

Seven object to Booker-Tesco



Mounted opposition. Left to right: Race, Selley, White, Mills, Robinson, Jenkins and Schofield.

The managing directors of seven of the UK's leading cash & carry/wholesale concerns have written a joint letter to the **Competition and Markets Authority** urging it to block the Tesco-Booker merger.

The signatories of the letter are Martin Race, of Bestway; Bidfood's Andrew Selley; Nicky White, of Confex; John Mills, of Landmark; SPAR UK's Debbie Robinson; Philip Jenkins, of Sugro; and Today's John Schofield.

In the letter, submitted to the CMA as part of its ongoing Phase 2 investigation, the MDs refute the claim that the deal will enhance competition in the UK and promote

consumer interests.

The septet have told the CMA what they believe the consequences will be if Booker acquires Tesco's "unrivalled power in grocery procurement".

They argue it would harm suppliers and result in higher prices and less choice for independent retailers and consumers.

They say: "If the merger proceeds, Tesco will have incontestable power over the procurement of all grocery categories in the UK. Suppliers will find it even harder to resist Tesco's demands."

Furthermore, they feel that the supermarket chain, with its ability to target lower prices where it faces local

competition, would have the power to force out of business independent retailers with which it competes locally.

They add that the 'imbalance' between supermarkets and the C&C/wholesale sector would worsen if the amalgamation is allowed to happen. "Booker will be able to buy its products at Tesco's prices. It will be able to drive its competitors, be they delivered wholesalers, cash & carry or symbol operators, out of business."

A provisional decision by the CMA is expected by the end of this month, and the final decision will be issued just before Christmas.

► **Competition and Markets Authority (020) 3738 6000**

'Free from' additions



Moroccan cauliflower roulade with chickpea chutney.

Brakes is intent on having a market-leading range of top quality 'free from' products by 2019.

Lines being launched over the coming months include a selection of sweet baked vegan foods, dairy cheese alternatives, meat-free quiches, desserts including a chocolate & coconut tart, three varieties of vegan ice cream, frozen MSC Alaskan pollock portions and meat-free meal solutions.

"Over the coming year we will be educating our customers and inspiring them to add 'free from' to the menu," said Louise Hatch, category manager, meal solutions.

The 'free from' market has grown by 30% since 2015 and is forecast to hit £952 million by 2021 (Mintel).

► **Brakes Group (01233) 206000**

Marketing manager at Confex

Gilly Hunt, who worked for **Confex UK** for 13 years – latterly as marketing manager – has retired. Replacing her in that capacity is Jess Douglas (pictured).

Since moving to the group in Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos, four years ago as

digital assist manager from the publishing sector, Douglas has introduced an online brochure service and created an image library system for members.

Confex has signed 14 new members this year (see p.9).

► **Confex UK (01608) 652333**



Nothing paltry about this!

Country Range Group is this month launching "premium quality" fresh chicken breast fillets. The introduction is being supported by competitions, promotions, events and social media activity.

Recipe videos, created by

development chef Paul Dickson, are being rolled out digitally.

Group trading director Martin Ward said: "We hope this will allow us to reach different customers and take up more share of the plate.

We strongly believe this will be the biggest launch in our 25-year history."

The chicken (200-230g) comes in 2 x 5kg trays, each containing 22-24 fillets.

► **Country Range Group (0845) 209 3777**

Eighth branch

Blakemore Wholesale has opened its eighth Bmorelocal... outlet – in Rotherham, South Yorkshire.

The 900 sq ft store (formerly a post office) began trading after a £60,000 investment.

It still offers postal services as well as a full symbol shop range.

► **Blakemore Wholesale (01902) 371515**