

Farm Shops Unite

10 November 2014

Farm shops in the Midlands have joined together to highlight the value of handmade, artisan food and strike back against supermarket domination. Farm shop group FARMA (National Farmers' Retail and Markets Association) have hundreds of members throughout the UK and their members in the Midlands are some of the best known farm shops in the country. FARMA members in the Midlands are launching a campaign to encourage local people to shop for local produce.

In recent television advertising supermarkets have looked to emulate farm shops and farmers' markets. The Lidl advertising campaign epitomises this by staging their whole advertisement at a fake farmers' market, revealing that the produce on their stalls is all from Lidl by handing the customer their produce in a Lidl bag. This has created outrage amongst small producers who believe this type of advertising is undermining the authenticity of their produce and of real farmers' markets. The aim of Lidl's campaign is to impersonate the environment and feeling that shoppers get when they visit independently run shops or markets. However, independent businesses are able to back this up when customers actually visit their shop because they are largely family run and individual. Farm shops have traded on being the local, friendly face of food retail for years. Many have grown in to significant competition to nearby supermarkets who have been forced to imitate and copy their ideas to compete. Sally Jackson, Chair of FARMA comments,

'Farm shop owners are getting used to the supermarkets hitching a ride on the 'real farm' ethos yet no amount of slick advertising can replace the experience of buying real food at a real farm shop. Home raised, home grown, homemade and a love of all local foods are the characteristics of a great farm shop. Combine freshness and taste with few food miles and with so much more money going back into the local community - why wouldn't you support your local farm shop?'

The 'community pound' has been campaigned in many rural areas with some towns such as Totness in Devon actually creating their own currency. In the Midlands there is no move toward such drastic action but farmers and farm shops are trying to appeal to local people's sense of pride in their region when choosing where to shop. They argue there is no need to buy meat that is reared elsewhere, that there is plenty of seasonal produce grown in the local fields. With Christmas creeping ever nearer farm shops are hoping shoppers will spend their money wisely and enjoy the experience of food shopping rather than leaving it to a last minute dash around a supermarket.

Farm shops within the Midlands group all have their own ways of making food shopping a more interesting and enjoyable experience. Voted Britain's Best Farm Shop 2013, Ludlow Food Centre has 8 glass fronted production kitchens so customers can see their food being made. Apley Farm Shop near Telford has a children's play barn and Denstone Hall near Alton Towers has a large cafe/restaurant. Near Wolverhampton, Essington Fruit Farm provide all year round 'pick your own' produce. Even the smaller farm shops have added attractions to help them stand out including The Stables, close to Redditch, which has recently created a farm park with animals for children to feed and pet. Rather than using tricks and fooling people these food retailers are showing the real side of food production and farming. Their transparency is something the multiples are unable to copy which is made all the more obvious by advertising campaigns like that of Lidl's. Jeremy Jagger is leader of the Midlands group and owner of Battlefield 1403 near Shrewsbury, he says,

'I believe that we are blessed with a particularly strong concentration of exceptional award winning establishments in the Midlands that we can be very proud of. Farm shops are very competitive with supermarkets in terms of price and shouldn't be considered as high end or exclusive in this way. We all offer quality local and homemade produce. Our staff are passionate about this region's food and they all provide outstanding service which we hope gives every customer a pleasurable shopping and dining experience.'

The solidarity, and clarity of message, that is being demonstrated by farm shops in the Midlands region has galvanised them. By comparison, the ruthless competition and price wars the supermarkets have entered in to leaves little to be desired. Farm shops are clearly conveying the message that local is best and are asking communities to support their farmers and growers by choosing to buy their food at their local farm shop.

Details of the farm shops in the Midlands region can be found at <http://www.farma.org.uk/members-map/>

Ends

Issued by: FARMA

Notes:

FARMA: FARMA is a co-operative of around 400 businesses from across the UK that share one thing - a passion to promote food which is grown and sold by the same hands. Each member has a share in the co-operative; this ensures that the members all sign up to a clear mission that we all believe in.

PRESS ENQUIRES: All press inquiries are to be directed to:

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