

Geoffrey Roberts winner 2011

17 May 2011 by Jancis Robinson

The 16th [Geoffrey Roberts Award](#) goes to Sarah Robins of Melbourne, Australia, who will spend her £3,000 travel award visiting the US to learn about the hugely successful American scheme for encouraging those on welfare assistance to redeem vouchers at farmers' markets. Her aim is to make a submission to the Australian government to introduce such a scheme there, broadening access to farmers' markets to a wider section of the community.

Sarah, originally from New Zealand, is currently Director of Marketing and Communications for the Victorian Farmers' Markets Association. She will travel to the US to research the [United States' WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program](#), which makes welfare payment beneficiaries eligible for farmers' market coupons. More than two million people benefited from the US programme in 2009. Sarah wants to investigate the benefits and shortcomings of the American scheme so as to maximise its potential effectiveness in Australia.

Sarah says, 'Farmers' markets offer an incredible array of benefits to the community, from providing healthy and nutritious fresh food, to support for local agriculture, small businesses and local economies, an awareness of seasonality, preserving the rural landscape and acting as an important social and educational hub in cities, villages and towns alike. Unfortunately, however, shopping regularly at farmers' markets is beyond the financial means of some parts of the community. I'm thrilled that the Geoffrey Roberts Award will enable me to travel to the United States to investigate the food voucher system used there which enables those receiving welfare assistance to access farmers' markets. This information will be of invaluable assistance in making a submission to the Australian government for a similar system to be implemented here.'

Sally Clarke of Clarke's restaurant in London, one of the judges, commented, 'Sarah Robins was a very popular candidate amongst the panel of judges, and as we discussed her plans together, it became clear that we all felt confident that she had the potential to touch an enormous number of Australian lives, not only those on benefit and those on lower incomes, but also the farmers and producers themselves. I am thrilled that the Geoffrey Roberts Award may be seen as instrumental in moving these life-changing ideas to the fruition they deserve.'

'All of us judges hope that the long-term effect of this award will be that lower-income Australians, and perhaps others elsewhere, will be given access to high-quality, fresh, nutritious and delicious food - with the additional benefits involved in increasing understanding and awareness of health and nutrition, sustainability, and support for local businesses.'

The 2011 award nicely squares the circle for this annual international travel award made in memory of British pioneer New World wine importer Geoffrey Roberts. In 1997 the award was given to Jane Adams of Sydney so that she could go to the US to research farmers' markets with a view to introducing the concept in Australia. Today there are 150 farmers' markets in Australia and an accreditation system for food producers and markets introduced in Victoria (thanks to our winner Sarah Robins and her colleagues at the Victorian Farmers' Markets Association) is fast becoming an industry standard as other Australian states seek to implement the system to ensure authenticity among market stallholders.

Find out more about the Geoffrey Roberts Award and past winners, potential achievers in food and drink, at www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com.