

What makes an ethical mince pie?

FRANCESCA DE LA TORRE explores how to stick to your values whilst enjoying a festive treat.



Organic? Palm oil free? Vegan? There is actually quite a lot for an ethical consumer to consider when trying to choose which mince pies to buy. This guide explores the ethics of a range of companies and looks into exactly what each brand offers when it comes to finding an ethical mince pie.

It is also the second trial run of our proposed new rating system. This means we have rated companies on eight categories, including those most relevant to mince pies such as palm oil and animals. The guide covers all the major supermarkets as well as eight other brands.

We know it's a bit early for most of you to be thinking about mince pies, and as an anti-consumerism organisation we can only apologise for joining in with the somewhat capitalist notion that Christmas (and therefore Christmas shopping) starts in October. We do hope you can find it in your hearts to forgive us... it is Christmas after all!

The new system

As you may be aware, we are revolutionising the way we rate the brands in our guides. The new system scores out of 100 rather than 20, which we hope is more intuitive and easier to understand. The tables now have eight categories (rather than 20), each of which is scored out of 100, which allows us to create more nuanced and in-depth ratings on specific issues.

Some of the categories will feature in every product guide (for example Tax Conduct), while others will be specific to that guide. This ensures we are still covering a range of ethical issues and highlighting the most important issues in a particular sector. For example, our previous trial guide to furniture shops (EC203) included a Timber rating, while this guide to mince pies includes a Palm Oil rating.

The Company Ethos rating will incorporate both positive and negative practices across the entire company group, so we don't lose our 'follow the money' ethos.

A fully referenced version of this Shopping Guide is on our website

We'd love to hear your thoughts on this second trial of the new system. You can provide feedback by scanning this QR code, or using the link

www.surveymonkey.de/r/L9DPYQQ or writing to letters@ethicalconsumer.org.



Score table highlights

Tax conduct

A company will score zero if it has two or more high-risk subsidiaries registered in tax havens. To score 100 a company has to either be certified by the Fair Tax Foundation or we haven't found any subsidiaries in tax havens. Scores in between these poles represent the varying likelihoods that the company is engaging in tax avoidance.

Six companies on the table scored zero: Asda, Lidl, Morrisons, Premier Foods (Mr Kipling), Sainsbury's, and Tesco, while Aldi and William Jackson Foods Ltd (Abel & Cole) only scored 20. William Jackson Foods was penalised for having one subsidiary in Bermuda, which ranks third on Tax Justice Network's Corporate Tax Haven Index – a ranking of jurisdictions

most complicit in helping multinational corporations underpay corporate income tax.

The only company certified by the Fair Tax Foundation was the Co-op.

Climate

Three companies got full marks for this category: M&S, Premier Foods (Mr Kipling), and the Co-op. We were looking for discussion on what they had already done to cut their carbon impact, and how they will reduce it in future, focusing on the supply chain which usually counts for over 90% of emissions. They also had to report on their full emissions, have adequate reduction targets, and have no major criticisms.

Abel & Cole would have done better on its own, but its parent company did not meet any criteria. We found little discussion of climate impact from Authentic Bread Company and Roots & Wings, but as small companies they were not expected to meet such stringent criteria so still scored 40 each.


Some of the supermarkets lost marks for external criticisms: Tesco was challenged by the campaign group Feedback to look more at supply chain emissions, Asda had installed air conditioning that used a refrigerant with high global warming


SHOPPING GUIDE


Mince pies

ETHISCORE


The higher the ethiscore, the better the company.

