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SPECIALITY FOOD

NEWS, COMMENT AND BUYING IDEAS FOR FINE FOOD RETAILERS



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Hot Profits



Since last issue, many of you will have attended one of the big food shows at Excel and the NEC, and if you used your time well, you'll have returned with food for thought as well as new food for your shelves. With more space being devoted to areas for smaller artisan producers, there really is no place like a show for seeking out unique products which have yet to be snapped up by the supermarkets. An important show of a different kind opens later this month under the auspices of the Royal Bath & West. This, of course, is the British Cheese Awards, which will enjoy its second appearance at the Somerset venue. Launched over 20 years ago, the Awards are previewed in this issue by their founder, columnist Juliet Harbutt.

Now is the time when thoughts of independent food retailers should be firmly focused on summer. There are all sorts of ways in which this season can be thoroughly exploited, demand satisfied and turnover increased. In our special summer section, we offer a host of ideas which aim to increase summer trade and also make suggestions for the sort of summer stock which will put you a jump ahead of the supermarkets. We consider how picnics can sell all kinds of summer foods. We also tackle summer drinks – it's not an area to be neglected, so do check out our feature and guide on page 27. Summer sees the lighting of barbecues, and with everyone from the big four to roadside garages offering barbecue accessories and foods, it's important that once again, your stock offers that all-important point of difference. See page 31 and get your barbecue solutions absolutely right this year. We're also thinking about ethical trading: did the recession's penny-pinching affect our buying habits when it comes to Fairtrade? All this and more in the May issue of Speciality Food.

> "There are all sorts of ways this season can be exploited, demand satisfied and turnover increased"

Ross Gilfillan

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NEWS IN BRIEF

SELFRIDGES CELEBRATES YEAR OF MEXICO

To mark 2015 being The Year of Mexico in the UK, Selfridges is hosting a number of events, tastings and demos with leading Mexican chefs and showcasing quality Mexican produce in its Foodhall.

The Foodhall will also see its first street food Taqueria, and tequila and mezcal tasting evenings. Ceviche will be served at the Caviar and Prunier House, and churros with a twist will be available from a stand outside the Foodhall.

Mexican cuisine was the first international gastronomy to be recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage by by UNESCO.

Nathan Herrmann, Selfridges food and restaurants director said, "We are thrilled to partnering with the Mexico Tourist Board to bring the exciting Mexican food scene to London."

UK FOOD EXPORT BOOM

2014 saw a 2.6 per cent growth in Britain's food and non-alcoholic drinks exports, making the value of this sector almost double what was 10 years ago.

George Eustice, farming minister said, "[These] new figures are further evidence of the global appetite for our top-quality British food, which was worth a record £103 billion to the UK economy in 2013. It is particularly encouraging to see UK dairy exports at a record high as our farmers seize new opportunities to export abroad and grow their business."





Minimum Wage Change: What Does It Mean For Indies?

Wages have always been a hot topic – with a natural divide between the views of employees and employees ever-present – and as of October 2015, the National Minimum Wage is increasing from £6.50 per hour to £6.70. Good news for employees, but how does this affect employers? Our sector can boast an impressive number of businesses, small and large; does the new legislation affect one more than the other, or do both face an equally unsettling change?

While some Speciality Food readers represent large food halls, booming city centre delis and destination farm shops, a number of our readers own and run their business with a two-person team – with extra staff an unaffordable luxury – so what does this mean for them? We speak to a successful two-person deli to get the view on the ground.



Mark Kacary, The Norfolk Deli

My wife and I own and are directors of our business, so like many small business owners we pay ourselves what the business can afford. As directors we seek to reinvest as much as we can into the business, by replacing equipment which needs replacing, buying new equipment and developing new market sectors so that eventually we may reap the rewards of our hard work. What this means to us, though, is that to pay ourselves the existing minimum wage could be considered to be a major wage increase.

This news offers both positive and negative points. The positive in any wage increase is that it puts more money into the pockets of employees which makes them feel better about themselves. We took the decision when starting the business that we would do for without additional staff. This is not that we will never employ staff, it's just that we appreciate the use of the word prudence and that within most businesses wages constitute one of the largest drains on revenue/funds. When you consider that, as with many delis, the average spend per customer is nothing like the average spend per customer in a large retail store, it would require a combination of the following to happen before we make the decision to employ additional people.

1) a substantial increase in either footfall or average customer spend

2) for this increase to be seen to be continual and not a sudden spike

3) the introduction of services which stretches us to the maximum and prevents us from offering the level of customer service our customers have grown to expect

What will always be a constant is affordability. As a business we have to know that we can afford to employ somebody and that the job we're offering will be long term, challenging and fulfilling. It would be our aim to pay above any minimum wage as it would be our expectation that we would require the best and therefore pay accordingly. The minimum wage is a headline figure and an indicator as to what we should expect to pay as a bare minimum. It therefore helps us to determine when we can afford to employ somebody.

It's difficult to second guess how this would affect bigger indie retailers. One is tempted to say that the immediate concern I would have if we were of the size to employ 10 or more people is not only the affordability of this, but what impact it is going to have on profitability of the business. All businesses, large and small, need profits. These are needed to reinvest to ensure that the business can remain in business. Profits are needed to employ people! We have all seen situations where business profits have been affected for whatever reason, and the result has been the cost saving exercise of reducing the size of a workforce.

It's easy to look negatively and just think, "this is going to cost me more!" with the resulting knee jerk reaction that one has to either forget about employing staff or, even worse, that staff will need to go to pay for the extra wages. The alternative view, of course, is that the industry should embrace this and see it as an opportunity. After all, this isn't a directive aimed at the independent food and drink industry alone. With more people shopping locally, and more people wanting to buy things locally, this could be seen as an opportunity. More people may have a few more pounds in their pockets. They may want to spoil themselves from time to time, which means as a small deli in Hunstanton we will be working with our customers, listening to them and seeking to offer them whatever it is their extra income allows them to buy. That should mean in time that as owners we might eventually pay ourselves the minimum wage whilst seeking to employ somebody.

> “Profits are needed to employ people! We have all seen situations where business profits have been affected for whatever reason and the result has been the cost-saving exercise of reducing the size of a workforce”

It's time to spice things up!



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The Ginger People are delighted to be supplying the Gin Gins Ginger candy's and the Organic Ginger Pantry essentials range to all fine food outlets.





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Hider THE FINE FOOD FAMILY



OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Deli, farm shop and food hall openings and expansions across the country

SECOND SITE FOR STARTISANS

Startisans, the London-based supporter of start-up food businesses has opened a second site — a pop-up located at Duke of York Square on Kings Road in Chelsea.

Run in line with family business — and Duke of York Square neighbour — Partridges, which was behind the concept, and working with support from the Cadogan Estate, the new shop will be open daily from 8am-7pm, selling products from a rotating selection of artisan producers until mid-summer.

Producers scheduled include Hush Hush Chefs, producer of handmade pies, Chango Empanadas which offers authentic Argentine empanadas, traditional French patisserie business Comptoir Gormand and Hampshire-based coffee roaster Peaberry Coffee.

Kitty Shepherd, co-founder of Startisans said, "We're delighted to be able to bring Startisans to Chelsea. We opened our first shop in Covent Garden towards the end of last year and to be able to expand the concept is really satisfying. We're



grateful to the Cadogan Estate for giving us the space to do this.

"We're continuing to develop a framework for small food businesses to be able to bring their ideas to market without the large overheads of opening an actual shop. It's extremely rewarding to work with these innovative businesses and offer such great products, often at the forefront of emerging food trends, to consumers."



DEVON DRINKS LAUNCHES AT THE SHOPS AT DARTINGTON

The Shops At Dartington has opened a new shop devoted to beverages produced in Devon, named Devon Drinks, in the site's historic apple store.

The new retail enterprise will be stocking the finest wines, beers, ales, ciders, spirits and soft drinks produced in the region including those from Sharpham Wine, DAPPA, Ashridge Cider, Hunter's Brewery and Dartmoor Brewery, Lyme Bay Winery, Pebblebed, Lily Farm and Luscombe Drinks.

Barbara King, managing director of The Shops at Dartington said, "We have been delighted to see the growth of The Food Shop and thrilled with how well it has been received by our visitors. Following its enormous success it's become apparent that our customers are not only demanding locally produced and sourced food products but drinks as well. We are therefore confident Devon Drinks is going to address these demands whilst helping to support our region's passionate drinks producers.

"Devon Drinks showcases the very best alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks produced in the county in a stylish new shop located in the historic apple store here at The Shops at Dartington. We have seen a growing interest from visitors in buying local, and are extremely keen to support the region's passionate, artisan drinks producers."





£4 MILLION KEELHAM FARM SHOP NEARS COMPLETION

The West Yorkshire-based independent retailer aims to create 60 new jobs at its new site, opening in June.

Sibling owners James and Victoria Robertshaw consider the 20,000 square foot second site a natural progression from the award-winning farm shop based on a working hill sheep farm in Thornton, Bradford, which has been open for 40 years.

They will be sourcing a large portion of the products on sale from local suppliers, thanks to an abundance of farmers and producers in the area — making the retailer a showcase of the best regional food.

The site will offer consumers a number of new services including a 140 capacity café and a living wall alongside its offering of fresh produce, a bakery, a delicatessen and an established butchers.

Victoria Robertshaw, co-owner said, "The new farm shop will include a butchers, bakery, fresh fruit and veg section, juice bar, delicatessen, café, production kitchen, and florists; each offering a broad range of home-grown and reared produce.

"We pride ourselves on making good, long-term relationships with our suppliers and we're looking to find more producers and farmers that are that are local to Skipton, so that Keelham Farm Shop, Skipton is a retail showcase of the best fresh food in the region.

"We've built a reputation in Thornton for offering our customers tasty, locally produced ingredients at an affordable price, and we're looking forward to expanding that award-winning recipe in Skipton and welcoming many new suppliers to the Keelham team."



Fresh New Look for Pasta Brand



Producer of restaurant-quality pasta and pasta sauces, The Fresh Pasta Company has revamped its branding and product range.

The newly-renamed Mattarello range is made in Northern Italy and includes fresh pastas, pasta sauces and filled pastas which are available in pre-packed for retail or 1kg bags for food service and deli serve-over counters.

The new look also sees additions to the premium filled pasta range, including the new Truffle & Buffalo Milk Ricotta Cappellacci.

Sole Nasi, brand guardian of The Fresh Pasta Company said, "Our pasta is made where my family is based in Italy, using the very best ingredients and a lot of eggs. It's different to others on the market because the filling is very creamy and the pasta is thin and silky – this creates our signature experience on the palate.

"It has a two-week shelf life so retailers have time to sell it, but it tastes a lot fresher than the fresh pastas already on the market thanks to the soft pasta and extra-creamy filling.

"Our branding engages with consumers in an emotional way – it focuses on food as an Italian celebration, bringing together friends and family. These are the kind of products we'd make at home, with nothing processed only the ingredients you'd find in your kitchen."





DIARY DATES

30th April–3rd May
LONDON COFFEE FESTIVAL
London
londoncoffeefestival.com

3rd–6th May
TUTTOFOOD
Fiera, Milano
tuttofood.it

6th–8th May
SIAL CHINA
Shanghai New International Expo Centre
sialchina.com

13th–14th May
CAFFE CULTURE
Olympia National Hall
caffecultureshow.com

18th–20th May
LONDON INTERNATIONAL WINE FAIR
Olympia, London
londonwinefair.com

19th–21st May
SWEETS & SNACKS EXPO
Chicago
sweetsandsnacks.com

27th–30th May
ROYAL BATH AND WEST SHOW
Somerset
bathandwest.com

JOHN SHEPHERD OF PARTRIDGES



"Everybody wants to make a brand"

In the famous words of Tears for Fears, "everybody wants to rule the world", and this is no less the case in respect of shops and shopkeepers and their good name or brand. From the largest food emporia in the world to the humble corner deli and food market stall, own label products should be an area of great pride for the proprietors and alternative choice for the customers.

"Everybody wants to make a brand" is perhaps a better way of putting it. Something that will end up in most kitchens from Osaka to Oklahoma via Oswestry.

There are many familiar existing brands out there that have already trodden this path, of course. Twinings, Walkers and Baxters are three home-grown world beaters. All of these are Royal Warrant Holders, and when I was closely involved with the Royal Warrant Holders Association I learnt about some of the fascinating stories connected to products that we now regard as commonplace.

Many were inventions of grocery shop keepers who needed to expand to survive. Thomas Lipton, John Cadbury and Frank Cooper thought up highly successful ways of getting new business. Sometimes the inventors of products were scientists with an entrepreneurial bent like Mr Lea and Mr Perrin, or the products themselves were deemed to have medicinal benefits. Mathias Robinson created Robinson's Barley Water at his grocer's shop in Holborn as a cure for fevers and kidney complaints. Jacob Schweppe moved to London to sell more of his aerated water as a health tonic.

At the heart of each brand is so often a human story connected to families and the struggles of life. Giacomo Justerini followed the love of his life, an opera singer, from Bologna to London. She broke his heart but we gained Justerini and Brooks and J and B Whisky and all that. Some brands still have an association with the families that created them stretching back many generations. Twining's goes back 11 generations and Baxter's Potted Shrimps goes back seven. This shows the importance of family businesses in maintaining brands.

So what are the brands of today destined for greatness, and will Partridges Chelsea Flower Tea ever be among them?

A recent survey received votes from deli owners and shopkeepers on the most popular and successful brands in various categories. Prestat, Seggiano, Tiptree and Tracklements all were at the top of the tree. Excellent products and great packaging of course, but one thing sets them apart as well. Behind each of them is an ethos and a spirit. A desire to succeed but also a desire to collaborate and to give customers what they want. In short, they have the spirit and imagination of the family business.







CHARLES CAMPION

"Match making"

Thirty years ago, nobody had heard of food and wine matching. People who considered themselves refined would insist on white wine with fish and look down their noses at anyone quaffing red with their Dover sole, but the idea that you should expend time and energy on working out what went with what raised an eyebrow. Now, 'matching' sessions are big business: wine and cheese; chocolate and whiskey; beer and mushrooms; red wine and roast beef. It seems that we all need reassurance that we are doing the right thing in the kitchen.

First of all, it is worth trying to assess just what it is that makes a good pairing. Nearly a decade ago I had the pleasure of a session trying to match drinks to curry and we made an attempt to assess how the pairings worked. There were two kinds of successful match, either the flavours of the drinks echoed the aromatics of the curries or the drinks' role was reduced to cleansing the palate between dishes. So a strong ale (appropriately enough, an I.P.A.) worked well with rich dishes. Meanwhile, on the palate cleansing side of the equation, fizzy water, fizzy lager or champagne all worked equally well. So we can all save money in curry houses by ordering lager rather than our customary champagne.

Recently some Indian boffins have been researching the differences between dishes from a number of different cuisines. The fieldwork was extensive and there was plenty of number crunching, all of which delivered roughly the same conclusion: if you are a French or Italian chef you set great store by balancing flavours and textures. Dishes play one flavour against another, everything is refined and elegant. Indian cooks, however, are never as happy as when big flavours bang up against one another.

Take a peep into the kitchen of a Balti restaurant in the suburbs of Birmingham. Balti Tropical is a favourite, a sauce heavy with spices, plus pineapple, plus prawns, plus chicken, plus lamb, plus chickpeas, finally topped with a handful of chopped coriander leaves on its way out of the kitchen. Page one of the saucier's manual would rule these combinations out as impossible, it's enough to make a chef's toque quiver. But like some other strangely delicious combinations – bacon and marmalade, or Marmite and ginger biscuits – Balti Tropical is very good to eat.

If customers will opt for a heavily spiced and discordant curry, might not they also lean towards other strong flavours? Perhaps that very old, very acidic, blue cheese has some life left in it? Perhaps that West Indian pepper sauce will change their ideas about cottage pie forever? Perhaps we should all get heavy handed in the kitchen and seek flavours that scrap with each other rather than meekly blending together. It would certainly give the organisers of cheese and wine matching evenings something to think about.



West Country Showcase at The Food & Drink Show

Taking place at The Centaur at Cheltenham Racecourse 3rd–4th June and partnered with Taste of the West, the Food & Drink Trade Show is a valuable mid-season source of fine food inspiration.

A wide variety of sectors are represented at the show, including ambients, confectionery, handcrafted alcohol and packaging, offering retailers a fresh look at the latest and greatest products ready to hit shelves.

The show will host demos from top chefs, and both days will see inspiring cookery featuring products exhibited at the show.

Mike Anderson, Hale Events Ltd said, "Cheltenham and the surrounding area across to the Wye Valley in the West and the Cotswolds in the East are full of fantastic food and drink, which we are excited about introducing to trade buyers in this area. This show is well worth a visit to find something new and different."

For more information, to pre-register to attend or book a stand, visit thefoodanddrinktradeshow.co.uk.

Hider Hits 50

The Hull-based distributor is celebrating 50 years in the fine food industry, following its establishment in 1965 by Douglas Hider.

The company is now in its third generation – currently managed by Duncan Hider and Mike Thirklette – and offers independent retailers an award-winning selection of speciality ambient foods.

Following a warehouse extension at the end of 2014, which took the total space to 100,000 square feet, the market leading ambient specialist is working on decreasing minimum order quantities.

Duncan Hider, co-MD of Hider Foods said, "There is not a week that goes by at work when my grandfather Douglas, who founded the business some 50 years ago, is not mentioned in conversation.

Despite him sadly not being here to celebrate the momentous occasion, I'm constantly reassured by both customers, colleagues and suppliers that his straightforward open approach to business with suppliers and customers continues to be an extremely important and valued side of Hider Foods.



New Look for Little's

Little's, the family-run flavoured coffee company, has unveiled a new look as part of its plan to revamp Britain's instant coffee market.

Founded by husband and wife team Henry and Leila Little, who aimed to combine their Finish and Californian heritage using the finest Arabica coffee, the business is now run by their son Will Little.

Now under the management of the second generation, the brand's redesign has been inspired by Scandi design and mid-century American packaging.

Will Little, managing director said, "We wanted to bring our unique history to the forefront of the brand. The crossed arms imagery draws on the idea of the husband and wife team, with one side focusing on the Finnish coffee culture and tradition, and the other the American influence in flavour.

"With 74% of all UK adults drinking instant coffee we wanted our packaging to create a strong shelf presence and give consumers an exciting choice within the sector."*

"We feel like we have a really unique brand story – one that most companies could only dream of – so we felt it was time to make that work harder for us. Our previous packaging said nothing about us being a second generation family company, about our mix of Finnish and American heritage, or the unique quality of our products.

"That's why we enlisted the help of This Way Up, a London based food branding agency who really understood what we we're about and brought our brand to life with a compelling and unique visual language. We're delighted with the result and I think it's really going to shake up the category and ruffle some feathers!"

*Mintel Coffee UK April 2012 Report









FS&D Retailer of the Year 2015 Announced

North Devon-based independent Johns of Instow & Appledore has been named Farm Shop & Deli Awards 2015's Retailer of the Year.

The delicatessen beat over 500 fine food businesses from across the UK to win the title, which was judged by some of the UK's most respected food experts including Ross Gilfillan, Speciality Food editor and Juliet Harbutt, chairman of the British Cheese Awards.

The award, which celebrates the very best standards in speciality food retail and the highest levels of service, innovation, product knowledge and community involvement, was presented to Sue and Anthony Johns, owners of Johns f Instow & Appledore, at the Farm Shop & Deli Show held at NEC Birmingham on Monday 20th April.

Nigel Barden, chair of judges, food critic, journalist and broadcaster said, "Johns of Instow & Appledore are integral to their North Devon communities and a real jewel of a find to those travelling from further afield. They are brilliant examples of a local shop, offering a complete one-stop offer. Johns provide a friendly, well-informed service, with a marvellous array of, wherever possible, locally sourced ingredients. It's the type of business that others should strive to be like."

Elaine Lemm, co-chair of judges, food and drink writer and chef said. "Without doubt, choosing an overall winner from the outstanding 2015 Awards line-up was all but impossible. Ultimately, the choice was not just for a worthy winner but an enterprise that embodies the excellence of farm shops and delis in the UK today. The unanimous agreement of the judges demonstrates that Johns of Instow & Appledore is that business and justly deserves the accolade of Retailer of the Year."

