DOSSIER

LEBENSMITTELHANDEL
PREISE & PREISVERGLEICHE

2025

Current figures, data, and facts about the Austrian food retail industry with a focus on pricing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Trade Association vehemently opposes **government intervention in the pricing of the Austrian food retail trade** (LEH). In the current discussion about high inflation, we must distinguish between **cause** and **effect**. The causes are clearly the massive increase **in energy costs**, high **raw material and producer prices**, and significantly higher **personnel, financing, and logistics costs**.

Unfortunately, Austria is the **land of indexation**, as can be seen in **commercial rent increases** and all fees and charges, which the finance minister has also raised significantly instead of reducing them. But that's not all: at the end of 2024, important **relief measures and subsidies in the energy sector** will be **discontinued**. Since January, a **renewable energy subsidy** per meter has been payable, which had been suspended or financed from the federal budget in recent years. The **renewable energy subsidy,** which had also been suspended, is payable again as of this year. The recently **reduced electricity tax** of 0.001 euro/kWh will return to its full amount of 0.015 euro/kWh in 2025 – an increase by a factor of 15. The same applies to the **natural gas tax,** which will rise from 0.01196 euro/m3 to 0.066 euro/m3 this year. Finally, **network costs** for both **electricity** and **gas** have also been significantly increased. As a result, electricity prices have **risen by a third** since the beginning of the year**.**

It is perfectly clear that such a drastic increase in energy prices must be passed on to customers due to the already low margins in the food retail sector. Eight months ago, the Trade Association warned of a **renewed government-induced upward price spiral** and called for the extension of the waiver of the renewable energy surcharge and the renewable energy contribution, as well as the collection of the electricity and natural gas surcharges at a reduced rate. Unfortunately, these demands were not implemented. Instead, in Austria, only **energy-intensive industries** will receive an **electricity price bonus** for 2025 and 2026**,** while **retailers will not.**

The slightly higher food prices in **Austria compared to Germany** can be attributed to a variety of **structural factors** in addition to higher energy prices, in particular the **much higher proportion of discounts**. In Austria, **37%** of all items in food retail are sold at discounted prices rather than list prices. In Germany, this proportion is only **25%.** As a result, the list prices used in standard price comparisons do not reflect actual consumer spending.

The Austrian market is also **10 times smaller** than the German market, which results in higher costs and **lower economies of scale** in production, logistics, and distribution. Added to this are differences **in topography** (e.g., the Alps), stricter **standards**, and a much **higher share of organic products**. The average organic share in the EU is **10.5%,** in Germany **10%,** and in Austria **27%** of all farmed land.

Territorial delivery restrictions imposed by the global food industry are another major competitive disadvantage for domestic food retailers. Producers are free to source their goods anywhere in Europe, consumers can shop anywhere, but food retailers in the EU face **artificial barriers** and **higher procurement prices** charged by the industry. Country-specific distribution strategies hit retailers in small countries such as Austria and Belgium particularly hard. The **Federal Competition Authority (BWB)** describes this form of **discrimination** as **an** "**Austria surcharge" imposed by the multinational food industry.** The federal government should take action here and push for an immediate EU-wide ban. This alone could save European consumers around **19 billion euros** per year.

State intervention in the pricing policy of the food trade jeopardizes the regional supply of high-quality food for the Austrian population and **140,000 jobs**. **Local supply** should not be treated carelessly by politicians.

FOOD PRICES IN AUSTRIA

BWB confirms: Retailers are not the cause of inflation, but are themselves affected by it

