

## No excuse to miss the market



Doug Cotton

A NEW monthly food and drinks market gets under way in Cheltenham on Easter Saturday. Grenchurch Markets Ltd, which operates the fortnightly Friday farmers' market on the Promenade, is starting the new venture. Director Doug Cotton said it would take place on the first Saturday of every month at the same location. "The Friday market has been a great success but what about all of the people who work elsewhere in the week and can't get in to the centre of town?" he said. "Holding a market on a Saturday allows them to come along with the whole family for a day out and the chance to pick up some goodies." Mr Cotton's company also operates markets in Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucester and Tewkesbury. "The key to a good market is variety," he explained. "It would be no good having six butchers and another six bakers. "You have got to provide all kinds of different produce if people are going to keep coming back to pick up their groceries." The current Friday market in Cheltenham sells everything from fresh trout to home-made meringues, cheesecake to rose bushes. It was nine years ago that the market was launched.

"I'll be honest, I was a bit sceptical about whether it would work. "I knew there were lots of farmers in the surrounding countryside but I didn't know if there would be enough of the other producers. "I hadn't counted on how innovative people were in the town." He said he quickly had a waiting list of new businesses who wanted to take a stall on the market. "People who make cupcakes or cure their own meat were contacting me asking if they could get involved," he said. "They know the Cheltenham market is a chance to make some income, but also promote their business." Around two thirds of the traders who have pitches on Fridays market will also set up stands on the new Saturday market. "The rest will come from the waiting list which is full of people ready for their opportunity to sell products in the town," Mr Cotton said. He said farmers' markets across the country had been affected by the recession but continued to be attractive to shoppers. "If you want fresh produce, presented well and with expert advice on what to do with it – the market is the only place to go." The Saturday market will be open from 9am-4pm.

# Old skills and new technology

Traditional butcher Dave Tomlins is right up to the minute in the eyes of food lovers all over the country. **SUE BRADLEY** finds out why

**D**AVE Tomlins was just 10 years old when he first started learning how to be a butcher.

Almost half a century later he's still practising the skills he picked up from his father, but he's not afraid to try new ideas either.

That's why hundreds of people regularly beat a path to The Country Butcher on the A40 Ross Road at Huntley and several more place orders with him using the internet.

They cannot get enough of his flavoursome meat, especially the hearty sausages created from quality belly and shoulder pork and home cured bacon, made the old-fashioned way by being steeped in salt, sugar and saltpetre for two weeks rather than being injected with brine and sold within days.

Dave's specialities include his Tewkesbury-cured bacon, which involves using a marinade of golden syrup, honey and spices, along with his 30 different sausages, ranging from traditional Westmoreland and Lincoln to exotic Zulu Warrior and Balearic.

Most of the meat sold at The Country Butcher comes from local farms, with animals being slaughtered just a few miles from where they were reared.

"We know exactly where our animals

come from, how they have been fed and when and where they were killed," said Dave.

"I think it's important to build a stable relationship with the farmers who supply you – we have to encourage the farmers to keep rare breeds and to keep them longer so that they are fully mature.

"We have always tried to use traditional British beef breeds as we believe they are better to eat than the Continental varieties and truer to the British way of life.

"All the beef I sell is hung for a minimum of 21 days – beef needs to rest."

While quality and tradition are very much Dave's watchwords, he's not averse to coming up with new innovations.

He's currently working on a new Bramley apple and calvados cure for his bacon and fresh ideas for faggots.

Healthy eating guidance has seen people making big changes to the food they buy in recent years and Dave is keen to keep up to date with new national standards.

"The proof of the pudding has been in the eating as we don't tend to say anything about any changes we make and people don't seem to notice," he said.

"The most important thing is to make sure we keep the taste right."

Meanwhile technologies such as the internet, that enable The Country

Butcher's products to reach greater numbers of people, are keenly embraced. Dave's been offering a mail order service since 2001 and his website attracts customers from as far as Newcastle-on-Tyne, Kent and Cornwall.

"To begin with it was in response to requests from people who had moved away but still wanted the bacon and sausages they were used to," he said. "All our meat goes out by overnight delivery."

Dave, 59, learned how to be a butcher from his father, Len, who had a shop in Haresfield.

He first started getting involved when he was 10, before joining the shop as a butcher at 16.

Today he employs no fewer than six butchers to help him keep up with demand for his traditional products.

