

Movers, bakers & shakers

Suffolk

On the county's northern fringes, discover micro dairies producing the creamiest milk, bakeries making sourdough from toasted quinoa and breweries crafting golden ale

Words and photographs CLARE HARGREAVES

'How much is a pint of milk?' goes the perennial question lobbed at politicians.

The answer, if you shop in a supermarket, is probably just over 40p. But at Fiona Provan's dairy farm in Somerleyton, an estate village on the marshy border between Suffolk and Norfolk, you'll pay £1.70. It's quite a hike but then it's a very different product: her primrose-hued milk is almost indecently creamy (most of her cows are Jerseys), it's unpasteurised and, most unusually, it's from cows that keep their calves. Hence the dairy's name, **The Calf at Foot** (the-calf-at-foot-dairy.co.uk).

Braving the muddy, potholed farm track that runs opposite the walled park housing Somerleyton's Italianate mansion, I watch the cows being summoned by name, one by one, into the milking 'parlour' – a fenced-off corner of a vast medieval barn. It's 8am and nippy, so I huddle close to the cows' warm bodies. Fiona's milking assistant, Amy George, takes a quick taste of the milk on her fingers to ensure it's good, then sets to work as the cow munches from a manger of locally grown hay or lucerne (no industrially grown soya or other grains here). It's over in minutes as Amy needs to leave enough milk for the cow's calf as well. For the same reason, there will be no evening milking.

Fiona's labour-intensive micro dairy will never make her rich. But she believes it's an ethical compromise for consumers who are unhappy about calves being removed from their mothers at birth. Yes, the milk costs a lot more than that sold in supermarkets but her customers think it's worth it. "There's no such thing as cheap milk," says Fiona.

Happily for Fiona, a similar ethos steers Somerleyton's relaxed red-bricked pub, **The Duke's Head** (somerleyton.co.uk/the-dukes-head). Here, just a few minutes' stroll from the Suffolk Broads (park your boat, if you have one, on its free moorings), Suffolk-born chef James Santillo uses her milk to make luscious panna cottas, or ricotta to accompany spring asparagus. »

LEFT: THE YARE AND WAVENEY RIVERS MEET IN THE BROADS

He also takes her retired dairy cows and male calves, sources of meat that are often wasted. “We’re hugely lucky to have people nearby who share our passions and ideals,” says James, who previously worked with Richard Bainbridge at Benedicts, Norwich. “Buying directly, without a middleman, enables us to serve the best produce without having to charge silly prices.”

Another way James keeps costs and waste down is by buying whole animals and butchering them himself. In addition to Fiona’s dairy cows he buys Belted Galloways from Nicola Chapman at Carr Farm, on the other side of the Waveney River (carrfarm.org). The striped, teddy-bear-faced cows live outside, on the species-rich marshes, yielding a beef that’s not just packed with flavour but is easier on the environment: the animals don’t eat the usual livestock grain, the production of which consumes large quantities of fossil fuels. Nicola also rears geese, for meat and eggs, the latter appearing at the Duke’s Head at lunchtime alongside a wholesome bubble and squeak, and cured pork from rare-breed pigs at Maypole Farm, near Bury St Edmunds (maypolepork.co.uk). Glance at the bottom of the menu and you’ll see the farms discreetly name-checked.

Driving through lanes studded with pretty flint churches I reach another farm (just over the Norfolk border) that takes welfare seriously. At Clinks Care Farm, care of animals and the soil is combined with care of people (clinkscarefarm.org.uk). “People who work here have disadvantages ranging from anxiety to brain injuries,” explains grower Niamh Mullally. “They benefit hugely from working with the soil.” Andy Jaye, who was brain-damaged in a car accident, agrees. “Being in the polytunnel is restful, it clears my mind,” he says as he picks Green Giant mustard leaves.

Clinks’s produce, which includes both vegetables and free-range meats, is sold through its shop and veg box scheme, as well as direct to businesses including The Duke’s Head. Later, at the pub, I try its Texel lamb, pink as cherubs’ cheeks and partnered with just-dug celeriac, finely cubed and blended with cream. It’s simple but delicious, and taken to another level by a smidge of Italian



black truffle. “Having Clinks so close means we get stuff that’s been picked just minutes earlier – or in the case of lettuces, still growing,” says front-of-house Tara Smyth. “I’ve even popped over to replenish stocks during service.”

