

FOOD AND DRINK IN THE COTSWOLDS

From a speech by
Barry Hancox,
Cotswold Taste Ltd



THE RICH AND DIVERSE FOOD FOUND IN THE COTSWOLDS

The Cotswold region is already known for its rich food and drink production, much of which is marketed nationally.

This includes rapeseed oil, maize, artisan cheeses such as Godsell's, beers from larger breweries such as Arkells and craft breweries such as Stroud, Wickwar and Severn Brewing Co, wine from Poulton Hill Estate, gin and whisky from The Cotswolds Distillery, and Cotswold Wagyu Beef.

Fortunately, it is constantly growing and we are already seeing growth in the production of maize and spelt, and an increase in the Old Spot rare breed pig population - and hence the availability of its meat.

Consumer demands can frequently be satisfied locally

At present, no one on this planet seems to fully understand the consequences of BREXIT. However, to my mind local production becomes even more essential to this demand and to a thriving economy. Accordingly, we need to take a positive slant on Brexit and encourage growth at home with artisan producers and sustainable, free range production of meat, fruit and vegetables. I have recently come across a new (and expanding) producer of 'micro-herbs' in Broadway, intended for restaurants. It's an indication of the millennial desire to improve our health and wellbeing through nutritious food consumption.

Likewise, I have recently met an individual with a considerable background in international hospitality, who has a vision to take the amazing products we have here in The Cotswolds and market them in other parts of the UK as well as the USA. I know we have much in this area of which we can be hugely proud.

The 'Cotswolds' name is a massive USP

We are seeing an ever-increasing and richly diverse restaurant and dining trade in the region, and there is no reason why we can't locally sustain dishes from India, Asia and elsewhere in the world. As we see an increase in varietal production, it has to be a huge selling point that dish contents are produced locally - whether it be in one of the great pubs around the region, or some of its Michelin starred restaurants.

Consumer demand is dictating the need for free range, organically produced and local food products. Even the larger supermarket groups recognise this need and the importance of offering locally produced food and drink, wherever possible.

Vegan - is this the future of food consumption

Through Cotswold Taste, I have been involved in discussion with leaders in vegan, plant based initiatives, based on the fact that we will have to move away from factory production. If this is so, meat production for the masses becomes unsustainable. There are a great many questions to be answered.

Can we at least encourage the population to significantly reduce meat consumption, so as to allow it to be produced free range and organically? Should we follow the trend to veganism and radically discourage meat consumption completely? Is a completely plant-based diet a sustainable option?

I was struck by the headline of a recent article by Isabella Tree in The Observer: 'If you want to save the world, veganism isn't the answer'.

If you want to do some further reading, you could do worse than look online - www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/25/veganism-intensively-farmed-meat-dairy-soya-maize

<https://eatbychloe.com/2015/06/plant-based-vs-vegan/>

COTSWOLD TOURISM

Much of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) relies heavily on visitors and tourism. In fact, the economy of the region as a whole is massively visitor dependent.

Our growing reputation as a food-producing region, as an area with amazing dining experiences and a multitude of great places to stay, can only serve to enhance the visitor experience and increase visitor numbers.

Without question, food and drink production, food and drink retail, restaurants and hospitality are all major employment providers both for local citizens and migrants.

Cotswold Taste as a promotional tool

Cotswold Taste is the quality marque for food and drink produced to high standards in the Cotswolds. Launched in 2016, Cotswold Taste aims to be a collective for all aspects of the food and drink industry, including technical and operational aspects such as environmental health, training, design and business planning. New start-ups and developing businesses may well need this assistance to ease their journey (and sometimes battle!)

The reality of Brexit is giving serious cause for concern. Whilst HM Government is actively coming up with solutions to maintain levels of skilled and professional migrants to this country, there appears to be a significant lack of initiatives aimed at maintaining the level of migrants in the food industry.

In a recent discussion with a significant employer in both this country and abroad, he tried to reassure me about the great opportunities for immigration from the Indian sub-continent and elsewhere. He didn't convince me this would happen. I see this as an urgent and critical issue which no one appears to be addressing.



I have enjoyed a lifetime in the hospitality industry. I have recently developed a significant interest in supporting The Cotswolds in its ever-growing status and have been able as a blogger to enthuse about new food and drink start-ups and producers.

I sincerely hope I will have the opportunity to continue.



About Barry Hancox

Barry Hancox has spent over 40 years in the industry he has loved since he first started working in it. His early days were spent in 5-star hotels in London, relocating to the Cotswolds nearly 30 years ago, first as Manager and then as General Manager of The Lygon Arms, Broadway, then part of the Savoy Group.

Barry has owned and run two restaurants (one with rooms) from start up, setting everything up from scratch including design, style, service, technology, staffing and menu choices.

He has since played a role in the successful launch of several delis and food retail outlets in the Cotswolds in his role as a consultant. Barry, in short, has an indefatigable passion for the food industry

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