

### Apples for schools

When I was at school in Cahir in the 1970's and 80's, the apples grown by my parents on our farm were very popular with my classmates. From time to time I would bring a few extra to school, and swap them for sweets that other children might have. Given the amount of apples I had access to, this was a no-lose deal for me.

And during primary school, and then on into secondary, both my late brother Henry and I would bring apples to school at Hallowe'en, to be given to every classmate. Good to keep us out of trouble and good advertising too I suppose. I must admit that I felt sorry for the teachers who would have to clean the blackboard of apple stains, after we had a fight with the left-over cores. You can never trust boys with ¾ eaten apples I suppose.

When I finished in secondary school in 1986 I left home to go to college, and eventually came back again. Growing apples, selling apples and so on. Around 1994, I thought it would be a good idea to revive the tradition of sending apples to school, but to do it in a more meaningful way.

So with the help of an old schoolfriend (Mr. Horan) who was by then a teacher, I got a list of local school principals together, and wrote to them, asking if they would like free apples for every child in the school. No strings attached, but someone from the school would have to collect them. Each year since then, between 5000 and 6000 apples are carefully picked and packed here the week before Hallowe'en, and then collected by the schools for presentation to the children (and teachers too – we still know that teachers

love to get apples). So this year I thought, how many apples is that? It's hard to be exact, but when I did the calculations it comes to about 125,000 free apples since we began.

And I was also thinking, how many trees worth is that. Well each year I have given the schools Elstar apples, and a typical Elstar tree gives 100 apples per year, so 6000 apples is the fruit of 60 trees. And the trees we pick the apples from are the same ones each year, planted by my dad and myself in 1990, and still growing well and producing delicious fruits. It's a wonder what can be achieved by 60 small apple trees. 125,000 free apples for primary schools in Tipperary.

### Competition for kids (based on this page):

Q.1 About how many apples does one of our trees produce each year?

Q.2 Why would we give apples to teachers as well as to pupils?

Q.3 What is your favorite type of apple?

When it is ready send it to:

Christmas competition,

The Apple Farm, Moorstown, Cahir, Co. Tipp.

Prize is a €20 Easons voucher for three correct entries selected at random.

Closing date Jan 19<sup>th</sup> 2018.

The Tipperary Breakfast:  
Sourdough toast served with warm apple and blackberry compote served with natural yoghurt with grilled bacon & black and white pudding alongside, served with local apple juice. Also used in the preparation are local Emerald Oils rape oil, and locally produced honey.

Welcome to our winter newsletter. What an eventful year we have had. And that's before we even think about the President of the United States. But I won't venture to comment any more on that. So a happy Christmas to all our customers and friends. Many thanks for your support this year and through the years. We look forward to seeing you in 2018.

### The Tipperary Food Producers Network

People in Tipperary (and indeed across Ireland) who are interested in what is going on with food will be well aware of The Tipperary Food Producers Network.

Last year, as the previous chair, Pat Whelan of James Whelan butchers stepped down, I was honoured to be selected as the new chairperson. Little did I know what I was letting myself in for. Somehow I think Pat knew though, even though he said it would be "no bother" and take "no time at all".

So there's been plenty hard work for the past 18 months, but it's also been very rewarding.

Towards the end of Pat's stewardship, the Great Taste Awards came to Tipperary. What a sensational event that was, with judging (by a highly respected international panel) of all foods entered in the awards taking place in the Minella Hotel in Clonmel, and scores of highly commended Tipperary products being awarded, along with foods produced throughout Ireland.

Well after that we set about designing a "Tipperary Breakfast", to be offered as a modern and healthy alternative to "The Full Irish". Who else but Michelin Star chef Kevin Thornton, with his roots in Cashel, could be commissioned to design and deliver the breakfast. And so on a cold February morning in Rockwell college, we launched the

Tipperary Breakfast to the people in Tipperary who serve breakfasts (Hotels, B&Bs and Country Houses, and some Cafés and Restaurants). What Kevin Thornton had prepared was an astounding success, but not only that, he then demonstrated how it could be prepared on what can only be described as a camping stove, and the skill and precision was a treat to behold (and eat). The plan of the network next is to recruit some champions for the breakfast within the county, and then to expand it across the country. We see a time soon when, right across Ireland, the Tipperary Breakfast will be offered on menus (see back page for the menu).

But that was not all we accomplished in 2017. Next on the agenda was our Tipperary Book. We wanted to make it stand out from the many other food books that are now so common (often nice recipes or nice pictures), so we decided to aim it at children. The talented Fiona Dillon was eventually chosen, and she wrote a book incorporating all the members of the network – a story of a group of children travelling Tipperary to collect foods for a huge banquet.

The book was printed just a few days ago, and it is just wonderful – a testament to the work put in by the committee, by Carey-Ann Lordan and Clare from RedPR, who helped co-ordinate the members, and by Mairead Maher English of the Tipperary Local Enterprise Office, and of course Fiona and Derry.

The book is aimed at children from 4<sup>th</sup> class to 6<sup>th</sup> class, or a bit younger if they are advanced readers. Responses from the libraries (who will stock it and even do readings from it) are great, as they are from the parents and children who have already read it.

And we're not finished at that. We want the book to be used as an educational resource too,

so in 2018 we are planning an educational programme around the book, with resources such as a workbook for teachers, and an ambassador system with school visits from food producers to go along with the project. Keep your eyes peeled as you will see more about this soon!

