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## M&S launches first ever 'Reverse Season' British Asparagus

**I**N A major UK first, M&S is launching the first ever 'Reverse Season' British Asparagus. It will be available in its stores from now until November.

A revolutionary step forward for the asparagus industry, M&S has worked with its asparagus grower John Chinn over the past five years to develop a new way of growing British asparagus long after the traditional spring season has finished.

M&S Agronomist Dr Simon Coupe explained: "There is always an air of excitement when the first British asparagus comes into season in the spring and our customers always tell us that it's such a shame that the window to enjoy it is so short, so we decided this was something we wanted to try to change."

Dr Coupe continued: "We went on several study trips with our grower who travels the world researching asparagus, and in the Mediterranean we discovered a special new variety that we thought could grow in the UK.

"We then worked out a careful plan for feeding and watering it so it could grow in the UK during the autumn for a second season of delicious British Asparagus."

It is being grown in Herefordshire in the Wye Valley by Mr Chinn, and the production system relies on harnessing the sun's energy, not artificial heat.

Mr Chinn said: "This is a really exciting achievement – by discovering this new variety we will revolutionise the asparagus industry by offering British grown asparagus to M&S customers for a further two months, long after the traditional season has finished.

"We really want to drive the British asparagus industry forwards and do this in the most sustainable and natural way."

Several years ago Mr Chinn was the first asparagus grower to extend the spring season by making the most of the micro climate within the hidden Wye Valley where his farms are based.

By using an early variety of asparagus planted on the south facing slopes and covering them to protect the spears from harsher temperatures, he was able to start harvesting in early March and extend the season into July, increasing the traditional season from eight weeks to 14 weeks.

By extending the first season by six weeks, Mr Chinn managed to save more than 500 tonnes of carbon dioxide by relying less on imports from Peru, and the new 'reverse season' asparagus will result in even more savings.