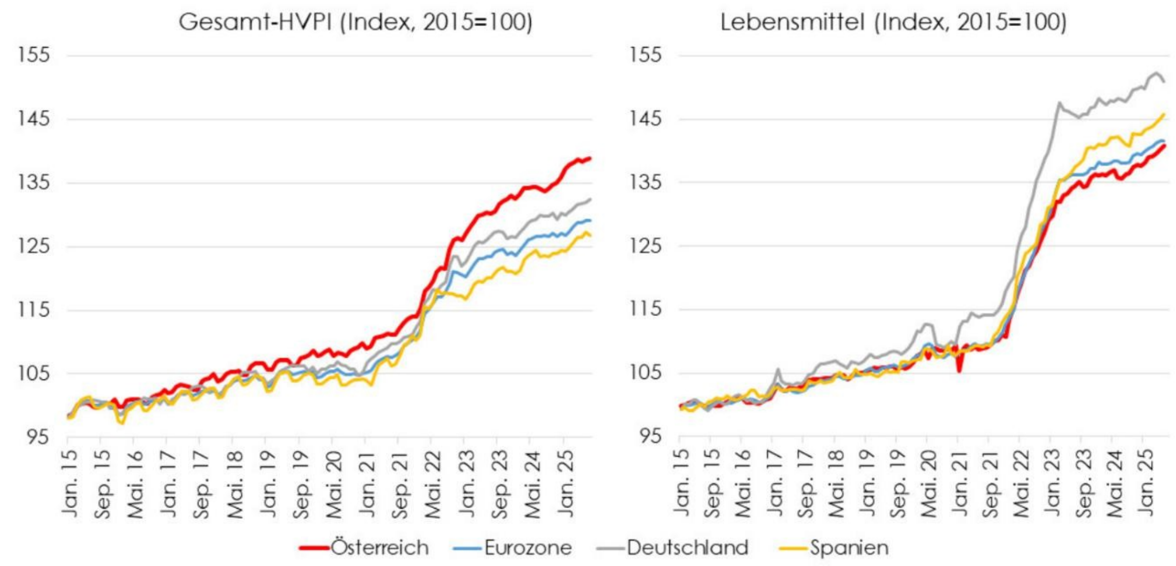
In 2023, the **Federal Competition Authority (BWB)** presented its **final report** on **its industry investigation** of the entire Austrian food value chain. Among other things, this report clearly demonstrated that **competition** in the domestic food retail sector **is functioning** and that Austrian retailers are not the cause of **the inflation crisis**, but are themselves **affected by it**.

Strong domestic competition, which is often driven by price, ensures **the best possible prices** for consumers and supports **low-income earners** in particular. In its report, the BWB clearly demonstrated that the **food retail sector** did **not systematically increase its profit margins between 2021 and the second half of 2023** and therefore did **not benefit from inflation**.

Inflation for food and non-alcoholic beverages in Austria was **2.6%** for **the whole of 2024**
, well below the general inflation rate of **+2.9%, meaning that food retailers helped to curb inflation.**

The latest analyses by WIFO also clearly show that **food prices in Austria have risen significantly less than the European average in recent years** – and that the comparison with the supposed model pupils **Spain** and **Germany** is particularly favorable for us. This is an aspect that is unfortunately often overlooked in the public debate.

Figure 1: **Price dynamics: Food prices in Austria are below average**



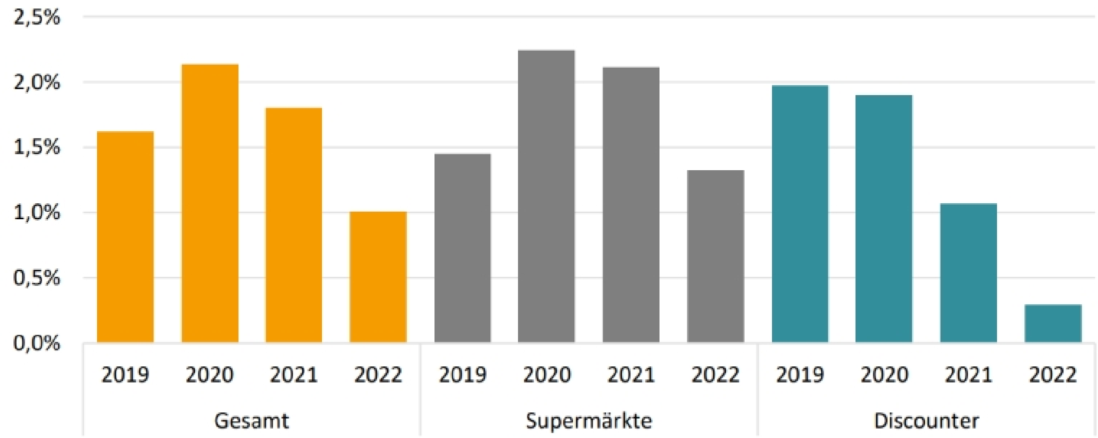
Source: WIFO 2025, based on data from Eurostat.

