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# Ox ploughs rich furrow



Listening and learning: David & Suzanne Pritchard value customer feedback

**David Hancock** talks to David Pritchard, joint owner of the Sussex Ox, in Alfriston, East Sussex, about growing his business

## Why our food business is a success

Flexibility has been key to our success, with some customers coming in for three courses, tucking into steaks and beautiful fresh fish, while others just want to pop in for a pint and a steak and kidney pie. We have high-end diners who call in for fish and chips during the week, and return at weekends with friends, spending £30 a head on three courses.

My wife, Suzanne, and I run the pub. We have been looking at the provenance of our food and seeking out more local producers to supply us with lamb, beef, fish, free-range chickens and fresh vegetables. Regular diners who trust our food have been asking where we source our produce and now we're shouting about it on our menu – this is proving popular and helping to draw more folk through the door.

## Pub facts

**Address:** The Sussex Ox, Milton Street, Alfriston, East Sussex BN26 5RL

**Tel:** 01323 870840;

**Web:** www.thesussexox.co.uk

**Owners:** David & Suzanne Pritchard (freehold)

**Number of staff:** 12

**GP food:** 65%

**GP drink:** 65%

**Covers a week:** winter 400;



Flexible approach: the Sussex Ox menu is the same wherever customers eat

## Our menu

We use a blackboard, and the menu and service is the same wherever customers eat. This flexibility allows us to take advantage of deals from our butcher or fishmonger and use seasonally-available produce.

Main courses are split between bar meals and main meals. The former offers pub classics, such as fish and chips, ham, egg and bubble-and-squeak, as well as our famous Ox burger, while main dishes are more adventurous, such as rack of lamb or

the enormous plaice we have on at the moment.

## Best-selling dishes

Time-honoured pub classics sell well. We do a great lamb burger (£8.75) and make our own chips and coleslaw. We sell about 90 Ox burgers a week. Many come to enjoy a pint of Harvey's and an Ox burger.

Soups are popular for lunch, and our fish and chips (£9.75) sell well – we buy white fish that's in favour, such as hake and pollock, and make our own batter. Our steaks sell well because we hang them for 21 days and cook them simply on a chargrill. When we put crumbles, treacle tart and spotted dick on the pudding board, they fly out the door.

## Best investment

With Le Verre de Vin wine preservation system, we can now offer a huge range of wines by the glass. Some customers are happy to pay £6 a glass for a Louis Latour Pinot Noir or have a flute of quality Champagne, as they don't want to drink a whole bottle.

## Marketing and PR

Our comment-card system generates feedback and builds up an email database. We particularly want to hear the negative comments, so that we can respond quickly. We ask for email addresses and reply to each comment, informing correspondents of forthcoming events. Our website is an excellent marketing tool.

## Top tips

■ Listen to the customer and respond to what they want. Having come to this business as complete novices, we have listened and learned from our customers. We have broadened our horizons and moulded our offering to fit the majority, who come here in search of a quality drinking and dining venue. ■ Our comment cards and verbal feedback have been vital in forming the basis of our ongoing business strategy.