

PRESS RELEASE



Farmers' Markets in Kent play key role in government's plans for 'food sustainability' as markets report bumper Christmas trading

As food sustainability and food security hits the top of the government's agenda again in the New Year, Kent Farmers' Market Association reported its 40 Farmers' Markets are making a significant contribution to this increasingly important national and global issue, with record attendance and buoyant demand for local produce in the run up to Christmas. The strength of trading at Kent's Farmers' Markets in the lead up to the festive period was particular strong evidence of consumers' increasing preference to shop locally and source locally grown produce and products, and neither the appalling weather conditions nor a challenging economic climate was enough to dampen demand.

Food sustainability has been put right back at the top of the government's agenda, following its recent Food 2030 report, which specifically cited Farmers' Markets as an essential part of the process of ensuring food sustainability.

The report concluded that government and industry needed to: "Encourage the further development of sustainable Farmers' Markets...to provide farmers and producers with a way to add value to their product and meet consumer demand for more regional and local food and to find alternative routes to market for that produce."

Benjamin Dent, chairman of Kent Farmers' Market Association, the umbrella group said: "A key word in the sustainable food dictionary is 'local' and the need to minimise energy used in food production, transport and storage. Kent's Farmers' Markets are doing just that – by radically reducing food miles and

sustaining local communities, whilst transforming the shopping experience. Farmers' Markets provide shoppers with higher quality, more nutritious, easily traceable, fresher local food and drink and they give Kent's farmers and small food enterprises the opportunity to sell direct to the public, providing competitively priced products in tougher economic times."

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Shipbourne Farmers' Market, was just one of the markets in Kent to break previous attendance records. Short-listed in the BBC Food and Farming Awards and voted one of the top 12 (out of 600 UK Farmers' Markets) in 2009 by The Times, Shipbourne reported its biggest attendance during 2009.

Bob Taylor, market manager at Shipbourne, said: "We achieved a record attendance for 2009 for our Christmas Farmers' Market despite the dreadful weather. People were using the market as their main pre-cursor to Christmas. We had 50 turkeys pre-ordered and shoppers were able to buy virtually everything they needed for the festive period fresh and from local producers – from fresh fruits and vegetables, through game and fish, to speciality breads and cakes."

Penshurst Farmers' Market reported over 1,000 visitors to its December market and the majority used the event as their key pre-cursor to Christmas stocking up on a full range of Christmas products, with around 60 customers pre-booking their Christmas turkeys and meat. One stallholder confirmed he had enjoyed "the best market in four and a half years" and that his takings were "up by one third".

Steve Wood, manager of West Malling Farmers' Market said that in less than a year the market has more than doubled in size (to between 40-50 stallholders) with a growing waiting list of stallholders hoping to join the market. The event before Christmas saw well over a thousand attending, whilst Wood reported doing twice as much business on his stall compared to the 2008 run up to Christmas.

Barbara Simmons, market manager for Tunbridge Wells Farmers' Market (which is held outside the Town Hall) said they held the biggest Christmas market on record, with 45 stallholders. The Tunbridge Wells market has developed quite a reputation as an event, and the Christmas market did not disappoint the crowds, with its first ever spit roast, as well as the familiar choir and Christmas

lights. Simmons said that despite the economic climate and treacherous ice, the market enjoyed “steady and substantial” trade from around 3,500 visitors, without the usual peaks and troughs in business.

As Simmons said, “Farmers’ Markets tick all the ‘green’ boxes and allow people to buy produce and products that are locally made and locally grown. I think many consumers are battle weary before Christmas and the chance to come and taste the products before you buy them and enjoy a fabulous Christmas experience rather than battling down the aisles of the supermarkets, has huge appeal for a growing number of consumers who also care about the ‘green’ issues.”

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Visit www.kentfarmersmarket.org.uk to find out when the next Farmers’ Market is taking place in your area.