

Award winners 2005

The FARMA 2005 awards attracted a record number of entries. Judges included Sandy Boyd, who chaired the judging panel; Susy Smith, editor of Country Living magazine, representing consumers; Peter Simpson, Countryside Agency; Tessa Driscoll, manager of Hampshire Farmers' Markets Ltd; Andy and Tish Jeffery, Farrington's Farm Shop, Bristol, last year's winners of the Farm Retailer of the Year Award. The judges found their task very difficult but, after much discussion, the order of the winners and runners-up was agreed. Congratulations to you all, and thank you to everyone who entered. There is great work being done and, unfortunately, with just one winner and a maximum of three runners up in each category we cannot hope to recognise it all.

Now in their fourth year, the entry forms will be out in May 2005 so that there is plenty of time to enter.

Below and alongside are brief profiles of the winners in three categories; there is a profile of Made in Stroud, winner of the Eat the View Environmental Award on pages 16 and 17.

See also 'What makes a winner?' on page 21.

FARM RETAILER OF THE YEAR 2005

Low Sizergh Barn, near Kendal, Cumbria



LOW SIZERGH BARN is situated on a working organic dairy farm, 280 acres tenanted from the National Trust, near Sizergh Castle, Cumbria. It's on one of the main roads to the Lake District which, for many years, farmer John Park, his wife, Marjorie and his young family considered a nuisance. Since the farm began its retail diversification, some twenty years ago, that busy road is seen in a new light completely.

In 1985, Low Sizergh Farm offered its first PYO strawberries. On the strength of its success, the farm shop followed in 1991, housed in a Westmorland Stone barn. Today, the old cow stalls in the basement are dedicated to local crafts; on the ground floor there's a farm shop, crammed with local produce, colour and texture. Upstairs there's restaurant with 40 covers, open daily for tea and coffee, home made cakes and light lunches. It features a viewing window over the milking parlour, an extra element of interest for visitors.

In 2002, the farm became fully Certified organic and since then, an increasing amount of the milk produced from the 120 cows on the farm has gone into small-scale local cheese and ice-cream

production to be sold in the farm shop, as well as being sold as liquid milk. The proportion of milk going into added value has grown steadily and, in 2005, a cheese-maker will be working directly on the farm so that 40 per cent of the milk will be sold for production at prices set by the Park family. With land not suited to intensive farming, the business has become less



rather than more specialised over the years. In partnership with Growing Well, an organic horticultural business, a variety of crops is now grown for the shop; sheep and free-range hens are kept and, in 2002 an award-winning farm trail opened, which allows visitors to see a great deal of local biodiversity.

Family members involved in the business include John, Marjorie and their daughter Alison, who share responsibilities in the shop. Son Richard is now in charge of the milking. Says Alison Park: 'At Low Sizergh there is a sense of a healthy, thriving rural business. It is part of an inter-dependent network of farmers, suppliers, producers and growers who rely on each other to provide the best produce to people wanting more than the faceless remote experience they get from supermarket shopping.'

The farm shop employs 12 full time and 41 part-time staff and training is regarded as important to maintain quality levels.

Congratulations to the other finalists: Darts Farm Village, Devon; Warbourne Organic Farm, Hampshire; Washingpool Farm Shop, Dorset.



Pictures: Top, Low Sizergh Barn; Right top, the trophy and team - Alison Park is holding the giant fork, Marjorie stands to her left, John Park to her right. Underneath is a view of the farm shop. Far right: the farm trail and right, chickens and sheep on the farm.

BEST NEWCOMER 2005: Gonalston Farm Shop, Nottinghamshire



Some of the Gonalston Farm Shop team, with Georgina holding the trophy, an Acorn carved from oak. Georgina spoke about Gonalston Farm Shop's first year at the FARMA conference in Llandrindod Wells.



Georgina and Ross Mason celebrated one year of farm retailing on 12 August 2004, with the help of Jimmy Doherty and his girlfriend, Michaela, of The Essex Pig Company (FARMA member) and BBCTV's 'Jimmy's Farm' fame, pictured above. Customers were delighted to chat. The farm shop has outperformed Georgina and Ross's expectations for the first year of trading by some five times. It has had to accommodate rapid customer growth and needed to provide extra parking with longer opening hours in order to meet demand for the farm's beef and lamb, supplemented with an excellent range of local produce. Ross and Georgina travelled widely in their researches before starting their own plans for a farm shop. They knew exactly what they wanted: to sell meat from the farm 'together with the kinds of foods that they liked to eat in an amazingly friendly and welcoming environment with people who really knew the products they were selling.'

The retail diversification came about when BSE, and FMD too, pinched the farm's store cattle business hard. Ross's tireless work on the farm was producing insufficient reward in the prices being achieved; and Georgina's skills in marketing and retail were going to waste. Says Georgina: 'Whereas before we were seen as 'just farmers' now we are food heroes within the local community.' Most Saturdays are 'tasting' days, with suppliers offering samples. Staff training is constant: At any one time, there will be one member of staff who has participated in Cheese Guild training available on the deli counter. All staff attend Basic Food Hygiene training and are given in-house customer-care training. Congratulations to the other finalists: Barleymow's Farm Shop, Somerset; Greystone House Farm Shop & Tea Room, Cumbria; Lifton Strawberry Fields, Devon.

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FARMERS' MARKET OF THE YEAR 2005

Orton Farmers' Market, Orton, Cumbria



ORTON FARMERS' MARKET, in the tiny village of Orton in Cumbria, won Farmers' Market of the Year for 2005.

It was started in May 2000 when, after successfully renovating the Market Hall in the village, two volunteers responded to requests from the community to revitalise the market activity. Orton farmers' market now generates some £150,000 for the local economy and was registered, in June 2003, as a community business, limited by guarantee. The vision of Orton Farmers' Market Ltd is simply one of rural regeneration based on the inextricably interwoven relationship of economic, environmental and community well-being. 'If one element is missing,' says Jane Brook, one of the two volunteer managers of the farmers' market, 'then, like a three legged stool, it collapses.'

Pictured left are Greg Wilson and Jane Brook, volunteer managers of Orton farmers' market. Jane's energy and drive, and gift for getting publicity for the farmers' market means that this village farmers' market draws customers from a wide area.

Frequent surveys among customers and stallholders maintain a constant picture of the market's performance. A survey in May 2003 revealed that 59 per cent of customers had travelled more than 25 miles to be at the market and half had been drawn to the market because of word-of-mouth recommendation. Also in 2003, 95 per cent of producers rated the cost-effectiveness of attending the

market as very good or excellent. All rated the marketing and promotion of the markets (at Orton and Pooley Bridge, a nearby market also managed by Jane & Greg) as 100 per cent excellent: Jane gets a great deal of free publicity through editorial, exploiting every opportunity - even the first-ever cancelled market in January 2005 (due to the floods) which she said 'broke the promise of the market' that it would always take place on the second Saturday of each month. Congratulations to the other finalists: Deddington Farmers' Market, Oxfordshire; Haverfordwest Farmers' Market, Pembrokeshire.