

LOCAL FOOD HEROES

Picture: James Douglas 103141_4



Farmer Will Speakman

STEPHEN WHEELER, commercial manager at speciality food company Mise en Place, now part of Creed Foodservice, is in touch with a wealth of food producers. Here he shares some of their successes and challenges

ONCE Christmas is over, and the January snows have melted away, we're all looking for signs of the long-awaited spring. Newborn lambs bouncing in the fields is a welcome promise of longer and warmer days.

Will Speakman farms 400 acres in Churchdown, and his 230 head of Charollais and Jacob ewes have starting lambing. I talked with Will during one of his many patrols of the ewes in the lambing barns, with his sheepdogs Pip and Jack keeping guard outside. The ewes are segregated into those expecting single, twin or triplet lambs – every ewe is scanned during their pregnancy.

Their diet of home-grown hay, oats and barley is adjusted depending on how many offspring are expected. The mothers with a single lamb are given one of any triplets to adopt – twins being a manageable number to suckle.

Will tries to deliver all 400 expected lambs himself, without the help of vet, so January is a round the clock vigil for himself and his father.

I asked Will about the Charollais breed.

"They were first imported from France in 1976,

where they centre around the town of Charolles in the Loire, grazing alongside the famous Charolais cattle. Because of their easy lambing, robust and fast-growing lambs, and high quality meat, they are now one of the most numerous sheep breeds in England."

Nowadays English sheep-wool is not commercially viable.

"The cost of shearing our flock is more than the fleeces are worth," said Will. "Cheaper imports and man-made fibres have closed off that market." Despite that, Will is optimistic for the future of sheep-farming in the Cotswolds, and for British farming generally.

"My family is still farming in Churchdown after 35 years of ups and downs in agriculture. We send to market a great product that has been reared to the highest possible standards," he says. "The fact that local people can enjoy my lamb is something I'm proud of. "There is a strong demand for local, high quality farmed food."

New season Cotswold lamb will be ready to buy at Easter – with bowls of steaming new potatoes and spring vegetables. Now there's something to look forward to.

Mise en Place
THE SPECIALITY FOOD COMPANY



From left: Fatiha, Saleha, Shamsul, Monrusha, Nipa and Joshua Krori

Stardom is just around corner

Not only was Curry Corner, in Cheltenham, lauded by Gordon Ramsay as one of the best local restaurants in the country, it's now won a gold in the Taste of the West awards. **LUCY PARFORD** catches up with the team

ONE of Cheltenham's longest established Indian restaurants is celebrating a fantastic start to the new year after scooping a coveted gold at the Taste of the West Awards.

The family-run restaurant, in Fairview, was first started by Shamsul Krori and his wife Saleha in 1977 and has been serving up deliciously unique Bangladeshi cuisine for more than 30 years.

Curry Corner has been awarded gold in the restaurant category of the Taste of the West Awards after judges described the food as "beautifully cooked" and the service as "very cheerful".

Shamsul's daughter Monrusha, who trained and worked as a lawyer in London before deciding to pursue her love for good food by working with her family as a chef, says: "We're off the beaten track and don't take anything for granted. "I've grown up watching mum and dad's passion for quality ingredients and flavour."

"Since 1977 we've been constantly improving and innovating. Last year we won a silver award, this year we've won gold and the highest score in the county. "We're dedicated to putting Gloucestershire on the culinary map of

excellence and I believe it is the best county in Britain with world class produce, producers and restaurants."

Other restaurants which scored highly in the awards include the Tudor Farmhouse Hotel and Restaurant in Clearwell and the Orangery restaurant in Wotton-under-Edge which both received silver, while The Pepper Pot near Dursley scored bronze.

Following a public vote, at the end of last year Curry Corner appeared on Channel 4's The F Word in the search for Gordon Ramsay's best local restaurant in Britain, which was eventually won by an Indian restaurant in Birmingham.

Curry Corner held its own F Word party, attended by 60 special guests and regulars including Sir Geoff Hurst and Countryfile presenter Adam Henson, who all watched the nailbiting final together. The event raised £1,000 for BBC Children in Need.

Monrusha says: "It was a really wonderful evening. We served exactly the same braised lamb samosas as in The F Word and 16 spice lamb shank masala and Brixham monkfish in saffron cream curry. "We asked if people would pay, as happens on the show – and they all did."

■ Curry Corner is at 133 Fairview Road, Cheltenham. To book, call 01242 528449.



Shredded lamb samosa at Curry Corner



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