



Picture: SIMON FINLAY

LET BATTLE COMMENCE: Visitors sample one of the competitors' entries at last year's Battle of the Bangers.

A WORLD OF FOOD ON YOUR DOORSTEP

The countryside will be heading into the city this weekend when Norfolk's finest food and drink producers pop by to show off their wares.

The Food Fair at the Forum in Norwich will bring together up to 30 exhibitors from butchers and bakers to cheese and wine makers.

Organiser Sonia Bell, trade stand co-ordinator for the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association, says visitors will be able to easily fill their shopping bags with a week's worth of food and drink – all produced on their doorstep.

She says: "We've got all sorts. I've got a brewery, free-range duck eggs, a couple of people doing jams and preserves, cakes, pastries, breads, meats and chillis. You can get absolutely loads of stuff."

The annual event, which takes place on Saturday, is set to see thousands of people wandering through the Forum as they browse the many stalls and try samples of the delicious produce on offer.

Now in its fourth year, the food fair has become a firm favourite with shoppers who can also join in with voting in the Battle of the Bangers competition taking place outside.

Producers return year after year knowing the day can help boost their profile among city dwellers as well as providing a great chance to meet and swap ideas with

other Norfolk-based businesses. This year Watercress Lane Duck Eggs, Norfolk Square Brewery, Edwards Eco Buildings – explaining how people can build their own cob ovens – and Country Fresh will be among the many local businesses taking part.

"It's about getting their names out there to a lot more people who perhaps haven't heard of them.

"We've got a lot of little companies here in Norfolk. They are not really producing big products on any grand scale but what they make is really fantastic quality and it's on our doorstep so the food miles aren't there," says Sonia.

The event will not only be fun for parents hoping to find a delicious new option for dinner.

Youngsters will be able to become a farmer for the day with Norfolk Young Farmers setting up on Millennium Plain with displays of agricultural equipment.

Past years have given children the chance to meet a mixture of animals and climb around a model farm.

■ The Norfolk Food Fair takes place at The Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich, on Saturday from 9.30am to 4.30pm. Any producers wanting to get in on the action can contact sonia@royalnorfolkshow.co.uk to talk about getting a last-minute pitch.

WHY IT'S ALL ABOUT FOOD METRES, NOT MILES

One of Saturday's exhibitors will be telling visitors to the Food Fair of his company's plans to bring unusual varieties of vegetable to Norfolk – without them travelling miles and miles to get there.

James Gunns, pictured, managing director of Norfolk-based supplier Country Fresh, has always been a big fan of local produce and cutting down the distance and time between a runner bean being cut and eaten.

While Country Fresh Gourmet makes use of Mrs Temple's popular cheese from Wells, the company's bakery produces a wide range of organic breads on site and the business constantly makes the most of local producers and growers to supply their customers.

But after recently buying 11 acres of farmland opposite the business's Hockering base, the Norfolk-produce enthusiast plans to grow more unusual varieties of vegetables.

James says: "Heritage tomatoes on the vine, Norfolk chillies, artichokes, to name just a few – all products which would normally be imported from the continent during the summer months.

"But why import when, with a little



passion we can grow them ourselves? The press talk of food miles, Country Fresh Farm is about food metres, championing local food not normally available."

The first harvest is just months away and plans for a carbon-neutral bakery by 2012 are also in the pipeline.

Country Fresh, founded in the 1970s by now chairman Delbert Gunns, began as a shop on St Benedict's Street in Norwich and now supplies goods to stores, hotels, colleges and restaurants across East Anglia.

Tap into a well

Just like wine, olive oil comes in many flavours, strengths and varieties. **RACHEL BULLER** meets olive oil expert Charles Carey who is hoping to persuade people that it can be so much more than a stock cupboard basic.

OLIVE OIL HAS BECOME A STAPLE INGREDIENT IN MOST PEOPLE'S KITCHEN CUPBOARDS these days, but how many of us think about the intricacies of its taste as we would with a good bottle of wine?

As with different varieties of grapes creating the distinct flavours of different wines, the same can be said for the variety of olives grown across the world – yet few of us will ever tell the difference between the subtle tastes.

But at a special event at The Book Hive in Norwich on Friday, UEA graduate and renowned olive oil expert Charles Carey is hoping to introduce people to the wonders of the different flavours of his oils.

"When people come to the tasting they will be able to try the best French, Spanish and Italian oils. As with good quality wines made with different grapes, the oils are made with particular types of olives, and the oils takes on the characteristics of their regions.

"People are surprised I think. They walk in a park but don't realise they are walking on eight different varieties of grass because they look the same and olives too tend to look the same growing on the trees to the untrained eye," he says.

"The Tuscan ones are certainly spicier and more assertive with a more bitter flavour at the front of the mouth then a peppery taste. The French tend to be lighter and sweeter and the Spanish ones are usually quite earthy and aromatic."

The olive oil tasting is part of the EDP Bidwells Norfolk Food Festival and as well talking people through the different samples, Charles will also be explaining the origins of olive oil and the manufacturing processes used.

Although he is based in London with his company, The Oil Merchant, he studied at the UEA and his godson is Henry Layte, owner of The Book Hive.

"Henry used to be our van driver and we want to try and support him in this extremely exciting venture, I think it's fantastic," he says.

Having studied art history at the UEA in the early 70s, his career path took an unexpected turn following a gap year, and he concedes, apart from enjoying the art galleries when he is in Tuscany meeting oil producers his former academic life bears little resemblance to his professional one.