The team at Johns of Instow & Appledore said, "We are absolutely delighted, it's not sunk in yet! We're so proud of everybody, thank you to our loyal customers and dedicated team. It is all of them who have made this possible. One of our core strengths is being able to bring so much local produce to customers whilst supporting local producers. This award is not just for our customers and team, but also in recognition of our local suppliers."

Customer comments were also taken into consideration, and included: "Quality local foods supporting local industry. Good atmosphere and delightful staff that make a wonderful eating experience."

"It's such a pleasure to shop at Johns. Everyone who comes to stay with us takes a range of products back with them and for my father in law to admit that it's the best meat he has tasted is a first! The quality of the food is high as is the customer service. It's our equivalent to Fortnum & Mason."

Johns of Instow & Appledore, which started as a family business in the 1940s and is now run by the fourth generation of the Johns family, has two shops – one in Instow and one in Appledore – both of which include a full delicatessen, butcher and wine shop. The Appledore site also includes the Johns' Café, which offers a seasonal and locally-sourced menu. In early April this year, it launched an online shop to allow customers to buy key delicatessen items and hampers and have them delivered.



GILES HENSCHEL OF OLIVES ET AL

"Stroking the Cat"

As part of this year's spring clean I came across a recent article in The Grocer by Clive Black titled 'Farewell to good, better, best', which referred to the practice by many of the multiples of offering the same product in a category at three different levels of quality – good, better and best. The article suggested that as we have gone through the recent economic situation, pressures on sales combined with the rise of the discounters have begun to make the boundaries between these levels blend and merge until, according to the article, we are likely to see products being developed to represent simply a good and best with best being redefined to truly match what the word implies.

This move will, the article goes on to say, annoy some customers because the overall choice for consumers will be reduced, but it should make the supply chain simpler and therefore more sustainable. So how should we in the speciality sector view this 'stroking of the categories', and what lessons can we learn from it?

There has long been an argument that speciality retail and the multiples clash in almost every aspect and the two are not mutually compatible in any sense or form. One perspective is that the multiples pay close attention to activity within speciality retail outlets, viewing them as places where consumers display true desire for certain new or innovative products. They are the one place where local or new products can find shelf space easily and swiftly, with relatively low risk to the operator. Such trial spaces are invaluable to the larger players in the industry and it's where much of the true innovation and experimentation takes place.

Whatever your own view is, and doubtless there are as many views as there are outlets, both can learn and take useful ideas and inspiration from the other, and Category Management (or stroking the cat as it's affectionately known in some circles) is an ideal place to start – for if the multiples begin to restrict consumer choice by focusing on good and best then, where space permits, speciality operators may gain significant new fans by increasing the choices of product across a category. After all, that's one of the major benefits of operating in a speciality market, the ability to reflect the true meaning of the word 'speciality'. Whether it be you specialise in one or two core things like cheese or charcuterie (or olives, even) or broaden all your categories, a decent spring clean around category management could pay dividends.

So, in line with the clocks gone forward and the new lighter evenings, why not spend some time stroking the cat and see where you can broaden your offering? Oh, and that chap or chappess from the multiple around the corner who's just nipped in to see what's new? Don't worry about it. Imitation always was the sincerest form of flattery.





M&S Ramps Up Artisan Offering

High street retailer Marks & Spencer has launched a new range in-store, focusing on speciality foods from within the UK.

The selection includes products from Little's Coffee, Scarlet & Mustard, Stag Bakeries and The Artisan Kitchen – all popular items on independent shelves.

Sarah Churchill of The Artisan Kitchen said, "As a micro business, we were thrilled to have achieved a listing with Marks & Spencer and have an additional platform to showcase our Damson & Raspberry Jam on a nationwide basis. We have signed an exclusivity deal with M&S and will not be looking to supply our products to any other supermarkets.

"The deal with Marks & Spencer secures the future for The Artisan Kitchen, and will help with investment into new much needed machinery including cooking vessels and automated labelling machines – equipment that will consistently ensure our products are the very best they can be.

"Continuing to supply our fine food independents with the very best innovative small batch preserves is also crucial for the ongoing development of The Artisan Kitchen. Our food independents are at the core of my business – and always will be.

"My independent customers understand the value of the ever-changing small-run limited ranges I produce, and this means that each retailer carries a very different The Artisan Kitchen Range.

"Our hope is that customers at Marks & Spencer will absolutely love our fruit packed Damson & Raspberry Jam and I believe this will lead to further interest in The Artisan Kitchen products within our fine food independent retailers."





Calls for Stronger Retailer and Grower Alliances

At the Westminster Food & Nutrition Forum calls were made to develop the relationships between retailers and the producers of their food.

Issues discussed included the requirement for more collaboration, a stronger sense of a joint approach, and improved collaboration in the interests of consumers.

Jack Ward, chief executive of British Growers Association said, "UK producers are some of the best in the world and are trusted by UK consumers. In particular, new product development, new varieties, new techniques for producing crops like cherries and adopting the new LEAF marque, have helped put UK producers at the forefront of fresh produce production. This makes a great supply base responsible for helping to deliver 60% of the UK's fresh produce.

"Growers want to feel on the same side as the retailer as they believe that, as a team, they can deliver the optimum customer proposition. We have a great industry, with some great natural advantages and great people equipped with some great technology but we need to work towards more collaboration to take advantage of these opportunities.

"Everyone I talk to is aware of the challenges facing the UK retail sector. Changing shopping habits, new entrants to the market and greater emphasis on quality and value. There is a strong sense that if the supply chain is going to succeed there needs to be a much stronger partnership from retailers to producers.

"The real goal is winning customers and a team working together is more likely to succeed than one working against itself."

Welsh Food and Drink Given £2.5m Boost

The Welsh Food and Drink industry will receive a boost in the form of a £2.5m investment over the next two years, announced Rebecca Evans, Deputy Minister for Farming and Food.

The announcement was made at IFE, where 36 Welsh food and drink companies have been aiming to attract new partners and customers, and build on existing business.

The investment, which will further enhance the country's increasing food export market, will also enable Wales to enjoy a strong presence at key UK and international food events.

Rebecca Evans said, "In Wales we have a remarkable range of highly innovative food and drink producers, who are making their mark internationally, and many are globally-recognised brands renowned for their high quality. Today's funding announcement underlines the importance of the sector to the Welsh economy and demonstrates our continued support.

"In our Action Plan, we have set out aspirational targets, but by working together in partnership with the industry, we are confident we can meet and exceed them. The establishment of an industry-led Food and Drink Board will provide a clear direction and focus for the sector and will allow us to identify key areas for development."

Rebecca Evans also announced was the launch of a new industry-focused website. "Our Food and Drink Wales identity is very important to us and the new website will allow us to develop it further, as well as it being a source of information and support for the industry, not only in Wales, but across the UK and internationally.

"It will assist us in showcasing success stories, of which there are many, in the hope that they will inspire others to become a part of a growing and thriving sector."





Independents Boost Organic Sector



The Soil Association has announced the results of its 2015 Market Report, which shows that the industry is booming for the independent sector.

The total sales of organic products increased by 4 per cent in 2014, which saw sales return to the level last seen in 2009 – in excess of £1.86 billion. Independent retail experienced high growth (5.7 per cent), while online shopping and box schemes saw 11.7 per cent growth.

The dairy aisles in particular saw a boost in organic sales, with yoghurt seeing an increase of 13.8 per cent.

Overall, 83 per cent of British households purchased organic products in 2014.

Helen Browning, chief executive of Soil Association said, ''Three years ago, commentators were writing off the organic market in the UK. Now, with a third year of steady growth, and against a falling overall food market, it's clear that reports of organic food's demise were premature to say the least. This reinvigoration may be partly related to an improving economy, but it's also testament to the fact that retailers and manufacturers who continued to invest in organic lines have continued to thrive. Now, even the discounters are beginning to stock organic ranges.''

Roger Kerr, chief executive of OF&G said, ''There is reason for renewed optimism based on the figures provided by a number of OF&G's licensees. In the organic manufacturing and distribution sector, Essential Trading has experienced an 11% increase in sales through 2014. This positive data is not out of the ordinary; in fact Essential Trading has seen sustained growth of 10% per year for the past six years. Servicing around 1,500 whole food shops, wholesalers and specialist food processors – Essential Trading has consistently reported that despite the economic downturn many of the organic independents they supply have been making inroads into consumer's purchasing decisions.

''As sales of organic food start to increase it's absolutely essential that we have sufficient certified land available to farm. We support licensees throughout the food supply chain so as demand for organic rises, and as production increases for our manufacturing licensees so we anticipate there being a continued upsurge in the number of farmers and producers seeking to transfer to organic certification with OF&G.''

Improve Your POS with EBLEX



Independent butchers and retailers with butcher counters can now produce their own bespoke promotional material with help from EBLEX's new Point Of Sale (POS) hub.

The new hub has been created to help independents selling beef and lamb to create personalised cabinet tickets and posters.

As well as uploading a company logo, changing colour schemes and selecting high resolution beef or lamb recipes, registered users can access EBLEX's existing POS items via its trade site, eblextrade.co.uk.

Dick van Leeuwen, business development manager at EBLEX said, ''We are thrilled to launch the POS hub, which will help independent retailers to promote their businesses in a simple, convenient and cost-effective way.

''The EBLEX trade marketing team is committed to helping businesses improve their operational effectiveness and provide marketing tools that are an essential part of every successful business.''

Tracklements Offers Bags of Opportunity

Wiltshire-based ambient producer Tracklements has launched a promotion to help independent retailers boost sales this summer.

For each case of retail jars ordered, retailers will be offered a free sustainable and biodegradable jute bag and supporting point of sale to encourage customers to trade up to three jars.

In 2010, this promotion saw some retailers experience a sales boost of up to 25 per cent.

Guy Tullberg, managing director of Tracklements said, ''Like all Tracklements' promotions, this is about adding value whilst generating increased sales for specialist retailers.

''It provides an excellent opportunity to show the breadth of the Tracklements range, get people trying new products and establishing long term demand.''

The promotion starts on 1 May and will continue as long as stocks last.





Set the Cows Free

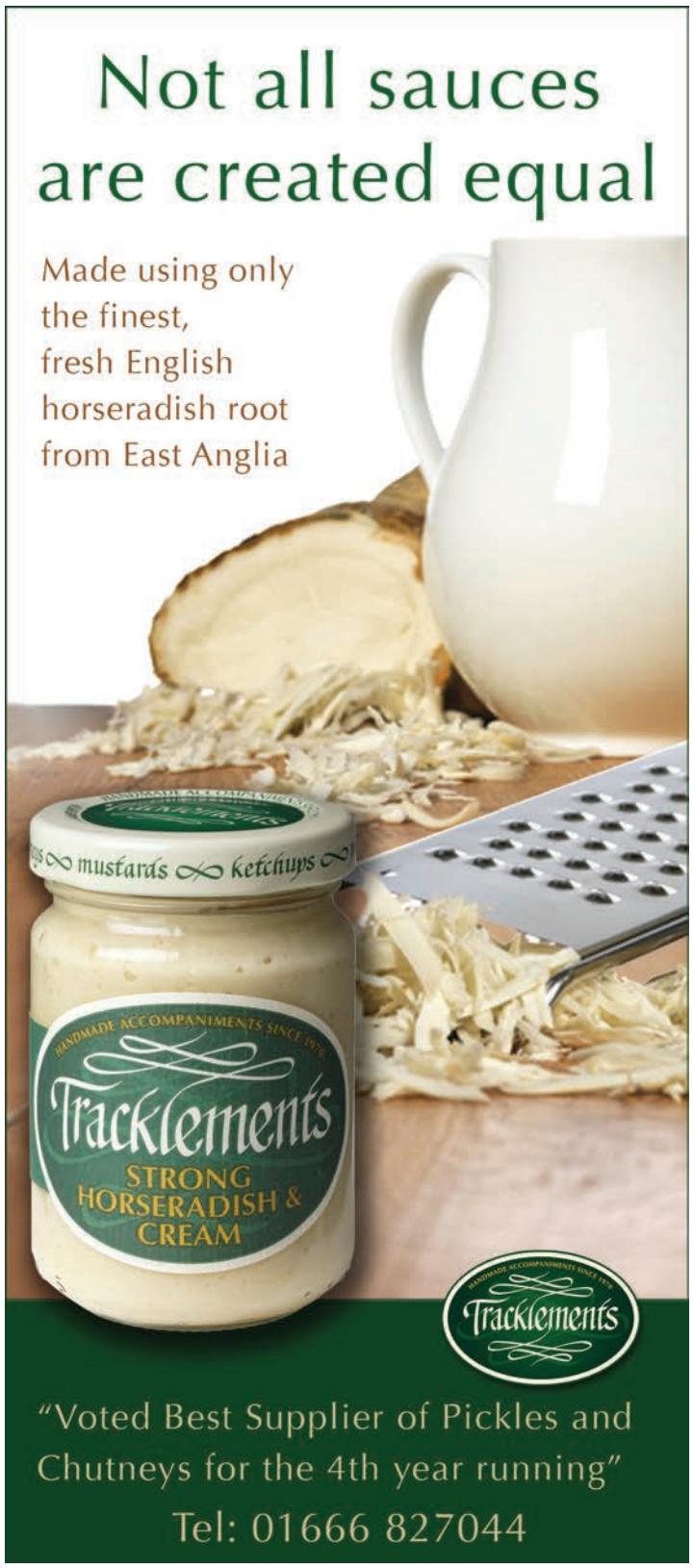
Moo Free Chocolates is an ethical, quirky, fun UK chocolate brand who have just redesigned their packaging. The brand is aimed at children and adults with food allergies and intolerances.

"We do our own design because we want to maintain the brand's key attributes and keep to a minimal colour palette. National Flexible helped us to create different effects using the metallised base film," said Mike Jessop co-founder. "They maintained our costs even though we have moved to a far superior pack, their help was invaluable."

About 33% of the World's population is lactose intolerant and Moo Free have produced a very tasty alternative to dairy chocolate in 17 product lines being sold to over 20 countries.

Mark Thompson. National Flexible's Sales Director said, "I am not lactose intolerant but this chocolate is one of the best I have tasted. Our marketing team hid the bars so they could get a photograph!"

T: 01274 685 566
E: jacqui@nationalflexible.net
W: www.nationalflexible.co.uk



An up-to-date look at the confectionery and chocolate industry



Ooh! Chocolata Launches Ooh! Sweetie Range

Ooh! Chocolata has added to its confectionery section with a new range, Ooh! Sweetie.

Handmade and containing only natural colours and flavours – a selling point thanks to the 'Naturally Delicious' tagline on the packaging – the sweets are available in Mango, Coconut & Pineapple; Deliciously Sour Jellies; Rhubarb & Elderflower; Persian Pomegranate; Wild Cherry Fizz; Damson & Elderberry; Lime, Orange & Lemon; Zingy Lemon Fizz; Very Fruity Jellies; Summer Strawberry Fizz; Juicy Blackcurrant; Passion Fruit & Raspberry flavours.

Ruth Yard, co-founder of Ooh! Chocolata said, "My personal favourite is Passion Fruit & Raspberry but Damson & Elderflower isn't far behind. The flavours are intense and will not disappoint those who really want that tangy, natural fruity taste.

"We are very excited and proud to be bringing these new, quality products to the market. We feel they offer retailers something a little different and will be a perfect addition to their confectionery aisles for gifts and impulse buys this coming summer and beyond."

Fudge Kitchen Releases Delectables

The fudge producer has launched its Delectables range, a trio of classic confectionery – peanut brittle, pecan turtles and fruit caramels.

Each item in the new range is created using all-natural and gluten-free ingredients, and packaged to appeal to discerning confectionery lovers and the growing number of self-gifters.

Sian Holt, MD of Fudge Kitchen said, "Over the last three years Fudge Kitchen has been honing the skills of NPD and sugar magic, so it seemed a natural progression to explore further afield and push ourselves to embrace other opportunities that use many of the same base ingredients and for which there is either established demand, or that fit into current trends.

"Thus our new Delectables were born. All three items produced with Fudge Kitchen's style and commitment to producing the best – with a tweak and a difference. Our caramels are smooth and soft, some chew but still melting; and our brittles are thin with a deep caramel undertone and that crunch that is so vital. A new journey from which other confections will now doubt surface!"



Fairtrade Accreditation for Taylor & Colledge

Taylor & Colledge, the organic vanilla company, has been awarded Fairtrade status for its Tongan vanilla rehabilitation programme.

The family-owned company has received the accreditation for successfully reintroducing vanilla growing to Vava'u, a Tongan island.

The accreditation has been awarded for the company's commitment to building a sustainable industry, the fair price it is paying for crops, and its investment in infrastructure and equipment.

Sam Himstedt, CEO of Taylor & Colledge said, "Tonga was once renowned as one of the finest producers of vanilla, however, the majority of Tongan vanilla disappeared due to market forces and unsustainable practices.

"We considered this a tragedy, so we decided we should help the people of Vava'u re-establish their place on the vanilla growing map, but in a fair and sustainable way.

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Choc on Choc Creates Crumb-free Afternoon Tea

Bath-based confectioner Choc on Choc has launched its Chocolate Biscuit collection, a pure Belgian chocolate recreation of Britain's favourite biscuits.

The new addition has been produced using the producer's patented chocolate layering technique to create realistic pink wafers, custard creams, digestives, jammy dodgers, bourbons and party rings from white and milk Belgian chocolate.

Flo Broughton, co-founder of Choc on Choc said, "The chocolates that we make are completely unique because of the patented layering technique used in our production method. This allows us to create intricate and lifelike designs and our no-biscuit Chocolate Biscuits are the latest example of our chocolatiers' handiwork.

The collection represents Britain's most iconic biscuits but with a Heston-esque surprise – they're made from pure Belgian chocolate.

"Our products attract a wide range of people; not only are they perfect for those wanting to buy gifts for a particular occasion, but they are also delicious as a personal treat. The Chocolate Biscuits make the ideal accompaniment for those looking for an innovative addition to the quintessential afternoon tea."



New Flavour for Joe & Seph's

The artisan popcorn producer has added a new flavour to its extensive range – Orange Marmalade.

The new product combines air-popped popcorn with a smooth, buttery caramel which is followed on the palate by a zesty orange marmalade.

Adam Sopher of Joe & Seph's said, "Last year we saw a big increase in the popularity of our fruity popcorn flavours (such as Strawberries & Cream) in the spring and summer months, so we decided to launch our Orange Marmalade in April to meet this demand.

"Lots of people have asked us to create a breakfast popcorn, so this is our own take on that too!"

PRIME CUTS

Robert Jones of Walter Smith tells Speciality Food the history of the iconic brand, and explains how you can set yourself apart from the competition



The roots of Walter Smith lie in a village at the centre of a small farming community, where John Smith and his son George Arthur Smith ran a traditional slaughtering and retail trade. Britain then experienced the agricultural depression in the 1870s, which led to G.A. Smith leaving Cambridgeshire and settling in Birmingham. He had his first butchers shop at the age of 22, and the rest is history – we now have Walter Smith shops across the Midlands and beyond.

I'm Walter Smith's retail director and own 25% of the business, overseeing new openings and all our Q Guild farm shops, plus growing the business through product development and competitions. I'm also a voluntary chair of the Midlands Q Guild and work as a consultant, advising farm shops on meat counters, product development and how to improve their offer.

These days there are lots of pop-up businesses which are here today, gone tomorrow, but a discerning customer cares where their meat comes from and whether it led an ethical life. As a company which has a heritage of over 130 years, we offer our customers a sense of security. We work by a very simple rule: we treat people the way we like to be treated. We work closely with farmers and don't beat them down on price like a lot of the industry does. For 52 weeks of the year, we pay our lamb farmer a premium above-market price – this means that we're selling a great product that customers will enjoy and that the farmer is making a sensible wage.

> “Food trends and consumer demands change, and as a business you have to move with the times. If you're really passionate about what you do, you're creating some of that change yourself”

We've always had and always will have a cross-section of customers; people of all ages shop with us. In our farm shop locations we're largely selling to younger customers, who are often looking for value-added products – meal solution items which are straight-to-oven, whereas our older customers frequently ask for a diced beef for a casserole.



