

Going out

People are mainly sociable. Most of us enjoy company, and like leisure pursuits based on sport or culture, dining out or drinking, adventure or romance.

The decision to ban these leaves a big hole in people's lives. Governments have to allow people to go out to buy food, so the trips to the supermarket become more frequent as they represent one of the few reasons to allow people to go out as they wish.

The pressures on the supermarkets are mainly from the demand side. There are five principal reasons

1. Some have to buy more food more often because we are no longer eating in works canteens or attending working meals when working from home. Many people have to replace missed meals out with home cooking. This means food that used to go to wholesalers for the catering trade now needs to be diverted to supermarkets. This must now be happening and will help. Supermarket models of true demand need adjusting for the increased home meals effects. There is no overall increase in food demand.
2. Some people have decided to greatly increase their stocks of food. Some have cleaned the stores out of new freezers to increase their storage capacity. Some have written unhelpful articles telling people what can be frozen, to swell the phenomenon. Most saw this as anti social and refrained, but a significant minority cleared whole shelves of items they liked .
3. The government's stronger guidance on 7 and 14 day isolation at home, and long term isolation for the elderly and ill, led more people to feel they had to lay in food for a longer stay at home, which increased the number of people building abnormal stock piles.
4. The media fanned hoarding by highlighting empty shelves at periods of the day furthest from the restock deliveries, to encourage a feeding frenzy.
5. The statement that one of the few legitimate reasons to go out is to buy food meant people became likely to do it more often. Having got there they proceed to buy things they cannot eat anytime soon.

The government and supermarkets need to agree a tougher approach to limiting purchases, so we deter people from further large stock build. Once this can be achieved supply and demand should come into better balance, reducing the tensions and showing people we are not about to run out of food. Astute farmers will be watching all this and see an opportunity to plant and rear more food this spring and summer given the appetite for it.