

# Letter from Farrington's



Negativity is catching, says PAUL CASTLE of Farrington's Farm Shop, so accentuate the positive – or you could infect your shoppers

We all know things have been tough over the past year. Doom and gloom about the economy, prices on the increase and a good old dose of VAT can all add to the 'start the day grumpy' mentality.

But we need to shake ourselves out of that. Customers often end up feeling the way we feel: mirroring our body language, mimicking our tone of voice and potentially replicating our negative mind-set.

If you don't feel great about your business, neither will your staff, and what hope do you have then of a positive relationship with customers?

We've been using a mystery shopper for nearly a year ([www.shopperanonymous.co.uk](http://www.shopperanonymous.co.uk)) and we've made 'exceptional service' the cornerstone of our strategy. It hasn't been easy. I spent an age – and a not inconsiderable sum – revamping the signage to highlight parking, toilets, opening hours. It all made sense to me. But it was down to earth with a bump when the mystery shopper was confused and still

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couldn't find anything – even the entrance to the shop. We tried again, and we finally cracked it.

Being told that staff, seemingly preoccupied with work, were ignoring customers was also a hard pill to swallow. Customers were just wallpaper back then.

But what a difference a mystery shopper has made. Yes, we reward staff for exceptional service. Yes, we make a fuss of the team member who got it 'just right'. And yes, we coach others to improve when they nearly hit the mark. But the big thing is, we are taking a stand by doing positive things every day.

Each month I invite six to eight customers for tea in the café. We talk through various topics, from range and layout through to packaging quality and service. It amazes me every time just how many 'quick wins' can be implemented – simple things we all walk past every day, the "it has always been like that" stuff.

I think we had the monopoly on cobwebs, never really looking up to see the dust around the air conditioning or down to see the marks around the floor edges. We thought the information we provided on how to cook our ready meals was just fine, and it was great – if you can read 8 point type.

We're all guilty of putting jobs off, but when you ask your customers what needs doing they don't pull their punches. If they tell you, 'Get it sorted – and fast!' you had better listen.

• Paul Castle is business manager at Farrington's Farm Shop near Bristol, named British Local Food Champion in the 2011 Countryside Alliance Awards

## news

### Fulham's Union Market to face competition from Whole Foods

Upmarket supermarket chain Whole Foods Markets looks set to go head to head with struggling Union Market in London after signing a deal to open a new 22,000 sq ft store in Fulham near year.

US-owned Whole Foods, which has a flagship store in Kensington and four smaller outlets in the capital, has signed a pre-lease arrangement to take over a 22,000 sq ft site in the Fulham Broadway area, believed to be just a short walk from Union Market.

Whole Foods has also signed leases on sites in Richmond, Surrey, and Glasgow.

Jeff Turnas, Whole Foods Market UK regional president, has revealed that the flagship Kensington store has finally made a profit after several years of heavy losses, while its US parent



Whole Foods: moving into profit in the UK

reported a 12% increase in total second-quarter sales to \$2.4bn last month. Announcing the new stores in Richmond and Glasgow, Turnas said: "It's always been our ambition to open stores the length and breadth of the UK."

### Pickering's Feast will be 'general store with a 21st century twist'



Feast-co-founder Marion Buchanan and chef Tom Marley, with rare breed cockerels, at the shop's opening

Pickering in North Yorkshire has a new speciality food store which will focus heavily on local food and drink. The people behind Feast are Victor and Marion Buchanan, who run the town's The White Swan Inn, which has been in the family for 30 years.

They say the new shop is the result of months of research – including focus groups held in the pub – into what the local community wants from an independent retailer.

The 1,200 sq foot shop will feature a cheese counter, small charcuterie counter and chiller for fresh meat from North Yorkshire's Taste Tradition, which specialises in rare breeds. Feast will also sell

ready-meals made by The White Swan Inn chef Tom Marley, and will include a 20-seater café.

Marion Buchanan said: "We're based in the Market Place in Pickering, and I really want to hark back to the days when people really cherished and valued local retailers.

"The supermarkets really take the heart out of small market towns like this. While they offer convenience and cheap food, they don't really feed the soul of a town. I'm aiming to be a general store with a 21st century twist. The focus is on local, exceptional cheeses, local bread and locally reared, rare breed meats."