

Selling your produce at COUNTRY MARKETS

After our recent articles on funding your poultry and veg gardening hobbies, reader Lucy Hill provides a real 'no risk' solution through the nationwide Country Markets co-operative organisation

DO YOU EVER have craft items or surplus produce that you would like to sell? Alternatively, perhaps you would like a market opportunity for the sale of regular production from your plot or animals? If so, read on to learn a little about the Country Markets organisation.

THE COUNTRY MARKETS ORGANISATION

For over ninety years a network of about three hundred Country Markets across England, Wales and the Channel Islands has been selling home-made baked goods, preserves, garden- and smallholding-grown fruit and vegetables, plants and handmade crafts. Visitors to these markets can buy a wide variety of produce – in fact almost anything local and seasonal that can be produced in a domestic kitchen, garden or on a smallholding; and alongside these home-made goods, many Country Markets also sell locally produced meat, fish and dairy goods, and honey and eggs. The producers pride themselves on keeping the tradition of home-cooking, home-growing and hand-crafting alive, as well as producing the latest fashionable produce.

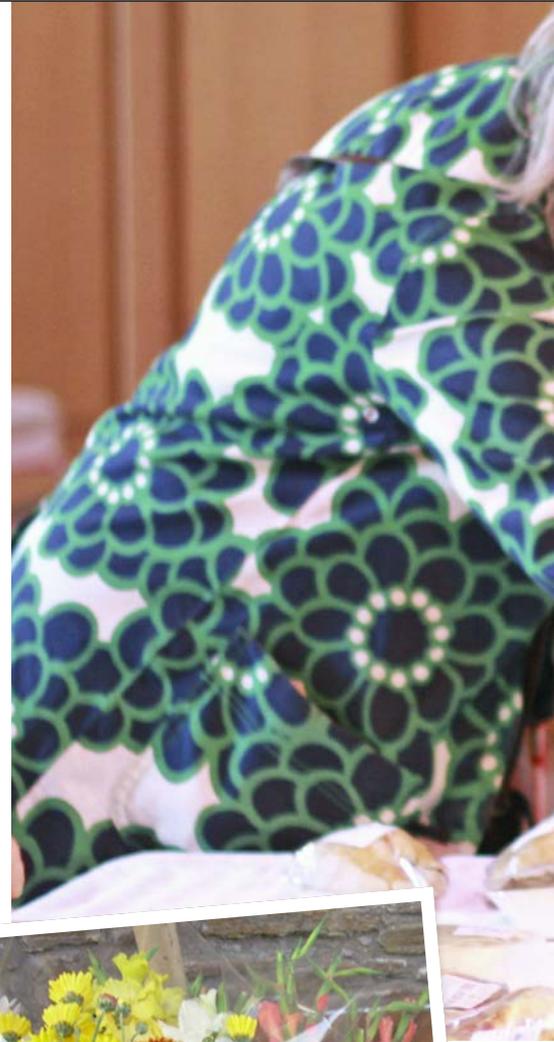
The aim of Country Markets is to encourage the public to discover the diversity and deliciousness of local, British, home-made, home-produced goods, and each market will reflect the locality and interests of its members – both customers and producers pride themselves on the quality of their produce and the friendliness of their markets.

To sell at a market you must be a member of your own regional market society, and you will, in addition, need to apply to be registered as a producer.

Markets sell on a co-operative basis, so all produce of the same type is pooled together on a table; for example, all vegetables are on one table, regardless of who produced them. If you help at a market, you sell the items on the table you are manning, which will include *any* producer's goods, not just your own. In return you will receive the sale value of the goods you sell, less a small commission, which covers the costs of running the market. You will also be covered by the Country Market insurance, so you do not need to arrange your own public liability policy.

THE HISTORY AND LEGALITIES

Country Markets are inextricably linked with the foundation of the Women's Institute (WI) in 1915. The WI was sponsored and supported





THE MANUAL

If you become a producer you must abide by the members' manual, which makes sure that markets do not fall foul of trading standards and food safety rules and regulations and that each market presents a similar 'corporate' face to the public.

The manual contains sections on each type of produce that can be sold, together with easy-to-follow guidance. Topics covered include what can and cannot be sold, labelling requirements, packaging, and standards of production and cleanliness required for items on sale. It also offers guidance on whether a producer must register with any additional official body, for example, if selling eggs or producing cooked items. Any producer wishing to sell food items (but not including garden produce or eggs) must have a Level 2 Award in Food Safety in Catering, which must be renewed every five years.

BECOMING A PRODUCER

If you wish to become a producer for Country Markets you should first ►

by the Agricultural Organisation Society (AOS), a government predecessor of Defra. The AOS was interested in promoting co-operative selling amongst farmers and, as this was wartime, in encouraging better distribution of essential foods.

