

In its 113th year, the Devon County Show is the first major agricultural extravaganza of the year, and the county's largest event, attracting over 90,000 visitors across 93 acres of showground at Westpoint, near Exeter. The theme of this year's event, which takes place from Thursday, May 15 until Saturday, May 17, is the Year of Food and Farming, a national curriculum initiative to teach children about rural life. The primary aim is to teach children about where their food comes from and how it is produced, and convey the importance of land management and conservation.

"We are trying to keep youngsters connected with the countryside and instil in them a lifelong appreciation for food and farming," said show secretary Ollie Allen. "Devon County Show is a unique event; nowhere else can you get up close and personal to the animals. It is a taste of Devon, a shop window for what is going on in the county.

"Agriculture and the environment are constantly changing and the show endeavours to embrace progress, while recognise tradition. Everything goes full circle, especially with people moving into Devon who are looking for a new way of life or new hobby. They are taking up the crafts of old and the show is a great place to promote those crafts.

"It is also important to stress to the people of Devon that this show is theirs. We make the best produce in the world and without consumer support the producers struggle. It's up to us to keep it going."

Livestock

Cattle, in all of their show splendour, are a fantastic sight. With more than 20 breeds, including two local varieties — the Ruby Red and South Devon — the cattle show is a major event. But this year, the visitors are in for a special treat as the World Jersey Cattle Bureau stages its World Pre-Congress at the county show.

The event is held every 20 years in a member country. Around 120 delegates from around the world will see and show the best examples of the breed before heading to Jersey for the World Congress.

Roger Trewelha is field service manager for the Jersey Cattle Society. He said: "Devon is the county with the most Jerseys. There are also big populations in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Denmark. The breed is growing popular in Switzerland, France and former eastern block countries.



'If you stood in a field of Jerseys you would have a circle of them around you — they are so nosy and curious and such fun to work with,' says Mark Davis

"We are expecting around 80 Jersey cattle from across the South West of England from over 20 of our leading herds."

There will be eight special Jersey classes, an interbreed class and the supreme championship — the highest class — along with plenty of special prizes.

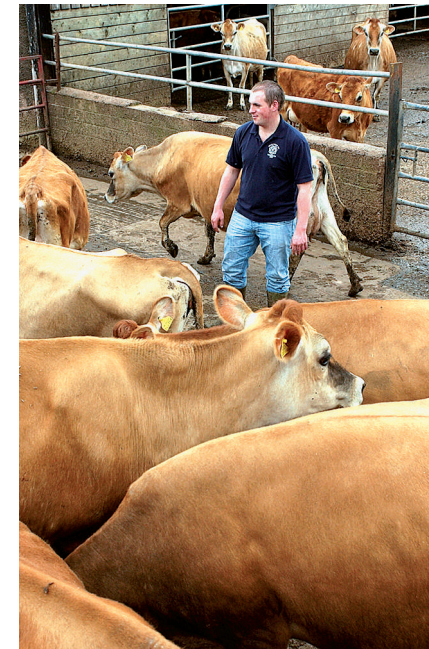
Alongside the competitions, local cooperative Milk Link is sponsoring a marquee with Jersey products, including ice cream, cheese, and milk.

"We hope visitors enjoy seeing the cattle and the various breeds," said Roger. "If anyone is interested in keeping cows they can ask questions. We hope people enjoy the products and we look forward to it."

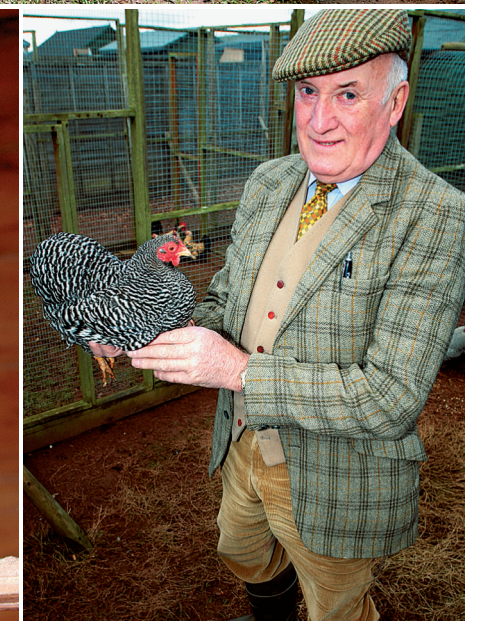
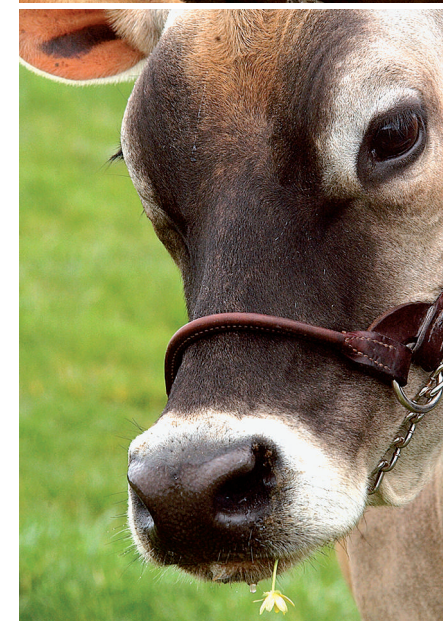
No one is as excited about the show as Jersey cattle farmer Mark Davis. The 24-year-old junior vice county chairman of the Young Farmers' Club has a herd of 60 Jersey cattle. With help from his younger brother, Mark has been going to the Devon County Show with his Jerseys for five years as the only Jersey exhibitor.

"Our original breed was just a little herd of Jerseys but we fell in love with them and kept breeding them and started registering them under the herd name Rivermead," said Mark.

"They are just such fantastic cows, easy to manage, hassle free and don't get problems. They are good on their feet, have



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no calving problems and produce good milk quality — the fat content is really high!

"They also have wonderful character. If you stood in a field of Jerseys you would have a circle of them around you — they are so nosy and curious and such fun to work with. They have a character all their own.

"The World Jersey Conference is a prestigious event and having it in our own country is absolutely amazing. I'm very excited."

Mark will be competing in most classes and has been spending the past few weeks training up the cattle.

"A huge amount of work and preparation goes in two months before," he said. "Usually we wash them a few hours before

we show them. You want to make sure that they look as good as possible and present at show standard."

Poultry

If you think birds are dull, think again. The popular poultry section has a fascinating display of rare and traditional ducks, geese, turkeys and chickens of all shapes and sizes, as well as an egg exhibition. This year the exhibitors are keen to highlight the advantages of keeping poultry and are encouraging people to set aside a patch of the back garden for these feathered friends.

Poultry steward John Redler said: "We have got traditional breeds as well as rare

breeds. I keep bantams, a miniature breed, as a hobby, and shall be exhibiting some of my birds — Partridge Wyandottes, grey chickens with a white flick. There are not very many of them about as they are a bit more difficult to breed. I also breed Buff Rock, Buff Sussex, Light Sussex, Silver Sussex and Sable Potts.

"It's been an interest since childhood and I try to encourage as many youngsters as possible to come in because they will be the ones carrying on the trade when the older people go.

"Youngsters could raise birds if they had some land. It is a really good hobby, and it is fun picking the eggs in the morning and taking care of them." ➤