

# The Importance of buying local



Jane Tomlinson, Director of Redhill Farm Free Range Pork, farms in Lincolnshire with her husband Terry. As well as running the business, Jane has three children and is founder of Lincolnshire Farmer's Markets, a founder member of Tastes of Lincolnshire, an

Ambassador for Select Lincolnshire and a Slow Food member. She is uniquely positioned to write about 'buying local'.

## “Local Food” – Supermarkets vs Farmer's Markets and Independent Shops by Jane Tomlinson

Nothing beats locally produced food sold locally....and better still bought straight from the people who produce it – you know it's fresh, where it *really* comes from, it tastes good, it's healthy and is excellent value for money, and best of all you can enjoy the experience of buying from someone you can trust.

The news that supermarket giants are now looking at moving into smaller high street stores for convenience having run out of out larger out of town sites (there are now five or more supermarkets in 40% of the towns and cities in the UK) should be of concern to us all. Not content with decimating the small town trade with out of town sites they are aggressively targeting the smaller town high street putting more pressure on



Farmer's markets such as the one in Bailgate may be threatened by the introduction of high street supermarket convenience stores.

our vital independent food shops. This is now a real threat to the surviving local butcher, baker, grocer, deli and farmer's market...especially when the supermarkets champion themselves as local food supporters.

The Bailgate has a wonderful asset in the independent food shops and farmer's market that are well established in the everyday life of shoppers to the area – offering the very best in



Andrew Dennis, owner of Woodlands Organic Farm is a Rick Stein super-food hero and a current BBC Radio 4 Farmer Of The Year. Left: Andrew is also a regular at the Bailgate and other Farmer's Markets.



local food from around our abundant food producing county. Along with this superb quality Lincolnshire produce is the friendly, approachable producer/retailer with a wealth of product knowledge and history of customer relationships – once this is lost it's gone

for good and we are left with the antiseptic, cold commercialism of the supermarket shopping experience.

The wonderful Farmer's market in Lincoln Castle Square – in what must be the best setting for a farmer's market in the entire country, has an inexhaustible variety of fresh, in-season, delicious produce which is amongst the best in the UK. National award

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Mary Davenport of Cote Hill Cheese on her stall and filling her cheese moulds.

winning produce sold by national food heroes – all from right here in Lincolnshire. The most interesting rare varieties of vegetables from Woodlands Organic Farm, a Rick Stein super-food hero and the owner, Andrew Dennis is current BBC Radio 4 Farmer Of The Year. He is there, in person selling his vegetables every 1st Saturday of the month. If you want to know anything about vegetables he's the man to ask. Likewise, we have organic breads and flour from Mount Pleasant Windmill, another Rick Stein Food Hero and former Waitrose Small Producer Of The year. Our two cheese producers in the county...the famous Lincolnshire Poacher cheese which has won the British Cheese Award is produced by farmer Simon Jones, and every month Mary Davenport who produces the Nantwich International Cheese Award winning Cote Hill Cheese is there, offering you samples to taste. My husband, Terry Tomlinson (current Tastes of Lincolnshire Grower Of The Year) is also there every month with our multi-national Gold Great Taste Award winning Redhill Farm Free Range Pork. The variety of the rest of the produce on offer is testament to the wealth of rural diversification that has developed such high quality produce. It is great to have national recognition with awards but the fact is, all this quality produce is what we have all been producing for you to buy from the farmer's market for the last 10 years.

So many consumers are duped into going to supermarkets for everything or for the so called 'fine' or 'best' ranges, seduced by clever packaging and spending more money than it's worth to buy something "locally" produced or of apparent premium quality.



Jane and Terry Tomlinson of Redhill Farm - champions of local food.

Take meat for example – you buy a packed cut of meat in the supermarket with a nice photo of the farmer on it, it says it's local so you trust the label and on that basis make the decision to buy it. In reality we know that many local butchers were driven out of business on the high street due to price wars with the supermarket which led to many of the small butcher-owned slaughter facilities closing that play a vital role in the local food supply chain. What we are left with is a piece of meat that has travelled from Lincolnshire to some huge centralised slaughter, processing and distribution centre in somewhere like Coventry with lorries coming in and out 24

hours a day bringing in and taking away meat all over the country. What chance really has that piece of meat of getting back to the same area supermarket as it was farmed? Unless caught out, the majority of supermarkets are happy to imply that it is produced in the UK when it is only packaged in the UK... look at the label again... and you may find that the meat is from the EEC, or possibly as far away as Brazil!

The responsibility is firmly placed on the customer to check the small print on the packaging. Why should you have to see if that chicken with the nice label with the fields and blue sky is not actually free range but intensively indoor reared and never seen the light of day?

This is where your friendly independent baker, butcher, grocer, deli owner and farmer's market producer really come into their own. We know everything about what we are selling, ask us anything, if you want speed and convenience phone us, order ahead and we will have it ready for you. We will get to know you and what you like, we can help you with cooking tips, save you money as you will be getting just what you need based on our expert knowledge and advice – we have nothing to hide, there's no confusion, we're completely honest and ethical... that's what we all need to preserve in the Bailgate and throughout our market towns... and more to the point that's what the supermarkets can't ever hope to compete with!

**The Lincoln Castle Square Farmer's Market is on the first Saturday of every month - 2010 dates: 15 May, 19 June, 17 July, 21 Aug, 18 Sep, 16 Oct, 20 Nov, 18 Dec.**