Walter Smith's award-winning pie

We're not just butchers. I think a butcher is able to cut and display raw meat, while a master butcher can go to market and buy live animals then produce sausages, pies and cured bacon. Something which sets us apart in our sector is the fact we enter and win competitions – our pork pie has been named Supreme Champion at the Great Taste Awards. Not many butchers can state that they make award-winning, independently-produced products.

We never source on price, only on the very best quality we can find. We do source locally, but are willing to travel if it means we're getting a better product. For example, my favourite cheese is Brie de Meaux, so if I need to bypass a small British producer to get that, so be it. We like to support our neighbours, and in a supplier look for an ethical company with provenance. For example in Nantwich, where I'm based, our free-range egg supplier is four miles away and our honey man has hives within three miles of the garden centre farm shop. For me, questions like 'can they supply a consistent quality?' and 'are they local?' are natural considerations.

Before a retailer expands their butchery offering, I would suggest that they take advice from someone who really knows what they're doing to set them off on the right track. There are lots of people who can teach you how to make pies and source meat, and it's worth looking into such things before you start putting together a butchery counter. From there I'd see what the local competitor was doing and improve on that – are they selling value-added or gluten-free items? If not, that's an avenue you can try. Consider your unique selling point and make the most of it; provide something consumers can't get elsewhere in the local area and make your business a destination.



Walter Smith at Huntingdon Farm Shop



A varied display at Huntingdon Farm Shop

EBLEX

SEASONAL SPECIALS



Summer presents retailers with the ideal opportunity to offer customers a variety of beef and lamb cuts. Here, Mike Richardson, independent retail sector manager at EBLEX, highlights a variety of added value alternative options which are ideal for the warmer months.



Summer is a fantastic time for consumers to try new and interesting beef and lamb cuts, as the appetite for alfresco dining increases. To help retailers make the most of this opportunity, we've developed the Summer Essentials point-of-sale (POS) kit which is packed with inspirational ideas.

The kit will be available to Quality Standard Mark (QSM) Scheme members who have registered to receive marketing support from EBLEX. It will be distributed in early summer and features cuts from our Steak Bar, Thin Cuts and Gourmet Burger ranges.

Added value cuts

All of the cuts featured in our product ranges have been developed with our key objectives in mind: maximising the use of the carcase, enhancing product consistency and eating quality, and adding value for retailers and consumers. The versatile cuts can be cooked outside on the barbecue, or inside if the weather takes a turn for the worse.

Our Steak Bar range features both traditional and added value alternative steaks. Cuts such as the Flat Iron, Denver, Ranch and Picanha are just a few options that will add differentiation to counters and provide value for money. Adding rubs and marinades is also a good way to add interest to steak ranges.

The latest update to the Steak Bar range includes cutting specifications for a collection of Thin Cut steaks. Each steak featured in the range is lean, versatile and quick-to-cook, as well as providing great value for money. One of my favourites is the Thin Centre Cut Steak (EBLEX Code: Thick Flank B012), which is an excellent option for both retailers and customers. Cutting specifications for the new Thin Cuts range are available to view at eblextrade.co.uk.

Burgers, too, are real crowd-pleasers at summer meal occasions, and retailers can benefit from offering customers a variety of premium options.

We launched our Gourmet Burger range after research showed that mincing trim from the rump, chuck or brisket can significantly improve margin potential, as well as creating different taste and texture profiles which many consumers prefer.

Why not try the four cut-specific products in our Gourmet Burger range? They are: Premium Rump Steak Burger, Premium Brisket Steak Burger, Premium Chuck Steak Burger and Premium Extra Lean Burger.



Quality is key

At the heart of our new product development work is our QSM Scheme. More consumers than ever are seeking quality beef and lamb which is both safe and traceable, and retailers are recognising the benefits of belonging to an assurance scheme such as ours.

As well as being able to provide customers with guarantees of quality and assurance, QSM Scheme members can benefit from a range of useful resources such as expert butchery advice, yield and costing information and promotional materials to use in-store.

For further information about our product ranges or the QSM Scheme, visit eblextrade.co.uk or call the Hotline on 0845 491 8787.

EBLEX is the organisation for beef and lamb levy payers in England and is a division of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB).

QUALITY STANDARD beef English

QUALITY STANDARD lamb English

Tough standards. Tender results.

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up



Burts Chips Partners With Well-Hung Meat Co

The producer of artisan crisps has joined forces with Devon-based The Well-Hung Meat Company to launch its new Devon Roast Beef flavour.

With its full and distinctive flavour, the new product makes the most of the meat business's close relationship with local organic beef farmers.

Simon Knight, sales and marketing director at Burts Chips said, "We're really passionate about our Devonshire heritage and work closely with suppliers from the South West to source the finest ingredients, where possible, from the local area. With Devon renowned for producing some of the best beef in the country, identifying a local supplier to partner with was essential in the production of our new Devon Roast Beef flavour."

Thomas Bourne, managing director of The Well Hung Meat Company said, "We take great pride in working with farmers devoted to rearing premium beef cattle on and around the South Devon coast and are thrilled to partner with a brand that takes as much care over the production of their crunchy chips as we do our meat."

burtschips.com

Nākd Enters Impulse Market

Natural Balance has added to its Nākd range with Nākd Nibbles, a healthier snack which is ideal for on-the-go snacking.

Available in Tooty Fruity, Strawberries & Cream, Coconut Bliss and Fruit Salad options, they contain only fruit and nuts and no added sugar, and are gluten, wheat and dairy-free.

Marina Love, marketing director at Natural Balance Foods said, "Nākd Nibbles is perfectly timed to appeal to consumers looking for a tasty snack that's also healthy.

"Research shows that one in four consumers look for nutritional benefits when choosing a snack, and with 52% of adults now shopping free-from products, Nākd Nibbles will broaden the brand's appeal to both 'healthy lifestylers' who make up 64% of all free-from purchases and shoppers who simply want to add healthier, but no less tasty, options to their snacking repertoire."

naturalbalancefoods.co.uk





Joe's Tea Co Releases Loose Leaf Tea

Following demand from retailers and the food service and hotel sectors, Joe's Tea is now offering its range of high quality teas in loose leaf format and matchbox variants in addition to the standard option.

Two new green tea blends have been created for the launch: Jasmine's Green Tea is an organic and fragrant combination of jasmine and green tea, and Sencha Green Tea is a balanced, sweet and salty tea with notes of seaweed and freshly-cut grass.

Joe Kinch, founder of Joe's Tea said, "It's incredibly exciting to be expanding our range of products. We have very good relationships with our customers across the board and we've seen a growing demand for a loose leaf and single serve range, so that's exactly what we've created.

"We believe that everyone should be able to enjoy a quality cup of tea, however they wish to make it."

joesteacompany.com

Natur Boutique Launches Future Fruit



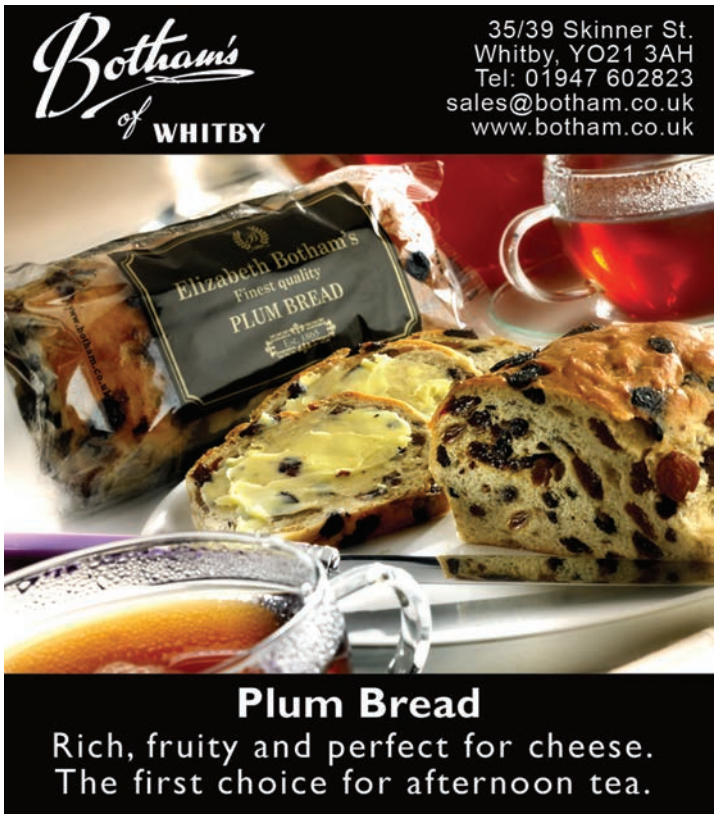
A favourite with consumers in Japan, freeze dried fruit is now available in the UK through Natur Boutique.

Available in organic banana, papaya, pineapple and mixed fruit varieties, this healthy snack contains no preservatives or added sugar thanks to the freeze drying method which preserves the full taste and sweetness of the fresh fruit.

Anton Le Khak, director at Natur Boutique said, "Freeze dried fruits offer something totally unique to the market. We feel they hands down beat other fruit products on the market in terms of taste and health benefits, with the production method meaning nothing at all needs to be added, such as preservatives, oils or sugar, or taken away.

"We personally use a unique Japanese freeze drying technique, which is slower than other processes, taking almost two days to complete. This helps better lock in the taste of the fruits and produces a product that is crispier and puffier than others."

naturboutique.co.uk







Acetomodena Annouces Artisan Fruit Balsamics

Acetomodena, a family-run producer of balsamic vinegar based in Modena, has added a selection of flavoured vinegars to its range of artisan balsamics.

Available in Pomegranate, Ginger, Honey, Fig, Blackberry and Raspberry variants, the new products are a blend of fine cooked grape must, Balsamic Vinegar of Modena I.G.P. and natural fruit juices ideal for pairing with meat, vegetables, fruit and ice cream.

Acetomodena's full range is available through Cotswold Fayre.

Paul Hargreaves, MD of Cotswold Fayre said, "Ever since I first visited the Acetaia early in 2014, I have been very impressed with the fantastic quality of these products, made in the authentic Modena way by this family business.

"In addition, the presentation and attention to detail are second to none, and it is enjoyable and fruitful working with an Italian business that really understands the British and Irish markets."

acetomodena.it





Tyrrells Unveils Poshcorn

The quintessential English snack producer has released Poshcorn — a healthier alternative to sweet snacks such as chocolate.

Available in Sea Salted, Sweet & Salted, and new Coconut & Caramel and Lemon Cupcake variants, the popcorn is created using 'gold-standard' kernels to give large and light pops.

The brand has also revamped the packaging to appeal to a female, health-orientated female consumer.

Jocelyn McNulty, marketing director at Tyrrells said, "Our Poshcorn launch positions Tyrrells as delivering deliciousness in a category where taste is often sacrificed in favour of counting calories.

"With improved recipes and a pipeline of flavour and format developments, Poshcorn is ideal for women looking to cut back on sweet treats such as chocolate, but without having to sacrifice on delicious taste".

tyrrellscrisps.co.uk

New Beetroot Juice for B.Fresh

Shropshire-based fruit and vegetable juice company B.Fresh has just launched a new cold-pressed juice containing 95% beetroot juice and 5% lemon.

Ideal for consumers who enjoy the distinct taste of beetroot alongside all of its nutritional virtues, the new addition to B. Fresh's cold pressed juice range offers consumers high levels of vitamins and minerals with no added sugar or stabilisers.

The new juice is being aimed at the health-conscious and fitness market, due to beetroot's ability to reduce high blood pressure and enhance sports performance.

Philip Maddocks, founder of B.Fresh said, "Beetroot is a vegetable currently used in our other drinks, and we are excited to launch #totalbeets to extend our range and create a drink to offer greater health benefits to a more specific audience.

"This is a surprisingly light, refreshing juice with a zesty note from the lemon inclusion, whereas our other beetroot drink #rockthebeets has an earthiness to it."

b-fresh.co.uk





PREVIEW: THE BRITISH CHEESE AWARDS 2015

The British Cheese Awards, now in its second year at its new home, the Royal Bath & West Show, is previewed by its founder, Juliet Harbutt

The sight of rows of tall racks and cloth-covered tables groaning under the weight of 1,015 British cheeses moved even the most jaded palate and cynical farmer at the 2014 Royal Bath & West Show. Some were visibly shocked to find a 200g goat log sitting pert and proud on the winners' plinth instead of a 25kg bold buxom Cheddar, but apart from a few hardened traditionalists, when they tasted the Rosary Goat, most were suitably silenced.

Educating and inspiring a new generation

I set up the British Cheese Awards in 1994 to reward excellence and to educate and inspire people through tastings and workshops. The UK now makes over 750 different cheeses including 80 blues, 105 goats cheese, 29 wash rind and hundreds of knobbly-rinded, rustic cheeses. Yet the average shopper still struggles to name more than five British cheeses, so joining forces with the Royal Bath & West was an opportunity that had to be grabbed.

After 20 years, the decision to sell was not taken lightly. However, knowing that over 120,000 visitors will see, taste, photograph and talk about the thousands of British cheeses produced each year made huge sense and we can now offer cheese tours and tastings throughout the week for the trade and also for wannabe cheese experts. Plus, we have a new event designed to inspire young cheesemongers!

Taste 1,000 Cheeses

WEDNESDAY 27TH MAY 0900 – 1200

(Sponsored by Pilgrims Choice)

If cheese is your business then this is a must-do, unique opportunity to see and taste, 1000 of Britain's finest, oldest, newest and quirkiest cheeses and stay ahead of your competitors. Participants will spend 15 minutes at eight key cheese types doing comparison tastings, learning about the different styles and getting an overview of the good, the bad and the unusual before moving on to the next category. And at the end, if you want to taste more, then from 12.30 you can joina cheese tour and just keep going round!


AWARDS FOUNDER JULIET HARBUTT


JUDGES MAKE THEIR DECISIONS AT THE 2014 BRITISH CHEESES AWARDS

Cheese lovers tours

WEDNESDAY 27TH MAY – SATURDAY 30TH MAY

These start after the Taste 1,000 Cheeses and continue all week. They will be led by experts, retailers, volunteers and as many cheesemakers and judges as we can persuade to join in. Why not volunteer or send one of your younger staff as a reward for their love of cheese? In the past, visitors to the Royal Bath & West were encouraged to look not taste, so this should be an exciting new feature for the show and for British cheese!

Young Cheesemonger of the Year

Very little is offered to reward or recognise the hard work and dedication required to become a successful retailer. So with support from leading wholesaler Rowcliffe we have created this award.

Open to anyone under 30 who has worked in the industry for three or more years, Young Cheesemongers will be mentored at the awards by a judge, participate in the Taste 1,000 Tours and eventually lead one of the cheese tours.

In addition, during the week they will go up against each other in various challenges and competitions, from cutting and wrapping cheese and creating a cheeseboard, to a tasting challenge. The Young Cheesemonger with the most points will be awarded Young Cheesemonger of the Year.

Fun, educational and great entertainment, this award will inspire people to join the cheese trade! For entry forms and details, contact Juliet Harbutt cheese@thecheeseweb.com or clemrowcliffe@rowcliffe.co.uk


JUDGING L-R: DAVID HARTLEY OF WENSLEYDALE, CATHERINE MEAD OF LYNHER DAIRIES AND ASHLEY REEK OF LONG CLAWSON

Awards dinner

The Awards Dinner on Tuesday night is not a glitzy event with a slick MC and big screens – it's a fun, laid-back event for cheesemakers and the cheese trade, held in a big marquee. So come down the night before, meet old friends, put faces to names and be ready for the TASTE 1,000 in the morning. (But do book accommodation sooner than later as demand is high!)

Tesco Cheesemakers Invitational

This new category will be judged while the Taste 1000 Cheeses is taking place. Entries will be from cheesemakers wanting to get their cheeses listed by TESCO and the TESCO experts will judge the cheeses in front of a watching crowd. Nerve-wracking for the cheesemakers, but great entertainment!

Display of British cheese

There are 1,000 more reasons to stay in your shop than come to the British Cheese Awards. I have heard them all before, but if your business is to buy, sell or make cheese, then you need to come. At the very least to taste as many as you can of the 1,000 cheeses, because the awards attract entries from nearly 80% of British cheesemakers, making them by far the biggest competition for British cheese. For more information email cheese@thecheeseweb.com.

BRITISH CHEESE AWARDS 2015

WHERE: The Showground, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 6QN
WHEN: Wednesday 27th – Saturday 30th May
WEBSITE: bathandwest.com

By car: The show is situated on the A371 between Shepton Mallet and Castle Cary. From the Bristol area, turn off at M32 and take the A37. From Devon or Cornwall, turn off at junction 23 off M5. From the East, take the M3, A303 or A371.

By train: Nearest stations – Bristol, Castle Cary or Temple Combe. National Rail Enquiries 08547 484950

By bus: contact: First on 08456 064446 or the Travel Line on 08706 082608. Coaches from Castle Cary, Shepton Mallet and from Yeovil.



Cheese Talk

New retail perspectives from industry experts



JULIET HARBUTT

"Finding and taking advice"

I have spent nearly two months in NZ giving masterclasses, tastings, workshops and advice to retailers, potential retailers, restaurants and cheesemakers. It's what I do, and as most of my clients seem to be very happy with the advice and are willing to recommend me, I assume I do a good job. But sometimes I wonder if it is the old story where "in the kingdom of the blind, the one eyed man is King". So before I work with a client I establish what their experience is and what advice they really need, then do some serious thinking about what I can offer before I commit, whether it's a half day session or an ongoing project.

With people new to food retailing, cheese or deli products, I believe my role as consultant is to answer the questions they don't know to ask. IT people, on the other hand, tend to answer the questions we already ask, which ends up costing us a fortune because we don't know enough to ask the right questions or even use the right terminology. So how do you choose the right person?

Professional organisations can give you a list, but they can't and probably won't recommend anyone, so start by looking at all the businesses you like that are doing it well. See what you can learn from them or even if you can pick their brains – when I first started, most retailers I asked were willing to talk about what they did right and wrong, but as many did it by the seat of their pants they couldn't say why things had worked. They could, however, tell me how costly the wrong advice had been.

Some issues I've come across: shop layouts that were impractical to the point of being unworkable or invited shoplifting; signage that looked amazing but no-one could see; lists of equipment that proved inadequate, not fit for purpose or redundant; the wrong location. My clients thought I was mad when I said they should 'camp' outside their potential shop for three days – after two they called to thank me – they would have gone bust.

When someone recommends a consultant (or a key staff member), find out what they have done and what they did before they started advising people – how much experience have they had doing what you are doing and what exactly was their role? Working in a shop is not the same as setting one up and running it. If they worked with cheese or in retail, did they inherit someone else's excellent system and contacts or did they set them up and manage them? Even those people, or especially those people, who run training workshops need to have been there and done that and got a wardrobe of t-shirts, not just learnt how to train.

> "Start by looking at all the businesses you like that are doing it well. See what you can learn from them or even if you can pick their brains"

Ask successful businesses if they have used anyone and if their advice or help was effective long-term. Short term fixes are not what you want. I recently asked my friends to recommend someone to help me understand and capitalise on social media as I was too busy with a zillion different things (aren't we all) to do research. Well, £750 down, I still don't understand how to use Twitter, he never mentioned Instagram because I didn't ask, he created an 'ad' that got precisely no response, and the tweets he did on my behalf – without consulting me – were facile at best. Note to self: practice what you preach!

And then you have to be willing to pay. A few years ago, a very wealthy businessman called me and said he was looking at starting a new cheese venture with a number of investors and wanted to run some ideas past me. I gave him my rate and he responded, "Oh, I only wanted to pick your brain and thought we could do it over lunch". Five years and a few million later he and his investors lost their money in a venture that was flawed from the beginning. Easy in hindsight but his model was wrong.

Lastly, advisors don't have to be your new best friend but you do need good rapport. If you don't feel they are listening to you, you don't understand what they are trying to say when you first talk and they don't seem to get what you are trying to do, then find someone who does. My wonderful IT man 'Big D' has taken all the stress out of IT. He is expensive but he is always there to listen and help.



