

*With more and more attention being paid to the origins of our food, the issue of food miles promises to become as important for many consumers as issues of animal welfare and use of chemicals in the production process. Here in Marcham we are lucky enough to have both organic and free range meat available in the heart of the village - direct from the farm the animals were raised. Clare Holt went along to the Manor Farm to meet **Janey Cumber**, whose shop, *Cumbers of Theale* has just celebrated its first birthday.*

You went partially organic 6 years ago – why?

I'd felt increasingly bothered by the use of sprays, pesticides and fertilisers. When we made the decision, everyone told us it would be very difficult, so we hedged our bets and we're about half and half now. I'd say the animals have responded very well – without wanting to be critical of conventional farmers, we think our animals are happier, less stressed and better fed.

Your cows have a pretty good life don't they?

Yes – we have a Voluntary Milking System at the farm which fits in very well with organic principles, which is all about treating the animals as individuals. The cows decide when they want to be milked and in the summer months can go out to graze when they want.



We are not just a number!

Why did you decide to set up the shop?

I'd felt for some time that farmers weren't connecting with their buying public. As a family business we were all very fed up with just sending our grain, milk and animals away to some anonymous end market. We were looking for a much more local chain of activity, and none of our meat goes more than 30 or 40 miles for slaughter or butchering.

What's the feedback been like?

People have a variety of reasons for coming: I have a lot of continental customers who want to buy high quality meat, people who want to buy organic meat for welfare reasons, or dietary reasons, people who just like to cook with good meat - I suppose the common denominator is that they are prepared to go slightly out of the way to buy their meat rather than get everything at the supermarket.



Lambing time

You were recently the subject of a mini media frenzy weren't you – what happened?

Yes! Neil Rowe, who manages our dairy unit, did an interview on the BBC's radio programme Farming Today, and it snowballed from there – we were on Radio 4, Radio 5, international radio, the Sunday newspapers, local television



The shop on opening day

– eventually the Abingdon Herald even caught up with us! We've just finished filming with a crew from Australia for a programme that's going to be on the Discovery Channel.

How important is it for you that you're part of the village?

We all feel passionately about being part of the community. Anybody in the village is welcome to come over and have a look round the farm and the dairy unit. Part of our ethos here is that we are different from other shops so we will open up especially for our customers outside our regular opening hours, and we're happy to give advice on how to cook what you're buying – it's all part of our service.

What about future plans?

Our first year has exceeded my expectations and we've had a very good Christmas. We're really keen to support other farmers, so we were stocking turkeys from Peachcroft farm in Abingdon. Eventually I would very much like to start stocking fresh meat – at the moment it's all frozen – but I need to persuade my husband Will to give up his workshop!



Nature – tame and wild side by side!

Manor Farm produces organic lamb and beef, free range eggs, pork, bacon and sausages. They also sell ice cream made by Oxford company George and Davis made from their own organic milk. Opening hours are Monday to Saturday, from 10 am to 1pm, other times by arrangement. To contact the shop, call 01865 391 327 or 391 840.