

Why do we charge for Pick Your Own entry?

At Millets we have been growing and selling strawberries via Pick Your Own for over 45 years and in that time we have had to adapt and change considerably. Unfortunately for the last 8 years the fruit growing element of our business has cost more money to deliver than it has generated. In short it is loss making and needs to be supported financially by other areas. Every year we, as a family, have the difficult discussion about whether we can continue to fund the fruit growing and offer a Pick Your Own at Millets. Every year so far we have decided to continue because basically we feel so emotionally connected to our Strawberries, the seed from which Millets as we know it today grew.

The changes over time that have affected the PYO are multiple:

Firstly, and most obviously, the ever-increasing price of fruit growing. From the team of 4 who work all year round to provide such an amazing crop, maintaining the polytunnels, the costs of the coya bags the strawberries are grown in, storing the propagated plants in chilled conditions, planting, pruning, weeding, irrigation and feeding the crop. These costs we aim to cover when deciding the price of the fruit.

On top of the fruit growing costs are the costs associated with opening the fields to the public. These include the time it takes to make the PYO suitable for the public to visit, the health and safety risk assessments and daily checks, mowing, signage and fencing, running the booking systems, staff to welcome people at the entrance and buying the punnets to pick into. Our admission charge aims to cover these costs (don't forget 25p of each £1.50 is VAT).

Secondly the way our customer use the Pick Your Own has changed. When PYO first began it was a way to buy food in bulk, fill the freezer or make jam and the "housewife" would visit on her own and get busy picking to feed her family.

Today our customers come to enjoy the PYO as a family day out. They use it to introduce their children to the concept of "where our food comes from", to get them out into the fresh air and enjoy a day of wholesome family fun. Most actually only want a relatively small quantity of fruit to take home compared to the number of family members who visit the fields.

This is by no means a bad thing, merely an observation we have made over the years. We absolutely support the public visiting our PYO to connect with their family and friends and create amazing memories. Unfortunately though we can't continue to fund this, and this is why we have implemented a very low admissions price for visiting the PYO. We consider this to be a very fair price for what can become a full day out with most of our visitors also enjoying our animal walkway, outside play area and beautiful walks through Phoebe woods. All of these are free of charge but cost us a considerable amount to maintain annually.

Add to this keeping the many customer toilets cleaned daily, picnic tables wiped, the bins emptied, and rubbish collected (businesses have to pay for this), pathways swept, lawns mown, flower beds weeded, car park cleaned (yes monthly when a huge sweeping machine visits!) and Millets Farm Centre becomes quite an expensive place to keep open! Instead of introducing an admission charge for Millets Farm Centre as a whole we aim for all ticketed areas of the business to contribute to the running costs of these public spaces and whilst the PYO will never be able to do this we do hope every year it will cover it's own costs (we are still waiting!).

We recognise that paying an entry fee into the PYO is a mindset shift for many of our longstanding customers and we acknowledge that all our customers have their own personal spending and budgets to consider but we would ask you to consider carefully and honestly if you have had £1.50 worth of fun from your experience at Millets? (Don't forget the strawberries you might have sampled that didn't make it into your punnet!). For those who don't feel they get value from money from their experience in the PYO fields we have plenty of our delicious strawberries available to buy from the Farm Shop.

We do have "Top Picker" cards which offers a discount to our regular pickers who still use the PYO as a food source rather than a day out activity and if you think this applies to you please so get in touch by emailing enquiries@milletsfarmcentre.com