

Welfare-conscious chicken farmer scoops major award

by Alison Stephenson

A 29-YEAR-old Belstone chicken farmer has beaten off stiff competition to win a major industry award for efficiency.

Hundreds of entries were received for the prestigious NFU award but Robert Lanning, who has been selling eggs and chickens since he was a lad, has won it at his second attempt.

The chicken farmer, who trades as Devonshire Poultry, started his business with three bantams which the fox ate. He is now producing around a million birds a year for sale in supermarkets.

NFU spokesman Paul Cooper said Robert was up against some of the most modern farms in the country.

'Robert farms on quite an old

farm but it shows that if you do the job properly you can win awards like this,' he said. 'It is lovely to have a winner in this part of the country — we do not get many from the Okehampton area.'

The farmer pays so much regard to the welfare of his chickens that he has even shown representatives from farm animal rights group 'Compassion in World Farming' around his units.

His connections with the poultry industry stem from his father who works in the business but Robert said breeding chickens was not something the family had done before.

'I have always loved animals but my parents did not own any land to have sheep or cows so the only thing I could look after was chickens.

'When I was ten I used to do a

free range egg round on my push-bike and it just went from there really.'

He said the award was something he genuinely wanted to win.

'It was a real surprise,' he said. 'I have put a lot of work in but I did not expect to win it.'

'It shows that I am a good chicken farmer and as well as boosting my own self-pride hopefully it will give me more respect in the industry.'

Robert said it was a competitive world and it was essential to work with supermarkets and consumers to produce what they wanted, but he could not and would not compete with the lower standards and prices of poultry meat coming into the UK from other parts of Europe, the Far East and Brazil.

'If consumers want welfare they must buy British chicken,' he said.



● Award-winner Robert Lanning

Picture by Ian Snell