GEORGE PAUL OF BRADBURY'S

"Investing in the corner"

There continues to be more upheaval in the grocery trade than there has been for the past 25 years, and when that happens opportunity comes knocking. So wherever one sits in the chain of supply in speciality cheese, the question of how to seize that opportunity is posed.

As volumes in most grocery sectors stagnate, and the cry goes up, price is everything and promotion is rolled out and leveraged to the max. It is not, and has never been, the sustainable tactic for artisan and speciality cheese, especially those of true artisan merit.

Deli promotions are hard to convey to the customer in major retailer outlets as 25% off a high unit kilo cost per piece does not compute into an attractive price (such as £1.99). But in any event, I have never subscribed to the belief that the aspiring customer wants that.

Product tasting, knowledge, provenance and ease of shop stand far above the issue of cost per kilo in keeping the shopper engaged. The independent retailer has long had a sustainable advantage in this field, whether in delis or farmers markets, and the customer has responded. The irony being that the independent – and I include suppliers in this – has not applied a marketing/promotion approach to selling, which is not appropriate in every case, but surely can be applied more often than many think.

The single most successful way of introducing a shopper to anything premium is, and always has been, tasting the product. Why would anyone spend £20 on a kilo just because it's 10-20-30% cheaper? The shopper's logic is stay with what you know. After all, there are promotions galore and another one will be along any minute.

In this the cheesemaker needs to invest, and invest now, whilst there is an opportunity. On this matter there are two clear camps. Clearly those that provide their own milk for cheesemaking have some reluctance to undermine their own income, and a number will not appear to do this, though it's surely necessary at this moment in the economic cycle to invest for a stronger future.

Those that buy in milk, frankly, have the best opportunity they are likely to have to advance their brand franchise: to utilise the lower milk costs to grow their brand. Not by reducing price, but by investing in product to sample, and if that were to be provided cubed and ready then the convenience will both help the retailer and ensure its use delivers the reward the cost requires. The shopper likes new, they like a new taste sensation, so promoting vigorously now is the right moment

The generational change in the shopper is happening, and very fast. The modern shopper has less time, but in many cases more disposable income. Why else would people buy online?

Even food is not exempt from this rush to complete, a need to grab and go at the counter. There are many good examples of pre-cut cheese pieces on display in garden centres and other deli outlets with a high flow of customers at peak times of the week. In many instances the glass counter can be a barrier and many younger shoppers have little willingness to wait, and since these are the shoppers of the future they need to be accommodated or could potentially be lost.

In times of supreme challenge there is a chance to adjust the approach to maximise an opportunity, which sadly the dairy farmer is funding, and build a sustainable better volume for the future which will ultimately reward everyone in the chain. More tasting funded by the makers with samples that advance their brand, more preparation to meet changing behaviour, and the trial of a couple of new varieties to freshen up the selection.

Many fast lane retailers will stay with promotion overload and remain with shallow foundations in artisan British cheese, whilst the independents can steadily proceed to be the destination of choice for variety, for knowledge, for a taste sensation!

> "Many old favourites here are being devalued by poor quality options from low-cost destinations, and while it's fine to be patriotic, Continental is trending fast"



JUSTIN TUNSTALL OF TOWN MILL CHEESEMONGERS

"Sharing the love"

I'm unlikely to tempt customers from the multiples on price or on convenience. Our tiny store is very specialist, and as we say on our website, parking is a nightmare! Nope, what helps win trade for us is a triumvirate of enthusiasm, expertise and our range – great stuff that can't be found elsewhere.

One of the great joys in my work is finding interesting new products, be they cheeses, preserves, biscuits, wines or accessories. When we opened, I made the selection from wholesalers' catalogues and from a couple of visits to trade shows. I had a clear vision of what I wanted the shop to be 'about' and approached sourcing as though I was casting a movie or a play – everything had to play its part and also complement the rest of my choices. Each item and supplier needed to be reliable (re-stockable) and importantly, saleable at a price that could deliver a profit. Every line has a story behind it – I set out to learn these stories about my range. The stories, or provenance, can be as important as taste when selling our wares.

As we developed the shop and mere competence moved towards expertise we decided that we wanted to sell particular products that weren't necessarily available through wholesalers – great produce that we'd found on our travels in the local area, or had come across at farmer's markets and food fairs. When I started judging at various cheese and food awards I made it my business to follow up and to identify products that I'd blind-tasted and loved.

But the process of getting smaller producers' products into the shop, outside the regular distribution channel of a wholesaler, isn't always easy. It takes commitment from both sides. There can be a hassle involved for the supplier in arrangingfor delivery, whether they undertake it themselves or via a third-party courier.

If both agree that there's benefit to be had from developing the relationship, it's a winner. Producers can add more regular and greater volume of sales and benefit from having tacit endorsement and hopefully another vocal advocate for their wares. Mutual promotion via social media, ads or new stories helps build both businesses. There's a quid pro quo that retailers should observe. Small suppliers will have been used to taking cash at the point of sale, and may insist on cash on delivery for sales to retailers. IF they're generous enough to offer credit, DON'T abuse that trust – in fact, when we're 'in funds', I find it worthwhile paying ahead of due date. It helps the relationship no end. Accounts and manufacturing are unlikely to be sited in separate buildings and this small gesture gets noticed.

Thus, I get exciting produce for my store that customers can't find elsewhere. Job satisfaction comes not from 'offloading' a slow moving item to a shopper, nor from ringing up a large basket of swiftly selected goods; it comes from seeing a customer's face light up as they sample something that I have recommended. It's a great feeling to share the enjoyment of food – and to be able to earn a living from that.

UK Dairy Farming: Why We Should Cry Over Spilt Milk



What's the future of the dairy industry in the UK, and what can retailers do to minimise impact? Laurence Harris, CEO of Trioni shares his views.

"If supermarkets and smaller retailers continue to put pressure on processors to lower the delivered cost of milk through cutting returns to dairy suppliers, then the downfall of the UK dairy industry is inevitable. Particularly impactful on smaller dairy farmers, they need to stand together and make sure the current losses being made do not continue and affect our future dairy farmers.

"For the farming unions however, this is easier said than done, despite their lobbying efforts. Farmers invest huge amounts in order to deliver and need to be rewarded accordingly. We need to educate retailers and their consumers on the importance of UK dairy produce and its corresponding economic and environmental value, otherwise it will end up a dying trade.

"Additionally, many independent retailers will have an affinity with smaller dairy farmers, although their listings aren't as heavily weighted as the demand from supermarkets. Across the board, more needs to be done to better communicate the cost of milk production compared to water; otherwise we will see even more farmers devalued and leaving the industry.

"Although these current events aren't having as bad an effect on the organic dairy sector, we foresee it will soon spread across the entire industry and could even affect cheese production and prices with similar consequences. This is particularly worrying when coupled with Russia's imposed sanctions on EU food imports, which lead to a surplus of cheese and a similar reduction in prices. We don't want a future where profit margins are so low that factory farms become a preference, and so hope the Government's investigation helps bring our sector out of the red and back on track."

Dunlop Dairy Awarded PGI Status

The Scottish producer of Traditional Ayrshire Dunlop has successfully passed the final stage of its bid for PGI status.

The cheese's new status means that, although Dunlop Dairy is currently its sole producer, it can be made by other producers so long as this is done within a particular area and using the techniques specified by the European Commission.

Ann Elizabeth of Dunlop Dairy said, "We are really pleased to have been awarded this PGI for the Traditional Ayrshire Dunlop.

"This cheese has a great history behind it. Not only was it developed here in Dunlop but the famous Ayrshire cow was first bred in the parish. The mild wet climate here is excellent for growing lush grass and the Ayrshire cow makes a great job converting this into quality milk for the cheese.

"With the name Dunlop being generic, all the tradition and origin was in a position to be lost. We are proud to be continuing this tradition and now with the PGI hopefully for years to come."







Second Queen's Award for Dorset Cheesemaker

Ford Farm, the Dorset-based producer of Wookey Hole Cave Aged Cheddar, has been awarded the Queen's Award for International Trade for the second time.

The cheese maker supplies retailers in countries across the world – including Kenya, India, Hong Kong and Israel – and its export sales have increased by over 50 per cent over the past two years.

Based on the Ashley Chase Estate, Ford Farm's main export market is America, to which it ships over 1,000 tonnes of cheese per year.

Mike Pullin, director at Ashley Chase said, "It's a fantastic accolade and has made a significant impact on our business over the past few years in gaining credibility for our brands as well as helping to open doors to new markets.

"It's a great honour to receive the award for a second time, particularly in the Awards' fiftieth year. It's our entire supply chain we need to thank – our farmers whose herds supply the milk, our amazing team of cheesemakers here at Ashley Chase who make such a consistently good product that gets re-ordered time and again as well as to our fantastic sales team both here in the UK as well in the USA."

Cheese Cellar Becomes Harvey and Brockless



Cheese Cellar, a fine food distributor since 1970, has re-adopted its original name, Harvey & Brockless, in order to better represent the diversity of the business – which incorporates olives, charcuterie, chocolate, patisserie and more as well as cheese and dairy products.

The Cheese Cellar brand has been split into three entities: Cheese Cellar Dairy will manage the cheeses produced at its Worcestershire Farm, Cheese Cellar Artisan will oversee the wholesale of artisan British and Continental cheeses, while Cheese Cellar Essentials will be responsible for other cheese and dairy products.

dell'ami, the distributor's Mediterranean deli products arm, will continue to sell olives, oils, vinegars, antipasti, and British and Continental charcuterie; while Huge Sauce, the food-manufacturing arm of the business, will still be producing restaurant-quality sauces, dressings and dips.

Nick Martin, managing director said,"As a business, our focus is on being the preferred supplier of speciality foods in the UK. We feel that the name Harvey & Brockless reflects our heritage in the speciality food market and the fact that we are more than just a cheese and dairy supplier.

"The category brands will reassure our customers of the depth of knowledge that we have across all of these sectors. We look forward to the next 45 years of working with our customers!"



Colston Bassett Reveals New Maturing Rooms

Award-winning Nottingham-based dairy Colston Bassett has announced that the first stage of its 10-year investment plan, released in 2013, is complete.

The producer has built new maturing rooms in order to streamline production flow without increasing the volume of cheese produced. This means that its cheeses – Shropshire Blue and Stilton – will maintain their traditional production methods and consistent high quality.

Billy Kevan, dairy manager at Colston Bassett Dairy said, "We have just successfully completed phase one of a ten year investment plan at Colston Bassett Dairy. It has been in progress since October 2013 – and we now have our new maturation rooms in operation.

"The focus initially, has been on streamlining production flow with increased storage capacity. We will now be carefully managing growth to meet demand, whilst maintaining all of our traditional methods of production and maturation – that are essential to produce our multi-award winning Stilton and Shropshire Blue cheese.

"We face an issue every Christmas period of not being able to meet demand. Of course, as a business, we want to be able to fulfil customer orders - but at the same time know that the demand is due to us being able to produce our consistently top quality product. Managing any growth of a handmade product effectively, is a business challenge. We feel that this phased long term approach, means that we can meet our objectives as a business and keep producing the multi-award winning great tasting cheese just as we have been since 1913."



Quickes Welcomes Account Manager

Quickes, the makers of traditional clothbound cheese, has added a new account manager to its sales team.

The role has been given to Mark Hindle, founder of the Mousetrap cheese shops in Ludlow, Leominster and Hereford and reviver of traditional Little Hereford cheese.

Mark Hindle also has experience running a farm shop, café and dairy.

Mark Hindle said, "I've previously met Mary Quicke through the Specialist Cheesemakers Association and sold Quickes' cheese in my shops for many years, so I have a good appreciation of their craft and quality.

"Once the Mousetrap business had been sold, my partner and I decided that one of us would run the dairy and the other would get 'a proper job' – so it's been a happy outcome to have secured a position with a company that I admire."

Tom Chatfield of Quickes said, "Independent retailers have always been our bread and butter, accounting for more than half of our turnover. We want to reciprocate the decades of support that retailers have given us by further investing in our team.

"Over the past twelve months I have dedicated more of my time on the export market and our business has been growing in the UK as well.

"We are excited to have Mark on board with his sole focus being UK sales to independent retailers. He has almost thirty years' experience making and retailing cheese, so has exceptional knowledge and passion; values that all the team share."







COMTÉ

Boasting a growing fan base in the UK, Comté is well worth a place in your cheese offering

For more than 10 centuries, villagers of Jura Massif in Eastern France have lovingly crafted Comté by pooling their milk together. This stunning region of mountains stretches between Jura and Doubs in the Franche-Comté region, and Ain in the Rhones-Alpes region, and is home to over 2,700 family farms dedicated to producing the highest quality of raw milk that is required to create Comté cheese. Today, Comté's methods of production are still based on the original co-operative approach (owned by farmers) and artisan traditions that it was founded on over 1,000 years ago. Each day it is crafted in around 160 small village cheese dairies known as fruitières.

Due to its distinctive nature, historical and cultural value and economic importance for the region, Comté was deservedly granted Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) status in 1958. This ensures that Comté follows a large set of stringent rules and requirements which guarantee the specificity of our unique cheese. The Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée also guarantees that the production of Comté remains based on traditional methods and stages which have been in place for over 1,000 years. This prestigious status was further recognised in 1996 when Comté was awarded the exclusive Protected Designation of Origin (AOP/PDO) status which recognises and protects Comté's remarkable reputation throughout the whole of Europe, and not only in France.

How is Comté made?

Montbéliards and French Simmental cows are the only breeds authorized to produce milk for Comté. With each cow given a whole hectare of pasture land in the spring and summer months, they are free to feed on a delicious natural grass diet. During winter, cows eat locally harvested hay and all fermented feed is banned from their diet. Comté is hand made every day by the cheese makers in the fruitières.

It is in the silence and shadowy darkness of the affinage cellars that



Comté will undergo its second transformation. The Jura Massif has 15 Comté affineurs (aging facilities), each with unique techniques depending on the location, the atmosphere in the cellars and particular style of the affineur. Nutty, creamy, fruity, peppery and toasty are just some of the notes that will be developed in this time.

How to identify

After aging in the cellars, each wheel of Comté is tested and given a rating out of 20. The rating covers taste as well as the physical appearance of the wheel. Wheels that score over 14 points are given a green band, wheels that score 12-14 points are given a brown band (this may be due to only a small fault in the appearance of an otherwise excellent cheese). Wheels that score less than 12 points are excluded from carrying the official Comté label.

> "Producing a high quality milk is vital for the expression of flavours and aromas in Comté"
>
> **CLAUDE VERMOT-DESROCHES, PRESIDENT OF THE COMTÉ CHEESE ASSOCIATION**



Wheels of Comté cannot be sold without this band (green or brown) as it is a guarantee of the retailer and the consumer that the wheel is officially Comté and not a given pressed cooked cheese. On the pre-cut or pre-packaged pieces, consumers can identify that it is Comté thanks to the Comté logo and the PDO label (this is an obligation too).

How to serve

There are no less than 83 natural flavours that can be detected when tasting Comté. These can be grouped into six aromatic families: lactic, fruity, roasted, vegetable, animal and spicy. Because of this range of flavours and because it melts easily, Comté can be added to all sorts of mouthwatering recipes and not just saved for the cheese board.

Comté is also one of the few cheeses that pairs well with a wide range of red and white wines. Jura wines from the home region are a classic pairing for this unique cheese, but other wines that have some texture and of comparable intensity also enhance Comté's unique flavour characteristics; a Palo Cortado or off-dry Amontillado sherry from Spain are perfect.

Comté can be eaten with Champagne. A young Comté cheese, packed full of the lactic and fruity aromas like yoghurt and citrus fruits for example, will be ideally matched with a Champagne Brut, while a more full-bodied Champagne, however, will be well teamed with a more mature Comté cheese. This makes a fantastic pairing which builds on all the tropical fruit, toasted almond and rich brioche-like flavours which are characteristic of a classic Champagne.

The flavours of Comté are most pronounced when eaten at 15°C, so make sure you take it out of the fridge a few minutes before you eat it for the best taste you can get.

What does Comté's PDO status mean?

- Comté is a PDO cheese, meaning that it is made in a specific area: the Jura Massif of France, a region of medium-range mountains stretching along the Swiss border north of Geneva. It is the first French PDO cheese in terms of volume produced (60,000 tonnes by the end of 2014).
- Comté production remains based on traditional methods and small-scale production techniques in order to guarantee a traditional and artisanal product respectful of its environment.
- Comté's specifications ensure a link between people and their territory. And then, each wheel carries the mark of the local fruitière, the micro-climate, the season, the particular skills of the cheesemaker and the affineur.

FACT FILE

- There are about 2,700 small dairy farms that produce Comté milk
- Comté Farms practice non-intensive agriculture, a farming method that, rather than focusing on large yields, instead focuses on quality, taking into account soil characteristics and the diversity of plant species and microflora
- In 2013 252,717 tonnes of Comte were exported to the UK, which marks a 21 per cent increase compared to the previous year
- From 2009 to 2013, exports to the UK have increased by 56 per cent

MEET THE PRODUCER

The sweet potato and the sweet potato crisp are finding a growing acceptance in the UK, thanks to the North Carolina-based Scott Farms International



Not so long ago, the sweet potato was regarded as something quite exotic. Not any more. Sweet potatoes are now widely sold and can also be consumed in the shape of sweet potato crisps, or 'chips', as sweet potato grower Dewey Scott calls them. Dewey is director of Scott Farms International, the North Carolina-based company which is the largest grower/exporter of sweet potatoes to the UK and Europe. In June, 2013, Dewey says, "we launched our Scott Farms Sweet Potato Chips at the Royal Three Counties Show. It was our first visit to the show and we picked up a gold medal for the chips (and 1st prize for best trade stand)."

His sweet potato chips were well received, he says, "especially in view of the fact that at the time we launched there were no other vegetable crisps with just sweet potatoes in the bag. People were getting to know sweet potatoes packed with parsnips and beetroot, but we were keen to have a sweet potato-only snack. Customers tell us they love the taste, the crunch and that they are very moreish!" This, he adds, is because of "the naturally sweet taste of the sweet potato, which we season with a pinch of sea salt to bring out its unique flavour. There are so many flavours of potato crisps out there I think people enjoy the simple way we make our chips."

It helps, too, he says, that the chips use no artificial colours or added flavourings. "They come as they are, with the exception of a pinch of salt," he says. "Our chips are gluten-free, coeliac friendly, and – because we cook them in their skins – higher in fibre." The chips are cooked in small batches and hand-turned with a paddle. The chips are produced in the UK for a number of reasons: "we had first-hand exposure to the industry, as we'd been supplying sweet potatoes to other crisp manufacturers. This meant we had a little more knowledge of the vegetable snack market here, which we all know is booming," Dewey says. "Cooking them in the UK, where they are under our direct control and supervision, seemed a sensible route." The chips are an ideal stocking inclusion for farm shops and delis, he says, because they are "a premium product with a story that appeals to food lovers. My name is on the packs and my sweet potatoes are in the bags. As the grower, I can offer absolute provenance to a product that happens to taste fantastic."



The main ingredient of the chips, the sweet potato itself, is a special vegetable: "sweet potatoes have huge nutritional benefits," Dewey says, "and are full of anti-oxidants, vitamins A, C and beta-carotene. They are one of your 'five a day', versatile to cook and don't cost the earth. We know our sweet potatoes and want to showcase different ways to eat them." The sweet potatoes are grown from seed and hand-picked, assuring strong provenance. An unusual degree of care is taken in the growing of this product: "when sweet potatoes grow in the ground, they form a vine from which they get their nutrients," Dewey says. "When we harvest them, we turn them, and then hand-pick them from the vine to ensure they are not damaged, as the skin of a newly-turned sweet potato is very delicate. Scott Farms is the only grower – large scale, at least – who doesn't machine harvest its sweet potatoes."

The UK's acceptance of sweet potatoes is growing. "Back in 2011, we carried out our own buyer behaviour research, which told us that 44% of those interviewed bought sweet potatoes; this year, that figure rose to just over 60%. This correlates with the happy fact that sweet potatoes are now included in the nation's shopping basket (Office of National Statistics), and more and more chefs and food bloggers are including them in their recipes. Deliciously Ella, for example, recently came up with a sweet potato brownie. In 2013/14 we imported over 24,500 tons of sweet potatoes into Europe, compared to 2000 tons in 2006/07. This all points to the UK acquiring a taste for this humble and hard-working veg."