Profitability: The profit margin in the domestic food retail sector is only 0.5 to 2.5%.

The fact is: The domestic **food retail sector** is experiencing **declining or stagnating sales** (real -3.2% in 2022; -1% in 2023; +1.7% in 2024) with very low actual **profitability averaging between 0.5% and 2.5% of sales**. **Global food producers often** achieve **profitability 10 times higher than this**.

Even in times of record inflation, the Austrian food retail sector has refrained from systematically increasing profit margins and trade margins – in stark contrast to some **international manufacturers**, who must be clearly distinguished from the valuable **Austrian producers** with whom we work together to secure **the supply of food for the population**.

Figure 2: **Profitability: Average profit margins in food retail (top 5)**



Anmerkungen: Die Berechnungen beruhen auf Daten von Spar, Interspar, Maximarkt, Billa (inkl. Billa Plus), Penny, Hofer, Lidl und MPreis. Zu den Discountern zählen Hofer, Lidl und Penny, der Rest wird als Supermärkte klassifiziert. Als Gewinngröße wurde das Jahresergebnis/der Gewinn nach Steuern (EAT, earnings after taxes) herangezogen. Die Gewinnmarge entspricht dem Anteil am Nettoumsatz.

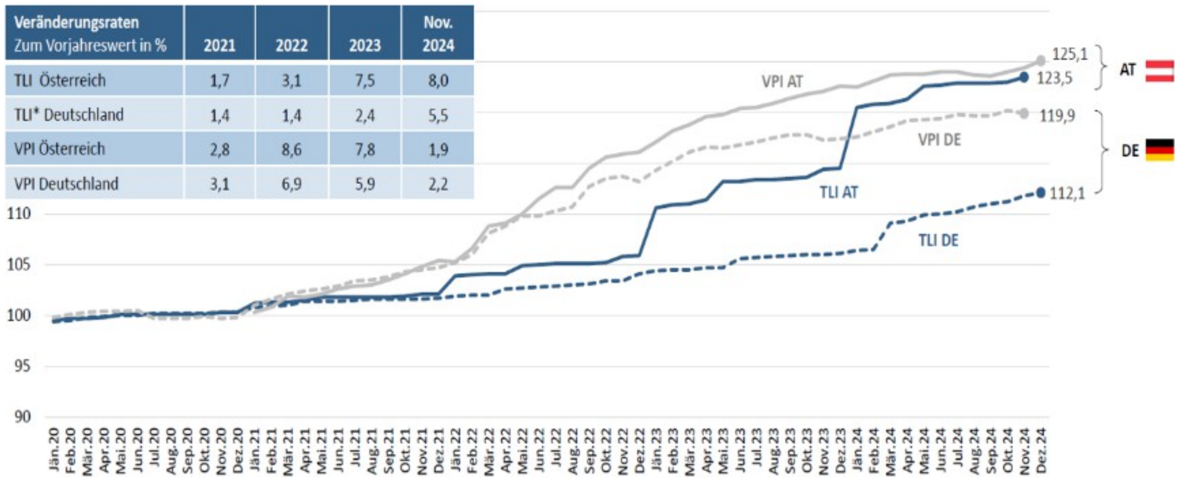
Source: BWB Final Report on the Food Value Chain 2023.

Personnel costs: Austria already ranks second in the EU

According to **Eurostat,** the average **personnel costs** per employee in the food retail sector in Austria are already €38,050 per capita. This puts Austria **in second place in the EU**. Only **Belgium** has higher personnel costs per capita. The Austrian food retail sector secures more than **140,000 jobs** in the country. Accounting for around **14% of sales**, **personnel costs** are the largest cost factor for the industry alongside the purchase of goods.

In food retail, **average personnel costs per capita** are **31% higher than in Germany** and **59% above the EU average**. In 25 EU countries, personnel costs in food retail are lower than in Austria.

Figure 3: **Austria vs. Germany: Collective wage agreements have risen twice as fast in Austria**



Veränderungsraten Zum Vorjahreswert in %	2021	2022	2023	Nov. 2024
TLI Österreich	1,7	3,1	7,5	8,0
TLI* Deutschland	1,4	1,4	2,4	5,5
VPI Österreich	2,8	8,6	7,8	1,9
VPI Deutschland	3,1	6,9	5,9	2,2

Source: Statistics Austria 2025.