"We do things the old fashioned way for old fashioned people," explained Dave, whose products have won several awards over the years, including a clutch of gold medals at the 2010 BPEX Foodservice Pork Product of the Year.

"More than anything I stick to the old methods out of pride.

"What's the use of doing something quicker if it upsets your customers?"

■ Visit [www.countrybutcher.co.uk](http://www.countrybutcher.co.uk)

### FARMERS' MARKETS

- Good Friday** – The Cross, Gloucester. 9am-3pm.
- Easter Saturday** – Cornhill, Stroud. 9am-2pm.
- Town Hall, Wotton-under-Edge. 9am-1pm.
- April 8** – Market Square, Stow-on-the-Wold. 9am-2pm.
- April 9** – The Cross, Gloucester. 9am-3pm.
- Promenade, Cheltenham. 9am-3pm.
- April 10** – Cornhill, Stroud. 9am-2pm.
- Town Hall, Dursley. 9am-1pm.
- Market Place, Cirencester. 9am-1pm.
- April 16** – The Cross, Gloucester. 9am-3pm.
- April 17** – Cornhill, Stroud. 9am-2pm.
- Town centre, Winchcombe. 9am-1pm.
- April 23** – The Cross, Gloucester. 9am-3pm.



Dave Tomlins' family have been butchers in Huntley since 1968



Dave leaned butchery skills at the age of 10

## Pork loin in the running for award

DAVE Tomlins' stuffed pork loin is in the running for a major award from BPEX, the organisation that promotes the meat from English pigs.

Dave's favourite way of roasting pork causes apple and cider flavours from sausage meat to seep into the meat.

Here's how he makes it@

**Ingredients**  
2lb pork loin  
½ lb pork, apple and cider sausage meat.  
**Method**  
Pre-heat oven to a moderate temperature –

180C / 350F / gas mark four.

Slide a knife between the rind of the pork loin and the eye of the meat to create a pocket.

Pack the pork, apple and cider sausage meat into the pocket.

Roast the meat for about an hour and a half until the rind has crackled and the juices of the meat run clear when a knife is inserted.

Serve with new potatoes and steamed asparagus.

This weight of meat serves four people and leaves a little meat for sandwiches the next day.



### LOCAL FOOD HEROES



Richard Cook with some fresh elvers

**STEPHEN WHEELER**, commercial manager at speciality food company Mise en Place, now part of Cheltenham-based Creed Foodservice, shares the successes and challenges of local food producers

THERE are families living on the banks of the River Severn who have been fishing Britain's longest river for over 400 years. Nowadays they net and hook around 1,800 wild salmon in a season, and anywhere between six to 100 tonnes of baby eels or 'elvers' on their incredible return journey to the Sargasso Sea.

A proportion of the catch goes to the Severn and Wye Smokery at Chaxhill, near Westbury on Severn, owned by fishery expert Richard Cook.

Over coffee in the smokery's stylish delicatessen and fishmongers, Richard told me that he set up the business when he was just 18.

"I worked in my father's small fish delivery company after leaving school, but quickly decided I had to do my own thing," he says.

Fast forward 30 years and the business now has sales worth £1.4m a year, and employs over 100 people in Chaxhill and in their South Wales depot.

Around 60 tonnes a year of farmed and wild salmon are cured in Severn and Wye's four smokeries, and sent to exclusive retailers and hotels, and to top chefs including Michelin men Gordon Ramsay and Marco Pierre White.

They also smoke herring, mackerel, eel and trout. Spectators at this year's Wimbledon tennis championships will be eating 'skippies' – smoked sardine filets from Severn and Wye.

Richard told me that they only use sustainable, deciduous oak for the wood chippings in the smokery.

Last year they felled five trees and planted 250.

Elvers, traditionally caught on the night tides, used to be part of the peasant diet along the banks of the Severn – and a serving would have filled their pint beer mug.

A pint of elvers today would cost Gloucestershire peasants around £200, but most are now farmed – wild elvers being used to establish the farmed stocks.

I asked Richard for his favourite elver recipe: Fry off some bacon cubes in lard. Remove the bacon from the pan. Tip in the washed elvers and fry till they turn white. Break in some beaten egg, the bacon, and cook till just set.

"We like to think of ourselves as one of chefs' best kept secrets," said Richard.

I think Severn and Wye is one of Gloucestershire's best kept food secrets.

*Mise en Place*  
THE SPECIALITY FOOD COMPANY

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