

About *La Chasse*

In 1989 we (Catherine and Charlie) started West Country Game, which went on to become West Country Fine Foods, which, during the 1990s was an excellent speciality supplier before its demise in 2009.

Using our knowledge and experience from 30 years at the coal face, La Chasse began life wanting to provide, fantastic service, fair prices and a more interesting range of products than just the norm. As a relatively small supplier La Chasse cannot compete with the large companies on the price of baked beans or long grain rice, so our ethos is always to find something different, a different angle, something produced by a local artisan producer to set ourselves apart. With us, the owners at the helm, we feel we can offer a fantastic personalised service, a wee bit more nimble than some of the larger companies. For example if River Cottage want squirrel for their menu, they get them next day, Somerset ewes curd for Limewood - no problem Chef. Our size and our experience, make it easier to think outside the box and offer quirky and funky products to get our customers attention.

Our patch includes the counties of Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Devon, Somerset and Dorset and London. [Click here](#) for our delivery area.

There are loads of producers within these counties who we can collect from on a daily basis and while local products dominate our thinking Cocoa doesn't yet grow in Wiltshire, and there aint no Grouse in Dorset. Producers sometimes find us, and use our wheels to find them new outlets, Chefs sometimes suggest a new product and can we get it for them, and sometimes we get off our backsides and discover something new or quirky that might just work in a kitchen.

We sell a lot of Venison from Exmoor, the Red Deer there have a much better diet than their Scottish cousins and provide a bigger carcass ideal for the table in all manner of cuts. The stalkers take the beasts to our Game Dealer in Crediton, who butchers them into saddles, haunch, steaks, dice and mince. The venison is delivered to us weekly, we use between 12 and 20 carcasses a week, and these make their way to customers such as The Pony and Trap, Limewood and Chewton Glen in our Chilled van fleet.



I use the word fleet as it sounds posh and grown up but we only have nine, or eight and a half as Catherine always says, even that number is a logistical headache to manage with breakdowns, bumps and the inevitable scrapes you get driving 300miles a day down scenic lanes. What state the transport manager at A David is like at the end of his day, coping with well over 100 vans I can only imagine, but whisky can help! Another headache we share with our competitors is our stock, very little business is done to order, so we all hold stock of a myriad of products, hoping to sell them, not too painful with 'dry stores', but the guessing game gets a bit more interesting with short dated produce such as baby leaf.

I guess the skill is having just enough but not too much, anyone got any ideas?! As with our customers we can only predict what level of business we will do each day, and no one, wants to be sitting on too much stock or to have too many shortages.

One of the principal changes over the 30 years has been the very welcome growth in the number and quality of British artisan producers and growers. In 1989 most chefs were classically French trained, this allied to the fact that only the Chinese and French seemed capable of growing Ducks, the Italians, the French and the Spaniards had charcuterie sorted and of course all cheese boards boasted Camembert, Epoisse and Pont L'Eveque from those Frenchies again. Then came Goosenargh Duck, Gressingham duck and now Creedy Carver Ducks, a wealth of fantastic British charcuterie and British cheeses now boss the cheeseboard of most of our best restaurants, chefs are now far more home-grown and now lean towards these fantastic producers, great for the customers and great for Britain.

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This leads me on nicely to the other bane of all suppliers' lives, the bloody answer-phone! Why do we have them? Why does one little machine cause so much trouble, so much cost, so much heartache, so many tears? We have them to 'improve' our service levels that's why, about 75% of our business comes in on 'The Machine' at night its terrifying not electrifying because so much can go wrong. An order for a bag of chocolate at 11pm is not uncommon, from someone called Pete. Pete who,? where,? why? what chocolate might that be exactly? We have exactly 32 options; milk, dark, white, extra bitter, remember this order is relayed to one of our fantastic night staff, who have never met Pete and if they did, might not be responsible for their actions, we can't phone back 'cos its now 1am, and when inevitably, the wrong item has been picked and delivered the next day, why have you sent me the wrong chocolate again you imbeciles. I bet all fellow suppliers would really like to give the 'Machine' the Basil Fawlty treatment.

All local products are not great, amateur enthusiasm, love even, for his piggies or cavalo nero, doesn't always translate into product quality, which is always tough to explain. I reckon chefs have become more understanding of supply issues too, probably because they can now get produce direct from the grower and therefore hear first-hand from the farmer about the issues they face with the weather, seasons etc. Chefs have, I think, got a lot less scary than 30 years ago, however that might just me getting scarier myself!



La Chasse employs some 30 local staff, all stars, and along with our Suppliers, the most important cogs in our wheels.

Brexit which for 2 happy weeks seemed to have had little or no effect on our company, has now hit home with a vengeance, resulting in some thumping price hikes, which is challenging to say the least. Some price increases have followed the pounds fall, however some products such as sugar and dairy seem to exist on some parallel universe controlled by Blofeld. The only increase I fully understand thanks to my illustrious tutors at Centaur Foods in Bristol, is that of vanilla. Basically there isn't any and if a stray pod should land at your feet its worth its weight in gold. Random statistic.... Did you know all vanilla pods have to be pollinated by human hands, takes 3 years to grow and is from the orchid family.



A cheese on the menu in Bath is very likely to have been made within 5 miles of the city. Duck on the menu at The Chewton Glen, will have travelled from Crediton in Devon and charcuterie on the menus in Dorset will have come from Dorset itself. Leaf salad is grown in Bristol by the Severn Project. How good does all that sound for our industry? We are really proud to be able to supply the wheels to help make this happen and cut down the food miles within our sphere of influence.

As far as food trends and other chef stuff goes, far more emphasis is rightly put on provenance, with local best if possible. Consistency is very important to a chef. British lamb is fantastic, I know I used to farm sheep on the fells of Cumbria, but the sizes of cut can vary enormously with the season and the breed, so a chef wanting rumps for example has to work hard to get his portion control right, also a local farmer supplying his local pub with his own beef or lamb can find supply drying up at the crucial moment for the chef.



Back to Brexit, maybe the days of cheap imported foods from Europe are on their way out and as a result it's a big opportunity for Britain and its many localised growers and producers to further fill that gap, with better products. One more plus from Brexit should be the increase in tourism and therefore eating out in Britain and hopefully the south west in particular.

Thank you for choosing *La Chasse*
We very much appreciate your business