

## ROD & BEN'S ORGANIC PIONEER PIECE

### 'Food from the soil nothing more, nothing less'

In tough economic times where a once buoyant organic food and drinks sector now finds itself under ever growing scrutiny to justify its space in an increasingly cluttered chiller cabinet, it's refreshing to hear about a friendly independently-owned organic operation that continues to enjoy significant growth (+35% in 2009 Vs 2008) whilst stubbornly sticking to 1st principles.

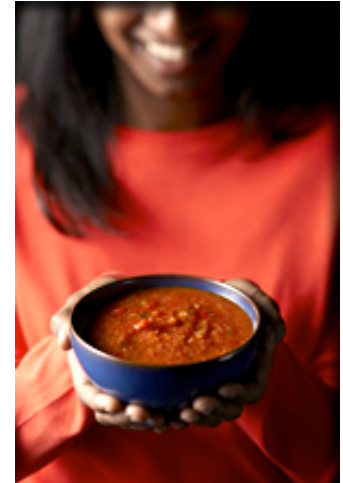
#### AN INVITATION

I enclose some interesting background info on Rod & Ben's soups who would like to extend an invitation to you OR someone from your editorial dept to come down to Devon for a couple of days and learn first hand what it's like to live and work on an organic farm to get a real hands on appreciation as to the very many challenges facing Roddy and his small squad of organic soup aficionados.

We believe that such an approach could make for a very interesting piece. For more info: [www.rodandbens.com](http://www.rodandbens.com)

#### IN THE BEGINNING

Rod & Ben's organic soup adventure began back in 1998 when our two home-grown heroes set themselves the uneasy undertaking of how best to grow tasty, nutritious vegetables without endangering the environment. Their initial vegetable box business was based on the non-negotiable notion that the best tasting food is always picked and eaten in season.



Although their thriving vegetable box business quickly took root, it quickly became clear that in order to extend their organic reach they needed another food format with broad brush appeal

To shamelessly plagiarize from the back of their tubs:

'FRESH THINKING – when you consider how much of our lives Ben & I spend knee-deep in fresh seasonal veg, perhaps it was inevitable that our minds would turn to organic soup. As any wellie-wearer knows, it only takes a small step of the imagination for fresh local ingredients to become a bottomless bowl of sumptuous seasonal soups.'

Chilled Soup -the original, highly nutritious fast food with all year around appeal provided the perfect vehicle for Rod & Ben to express themselves. Although the premium pedigree of chilled soups was already well understood, thanks to pioneering work by the likes of Covent Garden, Rod & Ben saw the opportunity for a more informal small company approach where real in the 'thick of things' founders, authentic regional provenance and a less starchy 'everyday organics' outlook were the order of the day.

#### BICKHAM FARM

Bickham Farm, 106 acres of deep red soil, is a mixed farm, having a good blend of animals, vegetables and arable crops. It is the home farm to Bickham House and Garden, one of the finest examples of a traditional Victorian garden in the country.

Bickham Farm was largely derelict when Rod first arrived in 1997. Indeed Rod still remembers arriving in the pouring rain to a very basic cold and unfriendly house wondering what on earth he'd done.

The farm has been owned by one family since that time, a family whose son knows Roddy well, a family, who more importantly were willing to match his organic enthusiasm with a long-term commitment. This was probably just as well because the land agent at the time wasn't nearly so keen and didn't take to Roddy, suggesting that he didn't have the experience and so would fail – in truth he was half right but not with regards the half that really matters!

## GOOD BREAKS

Lots of helpful assistance/support from those whose opinion carries real weight including- a Rick Stein recommendation, Great Taste awards, a guest appearance on Ready Steady Cook (Rod beat Ben) and in 2008 the prestigious Soil Association award for best prepared food.

N.B.

Very recently a finalist in the 2009 Debi Awards (Devon Environmental Business Initiative) – food & farming

Rod & Ben's champions FORWARD THINKING

- A non-worthy organic voice
- A dairy-free sub range
- Progressive alliances with regional 'kindred spirits' - Riverford
- An unconventional 'friendly soup producer next door' branding/ tone-of-voice
- Friendly perusing websites – [www.rodandbens.com](http://www.rodandbens.com) & [www.rodandbenssoups.com](http://www.rodandbenssoups.com)
- A full calendar of 'Seasonal specials'
- Foodservice formats
- The 'lump pump' which allows for some R&B flavours to take on an altogether more three-dimensional demeanour
- Very recently 3 local organic farmers have agreed to join forces with Rod & Ben's to support the next stage of their blossoming soup adventure.



N.B. Possibly our founders' bravest decision to date has been to turn down various polite requests from a number of the UK's most ambitious multiple retailers to join their respective soup fixtures. Although our founders are open-minded enough never to band around words like 'never,' in the current retail climate, Rod & Ben's feel their loyalty to the discerning independent sector has been more than matched by a thriving community of supportive 'stand their ground' delis, food halls, farm shops, hotels and independent stores who've historically been undervalued by so many of the UK's less discriminating bigger brands.

## NEXT STEPS

- Life without Ben (see website INTRO section – Ben ploughs his own field)
- Build a larger kitchen
- Create soup using renewable energy
- School trips for disadvantaged children
- Wider scale hedge laying and the maintenance of other traditional farming skills
- Expand our championing of rare farming breeds Dexters Cattle/Longwool Sheep

## RODDY'S 'IN A NUTSHELL' BELIEFS

Roddy's deep-seated appreciation of organics isn't hard to understand. It's not really about the science, it's more about the most thoughtful use of locally occurring sustainable resources, it's about fairness, equality and responsibility.

In a nutshell it's about wanting to leave to his children and grandchildren a world which is as fruitful, diverse and magnificent as he has experienced. Luckily Rod & Ben's is now at a point where it's: 'Big enough to do what it wants with real conviction yet small enough to stay true to 1st principles.'

## IN SHORT

A company that understands that organics is all about everyday appreciation and not small-minded elitism

Think that's it for now – so much more we could say but we'd much rather you asked the questions or better still popped down and found out for yourself.

**HAVE A LOVELY XMAS BREAK.**