Scott Farms International has been working hard to raise the profile of the sweet potato. "We're really proud of our Love Sweet Potatoes campaign," Dewey tells Speciality Food. "This features recipes from our very own chef, Felice Tocchini, as well as education on how good sweet potatoes are for you. Since we kicked the campaign off in 2011, we have amassed over 10,000 Facebook likes and 7,000 Twitter followers, plus a healthy 2,500 subscribers to our e-newsletter. The general public want to talk sweet potatoes; they share their recipes and tips with us."



The Scott family has been growing sweet potatoes in North Carolina "for four generations," Dewey says. "We know our sweet potatoes and are passionate about them. So passionate, we've just invested $7m into a brand new state-of-the-art packing plant, along with more acreage to ensure we continue to supply increasing demand with the same attention to service and quality, both domestically – here in the State – and abroad." Dewey sees the market for sweet potatoes, continuing to grow, "as more people become aware of sweet potatoes as a great tasting superfood." Scott Farms International, he says, "wants to be at the forefront of that awareness, including developing other sweet potato products ourselves and with other third parties. We're also developing more lines of our sweet potato chips, including a bag containing three varieties of sweet potato – orange, purple and white. This will be a first for the market in terms of putting these varieties, all grown on our farm, in one bag. Not only do they look outstanding, they taste outstanding. We've definitely kicked that one out of the ball park..."



FARM SHOP FOCUS

After owning a business selling upmarket furniture and oriental carpets, Gary Wilkes returned to his roots in food retail and opened the Moss End Farm Shop

Of the many factors which can bring success, location is not the least of them. "A good location is extremely important," agrees Gary Wilkes, owner of the Moss End Farm Shop in Warfield, Berks. "We are out of the town, on a main route between of Bracknell and Maidenhead." As locations go, the shop is well placed. It attracts visitors from both of these well-heeled Berkshire towns and lies between two of the main arteries into London from the South West, the M3 and the M4.

Easy access and parking is also an under-estimated factor, but at Moss End, a "huge, free car park" serves the shop and the retail centre of which it forms a part. Customers appreciate being able to pull off a main thoroughfare and park easily. The centre of which the Moss End Farm Shop forms a part is a multi-faceted retail venture, and its various components attract a varied range of customers, augmenting the farm shop's footfall with casual visitors.

"Within the centre," Gary says, "there's not just the farm shop itself, but also a tack shop for horse

> "While all the work was being done on the shop, I went to exhibitions and to food shows. I also read up about the business. I did a lot of research and I learned a lot in very short time. That said, I'm still learning"



owners. This brings in a lot of people. As well as this, we have a place on the site that makes biltong for the large South African community here. The butcher does a very good boerewors, which brings in the same people. "In the summer, we have Saturday car boot sales and we are very busy then and also at Christmas, when we have a Santa and reindeer. We have a lot of charity events and the butcher runs a cut and cook class."

Prospective owners tend to arrive in the industry by a number of routes. Some take on and improve the family business, while others build from scrtach. Gary's manner of coming into the farm shop business was perhaps a little unusual. Before he opened Moss End Farm Shop, he says, "I used to have several shops doing upmarket furniture and oriental carpets and rugs."

This might have been his future, had it not been for the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. "When 9/11 hit, "it really killed my trade," he says. "After I had got rid of all my shops, I came to the antiques shop here to put my rugs in for sale."

First enquiries

His first impressions of the centre itself were not promising. "When I looked around, I thought it was a bit dull and boring and wouldn't attract the customers I needed to come and buy my rugs," he says. "But Karen, who has the antiques shop, said that the centre was going to hold barbecues and other events and open a farm shop." Hearing this, Gary though he might be able to help. "I spoke to a few people I knew, who





expressed interest in taking on the farm shop. However, when I got back to Karen a few weeks later, I found they hadn't even made the first enquiries. So I said, you know what? I'll do it."

If this sounds like a spur of the moment decision, Gary was not unprepared for the world of food retail. In fact, he already had considerable experience in this sector. "When I left school in the early Seventies, I was actually in this industry," he tells Speciality Food. "I worked for the International Stores as a young relief manager, so I knew a bit about it. Plus, I'm a foodie, and so I go to lots of restaurants. I wasn't coming into the business cold. This was why I agreed to take on the Moss End Farm Shop." While the shop was being fitted out, Gary spent his time profitably. "I went to exhibitions and to food shows," he says, "I also read up about the business. I did a lot of research and I learned a lot in very short time. That said, I'm still learning."

New farm shop owners can find themselves facing problems of various kinds. The only obstacles Gary encountered in setting up the farm shop, he says, were "with the council. There were problems with planning, and obtaining the drinks licence nearly made me pack it all in. The people at the council were very helpful, but I didn't like filling in all the questions on the forms for health and hygiene, and health and safety, many of which seemed very petty, and that's just not me."

From the start, Gary was very clear about what he wanted his farm shop to be. "I didn't want the shop to be just another supermarket, which places like this can so easily become," he says. "I wanted somewhere that I would be happy to shop in."

Nearly two years after the shop opened, and operating with two full time and four Saturday staff, Gary is doing a brisk trade with food shoppers, and also drawing in casual visitors who come to browse the antiques centre. "The big thing you need to learn," he says, "is what actually sells and what doesn't, because what sells around the country may not sell here. I base my



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business on what sells here, but it's all trial and error, really."

Artisan products

Central to his own success is his stock. "We stock stuff that you normally won't see outside Devon or Scotland, and so on," he says. "I'm trying to find artisan products from around the country, along with the things you will see in most farm shops, which is my bread and butter. We stock local honeys, of which I have a huge range (we also have a good range of world honeys), local chutneys, bread, cheeses, and when I can't get it local, I go further abroad. I've tried a lot of the items, so I know that the quality is good and I generally try and get in things you won't see around. I make daily checks of stock, and I'm constantly looking out for new things." As an independent food retailer, he is, of course, wary of goods already stocked by supermarkets. "With anything that's in Tesco," he says, "I tend to either beat them on price or, if that's not possible, I consider ending my stocking of the item."

As any owner of a farm shop or deli knows, finding out quickly what draws custom can be crucial.

"The wine and vinegar which you pour yourself has proved very popular," he says. "Another item which is a very good footfall finder is our range of very hot sauces, which you won't find anywhere but online."



Gary's wide and varied range is perhaps key to the shop's success; the shop prides itself on providing good variety. "I've got probably got about 50 different types of chutneys," Gary says, "40 types of pickles, and probably a hundred different jams." The same applies to the shop's 60-strong cheese counter.

"Cheese is very important and we stock some very good local cheeses, such as Barkham Blue by Two Hoots, and Waterloo, and Wigmore by Village Maid," Gary says. "Other British cheeses we stock include the full range of cheeses from Snowdonia Cheese (including Black Bomber) and the Cheshire Cheese Company." The best-selling cheese at Moss End Farm Shop, Gary says, is Barkham Blue. Among the Continentals included in the Moss End cheese counter are "Italian Dolcelatte, Gorgonzola, Parmigiana, Greed Feta, Halloumi, French Brie de Meaux, Rosary Goats cheese, Swiss Emmental, German Montagnolo and Cambozola."



Among the extra services offered by Moss End Farm Shop are advance telephone ordering and a variety of food hampers, which can be personally customised or bought from a range of themed hampers. The shop offers hampers for birthdays, Valentines Da and anniversaries. Gifting is also catered for byofferings of baskets filled with wine, chocolate and fresh flowers.

Friendly staff

The shop's appeal is not the result of careful stocking alone. "We have very friendly staff, for one thing," Gary says. "In store, we have a local butcher, Lewis of Sunningdale, who is well known and has a very good reputation in the Sunningdale/Ascot area." The shop boasts a welcoming ambience and it is evident that people like to spend time there. "Customers like to stand and chat to us, they feel very welcome." The secret to retaining good staff, he adds, lies in "keeping them happy. If they feel that they are part of the team, they act as part of the team. I treat the staff like I would wish to be treated myself."

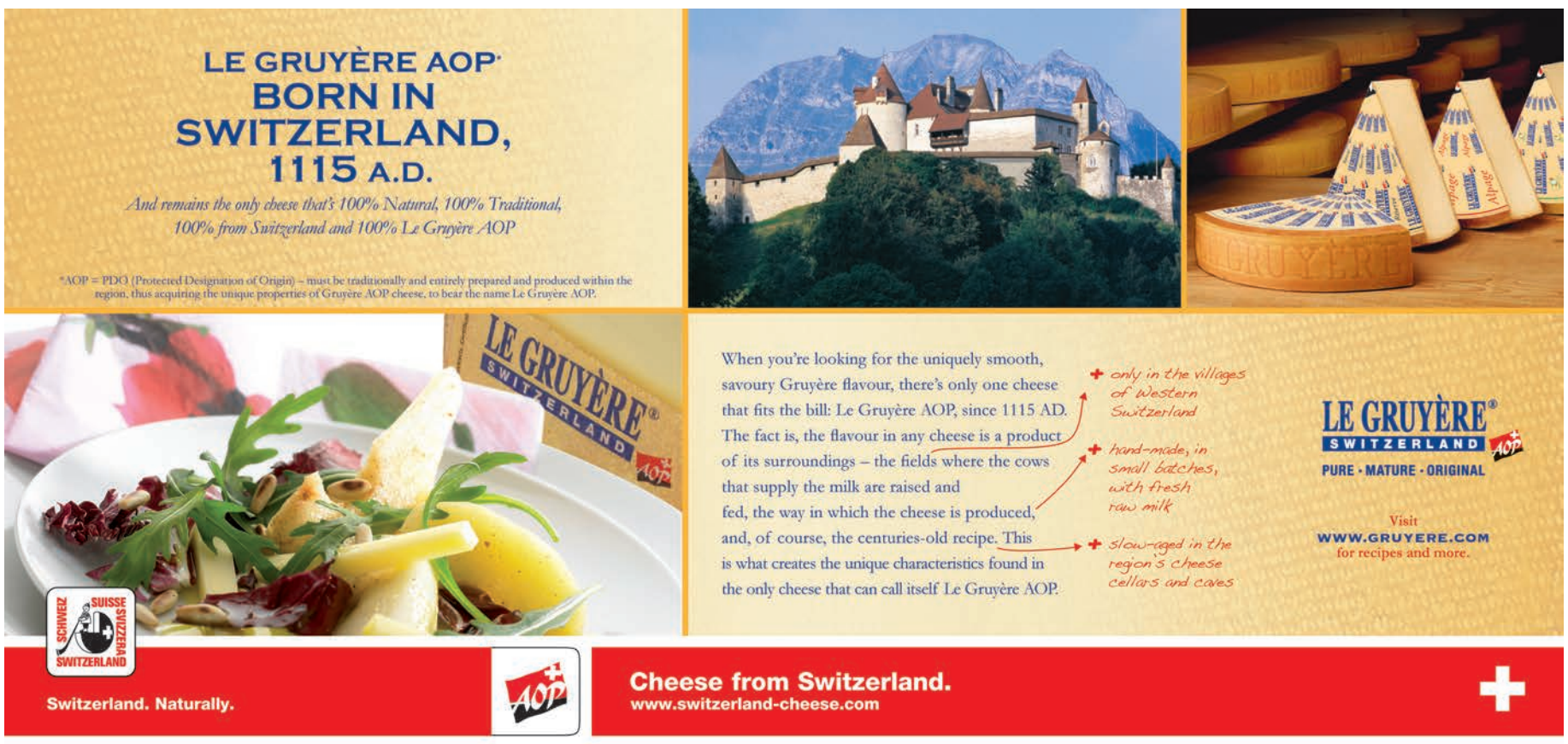




In Gary's opinion, the size of a farm shop can be an important factor when it comes to creating the right ambiance and in his opinion, some important qualities can be lost when a business becomes too big. "There's a farm shop not far from here that has been going for a long time," he says. "This place is usually rammed with customers. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, but they are now just another supermarket. They got too big. Here, we are small enough to react personally to our customers. We like to chat with them, and if a customer asks for a product, we don't just point them to it, we take them to that product and talk to them about it. I think we have the right customers here, and they are nice people."

The people he serves are enthusiastic about the farm shop and the goods it sells. "We have customers coming in and saying of a product, 'this is great,"' Gary says. "The most important thing to get right is your relations with your customers. Ours come back time and time again."

> "I spoke to a few people I knew, who expressed interest in taking on the farm shop. However, when I found they hadn't even made enquiries, I said, 'you know what? I'll do it"





TERESA KURGAT, KENYAN TEA FARMER
PHOTO: SIMON RAWLES

MARKET REPORT: FAIRTRADE

When growth in the Fairtrade category hit the buffers many blamed the economy. But premium food and drink sales are booming, so what's really going on? Anna Blewett investigates

It's a truth that most of us grudgingly accept, there are no dead certs in this evolving world of retail. Thought cheapy discount chains would never attract AB consumers? Wrong. Presumed Tesco was invincible? Not quite. If you've been in the business long enough you probably wouldn't be that surprised to see an acorn-fed, woodland-reared pig fly past your shop window. But one absolute sure thing, on paper at least, has been Fairtrade-certified food and drink. A small category, granted, it enjoyed double-digit growth in value of sales over the last ten years, at a time when some premium food sectors were being seriously squeezed by the changing habits of cash-strapped consumers. As recently as September last year the most up-to-date figures (reporting on total UK sales in 2013) reported Fairtrade-certified foods saw a whopping 14% growth in year-on-year sales, bringing the UK market to value of £1.8 billion.

Fast forward seven months and the industry is facing a very different picture. Stats released by the Fairtrade Foundation to coincide with last month's Fairtrade Fortnight revealed that the seemingly unstoppable trend for big growth screeched to a halt in 2014, with the value of total sales down 3.7% to £1.67 billion. So just what has derailed this juggernaut, and how concerned should we really be?

Testing times

In a statement accompanying the release of the figures, Michael Gidney, the Foundation's chief executive, laid the blame squarely on tough trading conditions, linking the poor performance to that of food and drink sales in general. "For the first time in our 20-year history the traditional grocery market has been contracting," he pointed out, "and the value of food spending is in decline. Our main concern now is that increasingly aggressive competitive behaviour in the grocery sector could undermine the volumes farmers and workers are able to sell on Fairtrade terms, resulting in real losses to hard-working families and communities in some of the poorest countries in the world."

This argument is certainly compelling – few could dispute the challenges facing the whole retail sector – but with economic analysts speaking of 'green shoots' and other premium sectors like organics reporting growth, wouldn't we expect Fairtrade to be a little more resilient? To Euan Venters, the organisation's commercial director, the contraction in growth is an inevitable result of the category outgrowing its niche status. "With double-digit growth posted in previous years and the Fairtrade market growing to £1.67 billion, which is huge, we've become mainstream," he explains. "What's happened to mainstream groceries is well-documented. We've become caught up in the sales challenges facing major grocery."

Global forces

"On top of that we have specific challenges facing sugar, which is a very important product for us.

THE GLOBAL VIEW

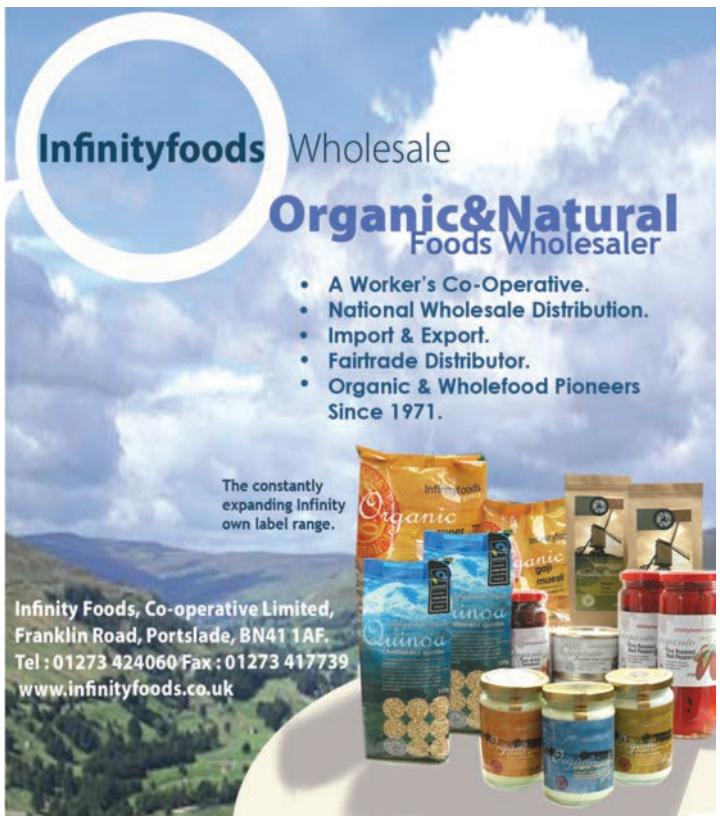
Caroline Hickson, Fairtrade International's director of communications, gives the context



The UK is the largest market for Fairtrade products worldwide, and has been leading by a clear margin. We expect it to remain number one, despite the slight dip in UK sales and strong growth expected in other markets. In Germany, our second biggest market, sales grew by 23% in 2013 and early estimations indicate a strong increase in 2014.

A survey of 17,000 consumers across 24 countries shows six in ten shoppers worldwide recognise the Fairtrade mark, and nine in ten of those trust it. Sixty-four percent of those familiar with the Fairtrade Mark associate it with helping farmers and workers in poor countries escape poverty.

There are over 300 raw products for which we have Fairtrade Standards. This covers long-standing products such as coffee and bananas, to more recent exotic additions like pomegranates, watermelon and other fresh fruit; olive oil and shea butter, often from women's cooperatives; and current superfood favourites quinoa and chia seeds.





Restrictions from the EU and a general decline in prices mean that cane sugar is being priced out of the market." In fact, the global sugar price has plummeted by 50% in the last few years. What's more, plans announced by the European Union to lift its cap on sugar beet production by 2017 look set to threaten sales of fairly-traded cane sugar even further, and expose the category's reliance on a few key crops. The effect on small-scale farmers in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific, many of them amongst the world's least developed countries, could be devastating. Elsewhere, categories equally synonymous with the Fairtrade mark have reported mixed fortunes: sales of Fairtrade-certified bananas grew by 3% in 2014, while coffee sales grew by2%. Volumes of tea and cocoa sold fell by 1% and 2% respectively.


COCOA FARMER, KUAPA KOKOO, GHANA
PHOTO: JAMES ROBINSON

> "It'll be a tough retail environment in the near future, and more important to stock products with strong customer support"

These disappointing figures have been widely reported in broadsheet papers, proving that the maelstrom of interest around food can be, at times, a double-edged sword. As trend-hungry media outlets look for the next big thing, today's hot topic can becomes tomorrow's old news; has Fairtrade had its day? Are shoppers forgetting ethical supply chains and prioritising other lifestyle choices? The Foundation admits that sugar consumption has declined as health moves up the consumer agenda, hampering sales in that category, but denies any wider effects. "I don't think Fairtrade is faddish," says Euan. "Our membership continues to grow, and now the importance of Fairtrade to farmers is taught as part of the National Curriculum. The Fairtrade brand is something that more and more people care about and go out of their way to choose."

Trust issues

Not everyone agrees with this analysis. Recently Labour peer Lord Mandelson, chairman of management consultants Global Counsel, told a conference of business delegates that kitemarks such as Fairtrade no longer carry consumer confidence. "We know the mark's trusted by 80% of consumers," counters Euan Venters, "and that there are strong local networks of Fairtrade campaigners and believers who are committed to buying and supporting Fairtrade." So retailers who've invested in Fairtrade should be sticking to their guns? "Absolutely. I think they should be offering choice. Interestingly, if we look at organic – which has seen growth in sales – there's a big overlap. A lot of our product is organically grown, as you see with brands like Green & Blacks. We don't see organic as a competitor; the two categories complement each other."

