

North East England Tourism Awards 2009 Taste of North East England Award

Gold award winner: Archer's Jersey Ice Cream

'Winning the Gold Taste of North East England award has given us a real sense of pride in our business,' says Susan Archer of Archer's Jersey Ice Cream, near Darlington, Co. Durham. 'Taking my main staff to the awards ceremony was a tremendous team building experience and I think having the award gives us a competitive edge when trying to build new business.'

When replacing the herd they had lost to foot and mouth disease in 2001, Susan and her husband, John decided to change to a more traditional breed. They chose Jerseys, with a view to processing some of the milk. Susan says, 'It was my husband who came up with the idea of making ice cream when milk prices dropped in 2003 and we needed to add value. We set up the first ice cream parlour the following year and invited the public to come to the farm. We established a small children's play area and put seating on a patio area outside the parlour.

'In 2008, we were approached by The Station, Richmond which was looking for local producers to rent units as part of their renovation of the station. Our original business had developed so much we decided we would like the additional production – so we've doubled our capacity.'

Susan adds, 'We're inspected by the RSPCA for standards of husbandry and are therefore Freedom Food Accredited; we proudly display their logo on our ice cream tubs. Our milk is also Farm Assured.'



Explaining why she decided to enter the awards, Susan says, 'We entered for the profile really, as I thought what tremendous publicity it would be if I did win. I wouldn't have dreamed of entering a competition before, but I was nominated for and runner up in the 2008 North East Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards. I realised then how brilliant the publicity could be.

'It took me two weeks to put the entry together. I got a lot of useful help and advice from One North East – although I completed the entry form myself.

'I have a lot of summer staff and the fact that they knew (after we were shortlisted) that the mystery shopper would be coming made them step up a gear. They were very aware that the visit was coming and it made them think more carefully about what they were doing.'

When asked what she thinks makes their ice cream so special, Susan says, 'I think it's the fact we have really high quality Jersey milk and because we get it straight into the parlour and make the ice cream fresh each day. You can't get that quality elsewhere because we make our ice cream so quickly – within two to three hours of milking.

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'We also make decorated ice cream cakes to order. This is quite a speciality – people have said they've seen them abroad but not so much in this country.'

She continues, 'We have a lot of regular customers who are very much behind us as a business. Many said they thought we deserved the award for all our hard work. I think visitors do feel part of the farm – they don't just come to buy ice cream they also come back each week to see the animals, especially the calves and chickens.

'I also have good staff, who provide excellent service to the customer. I took my main staff members to the awards ceremony. When we won Gold, one commented "I can't believe I make that ice cream!" It was fantastic and a real team-building experience.'

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Susan is proud of the recognition Archer's Jersey Ice Cream has gained in the region. She says, 'It's satisfying to realise our business has become recognised throughout North East England. For example, the buyer for a large department store remembered tasting our ice cream at an event – I would love to get our ice cream and milk into such wider outlets in the future.'