

Chillspeed have their say!

FOLLOWING an editorial item, in the January/February 2007 edition of TCS&D's sister publication *Frozen & Chilled Foods*, by Brian Brennan, Managing Director of PDQ couriers, further comments on how many of the major supermarkets are actually increasing pollution with their unrealistic supplier delivery vehicle demands have been received by TCS&D from another temperature controlled courier firm based in Norfolk. Mr Geoff Lazell, Proprietor of Chillspeed of Diss has this to say on the subject:

"Given the current public and government concern over global warming, environmental pollution and 'food miles' etc, it will no doubt come as a surprise to many just how much unnecessary transportation of food produce is placed on the HGV sector which could in fact be done by much smaller vehicles – for no other reason than that the supermarket distribution centres will not accept vehicles below 7.5 tonnes GW and in a few cases (e.g. some sites of the biggest retailer in the UK), 17 tonnes. What may equally surprise many outside the industry is that suppliers are 'fined' by the supermarket giants if they fail to deliver the amount of product that has been ordered by a specific time. As the production of fresh produce is governed by so many variables, it will NOT come as a surprise that this often means the normal delivery truck, with its pre-arranged delivery time slot, has to depart without the full load on numerous occasions.

With the notable exception of just one 'up-market' major food retailer, this then forces the suppliers to put the last few trays or boxes (often as few as 5 or 6, say about 50–60 kg) in

another vehicle capable of carrying 4, 14 or even 26 PALLETS! This is often then driven quite literally the length or breadth of the country, causing excessive and unnecessary wear and tear on our roads, using unnecessary fuel and contributing unnecessarily to the global warming that we are assured by our masters will be the end of mankind if we don't ALL do something about it. These tiny loads can be far more cost-effectively delivered in a small van, but due to supermarket inflexibility, it is generally forbidden. Like PDQ, we too have turned up at some RDC or other, having rushed there to avoid our customer being fined, only to be turned away because the vehicle was too small. One doesn't need a Master's Degree in economics to understand the financial impact this draconian intransigence has on the suppliers.

The supermarkets or logistics companies concerned will defend this policy by claiming either; a) Health & Safety issues, as vans cannot match the loading bay dock height and therefore those few trays or boxes must be manhandled ("So what?", we ask, "it can still be done safely can't it?") or b) that because a van is not big enough to effect a seal with the bay doors, there will be a break in the 'cold chain'. It takes only a few minutes to unload even a tonne of product in 10 kg trays from a van by hand and current industry practice already allows for some breaks in the cold chain, for instance at the supermarkets themselves, most of which do not have sealed loading bays! The REAL reasons for this unreasonable attitude however, is that everything to a supermarket is about high volume and rapid throughput and they just cannot be bothered to handle small loads in

small vehicles. It is as simple as that.

Most RDC's have a multitude of loading bays, all designed for 40ft articulated trailers with a 26 pallet capacity. One or two of these bays could be easily converted to facilitate a variable height and thus still allow unloading by pallet truck or whatever from vehicles of any size and shape. Such devices are already on the market and cost between £17,000 and £35,000 to supply and install, depending on size. We know this because we have made enquiries. Such capital investments are small beer to the giants of UK food retailing, who lack only the will, NOT the resources to implement them.

We have, through our local MP, tried to bring this absurd situation to the notice of the Dept for Transport – with a notable lack of success, despite numerous letters to and fro over the past couple of years. The government it seems, is just not interested in taking the supermarkets to task over this – or perhaps they are afraid to, such is the power the retail 'monsters' are now perceived to wield. As operators of a fleet of vans, we very obviously have a vested interest in seeing this addressed and pressure being brought to bear (for any change will not occur without it!) and it would be disingenuous to pretend that our argument is a purely altruistic one. Nevertheless, it should be obvious to all concerned that our argument IS a common-sense one and that it is high time the 'Mr Bigs' of UK food retailing and logistics put their money where their mouths are and 'did their bit' for the environment they so often claim to be so concerned about. They wouldn't want to be thought of as hypocrites would they?" **RE3**