

VISIBLY LOCAL



Every town and city in the land should have a local shop like Stroud's. Clare Gerbrands, pictured above outside the Made in Stroud shop, the highly visible public face of the crafts co-operative that she and her husband founded. The shop was started as a result of the farmers' market in the town and provides it with an office and information point. Made in Stroud won FARMA's 'Eat the View' environmental award for 2005, sponsored by the Countryside Agency.

Stroud farmers' market celebrated its fifth birthday in July last year. Running on alternate Saturdays, it is situated in a partially covered market square with more stalls outside on either side of pedestrianised streets. There's a café in a crowded corner where market manager, Clare Gerbrands, can often be seen chatting with customers. There's a friendly, relaxed atmosphere about the whole place - even on a cold day, there's plenty of business at the market.

Clare and her husband Kardi (known as 'Gerb') work as a team on market days, sometimes involving one or more of their four children, all boys aged from 18 to eight. They are directors of Made in Stroud Ltd, which manages the eponymous shop a short distance away, and farmers' markets in Stroud, Stow on the Wold, Gloucester and Swindon. Made in Stroud Craft Markets preceded the farmers' market, and came about because of Gerb's drums. 'We needed to find a way of selling them,' recalls Clare, 'and we thought the local - conventional - market would be good. However, stall space in Stroud's Shambles market would have cost us £10 and we had to provide our own table and canopy ... so I looked into hiring a hall as an alternative and found that for £100 I could hire the whole space. I thought this would make good sense if I could get nine others to share the cost of setting up a crafts market and that's how the idea of Made in Stroud was born, out of the need for local craftspeople to have somewhere to sell their products. The Made in Stroud shop opened in December 2001 and runs as a separate company, a co-operative of makers from the Stroud district.

Today, thirty per cent of the sale price of craftwork sold goes to cover the overheads and management, and the co-operative's members put in time as well, helping to redecorate or working in the shop. Made in Stroud has an important role, not only as a retail outlet but also as shared premises for the information point about Gloucestershire farmers' markets and local activities. It's also Clare's (very tidy) office and, because it's in the main shopping area, it's busy all day.

The Stroud Community and the Farmers' Market

Clare and Gerb's love of things local has a long history. When their three oldest children were still babies, the young family travelled around Europe, back-packing, busking and picking fruit to earn money for a couple of years. 'It was a wonderful time,' says Clare. 'The fantastic street markets in Italy, for example, really opened our eyes to local foods. There was a great atmosphere about them which we stored up for when we came back to Stroud.' 'Stroud has quite a large artistic community,' she continues, 'one of the highest proportions of any town in the UK. Our local authority is Green Party led - I think it's the only one in the country. The town is a strange mix of decline - there are lots of empty shops - and people-power. So when the Council started yet another 'regeneration policy' we went along to the planning meeting. We had the concept for Made in Stroud and the Council agreed to support a farmers' market - the first in Gloucestershire - in the Cornhill market place.'

'I had to write a funding proposal, and we budgeted for six pilot markets in 1999. We actually held 13 - two a month from July to December.' Funding came from the District Council and the Town Council, who provided for a portable stainless steel kitchen so that there could be cookery demonstrations from a local chef. The pilot programme proved the point that it had support from the community and, from April 2000, further funding was made available. Made in Stroud was then invited to set up other markets in the county, in Gloucester and Stow-on-the-Wold. Gloucester runs every Friday at the cross roads in the heart of the town's pedestrian area. Stow is on the second Thursday of each month. To this has been added a farmers' market at a factory outlet site in Swindon. More will undoubtedly follow.



Clare emphasises to customers how their choices at the market are environmentally-friendly; food miles is one issue, another is how she has resolutely refused to bow to consumer pressure to provide the market with plastic carrier bags. Instead she encourages customers to bring their own and provides attractive fairly traded calico bags to help them. Regular events, and the education programme, help customers and potential customers appreciate the links between local food, farming and the landscape. It was a mixture of all these factors that persuaded the judges that Made in Stroud Ltd was a worthy winner of its coveted 'Eat the View' award and the owl statuette trophy, pictured above with Clare, is now on proud display in the Made in Stroud shop.

For more information: www.madeinstroud.org

Pictured left, a view of the farmers' market in Stroud.

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