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Brit-Shop ™

Here's a little thought-experiment for you. Imagine you have set up a big store, maybe a franchise chain of them. Each store has food on the ground floor and clothes and durable goods on the upper floors. There is a decent enough range of produce and products on offer for people to use it for their weekly shop.

The only criteria is that all the products and their raw materials are made in Britain -- or whatever your local country is.

So here's the question -- "would being locally made be by itself sufficient to ensure a significant increase in environmental and social performance over a similar shop that takes products from anywhere?"

A few thoughts to get you started:

- Food and material miles would certainly be decreased.

- Britain has pretty high standards in some areas (food safety, child labour, etc.) and so while the store would not actively seek organic farming, for example, there would also be less food mile impacts than normal.

- Customers would initially be asking for tomatoes in December, but on the other hand they would be exposed to revival delights like samphire, burdock, sloes, chestnuts, etc.

- Almost all British forests would meet the FSC criteria, yet few bother because of the cost. British hardwood is inherently good stuff and far superior environmentally to any imported woods.

- Many materials would be tricky. Cotton is out, for example. But we have wool and hemp. And synthetic fibres made from North Sea oil (...!!?...). And what about electronics components? (I said this would get you thinking!)

Note that is not just about transport impacts. It's about local economies, national self sufficiency, balance of trade, employment, and retaining skills bases.

It's also about recognising that many UK environmental standards for manufacturing and agriculture are higher than some of the countries we import from. So why not buy locally?

I'm not saying that the store would exclude environmental criteria -- it's just that initially it would be pretty hard to stock a whole shop with products that are eco- AND British. It would also be a more viable and mainstream way to start a business to being with just UK-made.

Indeed, the main marketing thrust could be very mainstream -- about being "Made with Pride in Britain" and customers could draw their own conclusions about the inherent economic, environmental and social benefits.

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