



Press Release April 2006

GroSol

Stunning Truffles in the UK! By French Marie 6th April

Summary

*A new UK grown produce, a species of truffle could develop a home UK gourmet industry rather than bringing imports. The researcher French Marie makes the point that quality truffles can be found in nature in the UK, but the areas around the trees need to be managed and pickers trained. The current truffles found now on the markets lack quality. This is a first research statement on the spread of the season which covers 6 months of the year for harvesting potentially ripe *Tuber uncinatum*, and what to look for. Quality *Tuber uncinatum* fungus is the highest priced that can be harvested in the UK. It is time to carry out site maintenance and train pickers to harvest them instead of insects.*

Full text

Stunning truffles from the UK!

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The gourmet markets now include the expensive fungus, truffles on the British menu regardless of cost. It is a difficult product to buy satisfactorily if you are new to this market. Due to the cost, each trial is punitive. The descriptive terminology by colour, season or region is confusing. The black summer truffle for example is actually off-white, beige if you are lucky, inside, and many species of truffles are black on the outside. With regards to using 'season' as a descriptive, there are several truffle species that can be harvested in the autumn in the same areas. The Périgord truffle is found evidently in France, but also Italy, Spain, Serbia and Croatia etc. and in winter. How do you know whether this product is the one expected and of the right quality, packaged and kept the right way? Their shelf life is brief.

There are some attempts at developing 'local' UK fungi and truffle markets. However, all truffles bought and sold in the UK for the proven gourmet market come from abroad, yet a huge potential exists for the *Tuber uncinatum*, renown as "Truffe de Bourgogne" in France and various other appellations in other European countries. The taste and flavours vary according to a number of factors, such as soil, origins, genetics and the skill of the picker. Where the product comes from has been recognised as key to the flavours by fine connoisseurs of the French industry. Can we put the UK on the European truffle map for the connoisseur? Our slices as they might appear on a dish certainly compare well (Figure 1).



The truffles reach their full flavour once mature only. They must be firm to the touch but not dry, and have more than a faint smell! According to the specie, the colour, texture will vary and so will the 'recipes' to enhance the truffle flavours and the dish and not kill it. This is an art; something hard to appreciate fully from a book, a television programme, or radio broadcast, which cannot involve all of our senses.

Since picking her first truffle in 2003, French Marie from GroSol has come a long way. The truffles were used for research to understand the living ecosystem surrounding this precious fungus which grows in many parts of the UK mostly undiscovered. How does it compare? From one truffle only, the sweet nutty smell is so 'persuasive' that it creeps away from any container. It fills the box, the fridge, the kitchen, and the corridors. It is an inebriating smell that promises a great deal to the palate.

Figure 1 |Horizontal slice of a nodule of *T. uncinatum* (180g)

The UK Tuber uncinatum definitely has the wow factor. If it fails this test, then it is not of prime quality, for potentially many different reasons. It is then difficult to justify it on the real gourmet table.

Tuber uncinatum can be found ripe in the UK over 6 months of the year, when it justifies its high price, and it takes several months to develop. The best flavours were from perfect specimen picked in the autumn, the deeper in the soil, the better the flavour. For such maturity to be reached the picker must be patient and wait, until it is ready. It will not 'mature' in the same manner once picked or even budged from the soil. Nothing can replace good training.

Figure 2 Cross section of a ripe T.uncinatum (120g)



Unfortunately, whilst truffles can be picked by humans, nature is a fierce competitor. Insects, animals and plants all seek this bounty source of nutrients and minerals. The master in the UK is a hoverfly and it has found ways to disguise the truffle's sweet smell. Their much developed senses locate it even unripe. Investing in new 'plantations' particularly in T. melanosporum (Perigord Truffle) has revived the French truffle market where a scientific approach replaced the lost human knowledge and practice. It is estimated that most T. uncinatum truffles in France still come from natural sites. Now is the time to prepare for the next season, in training or tree area maintenance- to be able to pick some from August early September, this should start now.

In France, **l'Interregionale des Trufficulteurs du Centre et de l'Est** (ITCE) regulates the local markets for that species of truffle and plays a quality control role against the regulations for the fresh truffles before the opening of each market. Now with a European reach **la Confrérie de la Truffe de Bourgogne** (Grand Maitre

Jean-Louis Mangel) has a marketing role targeting primarily restaurants. French Marie had been invited to join the European producers group by Gérard Chevalier, the I.N.R.A. Tuber uncinatum scientist (the French DEFRA equivalent). He has been leading and defending the Tuber uncinatum truffle culture in Europe for 30 years. French Marie was given the place of honour, between the ITCE President Mr. François Beaucamp and Mr. Gérard Chevalier at the European Annual Chapter in Auxerre last autumn, as the UK truffle producer with a professional approach. Gérard Chevalier has chosen to work with her on the Tuber uncinatum in the UK on a unique research project.

French Marie

French.marie@grosol.co.uk

For more information see www.grosol.co.uk