

From Andy Link, chef/proprietor at The Riverside Inn, Aymestrey

Spring is now upon us in earnest, and the bird song in the trees and hedgerows is a real pleasure.

As the season changes, so do our menus. Spring is an exciting time for us as we meet new producers and catch up with some of our favourite smallholders. Creating delicious new dishes is another enjoyable challenge - although finding time for this is increasingly difficult the busier the pub becomes.

In chatting to people who run our fantastic artisan businesses, I cannot help but notice the anxiety they feel at the challenges that lie ahead.

Although I try and avoid touching on anything relating to politics (an old boss once said, when you run a pub, you must try a sit on every fence, when it comes to opinions), it's impossible to ignore the effect the uncertainty of our future is having on small businesses.

For example, some lamb suppliers are worried about potentially having to cull some of their flocks as they heavily export to the EU. With trading restrictions or a no deal they fear that this will result in difficulty in maintaining this supply. Similarly, some fruit and vegetable producers are worried about meeting the seasonal labour demand.

With so many people who feel passionate about their businesses facing uncertainty and potential difficulty, they need us more than ever.

So that these people - who make Herefordshire and neighbouring counties distinct, interesting and vibrant - survive, we need to buy

their produce regularly. Local drinks, locally reared meat, and our spectacular apples and pears, and fresh vegetables should be on our plates instead of food imported from faraway places, with its attendant food miles.

Make the most of the lovely spring weather and get out to farm shops, the butcher in your town or village, and check out the goodies in your deli, tuck into artisan bread, beer and cheese.

If you're not sure where to go, websites such as Big Barn (www.bigbarn.co.uk) will highlight the producers near you.

Once you've got a taste for local, seasonal, organic food, you'll never want bland, plastic-wrapped supermarket products again.