

Promoting Quality Mutton



Alde Valley Mutton, Suffolk

There are many producers of superb quality mutton in the UK, and it is a sector which offers great opportunities for sheep farmers looking to add value to their older animals. Perhaps the greatest problem faced by retailers, whether farmer/retailers, butchers or caterers in promoting mutton to the public is a psychological one stemming from bad folk-memories of poor quality wartime meat.

The question is how to overcome this misplaced prejudice amongst the potential customers? It has been shown time and again that once people try quality mutton, all pre-conceptions are abandoned, and the vast majority of people, regardless of age or background, love it. Generic PR campaigns promoting quality mutton will certainly start to break down resistance, but how about a local bottom-up approach?

One such initiative has yielded positive results in Suffolk, where for three years a celebration of mutton has been organised by a farmer, a butcher and local chef. Jason Gathorne-Hardy of White House Farm, Great Glemham, started his 14 day 'Alde Valley Mutton Renaissance' in 2014. He explained "The idea of The Alde Valley Mutton Renaissance programme, held each February/March, is to highlight this meat and to support the local supply chain, from farm to fork. It has been really exciting to see the interest in local mutton growing slowly year by year. We are blessed in East Suffolk with a vibrant meat supply chain".



Farmer, Jason Gathorne-Hardy



Butcher, Gerard King

In 2015, third generation butcher Gerard King of Salter and King in Aldeburgh worked with Jason to add 'Mutton Week' to the overall event. This year, the events held during the mutton celebration included butchery demonstrations, and a farm supper with local chef Peter Harrison, who has developed a range of superb mutton dishes through his involvement with Jason and Gerard over the past mutton events. Quality mutton was also on the menu at a number of local pubs

and restaurants, and a farm walk was included in the programme to explain about the production of mutton.

This series of events has been a great way of bringing the taste and story of mutton to a local audience, and has certainly broken down some of the barriers to embracing the meat, as well as boosting local businesses. And it's a formula which could be repeated elsewhere in the country. The collaboration of farmer, butcher and chefs is the key to its success. Mutton Weeks elsewhere in the UK could also highlight local breeds of sheep. A Mutton Week in Cumbria for example would obviously involve Herdwicks, as could Scottish events celebrate Blackface or Hebridean mutton.



Chef, Peter Harrison

The NSA's Make More of Mutton initiative would be happy to help local Mutton Weeks with tips and ideas, as well as potential publicity.

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