

## Welcome to UK's poshest veg shop

Prince and duchess launch latest royal business venture - and rival retailers say they don't mind at all. [Listen to Steven Morris' verdict on the Highgrove produce](#)

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Steven Morris

The Guardian, Tuesday 18 March 2008

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Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, leave the Highgrove shop on Tetbury High Street that will sell produce from the gardens of their Highgrove estate.

Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images

He is the heir to the throne, a businessman, a champion of the environment. And from this morning, probably Britain's poshest greengrocer. At 9am sharp, Highgrove, Prince Charles's store on the main high street of his adopted home town, Tetbury, will open its bluey-green doors to the great unwashed.

It is the latest venture for the prince's ever expanding business portfolio, which has earned millions of pounds in profit over the last few years.

At Highgrove shop, the prince is sticking to the formula that has served him so well; on offer will be everything from seasonal vegetables freshly pulled out of the ground from the prince's nearby estate - no extra charge for the royal mud still clinging to them - to

apple juice from Camilla's orchards in Wiltshire.

There will be jams, jellies, honeys, chutneys and mustards, as well as handmade biscuits and chocolates. But the coachloads of visitors, tourists and shoppers that will beat a path to his store should not come expecting a bargain.

Away from the food shelves, a Highland Vase to mark the prince's 60th birthday later this year was going for an eye-watering £395. You could spend £30 on a pair of gardening gloves or £45 on a nesting box - only the better class of bird welcome.

The best buy may have been a collection of Prince Charles's sketches, a mere £6.95.

A modest crowd turned up for the official opening yesterday afternoon. There was no cutting of ribbon, no toasts, simply an appearance by Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall. The royal couple had a chat with the staff, rubbed shoulders with the great and good of Tetbury and, no doubt, checked the stock was all in order.

"He doesn't exactly look like Arkwright [the corner shop owner played by Ronnie Barker in the sitcom *Open All Hours*], does he?" said Steve Gray, one of the onlookers. "Why is he doing this? He doesn't need the money and it seems a bit odd, a royal running a shop."

The cynics might say the prince is doing it to promote brand Charles. There have been rumours that Highgrove in Tetbury is the first one of a chain of stores. Charles's people said that this was nonsense - but did admit that he was looking at exporting some of his goodies.

According to the publicity blurb, the shop is about reflecting Charles's interests. So the first displays that the visitor is greeted with are chicken chinaware and stationery designed by Samantha Buckley, a student at the prince's School of Traditional Arts in east London. And the wooden boxes that the chutneys are stored in are made from sustainable Welsh oak by disadvantaged people being taught skills through one of the projects championed by the prince.

But the highlight is probably the organic vegetables. There is no greengrocer in Tetbury so the good people of the town are very excited that they will be able to buy Charles's muddy veg at his new store.

Sarah Champier-Lowe, the prince's personal florist and in charge of making sure the vegetables yesterday looked more like a still life painting than a food stall, said: "When we had a preview, people couldn't wait to get at the vegetables." To be fair, the veg prices were reasonable. A bunch of earthy organic leeks from Highgrove will cost £1.35 today.

A similar bunch of leeks that was plucked from the soil in the Netherlands and looked nothing like as tasty as Charles's was £1.10 opposite in the supermarket Somerfield.

Anyway, the prince's people were keen to point out, the profits of the shop are to be ploughed back into the prince's Charities Foundation, which manages and allocates funds generated by his social enterprises. Most Tetbury shopkeepers were welcoming of the new kid on the block. A few metres from Charles's shop, David Herbert, of the food and drinks store, Quayles, said: "Everybody has been telling me my business is going to suffer. It's not - it's good for the town. We'll all benefit. The shop will attract more visitors."

Chocolate shop owner Hortensia Oates had been checking out the prices Charles was charging. "I've got to admit they are pretty competitive," she said.

Butcher John Newman sells beef from Charles's estate - and, indeed fine lamb from Princess Anne's land too. "This will bring more people into the town so that's good for us." The shopkeepers are painfully keen not to be seen to criticise their royal neighbour - this is a royalist town if ever there was one. As they left the store yesterday, the duchess shook hands with onlookers - and heartily recommended the shop. "It's got some lovely things in," she said.

The prince was busy checking out a new rival, the Chef's Table. "I hear it's good," he told one Tetbury resident. "Not as good as your shop," she replied. In places like this, it is best to stay on the right side of the royals.

## **Duchy in numbers**

Duchy Originals was launched in 1992; its annual retail sales are now **£40m**

In 2007, it reported a £1.53m profit, a record for the company and an increase on the previous year of **29%**

Since 1999 it has generated profits of **£7m** which are donated to the Prince's Charities Foundation

The Duchy range has more than **250** products, including biscuits, condiments, meat, dairy products, drinks, and organic soups and ready meals

**23,000** people visit the gardens at Highgrove each year, and there is a two-year waiting list. Home farm, at Highgrove, supplies organic vegetable boxes to **140** local families

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