GOOD 60+ 




AVERAGE 25-59 

POOR 0-24 

CATEGORY SCORES

The more green bars the better 

ETHISCORE (OUT OF 100)	CATEGORY SCORES								UHC
	CLIMATE	ANIMALS	WORKERS	PALM OIL	AGRICULTURE	PACKAGING	TAX CONDUCT	COMPANY ETHOS	
80									Riverfood Employee Ownership Trustee
72									Food Revolution Limited
66									The Authentic Bread Company Ltd
57									Bamford Collection Ltd
48									Co-operative Group Ltd
42									Greggs Plc
41									John Lewis Partnership Plc
31									William Jackson Foods Ltd
31									Marks and Spencer Group Plc
28									E.H.Booth & Co Ltd
28									Premier Foods Plc
26									Market Topco Ltd
22									J Sainsbury Plc
18									Lidl Stiftung & Co. KG
17									WD FF Ltd
14									Tesco Plc
11									Hofer KG
9									Bellis Topco Ltd

-  **Best Buys**
-  **Recommended**
-  **Brands to avoid**

-  Riverford
-  Roots & Wings
-  Authentic Bread Company
-  Co-op
-  Greggs
-  Waitrose
-  Abel & Cole
-  M&S
-  Tesco
-  Aldi
-  ASDA



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has. 9 times out of 10 this will be the brand (or brands) that are top of the table but sometimes an ethical company which is truly innovative scores less well on our rigid scoring system and we use the Best Buy and Recommended section to acknowledge this.

potential, and Lidl was rated Least Climate-Friendly Supermarket by DeSmog.

Workers

In this category we looked at what companies were doing to uphold the rights of workers in their supply chains. For example, we looked at whether a company had an adequate code of conduct that was aligned with the standards of the International Labour Organisation, whether it publicly disclosed its suppliers, and whether it was doing anything to promote living wages in its supply chain. Small and medium-sized companies were not expected to have as robust policies as larger companies.

The highest scoring companies (with either a score of 60 or 70) were: Authentic Bread Company, Riverfood, Roots & Wings, and Waitrose. Those at the very bottom of the pile were Asda (no surprise!) and Iceland, both of which scored 0. Abel

& Cole's rating (scoring 20) included that of its parent company, William Jackson Food Group, which lacked adequate policies in this area.

We also took account of any significant and reputable third-party criticism that related to these issues (for example, evidence that workers in a company's supply chain had been paid less than minimum wage), which would lead to a company losing marks. Eight companies were subject to two or more third-party criticisms: Aldi, Asda, Co-op, Lidl, M&S, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, and Tesco. Each of these companies had 50 marks deducted. Only one criticism was found in relation to Waitrose, so 20 marks were deducted. No significant criticisms were found of the other companies.

Palm Oil

Our palm rating only applies to own-brand products, not the other products sold by these retailers. Roots & Wings and Riverford were the only

two companies that stated they were completely palm oil free and therefore received a score of 100.

Greggs was only company to receive marks for having over 95% of its palm certified through segregated supply chains. Segregation means that the actual palm oil contained in your product has come directly from a certified source. The Co-operative just missed out on these marks with 93.3% of its palm supply certified this way. Aldi was the only supermarket to have less than 50% of its palm supply certified through segregated means and scored lower because of this.

Iceland famously was the first and only supermarket to go palm oil free a few years ago. However, it recently announced that it had to temporarily start using some palm oil again due to the war in Ukraine, which has affected the supply of sunflower oil. Unfortunately, the company did not appear to have any palm oil sourcing policies in place, nor had it reported to the RSPO. As a result, it scored 0 in this category.

Companies could receive marks for bring transparent about which mills their palm comes from. Previously we found that none of the supermarkets were doing this, but it appears progress is being made: Tesco listed some suppliers (including some mills), and Sainsbury's disclosed importers (but not yet mills).

Animals

Top marks in this category are reserved for vegan brands which have no animal use in the wider company group. Marks are also available for companies that don't appear to use animal products (though lack a clear policy on this), are explicitly vegetarian, or have adequate animal welfare policies. Companies that used significant amounts of animal products without adequate welfare policies received zero.

You may have noticed that there isn't a large range between company scores in this column compared to others, with most companies scoring zero and some scoring 30. This is because, unlike most of our guides, this one does not contain any vegetarian or vegan companies.

All the companies in this guide sell a significant amount of animal products, and most of them are supermarkets with huge ranges but without adequate welfare policies.

Riverford, Roots & Wings, and Authentic Bread Company scored 30 because all of their animal products were covered by policies which, to some extent, mitigated the suffering of the animals concerned. For these companies, it was because their entire range was certified organic, which includes standards for animal welfare. With Riverford this is true apart from the sale of some wild fish, which it said was line caught in small boats. Abel & Cole and Daylesford were largely organic but sold farmed salmon so only scored 10.

