whatever happened to suggestions back in 2007 that outfits like Tesco run franchised health centres? In these straitened times, the proven track record of the UK grocers to deliver the goods would seem an eminent contribution to the nation's rising demand for health care. After all, every little helps!

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#) [5]

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/health/not-the-nfs>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5819>

[3] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/jun/29/waitrose-lidl-shopper-divided-britain>

[4] [http://disqus.com/?ref\\_noscript](http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript)

[5] <http://disqus.com>