

Customer demand secures contract

MARK PEARSON

Wilfred's sausages bound for Sainsbury's

SO MANY people who bought Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones' Westcountry sausages at Plymouth's massive Flavour Fest farmers' market later demanded them from supermarkets that Sainsbury's are now to supply them in 60 outlets.

Mr Emmanuel-Jones, from St Giles on the Heath, Devon, thought to be Britain's only black farmer, markets his products under his unique "Black Farmer" label.

He told the WMN his range of sausages will be available in Sainsbury's stores from February 2005.

Flavour Fest – the biggest farmers' market ever staged in Devon and Cornwall – was supported by the Western Morning News as part of our Buy Local Campaign and was a huge success.

Mr Emmanuel-Jones said: "On the first day of Flavour Fest, we had sold out of our sausages. We had an amazing reaction from everyone who visited our stall.

"Before the show in Plymouth, I had spent about three to four months trying to get Sainsbury's interested but with no luck.

"After the festival, people were demanding that they stocked my Black Farmer range and within a month they contacted me."

Mr Emmanuel-Jones, who also secured a deal with Asda in October, said he still believes his success is thanks to "a great demonstration of people power".

He said: "It just goes to show how important these shows are.

"It's a good example for other food producers because if people are keen on a particular product they will fight to find it in their supermarket. I am so enthusiastic

REBECCA SHORT

about getting my products into all the supermarkets – my next aim is Tesco," he said.

Mr Emmanuel-Jones, 47, said the supermarket deal was the highlight of a lifetime's ambition. As a youngster, he had wanted to be a farmer but it seemed highly unlikely he would succeed.

He was born on the Caribbean island of Jamaica but spent only a few years there before following the route of thousands of West Indians in the 1950s and moving to England.

He settled with his parents in Birmingham, where he was brought up with his eight brothers and sisters in a small

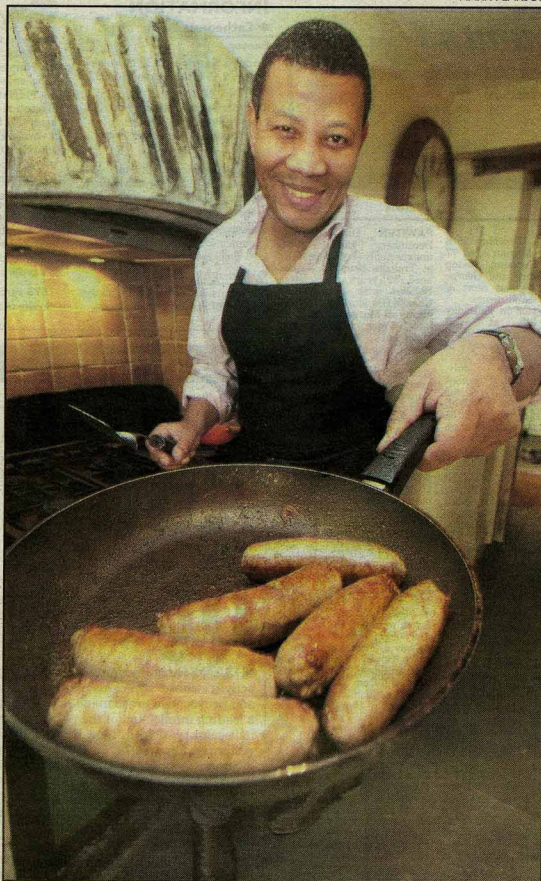
'I want to get my products into all the supermarkets'

terraced house. "I always wanted to live in the Westcountry and move out of that concrete jungle," he said.

Mr Emmanuel-Jones initially trained as a chef, then moved into television, travelling the world as a producer for The Food and Drink Programme, working with chefs such as Antony Worrall-Thompson and Brian Turner.

But six years ago, Mr Emmanuel-Jones started the ball rolling on his great sausage hunt. He bought the run-down West Kitcham Farm at St Giles on the Heath, near Launceston.

He now farms 30 acres with prime cattle and sheep and runs a quality herd of large white cross-landacre pigs which



● SUCCESS: Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones cooks up his 'Black Farmer' sausages

are kept at Kenneford Farm, just outside Topsham, Exeter.

After much research into the perfect banger, Wilfred came up with three varieties, all made by Westaways in Newton Abbot to his recipes and using his meat.

