



# Flour Power

Rob Harrison and Arwa Aburawa look at how UK consumers buying flour are slowly changing the face of agriculture towards a more sustainable future.



**16**  
**Bachelldre Watermill** organic flour (01588 620489) is ground using ancient stones in a mid-Wales mill.



**16**  
**Glebe Farm** organic flour (01487 773 282) is ground in Cambridgeshire - sometimes using local windmills.



**16**  
**Little Salkeld Watermill** (01768 881523) sell a range of organic and biodynamic certified flour ground in its Cumbrian watermill.



**13**  
**Doves Farm** organic flour is best of the more widely available brands because of its commitment to organic farming through its entire product range.

In a new age of anxiety over food and fuel shortages the BBC News website recently featured an article on how to grow your own wheat and grind it into flour.<sup>1</sup> And while most of us can't go to these lengths, one question we wanted to explore was the extent to which flour suppliers were involved in the shift to biofuels behind some of these concerns. Do any of the common brands of flour come from the huge agribusinesses accused of diverting crops from food plates to car engines, causing hunger and food riots? Of the brands on the table we found evidence that only one, Allinson, was clearly linked to biofuels projects through its parent company British Sugar.<sup>2</sup>

The companies supplying flour to UK consumers split fairly neatly into four distinct groups.

- **The super-ethical brands**  
 Glebe Farm, Little Salkeld and Bachelldre

offer genuinely sustainable organic products ground with ancient technologies of wind and water power.

- **The family milling firms**  
 Matthews, Marriages and Shipton Mill are medium sized traditional firms supplying bakeries and consumers with growing organic ranges.

- **The big flour millers**  
 Premier Foods (new owner of Rank Hovis McDougall) and Allinson have dominant but declining market shares because of their failure to offer organic options.<sup>3</sup>

- **The supermarket own-brands**  
 Waitrose discloses the manufacturer of its own-brand organic flour and therefore is ranked differently from the other companies on the table.

Doves Farm and Carrs don't quite fit into these neat categories and are discussed in company profiles below.

PRICE COMPARISON	
Brand	Average Price per Kg
Sainsbury	24p
Asda	50p
Hovis	57.2p
Morrisons Organic	80p
Allinson	82.4p
Waitrose Organic	83p
Tesco Organic	95p
Doves Farm Organic (Best Buy)	96p
Cotswold Organic	97p
Homepride	£1.02
Carrs	£1.02
Be-Ro	£1.03
McDougalls	£1.06
Marriages Organic	£1.19
Shipton Mill Organic	£1.26
Bachelldre Watermill (Best Buy)	£1.32
Glebe Farm Organic (Best Buy)	£1.50
Little Salkeld Watermill (Best Buy)	£1.63



All the companies on the table produce a very wide range of flours. There are spelt flours, gluten-free flours, wholemeal flours, short flours, bread-making flours and many more.

For the price element of this report we concentrated on plain white flour and organic where possible. It is interesting to note that quite a few ethical choices are actually cheaper than the best-selling brands of Homepride and McDougalls.

BRAND	Ethiscore (out of 20)	Environment					Animals			People					Politics			+ve		COMPANY GROUP
		Environmental Reporting	Nuclear Power	Climate Change	Pollution & Toxics	Habitats & Resources	Animal Testing	Factory Farming	Animal Rights	Human Rights	Workers' Rights	Supply Chain Policy	Irresponsible Marketing	Arms & Military Supply	Genetic Engineering	Boycott Call	Political Activity	Anti-Social Finance	Company Ethos	
Glebe Farm organic	16																	★	1	Glebe Farm
Little Salkeld organic	16																	★	1	The Watermill, Little Salkeld
Bacheldre Watermill org.	16																	★	1	Bacheldre Watermill
Cotswold organic	14	●																	1	FWP Matthews
Shipton Mill organic	14	●																	1	Coinstone Ltd
Doves Farm organic	13	●						●		●								★	1	Doves Farm Foods
Marriages organic	13	●						○						○					1	W&H Marriage & Sons
Waitrose organic	13	●						○						○					1	W&H Marriage & Sons
Carrs	10	●	●	●		○		○												Carrs Milling Industries
Be Ro	7	○			●	○		●	●	○		○	●	○			○			Premier Foods
Homepride	7	○			●	○		●	●	○		○	●	○			○			Premier Foods
Hovis	7	○			●	○		●	●	○		○	●	○			○			Premier Foods
McDougals	7	○			●	○		●	●	○		○	●	○			○			Premier Foods
Allinson	2.5	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○			Wittington Investments
Morrisons organic	2.5	○		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1		Wm Morrison Supermarkets
Tesco organic	1.5	○		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1		Tesco plc
Sainsbury	0.5	○		●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●			J Sainsbury plc
ASDA	0	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●			Wal-Mart Stores

## USING THE TABLES [F] = Fairtrade [O] = Organic

**Ethiscore:** the higher the score, the better the company across the criticism categories. ● bottom rating ○ middle rating ■ top rating (no criticisms)  
See 'Our Rating System' page at [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org) for category definitions

**Positive ratings (+ve):** Company Ethos: ★ full mark ☆ half mark Product Sustainability: Maximum of five positive marks

## Company Profiles

**Carrs Milling Industries** is a strange 1970s-style conglomerate of disconnected businesses. It loses marks in our rankings through its ownership of:

- companies supplying equipment to the nuclear industry;
- companies supplying equipment to livestock farmers;
- a travel agent and a car repair company (high climate impact sectors).<sup>4</sup>

**Doves Farm** won an Ethical Consumer magazine award way back in 1993. It has since grown to become the sixth biggest selling flour brand in the UK with 5% of the market in 2005.<sup>3</sup> When its annual turnover increased beyond £5 million our rating system began to demand the formal environmental and social reporting procedures of a larger company. The farm also produces organic meat.<sup>5</sup>

**Premier Foods**, owner of an astonishingly large number of UK food brands including Crosse & Blackwell, Mr Kipling, Cauldron and Quorn, burst onto the flour market with its acquisition of RHM in 2007. Aberdeen Asset Management plc currently holds a 12.9% stake in the company which has decreased Premier's ethiscore slightly since we last rated it.

### The supermarkets

In a strange irony of our ethical rating system, all the supermarkets in this report have recently received a lower ranking under anti-social finance

following a UK government statement on price fixing.<sup>6</sup> The area in question where price fixing (keeping prices artificially high) was occurring was in tobacco products. From an ethical point of view, it's hard not to think we should be applauding them for this piece of deceit rather than marking them down in this case!

#### References

- 1 World warned on food price spiral 10th March 2008 BBC News website 2 The Ecologist March 2007 3 Mintel Home Baking August 2006 4 [www.carrs-milling.com](http://www.carrs-milling.com) viewed 18/6/08 5 [www.dovesfarm.co.uk](http://www.dovesfarm.co.uk) viewed 18/6/08 6 Office of Fair Trading statement 25/4/2008

FLOUR (for the post-industrial society)

1. PLANT ACORNS (as many as liked)
2. LET THEM GROW INTO TREES (leave quite a while)
3. HARVEST ACORNS (not to scale)
4. GRIND TO FLOUR
5. BAKE SMALL LOAF (in clay oven) (salt to taste)
6. PLANT MORE ACORNS (repeat as necessary)

BUYER'S GUIDES ONLINE

Get daily updated ratings for the brands in this report from [www.ethiscore.org](http://www.ethiscore.org) where you can also access over 160 other buyer's guides.

You can also: customise the ratings to give more weight to your key concerns, see the story headings for each circle on the table and send automatic campaigning emails to companies.