

Gordon Leatherdale, the FFD columnist and farm shop consultant who founded Country Food & Dining, aims to raise up to £2m this year to establish a new chain of farm shops. Backed by venture capitalist Cairneagle Associates, Leatherdale has set up Countrywide Farm Shops plc, an Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) offering tax breaks to private investors. Country Food & Dining, which was also an EIS, developed farm shops near Hungerford, Bath and Telford.

● Beadlam Grange Farm Shop & Tea Room in Pockley, Yorkshire, collected the Local Food Award in the 2009 Countryside Alliance Awards, announced last month. The winner was described as "a family-run farm with a total commitment to local produce, the surrounding community and the future of farming".

Sales of Fairtrade products rose 12% in 2009 to reach an estimated retail value of over £799m, driven by more mainstream brands – including Cadbury's Dairy Milk and Morrison's own-brand roast and ground coffee – switching to Fairtrade ingredients.

● Orchard Pig, the Somerset apple juice and cider producer, is to start running orchard management courses to help landowners, estate managers and professional gardeners restore, re-plant and maintain apple orchards. It follows a similar series of training days run by Orchard Pig on behalf of the National Trust, with part-funding from Natural England, which ended in February.

The new courses will be led by Orchard Pig co-owner Neil MacDonald and will combine practical instruction with advice on marketing to ensure the commercial viability of orchards.

Italian chocolate brand T'a was launched exclusively in Selfridges last month to coincide with London Fashion Week, where T'a also sponsored a number of shows. The brand is produced by fourth generation family firm Alemagna, and combines single estate chocolates with blends of Grand Cru beans from around the world. Prices range from £5.49 for a two piece box, through to £59.99 for a 42 piece box.

Roaster offers 'wine list' of filter coffees for foodservice outlets

Retail coffee brand Grumpy Mule has launched a foodservice range of "top quality, characterful, single-estate beans" with a branded point-of-sale package including wall menus, table-talkers and branded sugar sticks.

The aim is encourage outlets that have so far concentrated on familiar, premium espresso styles like mochaccino and caramel macchiato to bring similar variety into the choice of filter coffees of offer.

Grumpy Mule's parent company, Yorkshire-based independent roaster Bolling Coffee, has been selling into the catering sector for 30 years.

But a spokeswoman said Grumpy Mule's sourcing expeditions to find single-estate and other premium coffees for the retail trade were now being fed into a specialist range for hotels, restaurants and cafés.

It will include six single estate Arabica coffees, six espresso blends and five ground coffees, offering "a broad spectrum of characteristics from the vibrant fruity coffees typical of East Africa to the rich chocolaty notes found in Grumpy Mule's best-selling Sumatran beans".



Grumpy Mule: coffee could be the new wine, with diners choosing from a list

Ian Balmforth of Bolling Coffee said the company was confident that the benefits that Grumpy Mule offers retailers would also be welcomed by "a specific type of restaurant and café where sourcing and traceability are crucial and integral features of the menu".

"We believe that the timing is right for a focus on filter coffee and the variety and choice it offers chefs and

restaurateurs when designing their menus.

"In the past the focus has been on espresso-based drinks but filter coffee has potential to become the latest trend."

He added: "The public is familiar with the idea of selecting from a wine list and we are set to show that coffee offers a similar level of choice for diners."

great taste awards

Guild recruits food writers to strengthen feedback to Great Taste Awards entrants

As entries open for this year's Great Taste Awards (GTAs), organiser the Guild of Fine Food has announced further improvements to the judging processes.

Guild director and FFD publisher Bob Farrand, described the judging system, which sees around 5,000 products a year blind-tasted by teams of experts, as "robust, but not completely foolproof". He said: "There was the odd occasion when a judging team was perhaps a little too harsh in reaching the decision not to award gold and we re-judged one or two that really turned out to be excellent. This year, we aim to eradicate this."

GTA judging takes several weeks and involves more than 100 experts judges working in small teams. Until now, one judge on each team has also been responsible for writing feedback to justify their team's marking decisions.

This year, a team of judging co-ordinators has been recruited whose role will be to directly input judges' tasting comments onto the Awards' database via laptops. "We've recruited 40 food writers for these roles," said Farrand, "which should speed up the process of logging comments and deliver more cohesive and constructive feedback for producers."

A small team of experienced senior judges has also

been appointed whose role is to act as arbiters when teams are divided on a decision. "Where one member of a team of four disagrees with the other three, the senior judge will read the comments, taste the entry and if any doubt exists, pass it to a second or third team for further opinion. Taste is very personal and we want to ensure there is no chance a good food fails to win gold."

Foods sent forward for gold will be judged by at least three further teams before the grading level – one, two or three stars – is agreed. For two or three stars, at least 20 experts need to be in complete agreement.

This year's judging will take place at the Real Food Festival in Earls Court in May, followed by three days at Olympia and a further 15 days through May and June at Guild HQ in Somerset. "We're also hoping to judge again in Ireland," added Farrand, "but at present we're having difficulty locating a suitable venue."

Following the launch last autumn of the Taste Gold Market in London and a Taste Gold theatre at BBC Masterchef Live in London, a series of consumer markets and exhibitions are planned for 2010.

GTA entry forms for 2010 are available now via the Guild website. Closing date for entries is April 9.

www.finefoodworld.co.uk