Mr Emmanuel-Jones said: "I wanted to put the Britishness back into sausages. When I was travelling, I found the one thing I wanted was a good old British breakfast. A great sausage is at the very heart of the breakfast. I travelled everywhere and I was always on the look-out for the right sausage," he said. "I am a sausage-aholic really. It is one of the passions of my life.

"In my time I have tasted any number

and I have often been left wondering about the actual meat content of some of them. People have really messed around with them and put a lot of rubbish into them."

Mr Emmanuel-Jones said he wanted a high meat content in his own sausages, with really good herbs and spices.

Chive and Onion, which has 85 per cent pork, took a gold award in the Taste of the West Food Awards, while Premium Pork and Pork and Leek both scooped silver awards.

Mr Emmanuel-Jones now plans to develop further ranges, including ham, bacon and cheese.

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A product brand to be proud of

WILFRED Emmanuel-Jones is a man of parts. In London, he is probably best known as a BBC producer and director. In Birmingham, where he was reared, he is a prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate. In the Westcountry, he is "The Black Farmer" – manufacturer of sausages and sauces. Thanks to his entrepreneurial skills and enthusiasm, he has just landed a deal with Sainsbury's, which will stock his products in 60 stores.

It will readily be understood from this summary that Mr Emmanuel-Jones is not a typical Westcountry farmer struggling to eke a living from the land. He owns a brand management company named Commsplus. His skills in marketing and his contacts saw him called in as a strategist and adviser by the BBC programmes Innovation Nation and Trouble At The Top.

For all that, his rapid success with The Black Farmer brand is instructive and inspiring. At his farm at St Giles on the Heath, he has just 200 pigs, 20 cattle and 80 sheep. They are not of rare breeds, nor are they organically reared, and, with such limited stock, he might reasonably expect to earn a modest living at best in today's market. However, he has an irrepressible and unquestionable passion for his product and for the region, a distinctive and memorable brand and a flair for communications. He knows that there are strategies indispensable to success for all small rural businesses. He said: "I have wanted a farm of my own since I was a small child. The Westcountry has always seemed like home to me and food is my first and greatest passion."

From the outset, he recognised that the region and its goodwill were central to any ambitions for expansion. That meant getting out into the streets and squares of our towns and meeting the customers. "The shows and markets were essential," he says. "I had spent ages working on the recipes for the sausages and the sauces, but it was the customers who made those vital final modifications which made all the difference, and their loyalty and enthusiasm which persuaded first Asda, then Sainsbury's, to stock the products."

It was Flavour Fest in Plymouth in August which made the biggest difference. Sainsbury's had shown no interest in The Black Farmer products until then, but received so many demands from visitors to the WMN-sponsored fair that they were forced to reconsider.

Mr Emmanuel-Jones set out knowing that, if he was to maintain the quality on which he insisted, he must co-operate with other, bigger players. Westaways, one of the region's greatest food success stories, was the obvious partner. Its product, after all, is already in Sainsbury's stores throughout the south of England, bearing witness to the superior quality of Steve Turton's butchery and of Westcountry meat. Mr Emmanuel-Jones aimed high, and found Turton's willing to meet his exacting standards.

Mr Emmanuel-Jones is committed to compassionate farming and high standards of animal welfare. This may spring from personal conviction, but it is self-evident that, in today's increasingly enlightened market, anything but the highest standards can blight an individual product and the region as a whole.

Passion, determination, imagination, dedication to quality, to animal welfare and to the region and willingness to co-operate. These are the distinguishing qualities of every food and drink enterprise which has expanded beyond the region and inspired trust and affection in the Westcountry as the nation's larder. Mr Emmanuel-Jones may have advantages upon which other farmers cannot call and so have fast-tracked his brand's elevation to recognition, but he has followed the classic route to success in an exacting market.

We at the Western Morning News are delighted, through the Buy Local campaign and through Flavourfest, to have contributed to the success of another excellent product which, in turn, sheds lustre upon the entire region. But it is above all to the people of the Westcountry, who made their preferences known and refused to take no for an answer, that The Black Farmer and Westaways owe their success. The "Buy Local" campaign, launched by the Western Morning News in the aftermath of the foot and mouth disaster, has now really got a hold of Devon and Cornwall.

There's still a long way to go, but we are on the right track to becoming a self-sufficient gastronomic region of national and international renown.