

# Baristas in the cowshed

Consumers really are interested in the provenance of everything that goes into their coffee - and what's more, they trust the expertise of a barista to explain it to them. This was the interesting conclusion of a meeting last month.

The Yeo Valley milk brand, major sponsor of this year's Bath Coffee Festival, began its work for the event with an imaginative move - it reached out to the café world, and invited a collection of baristas right into its cowshed, to debate the question of what baristas really want from their milk.

Marketing director Ben Cull was ready to confess to them his lack of informed coffee-making knowledge, and told the baristas that indeed, many of the public know nothing about milk: "we had a school group visiting, and we were very politely asked if we could avoid the children seeing any blood, and any cows being killed. When we realised what they were getting at, we said 'don't worry, we milk them a different way here!'"

It has long been known that milk 'moves' - it is not a constant product, and it changes with the seasons. Yeo Valley understands the deliberate changing of mineral balance in the soil, which goes through to the cows as forage and silage, and changes the quality of milk; typically, feed is controlled by sowing white clover, which uses the power of the sun to naturally fix nitrogen into the soil. Milk is, says Ben Cull, the original solar-powered industry!

But what Yeo Valley wanted to know is: do baristas want a milk that moves and changes, or a static product that is absolutely predictable?

Among the visiting baristas, Max Colonna-Dashwood of Colonna and Small in Bath told the dairy man that varying characteristics are no problem - the more important thing is for a café to explain to a customer why it uses a certain milk. "If you tell a customer that you have a reason for the milk you use, then they're happy. They respect the fact that you have a reason for your choice." Do this, agreed Paul Whitehead of the Jika-Jika café, and the customer will accept it and be interested in your advice.

The debate led to a practical demonstration, some of which came as a surprise to the dairy. Appreciation of the effect that different milks had on various coffees, was something dairies have not widely considered.

"We were interested that the baristas like to advise what the consumer should drink, rather than asking them what they want," remarked Ben Cull. "It



was also interesting to hear that their customers were interested in their recommendation."

This prompted the idea of promoting the baristas' choices with point-of-sale material saying something like: 'this café has chosen to use Yeo Valley milk, which complements our choice of coffees and teas. Please ask the barista for details'.

Enthusiastic agreement to this came from both Ben Cull and John Taylerson, the maker of Malmesbury

flavoured syrups. Taylerson was, in a previous life, a dairy man, and now promotes regional foods in general.

"Max makes the point that if you explain why you use a milk, the customer will go along with it. We really should do more of this!"

"Explaining the provenance of all our products is an essential part of differentiating ourselves from the big boys, and I would be a big supporter of point-of-sale materials that explain where and what is in a café's coffee. I would



"We now feel we know about the things a barista looks for" - Ben Cull

Meanwhile, baristas Paul Whitehead (left) and Max Colonna-Dashwood compare coffees made with different milks

be very keen to team up with other companies so that we can promote and explain the differences.

"The where, when and why of the milk, and any other ingredient, is a terrific thing to put before the customer. More detail for the consumer equates to less risk of ubiquity and commodity!"

Hearing such ideas from the trade helped a lot, said Ben Cull: "We now feel we can talk to café operators with a greater knowledge, now we know more about what they look for."

## International flavours on show at Bath

The second Bath Coffee Festival runs this month, on the weekend of 21st-22nd May, and after last year's event drew an enormous public attendance of around seven thousand, this year's show has a more impressive number of trade exhibitors.

An international 'world of coffee' is one festival theme, and there are indeed several exhibitors at Bath with roots on the other side of the world - Extract Coffee Roasters have a new Zealand background, while Green Cauldron Coffee grows its own beans on a 100-acre farm in Byron Bay, Australia. Romwa is a coffee brand from north-east Thailand, an origin which is well-known, but still a fraction unusual.

Meanwhile, Sea Island from London have whole business devoted to the exotic, unusual, and rare coffees of the world - it is at this stand that you may well find origins that you have never heard of before. There may even be a sample of the King of Tonga's royal coffee.

Coffee Cavern is a supplier which has said that it wants to support a charity with every sale it makes, and donates to Coffee Kids, who are themselves represented at Bath. This is the cause founded by an American green-bean buyer, who was so horrified at what he found on his first trip to origin that he immediately turned to



Tea from a samovar by Ronnefeldt

work on behalf of coffee farmers and their families. Another exhibitor, Cool Earth, has a similar aim - for every jar of coffee sold, it seeks to preserve one rainforest tree from logging.

At Cream Supplies, there will be the opportunity to see the Twist in action - this is the hand-held, gas-powered one-shot espresso machine that works with a flick of the wrist. Expect to find some 'red espresso' roibos being brewed. Going along with the new school of thought that says roibos tastes even better with added flavouring, we expect to see some interaction with the local flavouring company, Taylerson's syrups!

(Another exhibitor, Shelton's, is a flavouring company with a difference - it has pre-flavoured coffees sold in cube form).

Rather closer to home, Martin Carwardine is the family coffee-roast-

ing business from the nearby Mendip hills. This company also makes unique Somerset Teabags.

Lavazza will also be in Bath, showing its A Modo Mio capsule machine.

Tea is well represented and this magazine's local tea company will be on show - Tregothnan, the Cornish estate where the UK's only commercial tea estate was born of tea plants brought home by landed gentry explorers hundreds of years ago. The Chateau Rouge company says it has a similar mission to revive that same era of exploration and discovery, by bringing in a range of unusual premium teas, and we are looking forward to the one from the only tea estate in the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim. It is said to be similar to the neighbouring Darjeeling, although from much younger bushes.

The Cup of Tea company distributes Ronnefeldt, the extremely classy tea found in five-star hotels all round Europe. The company has a fascinating range of accessories, and we are promised the sight of a real operational samovar.

There's going to be a lot of chai at this year's event. "If you're looking for a sweet and healthy alternative to hot chocolate, you'll find everything you want in a luxurious cup of chai," says the Chai Chai company. Look in particular for their 'feisty, scrumptious' Masala Chai.

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