

Small firms joining the big boys



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SMALL-SCALE producers are being given the chance to showcase their products on some of the biggest shelves around.

Asda superstores, which is owned by American giant Walmart, has launched a new scheme to help little Lincolnshire producers sell their goods.

From this week, Asda in North Hykeham will stock more than 70 county classics including sage sausages, chine and plum bread - all made by comparatively tiny county companies. And Asda has employed a Lincolnshire farmer to act as food broker.

In recent years, traditional

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supermarkets have mutated into American-style hypermarkets. Huge economies of scale and bulk buying from reliable sources means the price of goods can be kept down.

Many retail and town planning experts have bemoaned this approach as the death of the small shop and the high street as we know it.

They say small retailers cannot possibly compete in terms of price and small producers get ignored.

But now Asda, largely in response to massive public demand, has made an attempt

turn the tide and sell county goods to county people.

Farmer Paul Davey is the firm's new food broker.

Trading under the name Ideal Lincs, he has grown spuds and onions on his farm, situated between Market Rasen and Louth, for more than 30 years.

Mr Davey explained how the



FRESH FROM SUPERMARKET: Peter Cotter shopping for his fruit and vegetables at his local big name store.

system worked. "Basically we go out and pick up goods from producers all over Lincolnshire, or they deliver to us.

"We sort out these goods into large pallet deliveries so that Asda can make one trip to one location once a week and yet still benefit from having goods from more than 20 small producers.

"It is a simple but brilliant idea

and God knows why no-one has come up with it before.

"In the past it has just been too complicated for small producers to get involved with giants like Asda. There are loads of issues to consider: There's labelling, bar coding, having advanced stock control computer systems and simply being able to produce enough to meet demand.

"This simplifies everything. These people can relax and concentrate on what they do best - producing top-notch Lincolnshire products.

"Hopefully this will give farmers, bakers and butchers the confidence to get involved."

"This Lincolnshire "food hub" is the eighth Asda has set up across the country.

The firm's PR manager Sian Horner said its aim was to get more local products in its stores.

"There are wonderful Lincolnshire products out there and we are delighted that we will now be able to offer local people what they want," she said.

Chris Pack, who runs Fenside Cottage Bakeries Ltd in Swingham, said: "This is great news for people like us.

"We've got nine products including flapjacks and shortbread in the Lincolnshire

stores. For some of the really small producers this has given them an opportunity they just wouldn't have had before."

And mum-of-two Claire Thompson (36), of Moorland Avenue, Lincoln, said the idea was brilliant. "I think this is great for Lincolnshire," she said.

"I want to try to buy local but supermarkets are so cheap and I can't afford not to shop there. Now I can also support county producers."

Should more supermarkets take up this idea? Write to Your View, Lincolnshire Echo, Brayford Wharf East, Lincoln, LN5 7AT. Or e-mail yourview@lincolnshireecho.co.uk

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BROKER: Farmer Paul Davey. Picture: Anna Draper. Picture reference: 6-4119-23.

Where there's quality and certainly variety

LINCOLNSHIRE is well known for top quality produce but it also has a bit of a reputation for some pretty weird innovations.

■ Last year Roger Welbrey, of Holme Farm, Kirton, near Boston, started growing purple sprouts.

He set aside an acre of land

for the oddly-coloured vegetables with the aim of growing 10 tonnes in time for Christmas.

The sprouts were an original variety which had fallen out of fashion in recent times.

■ Last year also saw the arrival of smiley potatoes in Lincolnshire.

Created by Branston Potatoes, based south of Lincoln, the red skinned spuds had cream smile shaped markings on them. The variety became the first potatoes in Tesco's exclusive Finest range. At the time they had never been sold commercially in Britain before.