

**PRESS RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

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**A Great Bunch: British Farmers Make Plea to Public Not To Take The Humble Carrot for Granted**

Putting a portion of carrots on your plate costs less than ten pence. They are cheap and nutritious but - fear Britain’s farmers - somewhat taken for granted.

That is why a group of six farmers have clubbed together to launch the first UK National Carrot Day to celebrate the iconic vegetable.

The dedicated day will take place on Thursday, October 3rd, and heading up the event will be eighth-generation farmer Rodger Hobson.

Rodger, whose family have farmed the same land near York since 1847, chairs the British Carrot Growers Association (BCGA) and is determined to dangle the proverbial carrot in front of as many people as possible, from supermarket shoppers to school children and professional chefs.

“Whenever I meet new people and tell them I’m a carrot farmer they always smile,” reflects Rodger, who likes to eat his carrots raw with hummus or honey roasted with Sunday lunch.

“Even kids who say they don’t like veg tend to eat carrots. It’s maybe because of their other role as the snowman’s nose, but they are a happy, feelgood veg.”

The UK has traditionally been 97% self-sufficient in carrots, but last year’s weather - the summer was the hottest since the height of the Roman Empire but went on to record 11% more rain than average - left 2023 notched up as the worst ever year in Rodger’s memory for growing carrots.

“This led to a lot of carrots coming in from Israel, Spain, France and even China,” says Rodger, who explains the double-whammy impact the freak weather had on his carrots. “They wilt when they get too hot and then are more susceptible diseases while they are sitting in wet soil. “Unlike lots of other vegetables they are harvested and sent straight off to the shops – they can’t be stored like potatoes.”

Looking for the red tractor, the sign of being British grown, on packaging is one way Rodger says shoppers can support the UK’s carrot growers. To try and produce healthy carrots that need less pesticides, once a field has been harvested Rodger doesn’t grow carrots in it again for a whole decade.

“British farmers do care about the environment and quality food and it would mean the world to us if this campaign got people to stop taking the carrot for granted, to understand all the hard work that goes into growing it a bit more.

“Buying British has got to be better for both our health and the country’s carbon footprint than carrots that have been flown in from the other side of the world,” he adds. “Provenance also affects price; British carrots cost around a third of what shoppers were paying last Christmas for ones from Israel.”

Rodger, who is constantly trying to outsmart burrowing bunnies trying to eat his carrots like a scene from a Bugs Bunny cartoon, wasn’t too concerned about some supermarkets discounting packs of Christmas veg down to 15 pence a packet.

“At least the retailers were subsiding this, it wasn’t that they were paying producers any less and it got people talking about and buying more veg.”

However, his friend and fellow sponsor of National Carrot Day, farmer Guy Poskitt didn’t like it.

“I think these ridiculously cheap prices undervalue products and increase food waste,” says 61-year-old Mr Poskitt, who grows around 50,000 tons (packed weight) of carrots annually with his 23-year-old son Ben near Selby, North Yorkshire.

“How many people would buy extra bags because they were so cheap and end up throwing some of them away? There isn’t a single farmer in the world who likes to see their produce go to waste and not eaten.”

Mr Poskitt believes fruit and vegetables sales are harder than ever because they are often no longer the first thing customers see when they walk into a supermarket.

“Fresh fruit and vegetables always used to be straight in front of you, as soon as you walked through the door,” he recalls. “Now, when you walk into lots of supermarkets, the first items you see will be non-food related, like clothing or homeware. You might have to walk halfway around the store now before getting to the fresh fruit and vegetables - which just doesn’t give them the same impact as before.

“Without those displays we have to work harder. If I get talking to somebody who isn’t involved in farming, they are always genuinely interested in how we grow carrots. They find it fascinating how we are trying all kinds of ways to work with climate change rather than just throw the towel in. Farmers need to make the most of this interest and get better at explaining what we do.

“As a farmer, a little bit of interest in what you do is very much appreciated and I hope this will be one of the lasting legacies of Carrot Day.

“With our limited budget we’re not expecting miracles with Carrot Day, but whatever support we get we’ll really appreciate.”

**-Ends-**

**Notes to Editors:**

The British Carrot Growers Association has approximately 40 members, made up of carrot producers in the UK. Funded voluntarily by its associates, the union has the primary aim of increasing UK consumption of carrots and aims to manage the sustainability of the industry and help responsible growers to operate.

The BCGA is a community of British carrot farmers that meet to discuss all things carrots – the diseases, varieties, and new growing/harvesting technologies.

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***Additional carrot facts and stats:***

* The carrot crop is Britain’s major root vegetable, producing over 700,000 tonnes of carrots each year from 9,000 hectares.
* Each year 22 billion carrot seeds are sown in Britain, producing around 100 carrots per year for every member of the population.
* The sales value of British carrots is around £290 million.
* Freshly harvested carrots are washed, packed and distributed to nearly every shop in the whole of Britain almost every day of the year.
* The UK is 97% self-sufficient in carrots – a great success story.
* The crop is harvested all-year round.
* Carrot farmers have had a tough time recently – the weather was awful from July 2023 through to May 2024, which meant carrot growers had to import some of their carrots because harvesting was so challenging. This led to a situation last Christmas where supermarkets were full of carrots from Israel, and they were being discounted down to 15p a bag.
* Carrot farmers have become very adept at protecting carrots over the winter from frosts and snow, by covering them with straw.
* Growing a carrot is a lot tricker than it looks. Once they have been harvested farmers like Rodger Hobson, chair of the British Carrot Growers, don't grow carrots again in the same field for a whole decade to protect the carrots from diseases and pests carried in the soil.
* And, you've guessed, Beatrix Potter was right - rabbits are always trying to steal them! Rodger, who read Engineering at Oxford before returning home to the family farm near York, has even invented a special fencing machine to try and protect his carrots from burrowing bunnies.
* Carrot history - It is thought that the carrot first came from Afghanistan sometime around the 7th Century AD, when they were originally purple! Carrots were known to both the Greeks and Romans. In fact, the Greeks called the carrot “Philtron” and used it as a love medicine – making men more ardent and women more yielding. The orange carrot is thought to have dated back to the Dutch in the 16th Century.
* Today’s carrots have 50% more carotene that those of 1970 – and the vitamin A in carrots are good for eye health (old wives’ tale is they help you see in the dark)
* On the 3rd of October there will be a carrot open day at Strawson’s farm near Newark, where carrot farmers will meet at a special open day to talk about all things carrot and look at new varieties and innovative ways of growing them.