

Farmers' Markets

With Benjamin Dent, chairman
Kent Farmers' Market Association



Farmers' Markets offer shoppers a chance to buy direct from local farmers and producers, so not only will you be buying fresher produce, but also finding variety, quality and value. And since the stallholders are knowledgeable about the goods on sale, they can answer all your questions – including where it's come from and how to get the best from their products.

Buying local food it is not just good for our tastebuds, health and welfare, it supports Kent's economy, too. Shopping at Farmers' Markets contributes to the vitality of high streets and villages, in a way out-of-town centres can't match.

It also helps support the environment. Keeping Kent's farmers in business is the best protection for our countryside, and researchers comparing Farmers' Market produce with the same imported, air-freighted products in supermarkets found that the carbon dioxide emissions were up to 650 times lower.

Farmers' Market of the month



More than 30 local stallholders regularly sell at Rochester Farmers' Market, everything from vegetables and fruit to cakes and bread, preserves, meats, cider, wine and apple juice.

The market is held every third Sunday of the month, from 9am to 1pm in a large car park in Corporation Street, which runs parallel to the High Street. Customers can park, shop and then visit the nearby Castle, Cathedral and Guildhall Museum, as well as restaurants and antique and speciality shops.

Stallholder Stephen Wood runs the Chilli and Herb Farm near Pembury, growing 28 varieties of chillis, sold fresh as well as made into a range of dips, sauces, jams, oils and vinegars.

All his paper and plastic bags are made from recycled products, and customers who bring back empty bottles get 10p off their next purchase. Biodiesel made from used cooking oil runs the vans and heats the polytunnel, so it's all carbon neutral.

Stephen can also be found at Farmers' Markets at Meopham, Tunbridge Wells, Hempstead Valley and Yalding.

Recipe of the month



June is the start of the soft fruit season, especially strawberries and cherries, with gooseberries and rhubarb still available. June also sees the appearance of broad beans, beetroot, carrots, peas, new potatoes, spring onions, spinach and even early courgettes – and a last chance to enjoy asparagus. All sorts of interesting salads leaves will be on sale, as will ready-to-plant herbs and bedding plants. June is also the start of the mackerel and Dover sole season, and the new season's local honey harvest should emerge towards the end of the month.

JUNE

Oak-smoked mackerel risotto

Seasonal recipe supplied by Hugh of Sussex Smokers

- 1 *Sussex oak-smoked mackerel*
- 1 *large onion*
- 2 *cloves garlic*
- 2 *red or green peppers, cubed*
- 400g *tin chopped tomatoes*
- 1 *chicken stock cube or 1 litre chicken stock*
- 1 *cup long grain rice*
- 2 *lemons*
- 2-3 *tbs olive oil*



Method

Heat the oil and fry the onions until soft, add the cubed peppers and garlic, and the mushrooms and courgettes if desired, Fry for two to three minutes. Add the chicken stock to the tomatoes and rice, stir and cover. Simmer for 20 minutes.

While the rice is cooking, carefully bone the mackerel by first splitting the fish down the back, removing the backbone and then picking the bones out by hand.

When the rice is cooked, add the coarsely mashed mackerel and the juice of both lemons. Season to taste. Serve with mushrooms and courgettes

TOP TIP: This dish is even better if left for a day and eaten cold with a salad of mixed leaves.

Every month we will be featuring markets from all over the county on this page. Find your local Farmers' Market under 'Food and Drink' on our website: www.kent-life.co.uk .
Next month: Whitstable Farmers' Market.
Now turn to page 91 for our Rochester town feature.