

Field's SuperValu celebrates 75th anniversary in Skibb

BY JACKIE KEOGH

IT is with a great sense of 'pride of place' that the firm of JJ Field & Co, Skibbereen, is celebrating 75 years in business.

The Cullinane family started the grocery and bakery business in 1865, but the Ring family took it over in 1890 and ran it until 1935, when Jack and Maureen Field bought it.

On that date, they made a commitment to supply only the finest produce and baked goods, and to offer a peerless service to all their customers – a tradition that has been continued by the third generation of the family to the present day.

The old shop has been revamped many times in the last 75 years. In fact, every four or five years, the family makes a considerable investment in the business with a view to creating a SuperValu unlike any other.

By continually enlarging and improving the different departments in the supermarket – which has grown to become a massive 20,000 sq ft

superstore – Field's has kept pace with developments in the industry, but still managed to retain its unique appeal.

Having a modern shop is important, but so too is the need to retain the traditional values on which the business was built.

With each investment – including the substantial recent investment in the business – the shelf and floor space increases, allowing for even greater diversity.

A huge amount was invested in the store's new highly efficient refrigeration units, which utilise the latest technology to reduce energy consumption by more than 30%.

The company's conservation policy also applies to the way it manages its waste disposal as Field's is continually striving to run the business in an environmentally sustainable manner.

This open and progressive approach to the business not only benefits local producers, it also means that West Cork's cosmopolitan customer base can find in Field's a range of

goods that is on a par with the great food halls of London.

To the forefront

It's not an exaggeration: John Field was to the forefront in championing the cause of local producers and in meeting the requirements of his increasingly eclectic clientele.

Everyone knows that this local supermarket was practicing 'Slow Food' principles long before the name was thought up.

Field's has been at the vanguard of the West Cork food culture and mentored many of today's famous brands, such as Gubbeen Cheese, Bunalun, Sally Barnes Smokehouse, Durrus Cheese, and Glenilen Farm, to mention but a few.

By changing with the times and meeting its customers' needs, Field's has retained a brand of quality that other supermarkets are missing.

The company's innovative approach and willingness to invest in the community has also led to the creation of more than 100 loyal, long-

serving and sustainable full-time and part-time jobs.

As a leading member of the SuperValu chain, backed by the Musgrave group, Field's has tremendous purchasing power – something that also shows in the range of goods and the store's highly competitive prices.

But Field's always goes one step more to ensure their customers are satisfied: from their home delivery service and the major investment in a new bakery, the business will continue to serve not only the people of Skibbereen in exemplary fashion, but also a very large hinterland in the heart of West Cork.

Anyone who shops in Field's knows very well that it can be a very social event: there's plenty of space in this superbly organised store to browse, discover new products, check out the unparalleled health food section, chat with friends or neighbours who are also in for their weekly shop, and taste test some of the new and innovative local products that the Field's family have agreed to champion.

Rave review by top Irish food writers

BY JACKIE KEOGH

FIELD'S Supermarket is one of the small number of destination addresses that has featured in every single book that the award-winning food writers, John and Sally McKenna, have ever produced.

From the first Irish Food Guide of 1989, to the first Bridgestone Irish Food Guide of 1991, and the eight subsequent editions, John and Sally have sung the praises of this most singular shop, and its most singular staff.

Without any exaggeration, John McKenna said: 'Field's is up there with Ballymaloe House, The Park Hotel,

The staff knew what they were selling, and were proud of it. As we wrote back in 1993: "the shop is nothing so much as a great big local store." We loved that atmosphere, that feeling of personality and place, the feeling that his store could exist nowhere else.

"Pure West Cork" is what we would say – meaning that Field's is one of those places that couldn't exist anywhere other than in the quizzical, poetical mystery that is West Cork.

Work differently

'Relationships in West Cork work differently than in the

We wanted everyone else to be as good, as distinctive, as this great West Cork icon – John & Sally McKenna

Millens Cheese, and a small handful of others whose work defines what Irish food is.

'But to tell the truth, the relationship between Field's and the work we do in the Bridgestone guides is actually much more than that – discovering John Field's shop in 1989 helped us to define the Irish food culture that we were searching for!

