

Pioneer Robert's award

WESTCOUNTRY poultry farmer Robert Lanning has been highly commended in the Poultry Producer of the Year Award at the Pig and Poultry Marketing Awards in London.

Mr Lanning, who was nominated for the award by poultry processor 2 Sisters Willand, owns Devonshire Poultry near Honiton. At just 38-years-old he is a respected pioneer and ambassador for Freedom Food poultry production, a system defined and audited by the RSPCA.

Because of his high standards, passionate advocacy and welcoming attitude, Robert's Freedom Food farms have become showcases for the system. They are visited by all sorts of people, from politicians to welfare campaigners and celebrity chefs.

"Robert has gone the extra mile with his open door policy," said the Pig and Poultry Marketing judging panel, "embracing the media at many levels. He has captured a niche in the market and is turning it into a mainstream business. We were impressed with his pioneering systems and alliances with research bodies to continually move forward with his business model."

It was his visit to Robert's



■ Robert Lanning

farm last year that convinced Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall there was an acceptable way of rearing chicken indoors. Jamie Oliver visited in 2007 and went on to advocate Freedom Food as THE affordable higher welfare choice for consumers.

Freedom Food production now represents around 50 per cent of Robert's total turnover, but he aspires to becoming a 100 per cent Freedom Food producer when consumer demand and profitability allow.

"As a farmer, I've enjoyed the challenge of developing

an alternative way to rear chicken. That's not to say that the existing systems don't offer a fantastic product at a great price, because they do," says Robert, who travelled to London with wife Jacqui to collect his award. "But for me, Freedom Food was about challenging how we do things with a system that encourages the natural behaviour of the bird but at a price that is still affordable for most consumers.

"I think we've achieved that, and I feel greatly honoured to have our efforts recognised in this way from within the industry."

Robert's farming career started when he was just a boy selling eggs from three bantams. His company, Devonshire Poultry, was established ten years ago and rears chickens for 2 Sisters Willand. This year, as 2 Sisters' requirements have grown, Devonshire Poultry has expanded to running six farms with approximately 560,000 birds – standard and Freedom Food – "on the ground" at any one time, making it the largest privately owned poultry producer in the Westcountry.

For more information about Freedom Food, visit www.rspca.co.uk.