



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

AVONSIDE

PRESS RELEASE

YOUR SHOPPING CHOICES MATTER TO THE REGION

Where you choose to shop can have an impact on your quality of life, the shape of your society and the landscapes which surround you.

And whilst some West Country residents may not have stopped to consider how their shopping choices could have such a far-reaching impact, it is in this very region – renowned for its farming, food and magnificent working landscapes – that making the wrong choice could deliver the hardest blow.

This message was heard at the AGM of countryside campaigners, CPRE (Avonside Branch), held last Saturday (24 November) in Cleeve Village Hall, North Somerset. Here, members learned how their choice of food and retailer had an impact on local economies; social networks; regional landscapes; the conservation of energy and resources; and the long-term security of food supply.

“It is not surprising that our food culture is closely linked with the landscape,” said speaker Angie Coombs from Taste of the West, the food group which champions the region’s exceptional food identity.

“Just as celebrated artists have used their artistic passion and the canvas to convey the beauty of the landscape over the centuries, so our producers have used the landscape as well as their passion for food production to convey a story of quality and integrity.”

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The Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

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Remarking on the profusion of food staples from this region alongside a growing tide of newly launched, value-added products supported by Taste of the West, she observed: “A study into the shopping habits of more than 5,000 shoppers has found that 57% actively try to buy locally sourced food.”

This gives it a higher appeal than any other ethical alternative, including Fair Trade at 33% and organic at 17%.

“It is interesting that one of the most significant benefits of shopping at a local farmers market or in a village shop is the interaction, the conversation and the opportunity to explore and understand the provenance of food,” she continued. “But it worries me enormously that we are leaning towards more and more isolation in the way we live and are becoming dependent on the internet and other technology. At this rate, it won’t be long before we forget to go out altogether. What sort of example is this to our children?”

And whilst also deploring the extent to which the supermarket has been allowed to dominate - for its destruction of our environment and agricultural heritage and its virtual eradication of local community retail outlets – she said our hunger for consumerism had brought about its rise.

“But we are beginning to see a change in attitude and culture,” she believed. “The Great British public is showing signs of regret and a willingness to change, and the first demonstration of this is in the renewed and invigorated interest in local foods.”

The meeting’s second speaker, Graeme Willis from CPRE took up the theme, and explained how documenting a ‘local food web’ would reveal the level of interdependency between local farmers, processors and retailers, and the overall health of the local economy.

Citing the market town of Saxmundham in Suffolk, where a retail survey had revealed the devastation a planned Tesco would have wreaked on the local economy, he said: “We found that 67 of 81 shops thought they would close if the superstore went ahead, affecting 295 local food suppliers and 548 shop employees.”

On the back of a successful outcome of this much-publicised campaign, he explained how CPRE would be taking the local food message out to the wider community as part of a collaborative project to map local food webs.

“Our objective is to reconnect people and land by increasing access to fresh, healthy and local food with clear and traceable origins,” he said.

His message has a particular resonance here in the West Country, where the culture is steeped in centuries-old traditions of food and drink production, the preservation of which stands to benefit us all.

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS

CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, is a charity which promotes the beauty, tranquility and diversity of rural England. It advocates positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside. Founded in 1926, it has 60,000 supporters and a branch in every county. President: Bill Bryson. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION on this or other matters discussed at the AGM, please contact Avonside CPRE chairman, Hilary Severn on 01454 412027 or hilary.severn@btinternet.com. For the Avonside website, visit cpreavonside.org.uk.

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