

## FOOD AND FARMING with Julie Blackburn

# All you ever want to know about charcuterie at Close Leece event

**W**ho knew that there were so many different types of charcuterie? Close Leece Farm's tasting event offered us no fewer than 21 examples of dry cured meat at its finest. It was definitely a night for the enthusiast.

Preserving meat with salt drying was a process being used 5,000 years in the Stone Age and it's still around. In fact it's more popular than ever with countries around the world producing their own versions, adding herbs and spices like fennel and paprika to give each region's product its own distinctive flavour.

We started the tasting with Manx Kielbasa, Close Leece's take on a traditional dry cured Polish sausage made from the farm's own Tamworth pork. Like all of the Close Leece charcuterie it's made in a purpose-built building on the farm by Roger Kowalewski.

Roger has taken over the charcuterie making from owner Steven Ridgway who is now fully occupied running the farm shop and cafe.

Steven originally began experimenting with making chorizo on the farm in 2012, using pork from the Tamworth pigs his wife Tracey was raising. The two of them had been interested in charcuterie for years, importing it from producers all over Europe and discovering just how different the traditionally made products tasted compared with most of the mass produced supermarket charcuterie.

Steven said: 'We decided to have a go at making it ourselves - how hard could it be?'

'So we read a few recipes on the internet and tried out our first batch. It was a disaster: from the smell alone it was clear that what we had made



A charcuterie tasting event at Close Leece Farm in Patrick: Gabor Domonkos and Steven Ridgway with plates of salami

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wasn't edible!'

It took three years and 32 failed attempts before they finally made a chorizo they considered to be reasonable in flavour and safe to eat. By batch 38 they knew they had something they were really enjoying eating and that they could start selling to the general public. They were even confident enough to enter it into the Great Taste Awards in the UK and, to their surprise, it won a Two Star award.

The following year their chorizo won the ultimate, a Three Star award. It was the only dry cured sausage to achieve this, against the best from top producers in the UK

and Europe. Now, in addition to the Kielbasa and three types of chorizo, they also make Manx Nduja, a soft spreadable charcuterie based on a traditional Calabrian product, coppa, pancetta and two types of salami, one of them made from Loaghtan lamb.

We got to try them all, along with several different types of terrine made from Tamworth ham. For comparison we also sampled charcuterie in different styles from other producers, ranging from Tesco Finest to an artisan producer in Suffolk and Spanish Iberico Bellota Chorizo, considered by many to be the finest in the world.

We also learned how to evaluate charcuterie. One of the key things to look out for is mould, as Steven explained: 'Ideally you want to see white mould on the outside. This isn't a problem: it's a form of penicillin mould similar to that used on soft cheeses like camembert.'

'It helps protect the product during drying and improves the flavour. In some mass produced charcuterie the original mould is stripped with harsh chemicals then replaced with fake mould, rice flour or something similar.'

Other key differentiators that help to determine a re-

ally good charcuterie product include tang: it shouldn't have too much sourness.

Steven said: 'Cheap, mass produced charcuterie is often made with quite a lot of tang because this allows it to be produced quickly. We think the best charcuterie has only modest acidity.'

It should also have distinct areas of fat and meat, rather than them both smeared together and it should be soft in texture, not hard and rubbery. The variance in these characteristics was clearly demonstrated on the products we tried from the different producers but the most obvious difference we noticed was in the flavour of the meat and the fat and all the Close Leece farm charcuterie scored very well on this, with a flavour-some meat and sweet, delicious fat.

We also got to appreciate some of the different flavours that come from the herbs and spices which are added to the products, like fennel and garlic. One of the most obvious flavourings of course are chillies for a really spicy kick and as the evening wore on the heat was definitely building. The Manx Nduja contains Italian Peperoncino chillies and Spanish Pimenton paprika. With the Manx Chorizo Pi-



Enthusiasts enjoy trying the different types and flavours of charcuterie

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quante the heat starts slowly then hits but the outright winner in the spice stakes was the Manx Thermonuclear Chorizo.

This was billed as 'only for the brave' and they weren't joking. It contains the Reaper pepper, allegedly the hottest in the world, and there is nothing subtle about it: the smallest taste leaves you with streaming eyes and a fiery throat.

As to favourites it's all down

to personal taste but on our table the Kielbasa, Lamb Salami and Manx Chorizo all scored highly for Close Leece, as did the Spanish Iberico Bellota Chorizo.

It was a great introduction to a whole world of complex flavours that reflect not just a food product but each region that they come from - and now Close Leece Farm has very definitely put the Isle of Man on the world map when it comes to charcuterie.



Charcuterie maker Roger Kowalewski with a plate of Manx coppa and Manx pancetta

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