The first market opened in 1919 using the same principles as today's Country Markets. In 1932 the current regional Market Societies started to become separately registered from the central organisation, and operating procedures were formalised to accommodate this. The National Federation of Women's Institutes became the sponsoring body, and remained so until 1995 when the present Country Markets organisation was established as a self-financing, self-regulating body. Any association with the WI name was finally dropped in 2004.

Country Markets Limited is the umbrella organisation under which there are now over fifty participating regions, each a co-operative social enterprise, and both the umbrella organisation and each regional society is registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act. To be a producer and gain the right to sell at

the market, you must become a member of the society. This is open to anyone over sixteen and costs the princely sum of five pence – yes, that's right, *five pence* – a one-off payment and a real bargain today, based on the typical daily wage of a man in 1919. With inflation the figure would now be between £70 and £80, according to 2013 statistics!





► check if there is a market near to you. Visit www.country-markets.co.uk and enter your postcode in the 'Find a Market' box – this will bring up a map showing the Country Markets in your area. If you click on a particular market you can get details of when it is open, where it is held and contact details. The best thing to do next is visit markets within a small radius of where you live and have a look at what they sell and what their customers are like. Each market has a 'market manager', and if you have a chat with them they can give more details about that particular market, what sells well, what items they are short of, etc. You can even take your produce to more than just one market in your area.

Most markets open once a week for between one and five hours, and some close for winter. Some more established markets have their own website, which give more information, such as the type of goods you can find for sale there.

If you like what you see you can apply to become a member by filling in a simple application form. You have to be approved by the Market Society before officially becoming a member, but that



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Ledbury Country Market

CASE STUDY

Ledbury Country Market is in Herefordshire (a county well known for its local food producers) and is held in a thirteenth-century building in the town centre – a former hospital and one of the oldest buildings in the town. It is open every Friday from 8.30am to 1.00pm, except for Good Friday and for two weeks over the Christmas period. They will be celebrating their 70th anniversary this summer. The market sells vegetables and fruit, eggs, ornamental plants and, in season, vegetable seedlings, as well as various crafts, sweet and savoury baking, jams, chutneys and honey, and locally produced apple juice. You can also enjoy a cup of tea or coffee served with home-made biscuits, a toasted teacake or a weekly special.

There are fifty-seven market members of whom thirty-three regularly produce items. They have one main vegetable producer and some smaller or occasional vegetable and fruit producers. Their main vegetable producer grows specifically for the Country Market, ensuring there is a continuity of supply for customers. Every week there is also a good selection of vegetables, all in season, but growing under cover extends that season. One of their home cooks also uses garden produce in sweet and savoury baked items.

The market now has about two hundred and fifty purchasing customers each week – most loyal regulars bringing repeat business. It has a lovely community, and as a tourist region they also have many holidaymakers and day trippers popping in.



The beauty of the Country Markets is that you do not necessarily have to supply a minimum quantity of things, or on a regular weekly basis, although you can do if you have the time, inclination and the items to sell. You also encounter no financial risk and are paid for anything you sell, with just a small commission deducted so the market can cover costs without you paying anything other than the cost of getting there and the time involved.

Most markets are made up of like-minded producers willing to advise on matters such as growing, food production and smallholding, so a typical market day can be a useful social occasion too. With many people keen on reducing food miles, most customers are also appreciative of finding a regular source of local produce, food and goods, and there is nothing nicer than customers telling you how they enjoyed your cooking, vegetables or whatever it might be!

If you like the idea but there is no market near to you, it may be worth asking your regional or your nearest market if they would be interested in providing assistance to open a new market in your nearest town. Ask yourself if there is a demand in your area for home-produced items that is not being fulfilled. Then ask yourself if there is a suitable venue in a good location – a village hall or community centre – and if there are enough potential producers to fill that venue. If the answer to these questions is “yes”, opening a new market would be an excellent solution. *

is a formality. You may have to do some further preparation before taking things in to sell, such as getting a food safety certificate, purchasing proper packaging, or setting out and completing any required labels.

As a producing member you are expected to help at the market to which you take your produce, but the commitment required usually depends on how many other regular helpers there

are, the type of produce you take, and the frequency with which you bring your goods to sell.

Typical goods a home farmer might consider selling include surplus vegetables or fruit, surplus vegetable seedlings (where sowings have been particularly successful and you can't bear to throw them away), excess eggs, ornamental plants, home-baking, jams or chutneys and hobby craft items.



With Thanks

Thanks to Lucy Hill and Graham Every for the photographs of Ledbury Country Market.