Agriculture

This new category looks at what actions companies are taking to reduce, or even reverse, the damage done to biodiversity and ecosystems by agriculture. For supermarkets, this looks at their own-brand policies only.

80 marks were awarded for fully organic companies. Non-organic companies could pick up some marks for having policies prohibiting GM and policies to reduce pesticides across their supply chain. All companies could then gain further marks for policies on: biodiversity and land use; pollution; water use; strong focus on seasonality

Riverford, Roots & Wings, and Authentic Bread Company are our best buys. As well as being at the top of the table they are all organic companies and also all scored 100 for company ethos.

 **BEST BUYS**



80



72

66



Abel & Cole are also recommended as, while the company as a whole (including its parent William Jackson Food Group) did not score as highly, its mince pies still tick a lot of ethical boxes. It also offered a gluten-free version (but not suitable for anyone with a very severe allergy).

 **RECOMMENDED**

For more mainstream options available on the high street, we recommend vegan options from **Co-op, Greggs, M&S** and **Waitrose** as they all scored higher on the table (but poorly for animal rights).

You may also have a local independent bakery that makes mince pies. As well as it being good to support smaller businesses, it also means you can ask them directly about their ingredients. Or you can have a go at making your own.

You may notice that Daylesford, while scoring highly, have not been listed as recommended. This is because the company is linked to the Bamfords whose activities may be considered controversial by many of our subscribers. Please see the company profile on page 23 for more information.

Aldi, Asda, and Tesco – Asda and Tesco are two of the top three supermarkets by turnover in the UK and two of the bottom three scoring on our table, scoring zero in multiple categories. Aldi also came out in the bottom three on the table.

 **BRANDS TO AVOID**

WHAT TO BUY

- **Is it vegan?** Dairy cows (used to make butter) often have very poor standards of welfare, and farming cows has a significant negative impact on the climate.
- **Is it organic?** Organic farming avoids harmful chemicals, GMOs and is generally far better for our ecosystems. If you are not opting for a vegan mince pie, organic also means somewhat higher animal welfare standards.

WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Are there poor workers' rights in the supply chain?** Mince pies contain a lot of ingredients, many of which, such as sugar, are a high risk for workers' rights abuses in the supply chain.
- **Does it contain unsustainable palm oil?** Try to go for palm oil-free options or, when not possible, avoid companies still using uncertified palm.

Mince pies

and locality; and for significant use of methods such as agroforestry, permaculture, and agroecology. As with other ratings, marks were deducted for criticisms related to these issues.

Despite run-off from farms, particularly non-organic and factory farms, being a major pollution risk for our soils and ever-declining river health, we could not find any clear policies around this issue among any of the non-organic companies. One UK farm which supplied M&S, Sainsbury's, and Waitrose was fined £35,000 for polluting waterways with slurry.

Riverford and Daylesford scored full marks as they had multiple policies beyond their organic focus. Authentic Bread Company, Roots & Wings, and Abel & Cole also scored well. At the other end of the spectrum, Aldi, Booths, Greggs, and Iceland all scored zero. It should be said that Booths did not really publish any detailed policies so they may be doing more than we know about! M&S and Morrisons scored the best out of the supermarkets but still only scored 40.

The Pesticide Action Network ranked supermarkets on their approach to pesticides – those ranked in the bottom five lost marks in our rating. These were, from highest to lowest, Tesco, Lidl, Asda, Aldi, and Iceland. Aldi, Booths, Greggs, and Iceland did not appear to have any policies for reducing pesticide use in their supply chain. Premier Foods claimed to advocate for reduced pesticide use, but we only gave marks to brands which provided detail about what they expect from suppliers and had standards for specific chemicals.

Packaging

We have often received requests from subscribers to rate companies on plastic and packaging, so this guide seemed a good opportunity to try this out.

For larger companies, marks were awarded for quantified dated targets to reduce plastic packaging, reduce overall packaging, increase recyclability of packaging, and increase the recycled content of packaging. Marks were also given when companies demonstrated that they had taken clear steps on these four aspects.



