



## **Shifty Business Practices**

### **Trimming size and quantity, but not the price!**

Maybe not all the time, but you've probably noticed on occasions that the goods you buy today seem to have changed compared to how they used to be. The table spread is the same price it always was; and at first glance the size of the tub looks no different; but if you have a squiz at the weight you may very well find that it's dropped a few grams. Just a few, so it's hardly noticeable; and when you come to use it – who's counting the slices of bread it goes on? Though the cost of this same-price-as-it-used-to-be single item won't impact the checkout total, in effect you are getting less value for your money.

The regular purchases that go in the trolley are often the target for this kind of shifty business practice. Shoppers may have a list, or simply buy on the fly; but generally the weekly shop is a necessary chore that has to be fitted into a busy schedule; so there isn't time to stop and scroll down every label on every can and packet. It's all there, of course: the net weight, the nutritional details, plus health and allergy advice; but who has time to read it? So the can of baked beans that used to be 440 grams is now 420g; so what? Well, unless the price is cheaper, you're being shafted!

Manufacturers and processors will claim these minor adjustments are quite legal, which they are; and when challenged they may offer explanations that seem, to them at least, reasonable. For the consumer on a tight budget, however, it's often a case of accepting the inevitable or going without. Meals on the plate will need to be slightly smaller, unless an extra can or pack is bought to make up the shortfall. It is harder to disguise rising costs on goods sold by weight, though. Tomatoes, for example, will be priced per kilo. Even when bagged, the bulk price should be there somewhere; maybe a label on the bag, or a ticket on the front of the bin. If that price is higher than it was the previous week, the shopper has choices – buy the tomatoes loose; just enough to equal the cost that was paid before; bite the bullet and pay today's kilo price for the bag; or forget tomatoes right now and wait until later for the price to drop; if it ever does.

The cost of living is forever on the increase and everyone knows that, in particular those who are scratching to make ends meet. These shoppers might be more inclined to check out the weights and size of the goods they buy. Packets of cereal, for instance – the boxes look the same as they ever were; and the price has increased, which is to be expected; but the net contents are very likely to have been reduced. Ah well, the kids like Fruity Bubbles for breakfast, and it's not fair that they miss out; so into the trolley they go.

Snacks are a great source of income for shops, supermarkets, and of course producers. I've mentioned this before, but in case you didn't read the article, here's a reminder. Even though the packets of crisps seem pretty much the same as they always were, that's not

quite so. The fact that some air in the bag is necessary to keep the chips fresh and crispy; as a bonus for the seller it also makes it appear pretty full. But wait, there's more sneaky stuff going on... The weight of contents will usually be found on a bottom corner of the bag, so when they are stood upright on the shelf, at first glance the weight isn't readily seen. Month by month, it's been going down a bit at a time; from 200g to 185g to 175g to 165g; the price however has increased in tandem to the point where the cost is shock horror ludicrous. What else is this other than deceptive profiteering?

It's happening with many products. Chocolate bars are smaller; packs of ham and bacon cost more and contain less; packets of biscuits don't look much different these days, but I can almost guarantee that the wrappers are slightly shorter because they are maybe one biscuit light. And if they're in a box, value for money is even harder to assess. As for fresh meat, have you noticed how much water it contains? Apparently, so they say, that's only a small percentage to keep it fresh; but you're paying the same for the water as you are for the meat. Think about it – one kilo of meat might cost \$18.00, 10% of which could be water; so for 100ml of the same stuff you get out of the tap, you could be paying \$1.80! Even the humble toilet roll is subject to a wee bit of trimming; not the cost, though. It really is a tedious pain, don't you think?

Unfortunately there's not a lot any of us can do to curb these shifty business practices. Our only recourse is to shop wiser, buy less, boycott the higher-priced goods altogether; or simply have a groan and cough up. It's all down to the way things are; and is, I'm afraid, the shape of things to come. Still, there's always Lotto, and someone's got to win.

**A Season of Happiness - helping you towards a better lifestyle**



**For a look at some more informative articles on a variety of subjects just return to the web page**