Cause & effect: Tackle inflation at its roots, not at the end of the value chain

Food prices are not set in stores, but rather in the **upstream stages of the value** chain—in agriculture, processing, and on international commodity markets. All of these areas are currently experiencing **exorbitant cost increases**.

Here are a few examples:

- **Veal** is currently 18% more expensive in **agricultural production** than it was a year ago.
- **Cow's milk** is up **15%.**
- **Rye** is up **15%.**
- Corn **is up** **18%.**

The food retail sector has **no influence whatsoever on these production costs**, but must factor the massive cost increases into its calculations accordingly.

Raw materials: global market under pressure

The **price developments on the world markets** are even more dramatic. Raw materials such as **coffee, cocoa**, and **orange juice concentrate** have become significantly more expensive. Droughts in Brazil and heat waves in Vietnam have led to massive losses in the **coffee harvest** – half a kilo now costs more than a euro more than it did just a few months ago. The stock market price for **Arabica beans** has risen **two and a half times** since October 2023 (i.e., in 1.5 years).

Cocoa prices rose by **280%** in just two months in spring 2024 after extreme heat severely affected harvests in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. These global developments are also affecting Austria, as **many food raw materials** are **imported**. Although some raw material prices have fallen slightly recently, they remain high overall.

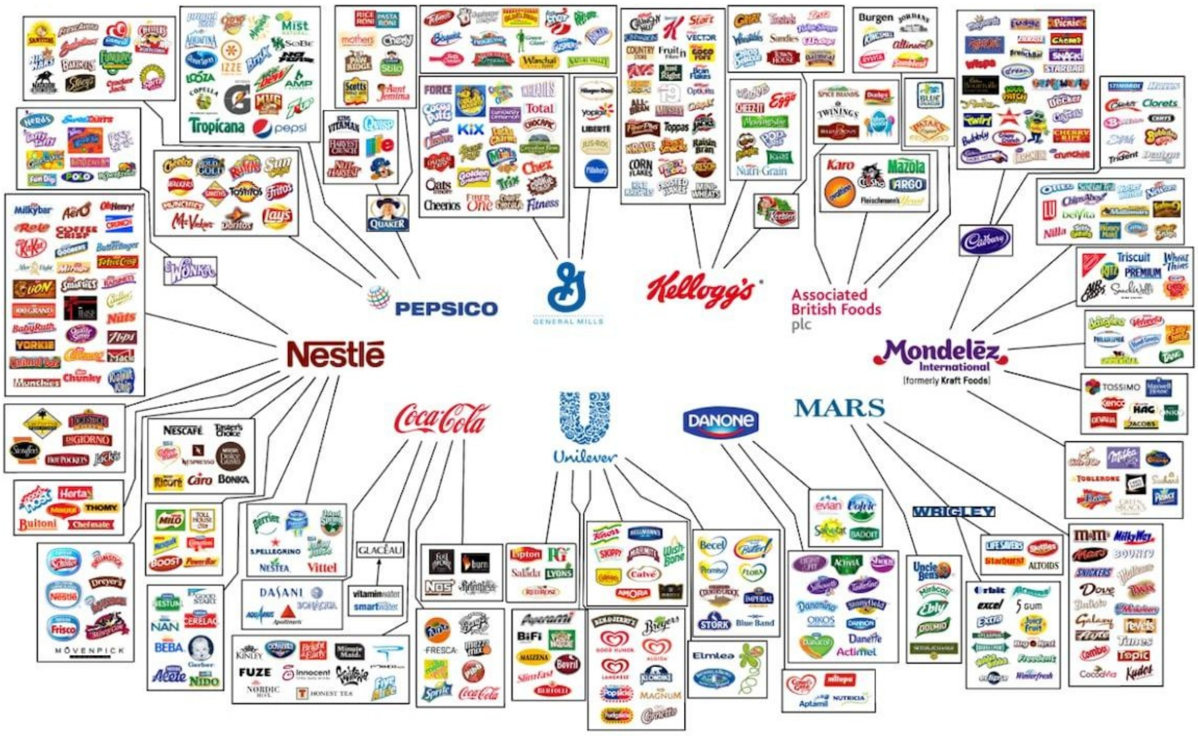
Austria's industrial price surcharge: Ban territorial supply restrictions across the EU!

