

Market force

Freshly baked bread, locally sourced fruit and veg, and an old-fashioned sweet shop – all these and more are on offer at the Bridge Farmers' Market, as Denise Smith discovers

Every second and fourth Saturday in the month, throughout the year, the tarmac car park of the Red Lion Inn is transformed with its vibrant market stalls, stripy canopies and bunting.

For three hours, local producers, bakers and makers come together to provide shoppers with a feel-good shopping experience.

Opened in November 2010, the market was a result of market research done by 'Bridge Going Green'. Residents were asked to pick their top three choices from a list of 10 environmental initiatives and a farmers' market was the overwhelming winner.

The market is run by a team of volunteers who meet bi-monthly to discuss and promote it. Mark Esdale is the market manager and deals with the logistics of the market of the day, the setting up of gazebos, co-ordinating pitches, etc. The

invaluable team behind Mark are Philip Wicker (who chairs the group), Christobel Seath, Ian Osterloh, David Finch and Mervyn Gulvin, and marketing manager Pam Dobson.

"We have built up a range of 32-plus stalls, some of which only visit us for special events, others are seasonal, and we have a regular and loyal base of about 16 stallholders," explains Pam Dobson. She points out there are stalls selling woollen products, plants, and even handmade clothes.

"You can buy all your essentials, such as locally grown vegetables and fresh meat, delicious pies and sausages, together with more exotic fare such as Mauritian, Indian and Russian food. The market can also spoil you with delicious treats like home-made desserts and cheesecakes, and traditional home-made preserves."

Kent-based chocolaterie Handmade by Henry has had a stall in Bridge from the start. "We don't have premises so being local, Bridge Market is an ideal place for us," says owner Henry Cullen. "It's very friendly and efficiently organised. We enjoy going there."

There are more than 40 farmers' markets in the county, with over 400 producers and farmers selling their products directly to the public. The organisation encompassing them all, Kent Farmers' Markets, extol their virtues, citing features such as

value for money (cutting out the middle man) and traceable, local produce (knowing where your food comes from). They also highlight factors such as the creation of a sustainable local economy and the generation of a community spirit.

One of the aspects of buying produce from a farmers' market is the fact you are presented with what is in season. Kent Farmers' Markets promote the fact that seasonal food is far better than food that has been 'forced'.

They say fruit and veg that are left to ripen naturally, rather than artificially, have a better flavour and are more nutritious. With the addition of 'local', there is a shorter time between the produce being harvested and arriving in your kitchen.

It won't have flown halfway across the world creating a massive carbon footprint, or

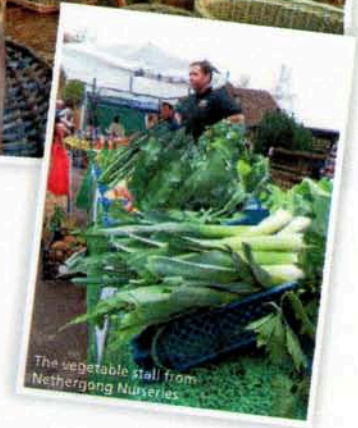
sat in the hold of a ship for weeks ripening on the way.

Farmers' markets provide a different and exciting shopping experience; a place to touch, smell and often taste before you buy. A chance to chat with the baker who kneaded that loaf a few hours ago, or to hear what herbs went into that sausage.

Bridge Farmers' Market invites some of the regions finest makers and craftspeople to join them for special markets such as Easter and Christmas – photographers, basket-makers, etc, all join to showcase the best that East Kent can provide. **L**



Basketry by Warstone Court



The vegetable stall from Nethergoing Nurseries



Breads from slow Breadroom, Whitstable

Other local farmers' markets

- Canterbury: The Goods Shed, Station Road West, daily Tuesday to Sunday (www.thegoodshed.co.uk).
- Herne Bay: Just starting at United Church Hall, High Street, call Vanessa Hill on 07740 586010 for more information.
- Whitstable: St Mary's Hall (AKA Umbrella Centre), Oxford St, 2nd and 4th Saturday every month, 9.30am to 2pm.
- Faversham: Standard Quay, every Sunday, 10am to 2pm.
- For other venues, visit the Kent Farmers' Market website at www.kfma.org.uk

Bridge market factfile

When: Every 2nd and 4th Saturday, 9am to 12noon
Where: The car par, Red Lion Inn, Bridge CT4 5LB
Cost: The pitch fee is currently £12
Contact: www.bridgefarmersmarket.co.uk