James makes almost everything he serves himself, from butter to charcuterie (“It uses up bits of animals we couldn’t otherwise use”) but he’s happy to leave bread to his childhood Scouts group friend, Johnny Spillings. Johnny, who runs **The Penny Bun Bakehouse** in nearby Lowestoft, cut his culinary teeth under Heston Blumenthal, Raymond Blanc and the late Michel Roux, so his bakery is more refined than rustic (thepennybunbakehouse.co.uk). For the Duke’s, he crafts treacle-rich oat and barley loaves named Black Dog (after Black Shuck, a legendary black hound said to haunt the coasts of Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex). Other must-try bakes are curried onion breads, salt beef swirls, and sourdoughs made from toasted quinoa and barley grown locally by specialist British pulse and grain grower **Hodmedod’s** (hodmedods.co.uk).

On Saturdays Johnny transports his breads and cakes to his pop-up shop in Southwold, down the coast, just a few blocks from »



ABOVE, FROM TOP: HARVESTING GREEN GIANT MUSTARD LEAVES AT CLINKS CARE FARM; CARR FARM GOOSE EGG, BUBBLE AND SQUEAK AND MAYPOLE FARM GLOUCESTER OLD SPOT PORK AT THE DUKE’S HEAD; AMY GEORGE AT THE CALF AT FOOT DAIRY. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CLINKS LOIN AND CROQUETTE OF TEXEL LAMB, CREAMED CELERIAC AND LAMB GRAVY AT THE DUKE’S HEAD; JOHNNY SPILLINGS AT HIS POP-UP SHOP IN SOUTHWOLD; BARON BIGOD CHEESES MATURING; THE DUKE’S HEAD IN SOMERLEYTON; ROASTING COCOA BEANS AT PUMP STREET CHOCOLATE; ST PETER’S BREWERY NEAR BUNGAY

ESCAPE

Adnams brewery (adnams.co.uk). The board outside the shop declares an opening time of 8am, but at 7.30am business is already brisk. I stock up on crisp-pastry custard tarts and walk them off with a stroll past the resort's colourful beach huts.

Pushing on south between pine forests and sea, I find another of James' suppliers, **Pump Street Chocolate**, established in 2010 by Chris Brennan and his daughter Joanna (pumpstreetchocolate.com). The company uses only beans imported directly from sustainably run family farms and cooperatives, and its bars and tins are labelled by country of origin, farm and sugar content. Search on its website and you'll even find the name of the farmer who grew the beans. At The Duke's Head, Pump Street's Jamaican Bachelor's Hall Estate 75% is turned into a formidable chocolate mousse (adapted from Chez Nico's chocolate tart recipe) and paired with a

PUMP STREET CHOCOLATE USES ONLY BEANS IMPORTED DIRECTLY FROM SUSTAINABLY RUN FAMILY FARMS AND COOPERATIVES

crunchy honeycomb. Savour it slowly and you'll pick up its boozy, rum-like finish.

The final stop on my journey around north Suffolk's rich larder is the pretty market town of Bungay, curled inside a meander of the Waveney. The straw-hued moated manor nearby looks like a medieval home (which it was until recently) but now houses **St Peter's Brewery**, which crafts real ales from Suffolk malts, Kentish hops and water from its own on-site well (stpetersbrewery.co.uk). Here, I watch the mash tuns being emptied of steaming spent malt before sampling a caramelly Golden Ale. If it sounds like I've stumbled, lips-first, into a Constable painting, the brewery's Stormtrooper Galactic brings me resolutely back to the present day. Inspired by *Star Wars* it's a hoppy pale ale with notes of zingy grapefruit, pine and herbs.

The star product at nearby **Fen Farm Dairy**, meanwhile, is its bloomy rinded Baron Bigod cheese, named after the farm's 12th-century owner (fenfarmdairy.co.uk). Jonny Crickmore's family have now run the dairy farm for three generations but a few years ago they decided to do things differently, buying a herd of Montbéliarde



and selling their raw milk from a vending machine. The family then went a step further by crafting a raw-milk Brie de Meaux-style cheese, one of very few farmhouse bries produced in the world. In cheese circles, this is in the top league. Unsurprisingly, it appears on the cheeseboard at The Duke's Head, its warm, mushroomy flavours providing a punchy finish to one of James's dinners.

MORE INFORMATION

Clare travelled (safely, before lockdown) with Greater Anglia trains (greateranglia.co.uk) and stayed at Somerleyton Meadows in Herringfleet (somerleytonmeadows.co.uk). She ate at The Duke's Head. For further information, see visitsuffolk.com or visitwaveneyvalley.co.uk, or follow Clare @larderloutuk.

FROM TOP: A SELECTION OF PUMP STREET CHOCOLATES; ST PETER'S BREWERY'S STORMTROOPER GALACTIC PALE ALE; FEN FARM DAIRY'S BARON BIGOD



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