Territorial supply constraints (TSCs) are restrictions imposed by certain large manufacturers that make it very difficult or impossible for retailers to purchase products in one member state and resell them in another. They have allowed **international producers to offer products at different prices in different markets.**

These **country-specific distribution** strategies—especially in the food sector—hit retailers in small countries such as Austria and Belgium particularly hard. The **BWB** rightly describes this form of discrimination against retailers as **the "Austria price premium" imposed by the global food industry.** This is often blamed on food retailers by those who are unaware of the facts, which has proven to be completely false. Removing this disadvantage would **save** consumers across Europe around **€19 billion** per year**.**

Producers are allowed to source their goods throughout Europe, consumers can shop anywhere, but only food retailers in the EU are faced with **artificial barriers** and **higher procurement prices**. **This is where the federal government should take action and push for an immediate ban on territorial supply restrictions at EU level.**

Figure 4: **Market power of global food companies**



Source: Oxfam 2021.

Ensure regional local supply to avoid Hungarian conditions

With **9,400 retail outlets**, the **Austrian food trade** ensures local supplies for the approximately 9 million people living in Austria – from urban centers to the remotest Alpine valleys. It also supports the economy with **140,000 jobs** and **a turnover of €31.5 billion**.

Austrian environmental and animal welfare standards are higher than in almost any other country in the world. That is why the domestic food retail sector relies on **Austrian products** in many areas – often certified with the **AMA seal of approval**. Our shelves are stocked **with** a **wide range of regionally and locally produced quality products** from organic farming. The retail sector thus makes a decisive contribution to **preserving agricultural structures and producers in Austria**. **Reform efforts** are the right way to **break up** the **state's ossified structures.** Austria must reduce costs and ease the burden on the population; we are waiting for big moves.

EU comparison: Spain and Hungary show how not to do it

In recent media reports, **Spain** has often been cited as an example of successful pricing policy. However, this comparison does not stand up to closer scrutiny. **Spain has not intervened directly in food prices**, but **has** merely **suspended VAT on around 40 basic foodstuffs for a limited period**.

Significant relief in Spain came primarily from **measures in the energy sector**, such as **decoupling electricity prices from gas prices**. However, the framework conditions of the Spanish energy market differ significantly from those in Austria.

Spanish households spend a significantly larger proportion of their budget on food than Austrian households. According to Eurostat, this share was almost 20% in Spain in 2022, compared with only 12% in Austria. This means that **Austria** remains one of the **four countries with the lowest food expenditure in relation to household income within the EU**.

In **Hungary**, Viktor Orbán **froze prices for selected food items** from **February 2022 to July 2023**. Initially, the cap applied to sugar, wheat flour, sunflower oil, meat, and milk. He then extended it to eggs and potatoes. Retailers also had to **commit** to **stocking fixed quantities in their stores.** Otherwise**,** they would face steadily increasing **fines**.

This was sold as a remedy for high inflation. The price cap was intended to protect consumers and ensure the supply of essential foodstuffs, despite **warnings from many economists**. In practice, it backfired, with **Hungary paying for the intervention with record food inflation of up to 46%.**

The Hungarian model of a **trade margin cap on 30 basic foodstuffs** (March to May 2025) was not the solution either, but part of the problem. Such interventions only mean that **customers** have **less choice and lower quality** – we should avoid Hungarian conditions in the interests of our population.

Purchasing power: Rising prices meet higher incomes

The price increases of recent years have also been offset for Austrians in the form of **higher salaries** and **government subsidies**. The wage index alone rose by more than 27% between 2020 and 2025. As a result, **real purchasing power in Austria** has naturally also **climbed**. According to the latest data from GfK, Austria **ranks sixth in Europe (**including non-EU countries such as Switzerland and the UK) with a **per capita purchasing power of €29,266**.

Germany ranks only ninth with €27,848, 5.1% behind Austria. While **Germany**
While Germany recorded only a moderate increase in purchasing power of +2.8% in 2024, the increase in **Austria** was at +6.7%.

