

Last week Parliament hosted a 'Taste of Kent' event. It was wonderful to see so many local producers showcase their wares in Westminster which ranged from cheese, beer and cakes through to strawberries, honey and wine.

I was born and bred in Kent. I am a proud Kentish girl. I love the fact that Kent is said to be the Garden of England and that is why it sometimes perplexes me to go into a local supermarket and see so many products shipped in not just from beyond the region but beyond our shores.

Many worthy organisations fight for our local producers and work hard to promote British farmers in our supermarkets. But in many respects it is down to us as consumers to make the big shops change their habits. Last year, Aylesford Sainsbury's helped support local farmers by selling so called "ugly food", the food that is usually wasted because it doesn't conform to the pretty consumer friendly regularity normally on sale. Hopefully they will do the same again this year.

The recent food scandals often have a short term gain for local suppliers. Butchers saw a huge increase in sales after the horsemeat scandal but talking to a butcher at the weekend it appears that sales have decreased again and for convenience reasons customers are returning to the supermarkets.

One thing is clear though, farmers markets are increasing in popularity. Often, because they sell "ugly food" or products with less packaging, supply chain or distance from production to sale, they are cheaper and people on a budget are finding the markets as a good alternative to supermarkets.

I would personally like to compel supermarkets to buy local, but in the meantime it is greater awareness and consumer power that will support our producers most and that was what the Taste of Kent event was about in Westminster.