For small companies, we looked for aims and action on the same factors but did not require these to be as quantified as larger companies. Top marks would be given for companies with more radical approaches to packaging such as zero plastic or packaging free. Marks were deducted for third-party criticisms.

Abel & Cole had a detailed page on its website outlining each type of packaging and explaining how customers can return or reuse it. The company will take back and reuse or recycle pretty much all of its packaging. This was fairly similar to Riverford.

Lidl scored the best of the supermarkets, but it should be noted this rating covers Lidl GB only as it reported separately. Asda, Authentic Bread Company, M&S, Morrisons, Mr Kipling, and Tesco all scored zero. In practice, the Authentic Bread Company may be doing better, but it had very little information on its website and did not respond to our questionnaire – with most of the other ratings, the fact that it was 100% organic addressed many issues, but this is not the case with packaging.

Company Ethos

We removed the 'Wider Issues' column that was featured in the first trial guide of the new system (EC203) and created a more comprehensive Company Ethos column. This column is also double weighted, so it has a little more impact on final scores than any other given category.

Companies were awarded marks for positive company-wide policies such as being Living Wage Foundation accredited, being a co-operative or employee owned, exclusively selling ethical alternatives (for example, organic-certified products) or being a not-for-profit. Companies would also gain some marks for not being associated with negative practices such as excessive pay to directors, membership in free-trade lobby groups, or involvement in the arms industry. Marks were lost for significant third-party criticisms.

All of the supermarkets reported that they paid their top directors over £1 million in a single financial year, except for Aldi, Asda, and Lidl which did not appear to disclose this information but lost marks due to lack of transparency.

Three companies, Lidl, M&S, and Tesco, lost out on marks due to being members of the lobby group Eurocommerce. Of all the companies, Riverford scored the highest, meeting four out of the six possible positive criteria and not being penalised for

negative practices or third-party criticisms.

Vegan mince pies

Mince pies have gone on a real journey when it comes to animal ingredients. They used to be made with actual meat (hence the name), but most swapped the meat for fruit in the late Victorian era (though they still generally contained suet which can be from animal or plant-based sources). Not to be left behind the times, many mince pies are now becoming vegan.

None of the brands in this guide are part of fully vegan companies, but the majority appeared to offer a vegan version, with the exception of Booths, Daylesford, Iceland, Mr Kipling, and Roots & Wings. Greggs was the only company that appeared to only offer vegan mince pies, but it did sell a lot of other meat products.

Palm oil-free mince pies

Roots & Wings and Riverford were entirely palm oil-free companies. M&S and Tesco appeared to offer a palm oil-free option. In the past, Daylesford has sold mince pies with palm oil, but more recent examples appeared to all be palm oil free. Iceland mince pies used to be palm oil free but this year may contain palm oil as the company has reintroduced palm oil for some products due to the supply chain disruption caused by the war in Ukraine.

Supermarkets and larger companies often use palm oil as a replacement for butter, so if buying from such brands your choice is likely between vegan or palm oil free.

Abel & Cole's mince pies were all also palm oil free. Their mince pies are made by the Authentic Bread Company but it appears that not all of ABC mince pies are palm oil free.

Organic mince pies

All the mince pies from Abel & Cole, Authentic Bread Company, Daylesford, Riverford, and Roots & Wings were organic. Waitrose offered an organic range, and it appeared Sainsbury's had done previously but it wasn't clear if this product would be continued.

What about fair trade mince pies?

While mince pies contain many ingredients that can (and should) be sourced fair trade, such as sugar, spices, and dried fruits, it doesn't seem that there are any options for buying ready-made fair trade mince pies.

Making your own mince pies can be a good way to ensure you know where all the ingredients came from, as well as requiring less packaging than pre-made pies. You can also buy a jar of mincemeat and make the pastry or vice versa. The web version of this guide includes a recipe for vegan mince pies.

