

fine food

at the heart of speciality food and drink

digest

Lavender takes circular route back to the farm

Kent lavender farmers William and Caroline Alexander are working with local food producers to develop lavender-flavoured products, such as ice cream, biscuits and chutney, which are then sold through their farm shop –

The Hop Shop.

The circular business model, which sees the farm act as ingredients supplier and retailer, is one that other farm shop owners could take up, according to Caroline Alexander. "Whatever they grow or rear, farmers are looking to diversify and this is just one way of doing it," she said.

Castle Farm, which is based in Shoreham, Kent, makes, grows and distils its own lavender oil for use in toiletries and aromatherapy. A proportion of this is also turned into lavender essence by a local flavours producer. "We have two essences. One is for cooking at high temperatures, for biscuits and cakes, so the flavour doesn't evaporate. The other has been developed to combine well with fats, which is

used in ice cream," said Alexander. "We also supply dried lavender heads that can be used in baked goods."

The farm has worked closely with local suppliers to develop a range of lavender-flavoured products. These include

Darenth Valley plum and lavender chutney, fudge from The Merchant Farmer and ice cream from Willets Farm Dairy. Cakes and shortbread are made by Daizylake in Maidstone.

Alexander says she is working with Sussex High Weald on a lavender-flavoured soft cheese, while

Estfoods of Suffolk is developing a lavender mayonnaise and West Sussex chocolate maker Montezuma is working on a truffle containing lavender oil.

The products are sold through The Hop Shop, which also sells bunches of dried lavender, hops and flowers, and beef that is reared on the farm.

Castle Farm is hosting several lavender events over the summer, including a farm walk and lunch in June and a lavender festival on July 8-9.

