



THE INDEPENDENT



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I am glad sometimes that I don't live in London, where it has become disturbingly easy for anyone to dress up as a Prime Minister, burst into the House of Commons and order frightened Labour MPs to ban fox hunting within 24 hours.

We get different amusements in the country. The annual Frome Cheese Show, for instance, which took place last weekend.

Ever been to one of these country shows, you town-dwellers? No? Poor you. Luckily, they're all exactly the same. That's because they are all divided into the same 10 activity areas. Let me list them for you.

1. Tents where they sell you country things to eat. So no pizzas. But there was a stall selling very tasty dips and sauces, under the label of The Black Farmer. There was a tall, black guy behind the counter selling them.

"Are you...?" I said, shyly, gesturing to the label.

"Yes, I am," he said, grinning at my discomfiture.

More about him later.

2. Tents smelling of beer and cider, where they sell you things to drink. My wife bought a fruit smoothie. Halfway through it she went slightly red and uttered a sentence I have never heard before: "I've got a pip stuck in my straw."

3. Tents selling things to improve your home. One year I went to the Bath and West Show to get some cider, and came home with a water softening machine instead. This year I nearly bought a walking stick, but saw sense just in time.

4. Enclosures full of grass. Very occasionally these fill up with horses jumping over things, rosetted cows being led round very slowly full of milk, rosetted bulls being led round with scrota dangling like handbags, or terriers being let out of a box and racing each other in every direction except the one they're meant to go in. Then they empty suddenly and revert to being grass enclosures again.

5. Tents full of prizewinning animals, grain and cheese. My wife liked the cockerels and hens best, and they were indeed wonderful. I felt the rabbits were easily the most boring, but didn't like to say anything to their face. The tent full of

prizewinning grain would not have looked out of place in Tate Modern. It was an empty space with a few sacks open for inspection, showing grain, as if we were Customs officers. One display looked like hand-rubbed green tobacco. It was labelled "Silage: First Prize".

6. A flower tent. After a while you get tent glut. So we didn't go in the flower tent. Our friend Sally did, and she said it was jolly nice.

Considering she also raved about the rabbits, I am not sure how far to trust her.

7. Stalls selling country clothes for country people. Check shirts. Brown trousers. Brown shirts. Check caps. Puffy waistcoats. Imitation Barbours. Check ties. Brown ties... Fashion? Forget it.

8. Once you've got dressed as a farmer, you have to buy a farm and equip it. You can buy everything mechanical you need here, and a lot you don't. It will break down after a year. You will put it in a yard, meaning to mend it one day. You never do. That's why all farms look like museums. Other mechanical delights include amusement machines which shake you up and down until you are sick. Why do people pay to go on them?

9. A cheese tent in which big round cheeses lie unwinking on tables. Don't touch. Don't eat. Enter, worship and exit.

10. Places selling chutneys and pickles and jams and... come to think of it, why isn't there a Frome Chutney Show?

I said all shows were identical, but I was wrong. You don't get many with a black farmer making and selling *Spicy Muscovado Sauce, Lime and Ginger Sauce, Tomato and Red Bean Sauce*, all delicious... Very nice, interesting bloke, called Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones. Sounds like a Welsh chapelgoer, but he is 100 per cent Jamaican, came to Britain when he was three and now farms on the Devon/Cornwall border.

"I call my products The Black Farmer, because that was what I was called locally when I first arrived," he says.

Well, it's certainly snappier than Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones Sauces. And even though we had a long chat, I clean forgot to ask him what he thought about fox hunting.

Next year, perhaps.