

PRESS RELEASE



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Do you go for the convenience of the supermarket or shop around for local produce? That is the dilemma. With our ever busier lives and the need for convenience it is no wonder that more than 70% of the food consumed in the UK is sold through the major supermarkets. These retail giants have brought choice and value at a scale that can only be marvelled at. But times are changing.

There was a time when “local food” was the norm. Many will remember the livestock market in Newport where local butchers bought cattle, sheep and pigs from local farmers. High Street greengrocers bought from market gardeners and vegetable growers across the Island, while milk, eggs and butter were delivered straight to the door by local farmers. What changed?

In a nutshell our entry into the EU. European farming policies encouraged massive overproduction – remember the grain mountains and wine lakes – as a result farmers sold bulk produce to large companies and became detached from the general public. The link between local food and local consumers was badly broken.

The tide is now turning. Across the country and certainly on the Island, farm shops and farmers markets have sprung up. A new generation of farmers have seen their future in selling their own produce direct to the public. These businesses know their customers well and thrive on generating trust between those growing the food and those eating it. At the heart of this revolution is the return of “seasonality”. While supermarkets have the buying power to ship-in produce from around the globe 12 months of the year, the farm shop and farmers market stands firmly by local food and what is available on the day. This is a hallmark of truly locally produced food grown under sustainable conditions.

How are these businesses fairing in these tough economic times? In 1975 UK consumers spent 25% of their total income on food, currently the average spend is a little over 5%. While food may seem expensive it now represents a small fraction of what we have to spend. In many cases farm shops and farmers markets are competitive with the supermarkets, but what is clear is that value must not be confused with price. Farm shops and farmers markets are still doing well as consumers increasingly realise that high quality locally grown food, sometimes organic, is a healthier and more nutritious choice.

Regardless of whether you are a supermarket shopper or a fan of farmers markets it makes sense to know where your food comes from. It may take a little longer to seek out seasonal local food, but slow food is better for everyone.

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