Private labels: Food retailers' pricing strategy for low-cost discount brands

The Austrian food retail sector offers **good-quality products** at **affordable** prices for every budget, particularly through its **own brands**. It is well known that retailers' own brands and discount brands are **calculated on a** particularly **tight margin**. If raw material prices or manufacturing costs change (e.g., due to higher energy prices), **this** has a much greater impact on product prices than on products with higher margins.

Example: A private label yogurt costs $1 in the supermarket, while an industry brand yogurt costs $2. Now the costs for energy, milk, logistics, etc. rise massively and the respective product price has to be increased by 25 cents. The private label yogurt now costs $1.25 (an increase of +25%), while the brand-name yogurt costs $2.25 (+12.5%). The absolute price increase for both products is 25 cents, but the private label is criticized more heavily in the media because its price has risen by 25%.

Transparency: Austrian food retailers are setting an example

Since September 2021, all food retailers with at least 100 stores in Austria have been centrally reporting their **weekly or monthly purchase prices** for their stores to the market regulation authority Agrarmarkt Austria (AMA) in accordance with **the Agricultural Market Transparency Regulation**. The data collected nationwide is weighted and anonymized before being forwarded to the EU Commission. In addition, the **report on price transparency in the domestic food retail sector** is published online by the **AMA** on a monthly basis.

Furthermore, as part of the so-called **food transfer reporting obligation**, **retailers and wholesalers** of food in Austria must report data to the Ministry of Agriculture (**BMLUK**) on a quarterly basis. These LEH reports cover exactly the amount of food that was **transferred free of charge** or **disposed of as waste**.

Wöchentliche Einkaufspreise (in EUR/kg) ohne USt	KW 28	Vorwoche	Vorjahres-woche
Butter	7,98	↓ -3,29%	↑ 13,96%
Gouda	6,84	↓ -2,92%	↑ 4,63%
Edamer	5,88	↑ 0,18%	↑ 8,12%
Emmentaler	8,21	↓ -1,38%	↑ 2,98%
Mozzarella	6,47	↑ 0,07%	↑ 8,33%
Apfel - Golden Delicious	1,29	↓ -4,22%	↑ 2,08%
Apfel - Gala	1,52	↓ -14,98%	↑ 5,68%
Apfel - Braeburn	1,10	↓ -29,89%	↑ 3,19%
Apfel - Elstar	*	*	*
Apfel - Idared	*	*	*
Apfel - Jonagold	*	*	*
Pfirsiche weißfleischig	*	*	*
Pfirsiche gelbfleischig	2,05	↓ -4,21%	↑ 32,53%
Nektarinen gelbfleischig	2,05	↓ -6,08%	↑ 29,79%
Orangen - Navelina	*	*	*
Orangen - Navel	*	*	*
Huhn grillfertig lose	4,97	↑ 0,08%	↓ -13,84%
Hühnerfilet	9,88	↑ 0,74%	↑ 0,93%
Faschiertes Rind	9,86	↓ -0,28%	↑ 25,02%
Faschiertes Schwein	4,03	↓ -0,53%	*

Monatliche Einkaufspreise (in EUR/kg) ohne USt	Juni	Vormonat	Vorjahres-monat
Weizenmehl	0,64	↑ 2,37%	↓ -2,82%
Zucker	0,85	↓ -0,02%	↓ -20,94%

* Preismeldungen mit weniger als drei Meldern je Produkt unterliegen dem Datenschutz

Austria already has a **high level of price transparency**, from fuel price calculators to strict **price labeling regulations** in supermarkets, which do not exist in this form in other EU countries. The accusation that food retailers are enriching themselves in the wake of inflation is completely unfounded. Profit margins in food retail are currently trending towards 0.5%, and many independent retailers are in **the red.** There is therefore no objective justification for stigmatizing the retail sector as an industry. The same applies to any government measures such as **price comparison calculators** or a **price commission,** which would give the public the impression that retailers are making a fortune in the context of inflation and that state price controls are therefore necessary.

All food retailers communicate their **prices and special offers** every week across the board via numerous channels, such as flyers, TV, radio, websites, etc. Customers know exactly which items they can buy at which retail chain, during which period, and at what price. The large retail chains also operate **online shops** where the prices of thousands of items are clearly displayed. These shops also have **search functions** that allow customers to easily filter products**,** for example, to show only entry-level products. It couldn't be simpler or more transparent.