The future looks interesting for the chocolate category, with the Foundation's new Cocoa Sourcing programme opening the gates to confectionery brands whose cocoa, if not other ingredients, can be certified as fairly-traded. The development allows products like Mars Bars to carry a new Fairtrade mark despite containing sugar and vanilla from non-Fairtrade sources. Exciting times are ahead, so is Euan optimistic about the trading environment that lies ahead? "My sense is that things are on hold until the election. It's that kind of year. Post election? If you talk to retailers, and a big part of my job is talking to retailers right across the spectrum from large retail groups to small independents, the view is there will continue to be pressure on prices and trading will continue to be tough. I get that from brand owners, retailers, wholesalers... It'll be a tough retail environment in the near future, but for that reason it's more important than ever to stock products with strong customer recognition and support."


BANANA FARMER IN COLOMBIA
PHOTO: EDUARDO MARTINO



ON THE **HIGH STREET**

Bridget Orr, owner of The Deli at 80 in Finsbury Park, North London

HAVE YOU NOTICED A DECLINE IN FAIRTRADE SALES?
We're in our first year here, so it's hard to compare, but our customers haven't particularly mentioned Fairtrade as a priority. I think local provenance is a bigger deal; I tend to push that element because that's where I see the demand. People want to know who made the product, if it's gluten-free or particularly nutritious. Health is definitely a big factor for our customers.

HOW REALISTIC IS IT TO DISCUSS SUPPLY CHAIN WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS?
I'd say that's totally doable. People always want to know the story behind the products we stock, so they're pleased to hear that our cheese is made by a chap up the road or our honey comes from a local woman with hives on her allotment.

HOW BIG IS FAIRTRADE FOR YOU?
We did a tasting with a Fairtrade chocolate brand for Fairtrade Fortnight and there was a lot of interest in how the system benefits the farmers. It's probably the first time I've heard conversations about ethical supply chain in the shop. I'd say I have quite a global outlook, so it was good to link the chocolate back to Ghana where the beans were grown.

STOCK CHECK

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE 2015



DIVINE DARK CARAMEL BAR

Using a rich, buttery caramel that is completely palm oil-free, we have come up with a delicious alternative that dark chocolate lovers will really enjoy.
divinechocolate.com



LIBERATION OVEN BAKED CHILLI & LIME CASHEWS WITH PEANUTS & ROASTED CORN

Sweet cashew nuts coated in chilli and lime seasoning paired with lightly salted and baked peanuts.
chooseliberation.com



CLIPPER GREEN TEA WITH PEAR & HONEY

Clipper teas contain no artificial ingredients and they are on their way to being the first tea company in the UK to only ever use unbleached tea bags.
clipper-teas.com



GREEN & BLACK'S BUTTERSCOTCH

In our Butterscotch chocolate bar, we choose to use rich, thick molasses to give the bar a treacly taste that bursts through the chocolate beautifully.
greenandblacks.co.uk



MACHARE KILIMANJARO COFFEE

Direct from the farm in Tanzania, this is an impressive pure arabica gourmet coffee; strong and bold with a sublime smooth finish.
eacoffee.co.uk



QUINOLA MOTHERGRAIN

Quinoa is a complete vegetable protein and contains all 8 essential acids our bodies needs. These means quinoa can quite easily replace meat and you'd still get all the protein you need and more.
quinola.com



TRAIDCRAFT BOMBAY MIX

Authentic Indian blend of fair trade peanuts, sultanas and cashew nuts, mixed with lentils, chickpeas and a unique fair trade spice blend.
traidcraft.co.uk



BIRD & WILD CAFE CAPUCAS, HONDURAS

Delicious nutty coffee grown by a cooperative in the Aldea Capucas area of Honduras by producers dedicated to producing high quality and sustainable coffees.
birdandwild.co.uk

MEET THE BUYER

North London's The Greek Larder deli-restaurant has yet to complete its first year of trading, but according to co-owner Theodore Kyriakou, signs are already good







If location is half the battle, then The Greek Larder, which opened on Halloween last year, starts in an advantageous position. "We're close to Kings Cross station, facing the Regents Canal," says co-owner Theodore Kyriakou. The deli-restaurant, which has a modern, open look and amenities which will be bolstered next year by the addition of a 40squaremetre terrace overlooking the canal, draws local custom from neighbouring communities in Kentish and Camden Towns. It offers restaurant and deli service six and a half days a week and serves home-made lunch boxes to office workers on weekday lunch, as well as families on weekends. A deli side serving ingredients sourced from mainly small, local producers in Greece provides quality ingredients for the Greek community and anyone interested in artisanally-produced Greek foods.

The restaurant has its origins in a delicatessen opened by Theodore's father in the 1930s, which he ran until he retired in 1992. "In Greece we have the tradition where, around one o'clock, everything shuts down and everyone goes for a two hour lunch," Theodore tells Speciality Food, "and because the deli was positioned in the old market, the traders and their customers went there to eat." Brought up "in a family surrounded by food," it's perhaps not surprising that Theodore, after training to become a merchant sea captain, gravitated towards a career in food and it was his family's deli-cum-restaurant which Theodore wanted to reproduce in North London. "I managed to trace some extremely nice pictures of my dad's shop from the 1950s," he says. "I gave those pictures to an architect, who copied them very well, and that was the beginning."

> "The look of the place is very unpretentious. Nothing is hidden, preparation areas and everything else is on show"

Despite planning original events such as the first Greek wine festival (set for October), Theodore doesn't claim to be reinventing the wheel. "I'm not trying to reinvent Greek food, either," he says. "I stick to extremely good ingredients and offer traditional recipes without adulterating them. I am in the very lucky position of being able to bring those ingredients here and offer them not at deli prices, but at the same prices you would find them in Athens." The look of the place, he says, is "very unpretentious. Nothing is hidden, preparation areas and everything thing else is on show." The deli stock, he says, is "not decorative." It's a display which changes with the seasonal food stocked. Sometimes, Theodore says, "the shelves are overflowing with produce, while at other times we have to wait a week for produce to arrive. This means that there is movement in the shop." The business gives the impression of "a Greek traiteur," Theodore says. "Not only can you come and buy the ingredients, but you can place your order the day before and enjoy some of our recipes like the stuffed vine leaves or one of our range of the dips or the incredible taramasalata."

The Greek Larder operates with a staff of 27, which includes Theodore himself, who is, he says, very hands-on. His partner, Panos Manuelides, has experience in logistics, which makes the operation of bringing in 146 different products from Greece much easier, Theodore says. In order to help their deli produce stand out, Theodore and Panos decided against having their product lines branded with The Greek Larder.

It's more important, Theodore says, that the first name the buyer sees on the product is that of its producer. Many, but not all, producers are small and much produce is seasonal, meaning that there are products that "you won't find on our shelf throughout the whole year." Recently, Theodore says, "we had a beautiful fresh, flowery cheese come in from Crete made from goat's milk. Anthotyro will stay with us probably until May, after which the Greek goats don't produce the right sort of milk."

Although The Greek Larder's main money-spinner is its restaurant, the deli is an essential component of the business and an alternative way of moving some of the ingredients used by the restaurant. There is a good range of both ambient and non-ambient goods. On the ambient side, Theodore says, "is everything from single estate olive oil, to olive oil produced by a co-operative, to olives in real brine. We offer a vast selection of Greek salt and some amazing vinegar from the island of Paros.

'We also stock the best tomatoes in a jar you will ever have tasted. We buy from a producer who sells us his entire tomato production in September. He simply puts the tomatoes through a mouli, then drains them and puts the pulp in a jar and gives it to us." This, Theodore says, produces an incomparable aroma when the jar is opened. "We stock lots of different dairy products and Greek charcuterie from the island of Corfu," he adds, "along with preserved sardines and anchovies. Our best sellers include some of our cheeses, the tomatoes and our thyme honey."

The Greek Larder is, as yet, a fledgling business but signs are positive (the shops reports an exceptionally good return in the normally depressed months of January and February) that this is one which will stay the course. The owners are energetic and enthusiastic. For Theodore, a business like this "is like an addiction. You either like it or you don't." Private life is sacrificed in the first year of trading, he says, but that's what must happen if a business is to survive and finally convince people that Greek food is "much more than chips and moussaka."

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SELLING SUMMERTIME

Summer can see a sizeable increase in your turnover, if you prepare properly

How you make the most of the summer season may depend on where you are located and what sort of customer you attract. For delis based in busy seaside towns, summer can be a double-edged sword. During these months, they compete with all kinds of other outlets, all seeking to offer refreshment to visiting trippers. Mark Kacary, who owns The Norfolk Deli in the coastal holiday resort of Hunstanton, has "always felt it extremely important to provide good signage," which he uses to flag up new summer products and services. Of course, drinks become a more important consideration as the weather gets warmer. In summer, Mark adds "many more beers to our stock, as well as cider," he says. He also extends the range of freshly-made salads on his takeaway menu. "There are also more products which can be viewed as grab bags," he says. "Cold drinks are always welcome, so products such as Posh Pop and Fentimans are easy purchases which encourage customers to spend more on other goods."

Open door

Although Mark does not feel the need "to promote any specific type of cheeses over the summer period," the Norfolk Deli, he says, has "become known as a place with an extensive cheese counter. It is a reason for people to visit us and therefore we always stock a wide range of cheeses. However, local cheeses are always very popular during the summer. People visiting Norfolk like to try these." To encourage casual summer customers, Mark has an "open door policy" because, he says, "if you have the appearance of looking closed, people will believe you are closed. Our chiller cabinet is by the front door and packed with artisan soft drinks. We also have a few bottles of local Norfolk wine (white and rosé) which become popular in and around BBQ season."

Summer can be a time to organise tie-ins with local events. In Hunstanton, Mark "makes the effort to speak to those running these, to ensure that we can be involved." One such event catered for by the deli is the Hunstanton Tennis tournament, for which the deli creates "specific picnics" for both players and spectators. Mark also works "with local holiday-let and glamping companies to provide meals for those arriving on holiday. We include a voucher with a discount to encourage repeat visits. Otherwise, all the summer standards are available in our deli: local ice cream and sorbet, local honey (for those suffering from hay fever) and beach picnic hampers."

Holidaymakers like to plan their time carefully, and for this reason, an online or telephone ordering service can pay dividends. At the Norfolk Deli, "customers can pre-order their sandwiches online and collect them at a specified time, allowing people to plan ahead," Mark



IN SUMMER, ADD SPACE AND ATTRACT INTEREST WITH EXTERIOR DISPLAYS LIKE FRESH BASIL DELI IN BELPER





extending this with a wider range of produce which can be ordered online and collected. Local hostelries and the tourist information centre are provided with leaflets and informed about our annual offering."

Over the course of the summer, this seaside store will sell hundreds of crabs, make hundreds of sandwiches, and supply a growing number of picnics. Also important during this period, Mark says, is offering "a good range of local produce, because when people are on holiday, they want to buy local. Mark's summer trading advice for similarly-placed independent food retailers is to "prepare well in the mornings, and then work flat out during the course of the day. Make sure you have the stock in place and work with suppliers to see if there is anything they can do to avoid making their deliveries midway through the day. Breath deeply, get your head down and realise that it's a season that only last five months. For us, this is the time when we make as much money as we do in December."

Letting summer produce speak for itself

The Ardross Farm Shop in Fife is within sight of the sea and benefits from an influx of holidaymakers and cottage letters during the summer. "We are lucky that our area is very touristy," says its manager, Nikki Storrar. "We are on a good road so if our car park is full we generally tend to have a busy day. We think cars attract cars." Summer is a great time of year for Ardross, she says. "With our main sellers in the shop being fruit, veg and other local produce, our shop naturally moves with the seasons. The vegetable table as you walk into our shop is fantastic over summer; it bursts with fresh strawberries, raspberries, peas, lettuce, spring onions, tomatoes and other summer produce. We link the other displays in the shop to this. The meat fridges show lots of burgers, sausages, kebabs etc. Our wines of the week are always great for al fresco dining (for that occasional warm evening!) and paired with a seasonal dish. We let our natural larder show us what to display and when."

Working wonders

Slate signs draw interest to summer produce, although, Nikki says, "we like to ensure that the display does the talking. I recently read that if a customer doesn't know what your display is about after two seconds, it is useless." Displays of fruit and vegetables "naturally change with the seasons," Nikki says. "We don't believe in discounting products, so the person doing the ordering needs to be on top of seasonal changes, weather reports, holidays and so on. Our winter wines slowly move to lighter ones, and in actual fact, our wholesaler is happy to take back any unsold bottles. Pies, custard and hot puddings make way for meringues, cream and ice cream. We don't worry about being left with winter foods as we have found that, unless something is very specifically for Christmas, for example, people still buy that product. You just need to wait for a wet and windy day, of which we have lots, and promote anything you are worried about. Samples and 'Product of the Week' signs work wonders."



FRUIT AND VEGETABLES DISPLAYED OUTSIDE AT CHATSWORTH FARM SHOP

During the summer months, Ardross takes its food to local events such as the Crail Food Festival. "It is fantastic for us. People come from all over Scotland to this food fair and we have a stall and sponsor the cookery theatre." A high percentage of Ardross' customers "had seen us at the festival," Nikki says. "We also market our own food fair at the event, which has proven very successful. The only thing that ever puts us off is having outdoor events. More often than not, it is raining or damp at the fair and our products get damaged. If we can't sell them, they are ruined."

For Ardross, summer is a time to promote outdoor food. "Picnics and BBQ weather are great for us. We use boards outside, with product and menu suggestions. We have suggestion cards inside, beside specially-grouped products. Our team are also great at talking about seasonal products and selling products according to the weather." Over the next few months, Nikki expects to increase turnover with sales of "seasonal products, salads, strawberries, burgers, kebabs, picnic pies..."

Stock that's ripe for summer promotions

Barbecues: Steaks, kebabs, fish, chicken legs and thighs, premium burgers, local sausages, venison burgers and sausages, British chorizo, peppers, barbecue sauces, artisan ketchups, relishes, chutneys, steak sauce, meat rubs. **Fruit and Vegetables:** strawberries, raspberries (late summer) corn on the cob, tomatoes, radishes, lettuce, spring onions, fresh herbs. **Picnics:** fresh cheeses, soft and rind-washed, Cheddars and crumblies; dips, pates, Scotch eggs, pickles, breads, piccalilli, aoli, olives, oils, vinegars, dressings; charcuterie including British air-dried hams and chorizos, pork pies, artisan crisps, locally-produced ice cream and sorbet. **Drinks:** fruit cordials, artisan fizzy drinks, ginger beers, coconut water, apple and pear juices; light craft and local beers, ciders and lagers, white wine. **Misc:** picnic hampers, paper plates and cups, one-use barbecues, meat skewers, foil, barbecue forks and spatulas, aprons, meat skewers. Room outside? Consider barbecue briquettes, aromatic woods, small barbecues.



SELLING THE SOUTH

With consumer demand for food with a story at an all-time high and barbecue sauce a staple of consumers' summer storecupboards, it's no wonder that Stubb's sauces are entering the UK market to great acclaim. A true American icon with an impressive history, the time has come for British barbecue-lovers to recognise its possibilities.

1930 Western Texas made way for a hero by the name of C.B. Stubblefield, who later became known simply as 'Stubb' after years of social building through his love of barbecuing/cooking. Stubblefield didn't just make barbecue, he made friends. After years of demand from everyone from celebrities to local foodies, Stubblefield open his first restaurant in 1968 and started bottling his famous barbecue sauce in 1980. 1996 saw the relocation of Stubb's restaurant to Austin, Texas, and today it is still the best place to go for great barbecue food.

Not only has Stubbs been supplying delicious barbecue for decades, since the 70's its renowned brand and restaurant have hosted musicians as great as Joe Ely, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King and Dolly Parton – all have tasted the great recipes produced by Stubb's and graced the stage at its well-known restaurant. 40 years have passed since Stubb opened his first restaurant, and Stubbs is now known worldwide and still run by Stubb's two grandsons.

It remains the gem of Austin, with the likes of Lady Gaga, Kanye West and Metallica becoming a part of its history in recent years. Stubb's range of products are No.1 in the gluten-free sector in the USA, No.1 in all-natural in USA, and sitting amongst the top five barbecue brands in USA, it's the fastest-growing year on year.

HIT REFRESH

The summer season brings with it a deluge of thirst quenchers – we share our recommendations and a taste of what's to come



Slowly but surely, the tide is turning in the soft drinks sector. While the redtops spread fear of sugar and additives such as aspartame become the norm, artisan offers an alternative for the discerning consumer – naturally and traditionally-produced beverages worthy of independent shelves.

The warmer weather brings consumers of all ages and incomes looking for a quality drop to quench their thirst, and the time is now ripe to establish yourself as a pit stop en-route to the park, picnic or beach. Don't fret if you're an out of town retailer, as all you need is a varied selection. Fruit juices, fizzy pressés and summer-friendly wines and spirits are all great options – and you could find there's a producer nearby.



Gabriel David, managing director of Luscombe Drinks talks artisan

To be artisan is to have boundaries which are not crossed in pursuit of profits. It involves using raw ingredients from growers, not industrially produced ingredients. An artisan is 'hands-on'. In all the processes here at Luscombe we are hands-on, from the fruit to the end bottle, and therefore any outsourced pressing or bottling of the drink must invalidate any claim of artisanal production. Artisan is often mistaken for homemade, but here too homemade products can easily be made with concentrates/flavours. Artisan is also not simply a small producer; it's the ingredients and processes that attributes the label artisan.

The term artisan is not protected, so it is easily abused. Marketing can distort the truth so then we are in danger of being spoon-fed a lie. On the positive side, marketing can extol the virtues of a great product, even sing its praises, but when it is simply 'spin', any mass product can be sold to us as artisan. Today's commerciall- driven approaches to the food and drink world lay us open to being fooled.

The public doesn't care so much whether a product is artisan, but it matters that it tastes good and that its ingredients are genuine. No one likes to be duped and customers are getting much more savvy to marketing lies. Get a genuine artisan article backed by copious taste awards and make that judgement for yourself.

The public are no longer sheep, to be fed a diet of mistruths. Good marketing can sell anything once, but it is the repeat sales that count and make your business successful. There are lots of small start-up businesses that look for this Holy Grail. For your customers to really get a benefit it needs to be more than just local, organic or even artisan, it needs to taste good, deliver something they want – ie non mainstream and be the genuine article. Taste and quality are the foremost concerns – I think we see through shortcuts. If you insult your customer with a mediocre product, they won't feel respected and you will lose them in time. A shortsighted business will have to find new customers endlessly, whereas a good business selling reliable products will have repeat customers – and that makes life much easier. That fact bodes well for genuine artisan producers. That said, there will always be a place for a flavoured water if that's what a customer wants.

> “Yum Cha concentrates are a bit like cordials, but twice as strong and with half the sugar. Soft drinks that don't quench your thirst and iced teas that don't taste of tea are the norm, and a simple iced tea that is thirst quenching and tastes of tea is a novelty. Bring on novelty, we say”
>
> **GUY WOODALL, YUMCHA DRINKS**



> “We don’t know anything about the future except it will be different. People value tradition and artisan, whether clever marketing can continue to pull the wool over customers eyes remains to be seen”

We have been growing every year since we started, and every step of that growth presents a challenge to keep the integrity of making a great drink. Luscombe takes no shortcuts. We talk to our growers to get the best of their crop, we press our fruit, we taste and tweak all our recipe mixes, we bottle our own drinks and we deliver pretty much all of our products direct to our clients (with a little via wholesalers). My job is to design our new equipment so as to keep processes genuine to artisan practice. Tasting what we do will be the judge – whether that is the right thing to do – a long term profit can only come by doing something right.



Peveral Manners, MD of Belvoir Fruit Farms tells Speciality Food how a family affair became an international best-seller

It was my mother’s idea to make elderflower cordial. Our fruit farm is located right underneath Belvoir Castle, which in those days had about 100,000 visitors a year, so my father decided to create a pick-your-own as he thought a lot of those visitors would want to pick a punnet of strawberries on their way home from the castle. We were producing delicious strawberries, raspberries, blackcurrants and blackberries, but one day noticed that people weren’t picking the fruit around the outside of the fields – this meant that acres of fruit was being wasted. My father decided that the solution would be to create a drink.

