# Sainsbury’s accused of copying Sublime Butter’s gourmet flavours amid pricing war



Sainsbury’s has found itself embroiled in controversy after accusations emerged from Sublime Butter, a London-based gourmet butter brand, alleging that the supermarket has released “carbon copies” of its popular products. The launch of Sainsbury's new Taste the Difference line, which features flavours such as Honeycomb & Salted Caramel, Chimichurri, Triple Garlic & Herb, and Truffle, Parmesan & Black Pepper, has drawn particular ire. Sublime Butter claims these offerings are nearly identical to its own flavour profiles, dismissing the retailer's actions as “bad sportsmanship.”

The allegations come in the wake of a protracted dialogue between Sublime Butter and Sainsbury’s regarding a potential listing of Sublime’s products. Founder Tony Ho shared that conversations had begun as far back as July 2021, with detailed discussions and samples exchanged over several months. However, he claims that after expressing a desire to stock Sublime Butter’s range, Sainsbury’s abruptly ceased communication. “This is not the first time this has happened to a small producer, and it won’t be the last,” he remarked, emphasizing the unfairness of such practices towards smaller brands.

Sublime Butter has positioned itself as a pioneer of the flavoured butter trend since its inception in 2018, concurrently becoming a staple in high-end retailers such as Harrods and Whole Foods Market. Ho has indicated that the brand’s struggle is not solely about financial compensation but fundamentally about the recognition of hard work and innovation that smaller producers contribute to the market. He asserted, “We want the market to grow but we don’t want our hard work benefiting someone else’s bottom line.”

The surge in popularity of flavoured butter reflects a wider trend in the food industry as consumers increasingly seek out unique and innovative flavours. This has also driven Sainsbury’s recent expansion into its own branded products, paralleling actions taken by competitors like Tesco, Aldi, and Lidl, all of whom have recently adjusted their butter pricing amid a decline in wholesale food costs. Sainsbury's has notably reduced the price of its own-brand butter to £1.89 for 250g, a decision lauded for helping consumers manage their expenses during a time of rising food inflation.

Despite Sainsbury’s claims that its new range is in response to customer demand, the circumstances surrounding its development raise poignant questions about the ethics of competition in the retail market. Critics have pointed out that the appropriation of smaller brands’ ideas by larger retailers is an ongoing issue that stifles innovation and jeopardises the livelihoods of specialty producers.

Ho has also sought guidance from the Groceries Code Adjudicator, indicating a willingness to fight against what he perceives as exploitative practices. As the dynamics of competition continue to evolve, small brands like Sublime Butter face daunting challenges, particularly in a landscape where larger retailers wield substantial power. The question remains: how can the balance be struck between competitive pricing and respect for originality in a market increasingly dominated by a few major players?

Sainsbury's spokesperson has remained evasive regarding Ho's complaints, merely reiterating the supermarket's position that the introduction of its new butter range was in direct response to consumer preferences. However, many industry observers, as well as smaller producers, are closely watching the unfolding situation, hoping it may inspire a more balanced approach to competition that prioritises integrity and innovation.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraphs 2, 3
3. Paragraphs 4, 5
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 5
7. Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/news/sainsburys-accused-of-ripping-off-butter-brand-in-copycat-row/704337.article> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/news/sainsburys-accused-of-ripping-off-butter-brand-in-copycat-row/704337.article> - Sainsbury's has been accused of copying products from London-based Sublime Butter after launching its own line of flavoured butters. Sublime Butter claims that Sainsbury's developed similar products after discussions over potential listings, leading to allegations of unfair competition and imitation.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/may/09/sainsburys-cuts-prices-bread-butter-food-inflation> - Sainsbury's has reduced the prices of its own-brand bread and butter, with loaves now priced at 75p and butter at £1.89 for 250g. The supermarket stated that these cuts are in response to falling commodity prices and aim to help customers manage their budgets amid rising food inflation.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-65531197> - Following Sainsbury's price reductions, Tesco, Aldi, and Lidl have also cut the prices of their own-brand bread and butter. Each supermarket has reduced the price of 250g blocks of salted and unsalted butter from £1.99 to £1.89, reflecting a broader trend of supermarkets adjusting prices amid falling wholesale food costs.
5. <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/markets/article-12063151/Sainsburys-cuts-price-bread-butter-products.html> - Sainsbury's has announced price cuts on several of its bread and butter products, including an 11% reduction on 800g loaves to 75p and a 5% decrease on 250g butter to £1.89. The supermarket emphasized that these reductions are due to falling commodity prices and will not affect payments to farmers.
6. <https://www.sustainweb.org/news/jun24-freshly-faked-sainsburys-in-store-bakery-trading-standards-complaint/> - The Real Bread Campaign has filed a complaint against Sainsbury's, alleging that the supermarket's 'in-store bakery' marketing is misleading. The complaint asserts that Sainsbury's uses terms like 'freshly baked' and 'freshly made' for products that are re-baked from pre-made items, potentially breaching consumer protection regulations.
7. <https://www.poandpo.com/companies/sainsbury_s_cuts_price_of_more_than_40_dairy_products_from_30_to_60_percent__farmers_won_t_be_affected/> - Sainsbury's has reduced the prices of over 40 dairy products by 30% to 60%, including butter. The supermarket stated that these price cuts are due to falling commodity prices and emphasized that they will not affect payments to farmers.