'The shop set the benchmark that we applied to every other store in the country. We wanted everyone else to be as good, as distinctive, as this great West Cork icon.

'There was a philosophy at work in this store that was actually the antithesis of what supermarket thinking usually represents.

'The standard supermarket idea is to "pile it high and sell it cheap."

'In many cases, food is treated like any other commodity, and is stripped of its personality, its sense of origin, and its human connection. But Field's is different in the most profound way.

'At Field's we found local foods, not just bland brands.

rest of Ireland, and John Field personifies this with his support for local producers, his championing of their work, his knowledge that they give his shop a uniqueness that matches the area.

'In this regard, Field's is not a shop; it is, instead, a gallery of great foods. A place that also gives great service and is, in every sense, a showcase!

'For us, and countless more like us, the enchantment has never worn off: every visit feels like a treat, a chance to discover some new West Cork food that John Field will be selling before everyone else.

'Where other shops feel frantic – because staff and customers feel frantic – Field's is always relaxed: of course, that feeling is created by the sheer hard work it takes to not simply maintain standards, but to be constantly asking: "How can we improve standards?"

'When I first walked into the store 21 years ago, I went: "Wow!" Twenty-one years later, and every visit to Field's remains a "Wow!" experience.



Pat and Kornell of the Fruit and Veg team.

Field's – a friend to fledgling food producers

BY JACKIE KEOGH

A PASSIONATE advocate of good food, slow food and local food, Sally Barnes is equally passionate about Skibbereen's unique SuperValu – a shop that is as interesting and as diverse as West Cork.

Sally, who has appeared on countless TV food and cookery programmes in Ireland and the UK, speaks about John Field's 'kindness, advice and generosity to me as a fledgling producer.'

Years ago, when she discovered the shop first, she recalls how it was tiny but full of stacks of fresh local cabbages, onions and turnips. She said she also remembers the sale of hot fresh bread and the large variety of delicious cakes.

Although the shop has been modernised many times, in order to keep pace with the times and new trends in shopping, Sally said it still retains that traditional element because in Field's you can still buy hot fresh bread, direct from Field's own bakery, and locally grown fruit and vegetables.

On a more personal note, Sally said that despite running a very busy and successful busi-

ness, John Field, never made her feel he was too busy to offer her advice.

'Such encouragements were essential, and gave me the confidence to start pushing myself, and my products, out into the bigger world beyond my doorstep.

He was, and still is, open to trying out new products – no matter how peculiar some might appear to be!

'In that respect, I think, the shop will always be "Field's" first, and a "SuperValu" second. It has been my experience that people say the word "Field's" reverentially because it is more than a shop: it is an institution, a testing-ground for new suppliers in this area.'

Rosscarbery

Long before it became a flagship development within the Super Valu group, Field's was renowned for the way they supported local producers.

According to Willie Allshire, the Rosscarbery-based producer of Caherbeg Free Range Pork – a traditional business that prides itself on producing quality meat with flavour – 'Field's rapidly became our biggest outlet and helped and

encouraged us in so many ways.

'As we have grown, our relationship with Field's has developed and matured: without question, their continued support has been immensely important to us.

'They stocked all of our new products as we launched them, including our dry cure loin rashers, bacon and ham, as well as our black and white pudding, and they have shown great interest in the awards we have won, whether it's from Blas na hÉireann, France, Belgium or the UK.

'It's my experience that Field's know their local suppliers and their customers; and expect their staff to be equally passionate about the products sold. Quite simply, this is a store that works with its suppliers to present the best to their customers.'

Ballydehob

Eugene and Helena Hickey of Skeaghane Duck fame, a 120-acre indigenous business near Ballydehob, congratulated Field's on celebrating 75 successful years in business.

Helena said: 'Field's has been a great ambassador for food producers: not just us, but a huge assortment of producers throughout West Cork and beyond.

'By supporting small local food producers, over the years, they have not only helped these businesses thrive and develop, they have helped to create sustainable local jobs and boosted the local economy.

'Since we started producing ducks and geese, Field's have not only stocked our products, they have promoted our products very successfully. For this, and all the family's kindness, we would like to take this opportunity to thank them and wish them the very best for the future.'

