

## LOCAL FOOD



**STEPHEN WHEELER**, commercial manager at speciality food company **Mise en Place**, now part of Cheltenham-based **Creed Foodservice**, is responsible for sourcing the best food ingredients for top chefs across the country

Over the past few months I have been introducing you to some of Gloucestershire's best food producers, food personalities and food products.

**Taste of the West Ltd**, led by chief executive **John Sheaves**, has been at the forefront of the South West's food and drink industry, from Gloucestershire to Cornwall, since its inception in 1991.

As a regional food group it aims to unite the food chain in the region by connecting it from beginning to end – from farm to fork or plough to plate. I talked to **John** about its work at the recent **Taste of the West** trade show in Exeter where over 200 South West food and drink businesses were exhibiting their products.

Trade buyers are invited from small restaurants to supermarkets and national wholesalers such as **Creed Foodservice**.

**John** told me that the organisation now has over 800 members from all stages of the food chain, whether they are growing it, processing it, selling or cooking it.

Members pay a subscription which provides **Taste of the West** with their income.

"In the beginning, most of our funding came from Government but now we

have to pay our own way, although we continue as a non-profit making concern," said **John**.

I asked **John**, what, in a nutshell, do South West food producers get in return for their membership fees? "Primarily, a route to market," he answered.

"Whether they're a small producer wanting to sell at local farmers' markets, or whether they have aspirations to break into the supermarkets, we give them the know-how to reach their target market. "We work hard to boost demand for locally sourced food and drink and create business opportunities to help them flourish".

More than 70 per cent of people in Britain want to buy more local and regional food, according to a recent independent survey.

"The customer is demanding provenance but the pricing is crucial," said **John**. "Local food must be affordable for everyone – not just the well-heeled in up-market delis."

Quality is also critical – and tasting the delicious array of produce from creamy blue veined cheese to a Sauvignon-like nettle wine or spicy **Old Spot** sausages to handmade chocolates at the trade show, I'd say the **Taste of the West** is truly a **Taste of the Best**

## this week's wine

Whites from the Alsace region



## Floral notes from France

BLESSED with an exceptional natural beauty, it seems only fitting that the fragrant wines from the idyllic Alsace region in north-east France are dressed in distinctive and elegant bottle shapes – a tribute to the excellent style that lies within.

The Alsace wine route stretches along vine-covered hills on the west bank of the Rhine river.

Sheltered by the Vosges mountains, the sunny, warm and dry climate provides ideal conditions for winemaking and its precious white grapes produce perfumed wines with intense aromas of spring flowers, dry spiciness and a honeyed richness.

Aromatic and incredibly food friendly, these unique wines will please the palate of an angel and are hard not to fall in love with.

For a taste of the Alsatian good life, gourmets should try the region's three best grape varieties – riesling, gewurztraminer and pinot gris, also known as pinot grigio.

Note to self: While these slim bottles may not be the cheapest on the shelf, your reward will be a champion glass at every level.

Versatile and delicate, riesling is a perfect partner with seafood and sushi. Try **Cave de Beblenheim, Graffenreben Riesling 2007 Alsace** (£8.99, Waitrose), dry with citrusy flavours and typical floral notes with a streak of minerality, it's a perfect partner with shellfish.

Small but perfectly formed, **Domaine Mersiol** in the pretty village of Dambach-la-Ville produces only a tiny quantity of its delicious nectar. Try **Domaine Mersiol Riesling Cuvee Granite 2006** (£12.99, www.laithwaites.co.uk) with zingy flavours of citrus fruit and heavenly mineral notes, it's a thrilling glass and an ideal aperitif.

For connoisseurs on the trail of old vine riesling, try **Vieilles Vignes, Domaine**

**Lucas & Andre Rieffel 2008** (£13.95, www.bbr.com). From its latest vintage, it's lively with a smack of green apples and scents of jasmine. Delicious with a juicy piece of skate and a fresh salad.

Fusion food lovers should try experimenting with the unmistakable taste of gewurztraminer. Try **Asda Extra Special Alsace Gewurztraminer** (£7.07, Asda). Crisp, scented with roses and a blast of lychee, it's a powerful glass that will stand up to spicy curries and stir-fries.

Earthy and rich, French pinot gris is also a great choice with Oriental and Thai food. Round and expressive, it's a far cry from its Italian cousin which is lighter and crisper.

From the celebrated **Cave de Turckheim** in Alsace, try **M&S Pinot**

**Grigio 2008** (£7.49, Marks & Spencer). Dry and refreshing with tropical fruit aromas, it's a ripe, juicy mouthful that's a perfect partner with white fish - and asparagus which is coming into season.

### BEST BUY

A pure delight, this Alsatian sparkler is made in the traditional method and the grapes are hand-picked to ensure the consistent good quality.

Try **Cremant d'Alsace Riesling** (pictured right, £8.99, Tesco), floral with creamy, peachy flavours and an exuberant finish, it's a trophy wine to pair with seafood, chicken and goats' cheese.



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