Ultimately, every measure taken in the area of price transparency must be judged by whether or not it creates **added value for consumers**. From an industry perspective, a **price comparison calculator** for food would **not** bring **any additional benefits** to consumers. At the same time, there are numerous difficulties given the lack of comparability of foods of different origins, qualities, and production methods, as well as **competition policy concerns** and risks regarding the possible impact on regionality and agriculture.

Food is very **heterogeneous** and cannot simply be lumped together with gasoline or diesel. Food differs in many ways (e.g., origin, quality, organic/conventional, animal welfare standards). For example, there is no such thing as "butter," but rather many different types of butter: entry-level butter from Austria, entry-level butter from Germany, regional butter, organic butter, Irish butter, low-fat butter, etc. It is doubtful that a price comparison calculator could represent this diversity in a factually differentiated manner without becoming a **bureaucratic monster**.

The **Israeli price comparison app**, which is often cited in the media, has very **low usage figures**. This example clearly shows that such apps offer no added value for consumers. **Competition economists** also warn that a price comparison app could have a **counterproductive** effect **on competition**, as it creates an incentive for companies to align their prices with those of their competitors.

In partnership with thousands **of local farmers**, the food retail sector has achieved major milestones in terms of **regionality** and the distribution of **high-quality organic food**. The introduction of a government price comparison app or price commission for food would send a **diametrically opposite signal to the market**. It would deliberately trigger a **downward price spiral**, which would also lead to **massive price pressure on domestic agriculture**. Domestic food retailers are aware of the major **challenges** facing **people in Austria** in view of the general **wave of inflation**. With its **own brands** in the entry-level segment in particular**,** food retailers are offering consumers **high-quality products at attractive prices** in this difficult situation**.**

Shrinkflation: The ball is in the food industry's court

In the wake of the inflation crisis, there has been repeated talk in the media of so-called **"shrinkflation."** There are basically two types of shrinkflation: a **reduction in the quantity of a product** (same price but smaller packaging) and a **reduction in quality** (high-quality ingredients are replaced by lower-quality ones). Shrinkflation is not a new phenomenon; both measures are used in the **global food industry** to **offset rising raw material prices,** for example**.** Domestic food retailers are regularly at loggerheads with international producers because, for example, grammages are changed without adjusting the purchase prices accordingly.

However, especially in the wake of **the inflation crisis of 2022/23**, our retailers in both Germany and Austria have observed an increase in this strategy among suppliers. The phenomenon was observed **across the entire product range**, from food such as yogurt and potato chips to cosmetics. **This practice is not prohibited** as long as the quantity of product contained is correctly stated on the packaging. In any case, the ball is in **the food industry's court:** it is up to them to decide how they position their products. The food retail trade is trying to avert rising prices and shrinking packaging in the interests of its customers. Retailers see themselves as **advocates for their customers.** That is why they have not accepted the sometimes excessive price demands of some global food manufacturers in recent years and **have negotiated hard on behalf of consumers.**

We definitely do not need a regulation or legal obligation similar to **France's** to warn of shrinkflation with stickers on products or even shelves. In Austria, this information is already clearly visible on all products. Furthermore, the **resource expenditure** would be **enormous**. Countless products would have to be labeled manually, which would be impossible for small local suppliers in particular and would involve **completely unnecessary additional costs**.

When it comes to questionable **shrinkflation or skimpflation practices**, it is not retailers but rather the **global food industry** that needs to refrain from such practices. As an industry, we stand for complete transparency.

PRICE COMPARISON: AUSTRIA VS GERMANY

The slightly higher food prices in Austria compared to Germany can be attributed to a variety of **structural factors**:

1. Higher discount rates

Unlike in Germany, Austrian food retailers use **price promotions** heavily to attract customers. **According to GfK, 37% of all items in Austrian food retail are currently sold at discounted prices rather than list prices.** In **Germany**, this proportion is only **25%.** As a result, the list prices used in standard price comparisons (including those by the Chamber of Labor) do not reflect actual consumer spending.

2. Smaller market

The Austrian market is **10 times smaller** than the German market, which results in **lower economies of scale** in production, logistics, and sales. Austria has 9.2 million inhabitants, Germany 83.5 million. This naturally leads to **cost advantages due to higher purchase volumes**.