And what other plans do we have? Well in 2018 we want to design a food trail around Tipperary food producers, for locals and tourists alike. We plan to work with Tipp Tourism and to bring this into being for the 2019 tourism season.

#### **A new product**

We always get excited when thinking about new things to do with our apples. This time we've gone in a different direction, thanks partly to the inspiration of Kevin Thornton, who made "dried" apple rings to serve as part of The Tipperary Breakfast, and partly due to the enthusiasm of my youngest child, David, to involve himself in the farm.

And so with the enthusiastic encouragement of David (now 13), who accompanied me to Germany late last year to look at apple drying equipment, we have just launched our "apple rings".

The rings are made by using either peeled or unpeeled apples, by slicing them into 4mm thick rings, and taking out the cores.

They are then dried overnight in a "dry air" cabinet at about 35 deg C, which causes the apples to lose about ¾ of their moisture content.

When ready they are not completely dry or crispy, but have a lovely texture, taste sweet with a little sharpness, and of course have the goodness of eating fresh apples because they are not cooked, and contain all the nutrients, vitamins, fibre and so forth that you get in apples.

Because the apples shrink in the drying process, it takes 4 apples to make a standard pack – as someone said to me when trying them: "It's an easy way to get 4 of your 5 a day".

The apple rings are available in our farm shop at the moment, but we hope to bring them further when the production gets into full swing next spring.

Next time you're in the farm, try a free sample.

We're still looking for feedback as people try them out.

#### **The problem with Bitcoin**

Bitcoin is what is known as a cryptocurrency; that is to say it is a virtual currency, typically used in transactions online in place of a normal currency such as Euros or Dollars or Yen.

When currencies were first used, they often held a value related to the value of gold. So for instance, in the US, the gold was stored in Fort Knox, and because the US government held this store of gold, the paper note (which has no value itself) was acceptable, as it bore a promise to pay by the US government, who had all this gold it could use to honour that promise.

The "problem" with such a currency is that, for a government to issue more money, more gold must be mined, and so there is a constraint imposed on economic growth. So during the great depression of the 1930's, the US cut the link between the amount of gold it held and the amount of paper money it printed, and severed that link completely in the 1970's.

Since then, currencies are called FIAT, which is neither convertible by law to any other thing, nor fixed in value to any objective standard. It basically works because people have faith in it. An employee accepts paper money in wages (or a bank transfer to their account) because they have faith that it will be accepted by the shop to buy what they want, and the shop owner in turn accepts it because they have faith that it will be accepted by their suppliers and so on.

A cryptocurrency is not much different to a FIAT currency. All that is needed is faith by the users, and a level of certainty that a whole lot of the currency can't flood the system suddenly (which would lower

its value, and so the faith users have in it). The inventors of bitcoin designed a system whereby more bitcoin would be created as people used existing bitcoins, but constrained the rate at which it can be created by requiring the computers that validate transactions and make new "coins" to complete very complicated computations, meaning that it takes time (even for a very powerful computer) to make bitcoins.

The process of "mining" is clever in that it also validates bitcoin transactions, ensuring against fraud (which in a traditional currency is policed by institutions of the state). This system seems to have worked well, and bitcoins are now used in about 400,000 online transactions per day. The value of one bitcoin is now almost 10,000 euros, though that can rise and fall like any normal currency.

The problem with bitcoin however is the fact that "mining" it and using it takes lots of computer power, and computers unfortunately require electricity to work. And the amount of energy is staggering. At current transaction rates, more electricity is used running the computers to do the transactions, than is used by all of Ireland in a year. Compared with credit cards (which also have a considerable amount of data processing for each payment), it is probably 50 times more demanding of energy.

So any bitcoin transaction, for example one worth about 100 euros (0.01 bitcoins), takes about 300kW of electricity, which is more than what a typical household uses in a week, or enough for an electric car to drive 2000 km.

Clearly this is unsustainable from an environmental viewpoint, given that there are at least a billion electronic transactions per day Worldwide (not to mention cash transactions). There simply is not enough power generation in the World for these to happen in Bitcoin.

Smarter people than me have speculated on the future of bitcoin as an alternative to mainstream

currencies, and are concerned that its value is grossly overinflated. While I don't have the knowledge to either agree or disagree, one thing is clear: using bitcoin is an environmental disaster.

#### **In the farm shop (and online):**

We have updated the website recently, especially the online shop section, to give people more options on what they might like to order. All the juices, sparkling juices in every flavour, the ever-so-special festive mulled juice made for serving warm, just at this time of year, as well as the lemonades, cider vinegar and jams are available there to buy. And if you mention that you've been reading this newsletter, we'll deliver you a free box of apples along with a case order of 12 bottles of juice.

At the farm, we have apples of course, Bramley's for cooking and Karmijn, Red Elstar and Jonagored for eating.

We also have hampers of fruit, juices and everything else that we sell, which every Christmas just seem to get more popular. You can take one of the pre-made ones, or get one made to order at any price from about 12 to 50 euros.

The festive colours of the fruit and juices just look so well, and that is before anyone even tastes the contents. Happy Christmas to someone lucky!

#### **Chef's Choice Award**

This year we entered the Blas na hEireann (Irish Food Awards) for the first time in a while. It is now the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the awards, and we entered our cider vinegar, which has become ever so popular in the past few years. Imagine our delight when the product won the "Chef's Choice" award, recognising its quality not just for at home, but also as a must-have for professional chefs. Wow!