

A new report proves that offering food unique to your area can help boost business. Here, some Enterprise pubs show how **local produce** can bring a local flavour – and a dash of credibility – to the menu.



TASTE THE DIFFERENCE: Chef Nathan Muir, of the Robin Hood's Retreat, swears by local produce, but says try before you buy



Pubs are the number one choice for eating out – you knew that. But a new pub catering report from Mintel warns that to reap the benefits, licensees must keep on top of consumer trends. The report says diners want better quality and are interested in quirky individuality as opposed to mass-marketing brands, and that organic, local or regional produce is key to this.

Nathan Muir, head chef at **The Robin Hood's Retreat, Bristol**, is passionate about local ingredients. "I use local family-run suppliers, the closer to us the better. Variety is good, too: we have beef and lamb from Toppington and Clevedon while our fish is from Cornwall or the Bristol fishpond area. I always

use free-range eggs and meat where possible. Mushrooms and cheese are unique here because Bristol soil is different."

Nathan stresses that you must 'try' before you buy. "Inspect produce for freshness, looking for vibrancy of colour and firmness. Check that it's in season, not from abroad; you want your ingredients to be the freshest, which means as little travel time as possible. Grow your own herbs and find good suppliers by asking other local chefs."

Passion

Buying from local businesses should boost your reputation and help you build strong links within the community. "But first," says Nathan, "make sure you go and see for yourself how they rear their livestock or grow their veg, and see if the passion is there. My butcher and vegetable supplier don't just sell their produce; they eat it, too."

The Pound at Leebotwood, Shropshire, sources as much food as possible from Shropshire or neighbouring counties.



"Our menu includes local lamb, eggs and Much Wenlock bacon and air-dried ham," said manager Abi Chapman. "Paul, the licensee, has done his research and our head chef Andy has some great contacts. Between them they keep an eye on local markets and use their knowledge of the area."

Transporting livestock round the country causes distress to the animals and makes the meat tough, says Deborah Turner of **the Queen's Arms, Taunton**. "We're buying some meat farmed literally from the field next to us. There's also a woman nearby who has her own goats and does wonderful things with goat's cheese."

"We source our produce mostly from farmer's markets in Somerset. My advice is to always cook fresh – it's great for business. Our customers appreciate it because they prefer the taste."

Useful websites

- www.buylocalfood.co.uk
- www.soilassociation.org.uk
- www.naturalengland.org.uk

fresh is best