"When I left the UEA, economically it was a bit like it is now. It wasn't easy to find a terribly good job in the art history world so I decided to take a gap year. After that I decided art history wasn't for me and I wanted to be a farmer. I had grown up on a farm, but my father had



OIL'S WELL: Charles Carey, far right, has run his own olive oil business for 25 years. Above, Fadrique Alvaez de Toledo, who produces Valdueva Spanish Evoo, pictured right.

sold it, so I became a farmer in Cornwall which I did for eight years very happily.

"For various reasons though, I sold the farm and was scratching my head wondering what to do next. My then girlfriend used to run a kitchen equipment shop and she used to send me bottles of olive oil as a gift, and I really loved it. So somehow I ended up pursuing this line of business with her and I ended up marrying her."

That was 25 years ago, and since then The Oil Merchant has grown enormously and he has remained loyal to the small Spanish, Italian and French farms and companies with whom he started – from one supplier in south Tuscany in the beginning to more than 20 now.

"In 1985 two things happened which kind of helped launch the business.

"First of all an American book was published about the benefits of following a Mediterranean diet, how you wouldn't have a heart attack if you ate olive oil and all that, and it was extremely popular and a well researched and written piece of work.

"Then there was a dreadful frost in Tuscany which killed a lot of olive trees.

"So the book was published and journalists were writing about the problems in Tuscany, and the book, and saying by the way, if you want olive oil then there is someone who has just started this business specialising in it



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of olive oil expertise



and importing it. We are still the only specialist oil merchant importing oils from around the world."

They now also sell some olive oil from the new world countries but, he says, there are pros and cons to the Australian, New Zealand and South African oils.

"The good thing about the new world oils is that you get two cracks at the new-season oils every year because obviously Europe and the southern hemisphere are on different time lines with their seasons.

"On the other hand we do produce extremely good olive oil in Europe, so it is hard for those oils to compete. That said, we do do a very good South African oil which is the same price as a Spanish oil but the same quality as an Italian one, which is great value."

He said people were using olive oil more and more and their understanding of the product was growing.

"About 20 years ago we used to sell a lot of very expensive bottled oils to restaurants, but they realised they shouldn't be cooking with these oils but using them for salads or finishing off dishes.

"They can use the supermarket brands for cooking but use a really high-quality oil for dressings and drizzling on a dish, to pour over a steak or on new potatoes.

"It is the same philosophy that you might have a glass of wine every night, but you wouldn't have a fine wine every



night. Mostly you will have a regular bottle of wine, but for those special occasions you might buy something special."

Most of the oil he sells is at the high end of the market, but he insists it lasts a long time and can be used to make a dish extra special.

"We have a popular estate bottled Tuscan oil and that retails at about £25 for 500ml, but that is great value."

He is clearly passionate about his work and plays down his expertise.

"When there are not many people who are experts in a subject a little bit of knowledge takes you a long way," he laughs. "I think spending time with the olive growers in Tuscany, doing lots of tasting sessions and the fact that I love olive oil and have a keen interest in agriculture and production is a good start."

So how about swapping the importing of oil to the making of the oil?

"As idyllic as that sounds in the olive groves in Tuscany, I think it is extraordinary hard work. I do fantasise sometimes about sitting under an olive tree in Italy, writing a definitive guide to olive oil though, but I think that is a very, very long way off," he laughs.

■ **The olive oil tasting is at The Book Hive on Friday at 6pm. For more information about the event see www.thebookhive.co.uk or call 01603 219628.**



FESTIVAL DIARY

Throughout September the EDP Bidwells Norfolk Food Festival will bring together a host of events celebrating the county's best food and producers. Each day EDP2 will bring you a guide to the top activities, talks and tasty treats coming up over the next couple of days.



■ This morning Norfolk fruit and vegetable supplier D and F McCarthy will be welcoming visitors to its distribution centre at Memorial Way in Norwich at 11am. Tasters of top-quality local produce, from Produce In Norfolk members, will be available and a guided tour of the business's new hub will be given. The company began in 1877 in Great Yarmouth and is now being run by the fifth generation of the McCarthy family, with members of the sixth also working there. For more information call 01603 708500, email martin@mccarthys.co.uk or visit www.mccarthys.co.uk.

■ Also today, master butcher Terry Beales will be on hand for sausage-making demonstrations as part of Poultec Training's sausage festival at its base in Mattishall. The butcher promises to create a variety of menus using only Norfolk pork and beef, including some unexpected alternatives to the traditional banger. It takes place at South Green Park Enterprise Centre. For more information call 01362 857100 or email mark.raines@poultec.co.uk.

■ Red-blooded carnivores will relish the opportunity to discover and enjoy locally sourced meats of Norfolk at a special event at Gresham's School tomorrow. Celebrity chef Chris Couborough and Norfolk butcher Arthur Howell will be on hand to educate you in a selection of locally-reared meats, with a cookery demonstration to show you how best to prepare it. The event costs £35 per person, including dinner, dessert and wines, and will be hosted by Gresham's Senior School, Holt. For more information or to see if places are still available, call 01603 763939.



■ Or if seafood is more your thing, try something new tomorrow and learn how to make sushi. SushiShed of Norfolk will be offering sushi lessons for beginners. A Japanese-trained sushi chef will show you how to wrap and roll your own sushi using locally sourced fish. Equipment and drinks are included in the price, and you'll be provided with your very own rolling mat to take home with you. The course costs £25 per person and will take place at Taverham Village Hall. For more information and to book call 07948 627243.

■ There are lots of events happening over the next few days so keep up to date throughout the EDP Bidwells Norfolk Food Festival at www.norfolkfoodfestival.co.uk and in the Eastern Daily Press.



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