We started with elderflower cordial, and in 1984 made 88 cases (just over 1,000 bottles) – Belvoir Elderflower Cordial was born! It was made in the Belvoir Fruit Farm buildings even then. Last year we made 20,000,000 bottles and shipped them internationally. We haven’t messed about with the recipe, it’s still just fresh elderflowers, fresh lemons, citric acid, sugar and water – my mother’s homemade recipe. Corny but it’s true!

Some people are anti-sugar, but I’m more anti-artificial sweeteners. Our bodies are adapted to process sugar and we know when we’ve had enough, and sugar can easily be sourced from fruit, but producers of cheaper products tend to use less fruit and more artificial sweeteners – but we know where we are with sugar. You can do it all naturally and still produce a brilliant product.

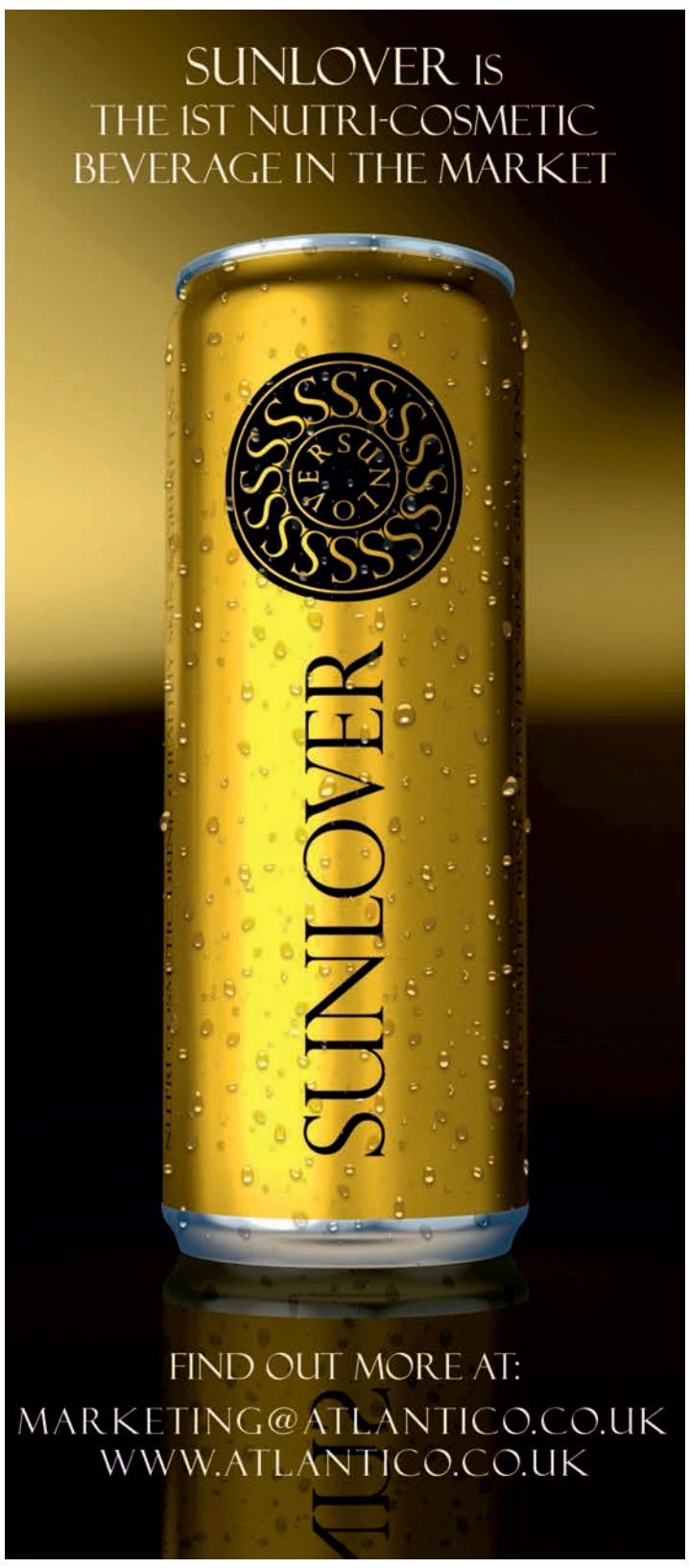


Dan Broughton, sales director at Cawston Press on grown-up flavours, quality and success

We’re passionate about crafting natural, better-quality and great











tasting soft drinks. We're raising the bar in the market by offering consumers 'foodie'-style products which are less sickly sweet than the competition – but which, at the same time, don't compromise on taste. So, we source, pick and blend the best possible kitchen garden-style ingredients to make wonderful tasting carbonated adult drinks, fruit and veg blends and juices.

We've pioneered high quality, pressed and not-from-concentrate (NFC) soft drinks in a market that typically uses concentrates and lots of sugar. Our products have been recognised with a host of awards and we're helping to raise the overall standard in soft drinks across every format. We offer truly grown-up products for the ever-growing number of consumers who are crying out for better quality in their soft drinks.

New drinks are always in the pipeline – but we've been really busy in 2015 already, with no fewer than three examples of NPD. First up was a range of original vegetable and fruit juice blends (Radiant Roots, Sweet Greens and Sunshine Blend in 750ml and 330ml cartons). Two more 750ml vegetable-led products have also been launched to further strengthen our hand in this fast-growing area. Incredible Carrot and Terrific Tomato arrived after another year of phenomenal success for Brilliant Beetroot.

Most recently, we've boosted our sparkling canned range with not only Elderflower Lemonade, but Ginger Beer too. This features two types of ginger – one sweet and citrussy, the other earthy and fiery – to achieve a fruity, complex ginger flavour with decent 'bite'. Using apple juice in the blend adds a dash of acidity to this not-so-sweet ginger beer. On that note, I think customers will be amazed to see how little sugar we use compared to other ginger beers! For our Elderflower Lemonade, the unmistakable floral fragrance is extracted directly from the flowers using a simple water infusion. Fresh lemon juice provides tingling citrus, while the refreshment factor is completed with an injection of sparkling water.

> "On the whole, people are looking for better – it's a good time for a good sector"

COCKTAIL O'CLOCK

Godminster may be best known for its cheeses, but it's far from being a one-trick pony. Deborah. Chambers, director of sales and marketing tells us more

Godminster Farm is known for its Vintage Organic Cheddar and Brie, but from time to time we also like to try new ideas using the crops that appear in our hedgerows.

One of the most popular results inspired by our farm is our range of infused spirit drinks. We produce three flavours that come in elegant, slim 35cl bottles; Elderflower, Horseradish and Blackcurrant.

The Horseradish is the fieriest of the bunch and was created with the sole aim of making the definitive Bloody Mary. It is the ideal partner for Godminster Bloody Good Mary Mix. The mixers are the perfect combination of tomato juice, Worcestershire sauce, molasses, red pepper and celery salt. The Bloody Good Mary Mix come in cases of six and also in the Bloody Good Mary gift pack (one bottle of Horseradish spirit drink and three bottles of Bloody Good Mary mixer), one of our most popular lines. It is, in our opinion, a very fine long drink pf spicy perfection and it works in all seasons.

The Elderflower is the most moreish of the three drinks and makes for a very easy drinking experience. It also makes a very fine summer cocktail.

If the Elderflower is for summer then the Blackcurrant is a lovely winter warmer. Rich, dark and warming, it benefits from all the flavours you associate with cassis and makes a very fine Kir Royale.

Don't take our word for it, try them for yourself!





SUMMER SPECIAL

STOCK CHECK 2015 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE



SUNLOVER

Rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. It's active formula, with zero calories, 0% sugars and no energy components, regenerates and protects the skin.

atlantico.co.uk



CAWSTON PRESS ELDERFLOWER LEMONADE

At the heart of this drink is the unmistakable floral fragrance of the elderflower. Meanwhile, fresh lemon juice provides tingling citrus.

cawstonpress.com



ASPALLS PRESSED ENGLISH APPLE JUICE

This juice offers a taste that only comes from pressed English apples, and a history with genuine provenance and authenticity.

aspall.co.uk



BELVOIR APPLE PRESSÉ

The finest pressed English apple juice blended with lightly sparkling Belvoir Spring water to create a pressé with a crisp, scented and very refreshing taste that's perfect served chilled over ice.

belvoirfruitfarms.co.uk



SHEPPY'S CIDER WITH RASPBERRY

A delicious combination of a traditional light Somerset cider and pure raspberry juice, which create a characterful drink with a pleasant, refreshing fruitiness.

sheppyscider.com



HAMPSTEAD TEA ORGANIC OOLONG TEA WITH PEACH

New for 2015, a range of biodynamic ready to drink organic iced teas uniquely brewed from whole leaf tea.

hampsteadtea.com

Every one of our drinks is made with delicious pressed fruit juice and features no artificial additives or preservatives – that all goes to help create distinctive and grown-up flavours, which is exactly what consumers are now demanding. What's more, our new ranges of cans, vegetable and fruit juice blends and Kids' Blends are mixed with a little water to ensure maximum refreshment and an altogether lighter juice drinking experience. Their distinctive designs also look great on-shelf!



Paul Bendit, founder of Folkington's Juices shares his thoughts on the current state of the soft drink market

Where we possibly can, we use the same farms and orchards for our fruit so we get the same varieties each year. We are different from the large players in our market, because we don't just shop around for the cheapest prices. By getting the same variety from the same growers, we also get a consistent product while helping in a small way towards the livelihoods year on year for our growers across the world. This sustainable approach is an important part of what Folkington's is all about.

What a lot of people at our end of the scale do very well is to keep our ingredients to the minimum, while sourcing the best possible ingredients they can. Simultaneously, some of the big brands are now producing products masquerading as 'artisan' products, while pumping in a number of artificial and unpronounceable ingredients – often the same chemicals they include in their standard drinks. That's a pity as anyone can produce cheap drinks, but if you stick to your principles you can deliver a really good product.



Unfortunately, the media has pronounced sugar as the new bogey man in our diet, without distinguishing between added sugar and the sugar that naturally occurs in fruit. This has now gone to such an extreme that consumers are being led to believe that a glass of fruit juice is bad for you. We're into the realms of utter confusion, and that's not good for consumers, retailers or the industry. We need a greater sense of proportion in the debate and products like orange juices and apple juice that are full of essential vitamins and nutrients are healthy, in moderation. Whoever heard of binge drinking fruit juice, for goodness sake?!

> “We're into the realms of utter confusion, and that's not good for consumers, retailers or the industry”






Image courtesy of Stokes Sauces

BBQ SEASON

The sun's shining and the temperature's rising – offer your customers a delicious way to celebrate the summer with an array of barbecue accompaniments

The first ray of summer sunshine brings Britons an unrivalled lease of life – shirts are off and barbecues are fired up within moments. This remains unchanged until early September, when the coals are reluctantly put away and BBQ placed grumpily back in the shed. This offers retailers a sizeable four-month window to sell barbecue-friendly products, and to explore the sector beyond the standard BBQ sauce, burger relish and cheese slice triad.

Thankfully, there are a number of producers in our industry which are looking to revamp the common British barbecue using an attractive combination of artisan ingredients, traditional techniques and international inspiration – small producers are embracing the evolution of consumer tastes alongside big names such as Stokes and The Bay Tree by turning their backs on the mass-manufactured, over-sugared condiments of old to create something truly – and temptingly – different.

One need not look far to see the influence of far-flung cuisines; pulled pork has long been a culinary favourite of the American South but the past couple of years has seen a surge in popularity on our shores. Similarly, chillies have left the confines of exotic climes to become a storecupboard must-have in a myriad of forms, from marinades and rubs to a tongue-tingling alternative to ketchup.



Mike Richardson, independent retail sector manager at EBLEX, shares his recent findings about the barbecue sector

There is a very wide range of meat cuts that can be used for the BBQ. Our new product development work has helped to produce a range of ideas that suit summer eating and BBQ occasions. Our Gourmet Burger range offers the opportunity to add value to the burger market; our research shows that nearly 70% of burgers are in the premium sector, with opportunities for cut specific burgers or breed specific burgers. The burger market is dominated by beef, but further opportunities exist for lamb burgers.

Additionally, we have a steak bar range that gives butchers the chance to cut steaks from parts of the carcase that would not traditionally be seen as steak cuts. Flat iron steaks cut from the feather muscle





> The emergence of street food and pop-up restaurants has been a really big hit over the past 12 months and is certainly pushing the meat category in terms of innovation and variety

are now very popular and work well with a marinade. We have added thin cut steaks to the steak bar range to further increase the product range for customers and profit potential for butchers.

Over the past three years we have been looking in detail at the retail summer eating category, considering 'what's hot and what's not' and how, in particular, trends prevalent in the foodservice sector have then impacted retail shelves. The British consumer's recent growing appetite for US-style slow-cooked and pulled meats has paved the way for a myriad of new products hitting the shelves. These modern comfort foods are providing quick and tasty meal options, ideal for the oven or barbecue, with guaranteed results regardless of the weather and experience level of the home chef. The emergence of street food and pop-up restaurants has been a really big hit over the past 12 months and is certainly pushing the meat category in terms of innovation and variety.

The main flavour profiles we discovered during this research were BBQ, sweet chilli, hot and spicy and Chinese. In addition to the products I've mentioned above, there is a growing market for pulled beef and lamb. This can be simple to do partly in the oven and finished on the BBQ. Often, simply marinading pulled brisket in a sweet chilli sauce, for example, adds to the choice and excitement for shoppers. This can be cooked low and slow in the oven, then finished on the BBQ and served in wraps as a real party piece for guests. If you're really keen, there is also the growing trend, mostly from USA, to smoke meats. The main flavours for this are hickory and sweet chilli.

When it comes to boosting sales, innovation and presentation are key. Highlight a section in the fresh meat counter for BBQ products, merchandise it clearly to your customers, and cross-sell to other products such as sauces and rubs. If you have space, why not have charcoal and wood smoking chips for sale?



Over the past decade, Stokes has become a stalwart of the shelves of independents. Rick Sheepshanks, MD, talks to Speciality Food about what makes his brand iconic

Since we started making sauces just over 10 years ago, our mission has been quite simple: to make the best sauces you can buy in a jar; the kind you might make yourself if you had more time. Our sauces are the root of our success, and we think this approach is what will help us become a recognised and globally admired brand.

It's all in the sauce. As we say, we like our food simple, good and delicious, so we make our sauces that way too; unique recipes, prepared in small batches with great real food ingredients, and absolutely



no cutting corners. We use the best ingredients for each recipe then reduce, simmer and cook in traditional ways to get exactly the taste we want for each sauce. Unlike some other brands, all our recipes are our own and all are British-made, produced at our small factory in the heart of rural Suffolk.

Our Tomato Ketchup is still the firm favourite, because of its uniquely tomatoey taste that comes from the 200g of Italian tomatoes that go into every 100g of ketchup. But we see interest in other varieties; for example, demand for our Chipotle Ketchup is growing as more and more people enjoy spicier flavours. Also, our first ever product, Stokes Real Mayonnaise, is still one of our most popular products, a classic, along with our Red Onion Marmalade, which is proving to be a year-round favourite as it goes so well with both cheese and barbecue meats and is a great ingredient for casseroles and gravies.

We've seen real growth in interest in barbecue sauces, so this year we are adding two new sauces to our range; Stokes Sweet & Sticky Barbecue Sauce, which is exactly as it sounds and made with honey and maple syrup, and Stokes Hot & Spicy Barbecue Sauce with a chilli kick. We're also very excited about a brand new range of Salad Dressings that will hit the shelves in April. We've prepared four lovely recipes perfect for any salad going: Mango & Orange, Raspberry & Balsamic, Mediterranean Olive and a Stokes take on the classic Caesar Dressing.

First and foremost, it's the quality and tastiness of the sauce that matters most, as people put more and more effort into their barbecues and alfresco dining and want the best-tasting sauces to complement the food they prepare. You can't beat a homemade burger with ketchup, or topped off with mature Cheddar and some Red Onion Marmalade. But a versatile sauce that can be used in different ways is also a big hit. You can mix either our chilli jam or red onion marmalade with a blend of mayonnaise and sour cream for a creamy dip, or for a creamy dressing for a burger in a bun. Just talking about it is making me hungry!



Richard Orme, director of Gourmet BBQ explains the value of dedicated displays

The display stands are provided free with a full complement of stock to fill them, and placed alongside a display of BBQs, they enable retailers to have everything necessary for great real BBQ in one place. It increases sales of BBQs by enabling sales staff to sell the food coming off a customer's new BBQ, rather than just the BBQ hardware itself, e.g. "if you like pulled pork or smoked brisket, you need this rub on this BBQ".



> It's the quality and tastiness of the sauce that matters most, as people put more and more effort into their barbecues and alfresco dining and want the best-tasting sauces to complement the food they prepare

BBQ CLASSICS

Year-round storecupboard favourites in their own right, the items below relish their chance to shine come barbecue season

KETCHUPS

Tomato may be a classic, but the time has come to branch out from the common spotted Heinz and consider your options. Chipotle is a flavour consistently gaining in popularity – and easily paired with burgers – while chilli ketchup would work brilliantly with a hotdog, and a family-friendly traditional version with more or less everything else. Look for a high tomato content; after all, the more tomatoes it contains, the less room there is for excess sugar and the like.

CHEESE

You'd be surprised how far some consumers are willing to stray from the infamous rubbery cheese slice when considering a partner for their burger. Blue cheese is becoming a mainstay on the menus of burger venues across the UK, while Gruyere is a popular choice when it comes to gooey-centred burgers. Goats cheese works well with lamb, and Cheddar offers retailers a chance to hammer home the value of local – who could turn down a locally-reared beef burger dripping with cheese from a nearby producer?

MUSTARD

Never underestimate the power of a good mustard. Traditional English may be the go-to when it comes to roasts and gammon, but it's well worth stocking a good range to cover all bases. Customers looking for a slightly sweeter, more textured and visually-appealing – option may well choose to opt for wholegrain, dijon pairs beautifully with chicken, and beer mustard is excellent with a chargrilled steak.





Please note that rubs are a very viable product for retailers year-round. They work just as well under an electric or gas grill in the middle of winter as they do on a BBQ in the summer. FYI, by "real BBQ", we mean "real" as they do BBQ in the United States, as opposed to burning a sausage or a burger in the open air as has traditionally been the practice here in the UK.

To our knowledge, there are no other stands available in this market. BBQ Gourmet is already the largest wholesaler of BBQ rubs and sauces in the UK specialising in supplying the fast-growing market demand for these products.

To find out more about our display stands and products, visit bbqgourmetwholesale.co.uk.





TAKING **STOCK**

With Dawn Davies, wine and grocery buying manager at Selfridges

WHAT SELLS?

We stock a wide selection of chutneys, ketchups and over 60 hot sauces which are perfect for a BBQ. Our hot sauces always sell well, especially Whoop Ass. Our truffle mustard from Truffle Hunter flies off the shelf and is a simple yet really tasty way to add something special to barbecued meat.

MODERN PAIRINGS

Beer mustard with steak is very popular. Try mixing up flavours from around the world; ponzu sauce and olive oil combine for a simple but tasty salad dressing.

EMERGING TRENDS

Mustard is really trending right now, especially flavoured mustards. At Selfridges we sell curry and coconut, raspberry and ginger flavoured mustards. Pickles and relishes are really picking up as a category.

WHAT'S NEW?

We have just launched a pouring mustard that is great with lamb, and some Korean BBQ sauces that are fantastic with beef.

UPSELLING

Cross selling always works– sell your steak sauce with the meats, chutneys with your cheese. Make it easy for people to pick up more than one item for their BBQ.