Heir Island

The Island Cottage, restaurant and cookery school on

Heir Island has been doing business with Fields for over 21 years.

During that time, the owners, John Desmond and Eilmary Fenton, said: 'our groceries have been delivered to Cunnamore pier twice a week in the summer and once a week in the winter without ever a problem.'

'That level of service is wonderful, but what impresses John and Eilmary most is 'the friendliness and professionalism of the staff – that and the quality of products it provides.'

According to John, 'we have always appreciated the service that Field's supermarket has provided us over the years and would like to extend our very best wishes for their 75th anniversary celebration.'

Glenilen

In the early days, Alan and Valerie Kingston, the creators of the multi-award-winning Glenilen range, started out with a little tasting stand in Field's supermarket.

Since then the company – which makes butter, creams, yoghurts and desserts – has grown to be in demand throughout the country, but they are still hugely loyal to Field's.

According to Valerie, 'Field's has always been more than supportive by giving us shelf space, advice and encouragement. We are proud to supply a supermarket of such renown and reputation: May it go from strength to strength.'

Clodagh McKenna

Like the Kingston family, Clodagh McKenna had a little stand in Field's offering samples of her homemade paté in Field's. Since then, she has gone on to forge a very successful career as a much sought-after food writer and TV presenter. In recent times, she has even launched her own cookery school. As a mark of her loyalty to Field's, Clodagh returns to Skibbereen on a reg-

ular basis to support the local Taste of West Cork Food Festival – an initiative that has the full backing of Field's.

Union Hall

The company, Union Hall Fresh Produce, is delighted to be part of Field's 75th anniversary celebrations.

Like Field's, Union Hall Fresh Produce is a family business, dedicated to growing seasonal produce, but specialising in strawberries.

The company started out in a very small way in 1999, but it has grown year on year, largely due to the help and assistance they have received from everyone working at Field's. 'Pat Collins and his team in the fruit and vegetable department, make it a delight to be a supplier. We cannot thank them, or the Field family enough. And we'd also like to thank the supermarket's loyal customers, who have helped to create two full-time jobs and ten part-time jobs in our company.'

Skibbereen

Dan McCarthy is another great example of how the Skibbereen supermarket sources good, fresh produce from a local supplier. For well over 30 years, Dan has been supplying fruit and vegetables to Field's supermarket.

During that time, he said: 'I have had a good working relationship with John Field and his staff and I am pleased to say there has always been a big demand for top quality local fresh produce in his supermarket.'

Schull

REMEMBERING back to the late '70s, when the very first local artisan foods began, the Ferguson family, who produce Gubbeen Cheese, wondered; what supports a new business?

'Education, of course, but also time spent on the skills needed to produce the best possible products.

'However, if it were to come down to the market place then

certainly, Giana Ferguson said; 'we think it is the support and advice of local shops – particularly skilled businesses that are well respected and established in the area.

'John Field and family run this sort of shop: they have years of knowledge of the West Cork market, they know all their customers personally, and they have influence when it comes to what people are looking to buy for their families.

'When we first made Gubbeen Cheese it was early days – very early days – for the artisan food movement, and we wondered would people want to buy local, seasonal, traditional and handmade food?

'It seems strange to be asking this now because we all seem to be thinking 'local' these days, but in the late '70s it was a sign of just how ahead of their time John and his staff were.

'They supported us right from the off: they saw how well our own Irish foods were going to be received. John knew that with time, and careful introduction to his customers, our cheeses would soon be known by name and bought by locals and tourists alike on a regular basis.

'We have a lot to thank John and everyone at the cheese counter for: they sampled the produce and they talked to customers about West Cork's good artisan cheeses, they worked through how best to present the product, and what stage of ripeness would work well for West Cork customers. 'The Fields were like our partners. They certainly were our friends. And today – 30 years later – they still are! 'Field's SuperValu is a great shop, run by great people who not only have a high standard of knowledge about everything they sell, but who have real interest and skill in selling food at its very best.

'We are all so lucky that they have a strong base here in the Skibbereen market place – a place that represents everything that is truly West Cork.'

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Congratulations to John and Ruth and all at Fields SuperValu on their 75th anniversary and wishing you continued success

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Continued success to John, Catherine and all at Fields SuperValu

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