3. Higher store density due to the topography

Austria has a very **well-functioning local supply system**. The **high density of supermarkets** in Austria compared to the rest of the EU – significantly higher than in Germany – creates **intense competition**. Customers benefit not only from fierce competition, but also from a particularly high proportion of special offers: all retailers are within easy reach, allowing consumers to take advantage of discounts and promotions offered by all market players – and thus make additional savings that would not be possible in countries with a lower density of stores, such as Germany.

The **high density of stores**, combined with a **smaller sales area per store,** is also due in particular to **the geography and topography of the country**. In **Germany,** there are 83 cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants and a further 633 cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants. In **Austria,** there are six cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants and only 22 medium-sized towns with between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. The **proportion of alpine regions in the total area** also differs significantly between Austria and Germany: the Alps account for **62%** of Austria's territory**,** compared with only **3%** in Germany**.** Local supply therefore has to be organized on a smaller scale. **A positive side effect?** The high density of stores not only ensures **proximity to consumers,** but also makes it easier **to return deposit containers**, among other things**.**

4. Higher cost burden

Wage levels: According to Eurostat, the average personnel costs per employee in the food retail sector in Austria are €38,050 per capita. This puts Austria in second place in the EU. However, higher personnel costs not only affect the retail sector, but also all other links in the value chain—from production and processing to logistics.

Logistics costs: Austria's geographical structure (Alpine region, rural areas) leads to higher transport costs. Germany has 238 inhabitants per square kilometer, compared to 109 in Austria. This naturally leads to higher distribution costs.

Real estate costs: Rents and operating costs for stores tend to be slightly higher in Austria than in Germany, especially in urban areas.

5. Stricter quality and origin requirements

Focus on organic and regional products**:** In Austria, both retailers and customers place great value on regionally produced and certified organic products, which are often more expensive to manufacture than imported and non-certified organic goods. Organic products account for **11.5%** of the food market in Austria, compared to **6.3%** in Germany.

Stricter standards: Even outside of organic production, Austria generally has much higher quality and environmental standards, which result in additional production costs. Two examples:

- According to animal welfare regulations, the **maximum** stocking **density** for **broiler chickens** in the EU must not exceed 42 kg per square meter. In Germany, the maximum stocking density is 39 kg per square meter, and in Austria it is 30 kg. Animals in Austria therefore have significantly more space and can move around more freely – but rearing them is more expensive.
- The improved **animal welfare** is even more evident in **turkeys**. At EU level, there are no legal provisions for turkeys. In Austria, however, there are. Here, the maximum stocking density is 40 kg per square meter. In some EU member states, production takes place at almost twice this density.

6. Higher taxes and tax burden

Value added tax on food in Austria is **10**%. In Germany, the corresponding VAT rate is **7**%. Other taxes and levies in the supply chain can also have an impact. For example, **beer tax** in Austria is 2.5 times higher than in Germany.

7. More fragmented agricultural structure

Austrian agriculture consists mainly of smaller farms that cannot benefit from economies of scale to the same extent as large agricultural enterprises. This goes hand in hand with higher production costs. **Austria is the world leader** in organic farming**:** the EU average is **10.5%**, in Germany it is **10%**, but in Austria it is **27%** of the land under cultivation.

8. Austria's price premium in the global food industry

Due to territorial supply restrictions (TSC), **procurement prices** in small countries such as Austria are generally significantly higher than in large countries such as Germany. This applies to most smaller countries in Europe, including Denmark, Belgium, and Luxembourg. In its industry investigation of the entire food value chain, the **Federal Competition Authority** has determined an **"Austria surcharge"** of at least **15% to 20% on brand-name products compared to German price levels**, which is attributable to this practice of international industrial groups.

Depending on the product, our Austrian retailers currently have to pay **up to 60% higher procurement prices** than German retailers. This Austrian price premium is pure pocket money for the multinational branded goods industry. In recent years, the EU authorities have repeatedly responded to such violations with penalties.

- For example, in May 2024, food giant **Mondelez** was fined €334 million for obstructing cross-border trade.
- **Anheuser-Busch InBev (AB InBev)**, the world's largest brewery group, was fined €200 million back in 2019.
- **Procter & Gamble (P&G)** is currently under investigation by the EU Competition Commission on suspicion of illegal market foreclosure.

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