Brand	Palm Oil Free	Vegan	Organic
Abel & Cole	All	Some	All
Aldi	No	Some	No
Asda	No	Some	No
Authentic Bread Co	Some	Some	All
Booths	No	No	No
Co-op	No	Some	No
Daylesford	All?	No	All
Greggs	No	All	No
Iceland	Maybe	No	No
Lidl	No	Some	No
M&S	Some	Some	No
Morrisons	No	Some	No
Mr Kipling	No	No	No
Riverford	All	Some	All
Roots & Wings	All	No	All
Sainsbury's	No	Some?	Some?
Tesco	Some	Some	No
Waitrose	Some	Some	Some

Who sells what?

The table opposite is a rundown of all the options. Only Abel & Cole, Riverford and potentially Authentic Bread Company offered the holy trinity of a mince pie that is palm oil free, vegan, and organic. (Authentic Bread Company make the mince pies for Abel & Cole and Riverford but to each brand's recipe). Abel & Cole also offered a gluten-free version.

Update closer to Christmas!

Please note much of this information is based on the mince pies being sold last year. We will update the website with any amendments closer to Christmas when mince pies have gone on sale. Where it says 'No' it is because we didn't find any examples of this.

Companies behind the brands

Greggs is a bit of a mixed bag when it comes to ethics. It gets full marks on its approach to tax, is the only large company to score above 40 for palm oil, and was also one of the higher scorers in the climate rating. However, it still needs to put a lot of work into ensuring workers in its supply chain are treated fairly. It scored zero in the Agriculture rating. It also scored zero in the Animals column, showing that while it might be able to hit the headlines with a vegan sausage roll, it is not doing enough to ensure welfare of the animals in its wider supply chain.

Bamford Collections Ltd owns **Daylesford**, which on the face of it appears to be a small company doing a lot of the right things – not only is it organic but it is also working to restore wetland and creating an agroforestry project on its farmland.

However, Bamford Collections is owned by Lady Carole Bamford, who is married to billionaire Lord Anthony Bamford, director of family business JCB. Bamford Collections lists a number of dormant companies with the JCB name amongst its subsidiaries. But because there is no evidence of a formal link to the wider JCB group, Daylesford still scores well on our tables. JCB has received heavy criticisms for human rights due diligence failures which allowed its machinery to be used to demolish homes in occupied Palestine. The Bamfords have been long-time donors to the Tory party, and more recently both Lord and Lady Bamford have made headlines for helping to bankroll Boris Johnson's post-PM lifestyle.

Abel & Cole is owned by William Jackson Food Ltd, which also owns Jackson's of Yorkshire, which makes bread, and Belazu, which specialises in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern ingredients. William Jackson is not an organic company and while the majority of Abel & Cole's offering is still organic, they are increasingly selling non-organic produce, including animal products like chicken.

Roots & Wings is the brand name of Food Revolution Limited. It's a small independent company that sells organic food as well as some organic hair/body care products. All its products are palm oil free.

We often find that, as small companies grow and become more financially successful, they seem to start compromising on some of their ethical credentials or end up selling to bigger firms. **Riverford**, which now has a turnover of £110 million, appears to be doing a pretty good job at bucking that trend. It has stayed true to selling only organic produce, is a Living Wage Foundation-certified employer, a certified B-Corporation, is palm oil free, and this year it has expanded its employee ownership scheme to become 100% employee owned.

It's been a few years since **Asda** changed hands from Walmart to the billionaire Issa brothers and TDR Capital who jointly own Asda's parent company Bellis Topco. It's safe to say the change has not had much of an impact on the ethics of the company and we still find Asda sitting at the bottom of the table.

The Issa Brothers made their billions from petrol and it looks like they want to stay loyal to this, with Asda recently purchasing all of Co-ops petrol stations.

When Asda was sold, Bellis Topco was moved to Jersey, a tax haven. It is still incorporated in Jersey giving Asda a score of zero in the Tax Conduct category.

The **Co-op**, owned by the Co-operative Group, scored the highest out of all the supermarkets. It gained 50 marks within the Company Ethos category for its Co-operative status, which means the company is owned by its members rather than private shareholders or big investment companies.

As mentioned above, the company has now also moved away from selling petrol, making £600 million in the process. ■