> "Try mixing up flavours from around the world - we sell items from the US, Korea and Japan"



STOCK CHECK



UNCLE ROY'S ONION MARMALADE

Created in response to requests, the universal reaction in taste tests was that this is the best ever.
uncleroys.co.uk



TRACKLEMENTS CUCUMBER & PEPPER RELISH

This is a fresh, vibrant pickle that's perfect on top of a burger, in a hot dog or slathered on fresh bread.
tracklements.co.uk



STUBBS BARBECUE SAUCE

An all-American, all authentic, natural and gluten-free range of high quality bar-b-q sauces, founded in 1968.
empirebespokefoods.com



CAPSICANA ADOBO D.F. CHILLI SAUCE

Made with authentic Mexican chillies – the type of flavoursome sauce you might expect to find in Mexico.
capsicana.co.uk



POTTS PARTNERSHIP MAPLE CHIPOTLE BARBECUE & GRILLING SAUCE

Brilliant for basting meat before cooking, or giving a tasty kick.
pottspartnership.co.uk



MCCLURE'S PICKLES

Layered, bold flavours and incredible crunch make for a unique pickle unlike others.
buckleyandbeale.com



GORDON RHODES FIRECRACKER QUICK HOT RUB

Add more to your BBQ grill with a hot meat rub, loaded with chilli seeds, black pepper and fennel seeds.
gordonrhodes.co.uk



THE BAY TREE SMOKEY CHIPOTLE BBQ SAUCE

Made with smoke-dried jalapeño chilies, this delicious hot, smouldering sauce is perfect for the barbecue season.
thebaytree.co.uk



OXFORD SAUCE

This sauce has a complex depth of flavour, deceptively sweet at first with tamarind, garlic and birds eye chillies.
oxfordfinefood.co.uk



COWTOWN BBQ'S 'THE SQUEAL' HOG RUB

Garlic, onion, brown sugar, paprika, and natural smoke flavour make this rub a taste sensation when paired with pork and poultry.
bbqgourmet.co.uk



PICNICS
PACK A PREMIUM

Forget curling sandwiches and sweaty mini sausages, posher picnics are in vogue and consumers are seeking a more refined selection of goodies to stuff into their hampers, says Nicola Whiteford

Whether it's a trip to the beach, a day at the park, or picnic hampers for 100 wedding guests, the humble picnic is no longer humble. Indeed, it's out with the old and in with the new this season as the desire to pack the perfect picnic that will impress has hit an all-time high. The likes of Fortnums, Carluccios and Beas of Bloomsbury are leading the way with picnics fit for the Queen, chocked full of delicious pies, cured meats, posh pickles and Champers. But that's not all, with trendy pop-up picnics appearing across the pond, it's only a matter of time before the UK follows suit, which is why retailers need to up their game and maximise this growing opportunity.

"Picnics have undergone a radical transformation in recent years," confirms Richard McWhinnie, founder



of Yorkshire's Finest Food, which sells a range of meats, chutneys, cheeses and pickles from small, high quality producers. "Gone are the days when we see middle-aged couples parked up in a lay-by eating jam sandwiches and drinking tea from the trusty Thermos flask. Picnics have re-invented themselves and are now a staple part of many different types of events, from major sporting occasions such as Wimbledon and Lords to Prom nights in the park."

Handmade is best

Richard believes that the rise in luxury picnics is something which has been closely connected to broader changing attitudes towards the food we eat. "There is a special quality in handmade products that simply isn't available in the generic, mass-produced items found in the supermarkets and the food in the picnic hamper forms an important part of the experience."

Yorkshire's Finest Foods has recently introduced a range of taster hampers, which have received a great deal of interest from those looking to find high quality produce to create the perfect picnic.

"Provenance is an important issue in the food industry and we're noticing that consumers aren't just interested in trying to find something that's unusual or different for their eating occasions, but they also want to know exactly where their food came from. They want to be able to share the story with friends, and being able to talk about the producer and how they found it is all part of the experience," adds Richard.

Deli owners Ian James and Nick Selby who run Melrose and Morgan, based in Primrose Hill and Hampstead in London, are trading in an area where quality is key and picnics are a favourite with their customers.

"Picnics are an essential part of British summertime – even though we tend to battle with the weather in this country! We love what the picnic represents – it's about seizing the moment and grabbing a piece of the outdoors, even if that is just a patch of grass outside the office. Wherever you are holding your picnic, the food fashion is still all about good quality food from local producers," explains Ian and Nick, who add that most of their picnic requests centre around a few really good quality things: carefully chosen cheeses, some cured meats, pickles, some good bread and some ripe seasonal fruit.

"More than anything, people want good food – that might just be a really beautifully-made sandwich, a hand-crafted Scotch egg, a jar of really excellent gordal olives, perfectly ripe British tomatoes or a locally-produced craft beer."

> "There is a special quality in handmade products that simply isn't available in the generic, mass-produced items found in the supermarkets"

Location, location, location

With Melrose & Morgan's two delis located in popular destinations for picnics during the summer months, it's no surprise this market proves lucrative for the retailer. "We are very lucky to have two of London's most beautiful parks on our doorstep: Primrose Hill just next to our Gloucester Avenue shop and Hampstead Heath next to us in Hampstead village, so summer is all about picnics for us. We put a lot of thought into their creation and over the years have made them as easily accessible as possible. Our shops stock a range of food that can be picked up on the day and are ideal for picnics, especially with our freshly-made salads, savoury pastries and sweet treats. But we also like to create a pre-ordered picnic that meets more organised outdoor eating occasions because we know our customers really do embrace the outdoors over the summer with celebrations taking place on the local green grasses," say Ian and Nick.

For this summer, the retailer will offer a mix and match range that will give customers more choice, as well as offering a new, easy way to transport it. "We'll obviously still be offering the classics, but there will be more choice for picnic planners who will be able to scale their picnic up or down depending on how many they are catering for. We'll even be packing a rain mac in case the heavens open," say Ian and Nick.

Despite our erratic weather the British public is not put off when it comes to picnicking, and increasing numbers of deli owners are introducing picnic hampers or teaming up with local hotels to offer picnic baskets for alfresco-eating wannabes. Arch House Deli, based in Bristol, offers three types of picnics to its customers, ranging from essential sandwiches, cake, crisps



and lemonade, right through to its romantic picnic that includes Prosecco, strawberries and dipping chocolate. All the picnics are provided in a disposable picnic box, with disposable plates and cups so the customer doesn't have to return anything, which makes them great for tourists and day-trippers.

"Picnics provide a useful additional stream of revenue for us," says owner David Greenman. "We tend to prepare them in the mornings when we are quieter and sales of them tend to be fairly constant year-on-year.

"We have picnic leaflets in the deli and a booking form on the website to make the process as easy as possible and, given the British weather, we

5 WAYS TO PICNIC SUCCESS

Want to make sure picnics work for you? Then follow these simple tips to ensure your shop maximises its picnic potential

1. **Consider your market. If you are located in a tourist area, be sure to advertise your picnic service in local hotels, tourist offices and with an A board outside your store. Also link up with local hotels to offer a picnic hamper service to guests**
2. **Introduce a few ready-to-go picnic hampers that people can buy on the day, or offer a mix and match service where customers can choose the selection that suits them best and fill their hampers themselves**
3. **Ensure you have a good choice of picnic products and create small selections that you can display to tempt customers. Also, consider offering customers a picnic checklist showing the range of products they can choose from such as cheese, pickles, bread, cured meat, cutting pies, snacks, cakes and biscuits**
4. **Advertise your picnic service on your website, newsletters and on Facebook and Twitter to ensure as wide a reach as possible. Also consider offering a small printable discount voucher or code to attract online sales**
5. **Offer all the picnic paraphernalia that customers might need. This will allow you to increase your margins slightly. Disposable plates and cutlery are great for tourists**

always take payment for picnics up front.''

David explains that quality has been key for quite a while now, but he says the luxury picnic phenomenon is certainly on the increase as people seek out picnics for more unusual occasions. ''We have noticed we are doing a lot more group picnics; usually for hen parties, but often also for weddings too,'' he says.

Top quality staples

It's not just retailers who are witnessing the impact of picnics on their sales. Sarah Pettegree is the owner of Bray's Cottage Pork Pies and she says that people still like to buy picnic staples such as pork pies and Scotch eggs for days out, but they just want to trade up to a better quality version. ''We've responded to a niche in the market from those people wanting a more individual and luxurious product from the standard pork pies they would find in the chiller cabinet in the local supermarket,'' says Sarah.

Bray's Cottage produces a range of pork pies in a selection of flavours, including seasonal recipes. The range and quality of its products appeals to more discerning picnickers. ''We have a lot of people who come and see us early in the morning at a farmers' market, or buy pies from one of our independent outlets and then head to the coast, the countryside or out onto the river with an interesting bag of goodies and maybe a bottle of fizz or an artisan beer,'' says Sarah. ''Pork pies are great for that purpose, being a lot more robust and portable than sandwiches. Because we make different flavour pork pies, including our spring special Wild Garlic, people can take a selection, chop them up and share them. That's the beauty of picnics, they are a fantastic social eating experience that everyone seems to enjoy.''



> “We've responded to a niche in the market from those people wanting a more individual and luxurious product”



STOCK CHECK



THE BUTTERMILK CONFECTIONERY CO CARAMEL SEA SALT FUDGE

Sweet and crumbly handmade fudge with a slightly salty taste and creamy caramel texture.

buttermilkconfections.co.uk



OLIVES ET AL SPANIARDS NUTS

A mix of peanuts, corn, roasted broad beans and chilli nuts. Available in 40g or 100g bags.

olivesetal.co.uk



PATCHWORK PÂTÉ MUSHROOM MARMALADE

A sweet relish packed with mushrooms, caramelised onions and shiitake. Perfect on toast or with crusty bread.

patchwork-pate.co.uk



WILKINS & SON STRAWBERRY CHEESECAKE

Creamy and delicious cheesecake, topped with Wilkins' famous strawberry jam.

tiptree.com



MRS BRIDGES CHUTNEY FOR CHEESE

A dark chutney, made with fruits, vegetables and spices, it packs a punch against a strong cheddar.

mrsbridges.co.uk



FIDDLERS LANCASHIRE CRISPS

Lancashire Sauce is made from a secret recipe is revered throughout the county & beyond.

fiddlerslancashirecrisps.co.uk



BURREN SMOKEHOUSE COLD SMOKED ORGANIC SALMON WITH SEAWEED

Cold-smoked Irish Organic Salmon covered in hand-harvested seaweed flakes to give a unique flavour.

burrensmokehouse.ie



GODMINSTER ROSEMARY WATER BISCUITS

These light and airy crackers have a subtle nutty flavour that complements a range of cheeses.

godminster.com



STONEWALL KITCHEN GARLIC AOLI

The versatile and creamy mayonnaise base is blended with slow roasted garlic and a touch of mustard.

stonewallkitchen.com



RODDAS CORNISH CLOTTED CREAM

Made the same way for 120 years, by gently baking rich local cream until it's thick and unctuous.

roddas.co.uk

SHELF DRESSINGS

Good olive oils, traditional balsamic vinegars and zesty dressings can bring your shelves cachet and colour

Perhaps the foodstuff most readily associated with the delicatessen is high quality, extra virgin olive oil. With the economy on the rise again after the recession, you can reasonably expect an increased demand for premium products such as good oils and vinegars. With this in mind, it's important that your selection of olive oils is as good as you can provide for the price that your customers are prepared to pay. Be careful about what you pay, too: in tests conducted by newspapers, olive oils sold by budget supermarkets were not only considerably cheaper but rated much higher than those sold by the big four.

In recent years, rapeseed oil has hogged the alternative oil limelight. This oil has one very strong recommendation – it's produced in Britain and many outlets will be able to source a good, local example without much trouble. When cold-pressed, it has a pleasing, grassy taste and can be used for dipping. Unlike some other unblended oils, rapeseed oil has a high flash point and can be used to deep fry without spoiling its flavour.

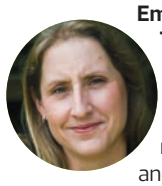
Should you want to offer something different, think avocado oil and coconut oil. Avocado oil is ideal for dressing salads, but like rapeseed oil, it is well-suited for use at high temperatures. Coconut oil is currently quite expensive, but is appearing on the shelves of premium retailers and is a popular ingredient in contemporary and South Asian cooking. Groundnut oil is another term for peanut oil and like olive oil, is available refined, unrefined, cold-pressed and roasted. The roasted variety tastes strongly of peanuts. Also described as having a nutty taste is pumpkin seed oil, a type which is rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids. Pumpkin seed oil makes a good ingredient of salad dressings but using it as a cooking oil will destroy its essential fatty acids. Thick, sweet and offering a flavour that lingers, strongly-flavoured pistachio oil is an ideal drizzle for a goat's cheese salad. Truffle oil is often something of a misnomer, as while very expensive oils will have seen a truffle, the regularly-priced ones generally won't. Truffle oil is not used for frying.

Balsamic vinegar and salad dressings

If you are offering high quality olive oils, it makes sense to stock a complementary range of good balsamic vinegars too. Traditional balsamic vinegar (Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale), which is aged in a succession of ever-smaller barrels for 12 years, (or even 18 and 25 years) is expensive, but a selective stock of this and quality olive oil can lend your shop some cachet. These are prime examples of fine foods which will be appreciated by your more gourmet customers. 'Balsamic vinegar of Modena' is the less-expensive alternative. It's still good, but it lacks the rich complexity of the original traditional variety. Bottles labelled DOP will contain vinegar that has been aged for at least 12 years, while those labels carrying the the letters IGP and the word 'invecchiato' will offer vinegar that has been aged for an indeterminate (but shorter) period. Younger vinegars may be labelled as 'condimento.'

With cookbooks and TV chefs offering an endless supply of new ideas for salads, it's not surprising that there has been a big increase in the number and types of salad dressing available. This offers the retailer a lot of choice and the chance to stock alternative products to those lining the shelves of his competitors. Smartly-designed, attractive labels, and new varieties of dressing, which include a deep red beetroot, bring both variety and colour to the shelves. Retailers can now choose between tarragon & elderflower, raspberry & chocolate mint, sweet balsamic vinegar, lime and ginger, pear & blue cheese, chilli & garlic and many more.

Flavoured dressings



Emma Macdonald of The Bay Tree offers a view of this sector's present standing. "In regards to the oil and vinegar market," says Emma, "I think people are increasingly price sensitive, especially when it comes to oils specifically for cooking. The range available has grown massively in the past few years, especially with the continued influx of British rapeseed oils. Hand in hand with being aware of cost, people are also increasingly choosy about what their oils are used for. This means that it's now more common to have a 'best' olive oil that is kept for dipping, not cooking. In fact, it's more likely than ever that the keen cook will have a selection of oils and vinegars on hand as store cupboard staples.



"The publicity that's surrounded rapeseed oil means that it's now a mainstream product with four key benefits. Firstly, it's primarily British-produced. Secondly, with half the saturated fat of olive oil and lots of omegas, it also has significant health benefits. Thirdly, its milder, delicate nutty flavour does not overwhelm, so it's ideal for making mayonnaise and other delicate dressings. Also, it has a higher flashpoint than olive oil, so it is easier to cook with.

"I think flavoured dressings are a quick and easy solution, as there is no preparation required. We know from customer feedback that these are often regular purchase items. We have seen consistent, steady growth in the dressings and sauce arena. Dressings have become much more interesting and are being regularly used by consumers across all sorts of meals."

As for emerging trends, Emma says that "at The Bay Tree, when it comes to NPD for dressings, we are continuing to explore interesting flavours. In particular, there has been lots of recipe development incorporating chilli flavours. Our Spiced Mango and fruit flavoured dressings are working well for us. Dressings wise, our three best-sellers are Pomegranate, Spiced Mango and Balsamic. These cover off both the solid, dependable everyday option as well as offering an alternative that's a bit different. We are looking at some yogurt-based ideas for the future as they are smooth and creamy, so great for certain types of salads."





> “One area that I expect we’ll see develop is infused rapeseed oils – it’s a solid, reliable base for incorporating additional flavours, so this could be really exciting”



Graham Stoodley of Harvey & Brockless says that because their dell 'ami brand is a Mediteranean one, their focus is "largely on the quality and variety of olive oil." But, he says, "we have seen cold pressed rapeseed oil's surge in popularity over the past few years and consequently we include a number of British producers in our range.

"In the same way that salt enhances flavour, good olive oil does exactly the same. There are so many variants, from the mild and delicate; fruity or nutty, through to some really strong, punchy, peppery flavours. Top quality olive oil is effectively fruit juice – there are no other processes involved, which is why you really capture their essence, in much the same way as a superior, single estate wine reflects the distinct grape variety and the terroir. It is up to retailers to educate their customers, in the same way that we appreciate being taught about fine wines. Tastings are an essential element of explaining why people should invest in a higher quality product and the benefits this brings."

With new oils and dressings appearing regularly, it's important that retailers know what is currently trending in this sector. "Media coverage has hyped up a number of new oil varieties, including hemp and flax," Graham says, "but I think these will remain very niche products. The exception to this has been the emergence of coconut oil. Whole Foods are reportedly selling around 6 tonnes of coconut oil a month in the UK! To support this fact, recent data released by Mintel indicated that coconut oil in food and beverages accounted for 26% of all new food and drink product launches in 2012. I would suggest that not all of these products will stand the test of time but I certainly think that coconut oil has a well-deserved and secure spot on our shelves. This is partly down to a realignment of our relationship with saturated fats and partly due to coconut oil being a crossover product between the food, health and beauty realms."

Graham feels confident about the future of rapeseed oil, too. "I think rapeseed oil is here to stay," he says. "It is hugely encouraging to see the public supporting locally-harvested British produce, so we embrace its success. One area that I expect we'll see develop is infused rapeseed oils – it's a solid, reliable base for incorporating additional flavours, so this could be really exciting. Watch this space."

There have been "some high profile fruit and herb vinegar product launches in the past few years which have been really interesting," Graham says. "At dell'ami, we have concentrated on a fairly traditional core range which includes wine vinegars and balsamic. The real innovation for us has been the arrival of Fresh As' premium freeze-dried balsamic flakes – they add a completely new dimension to garnishes and the taste is sensational."

On tap increase



Some ten years ago, the country was introduced to on-tap selling of oils and vinegars. Craig Riches is a director of Delicious On Tap, a company which saw the potential of this new way of selling these products early on. "Originally, we had a shop which we ran almost exclusively as on-tap," he says. "It was very successful, so we decided to expand it out and offer it to independent stores nationally. We teamed up with Rowcliffe, and they now distribute our oils and vinegars, and the whole concept itself." The idea works, he says, because "customers have a lot of choice. They can choose what oils or vinegars they want, how much, and which bottle they want to put it in. Then they can bring it back and get it refilled. It's also a great way for the retailer to create a bit of theatre." In Craig's experience, it is difficult for customers "not to make a purchase once they have started tasting and experimenting. Once they taste, they buy."



STOCK CHECK



THE BAY TREE SUMMER HERB DRESSING

the Bay Tree's Summer ~H~erb Dressing blends herbs with honey, lemon oil and white wine vinegar to produce a tasty, summery dressing

the baytree.co.uk



ATKINS & POTTS WASABI & LIME DRESSING

This dressing combines the warmth of wasabi with the sharpness of lime and is good drizzled over seared tuna or beef salad with avocado, or served with griled salmon.

atkinsandpotts.co.uk



AHUACATLAN AVOCADO OIL

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Words Last

the final word of fine food

Last issue's Food Chain subject recommended The Store Company in Aberdeenshire. Ross Gilfillan speaks to Andrew Booth



WHO OWNS AND RUNS THE BUSINESS?
I do, with my wife Debbie, and helped by my parents, Patsy and George.

HOW MANY CUSTOMERS DO YOU ATTRACT ANNUALLY?
We have about 40,000 pairs of shoes through our threshold each year.

HOW GOOD IS YOUR LOCATION?
Brilliant – our location in the North East of Scotland is a very good area to be in business; not only do we get the weather, but the oil industry brings us a great many more consumers. Our rural location helps us to communicate the provenance of our products to our customers.

WHAT'S SPECIAL OR UNUSUAL ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?
We are the only business in the north east of Scotland to complete the whole process, delivering meat from the farm gate to plate. We rear our own Aberdeen Angus Cattle, which are then master-butchered in our on-site butchery. Our meat goes to our kitchens to make handmade ready meals or for coffee shop meals. Alternatively, it could be sold from our farm shop shelves or at the farmers markets we attend weekly, or through Waitrose Scottish Stores, who we have supplied for many years now. It might also be sold as a wholesale product to local hotels, restaurants, fish & chip shops or independent caterers, as well as through our own outside catering offering.

TELL ME ABOUT THE ITEMS YOU STOCK
In the farm shop, our butchery chiller is full of Aberdeen Angus beef, Aberdeenshire venison, Pitcaple pork and British free-range chicken, which is all butchered on-site. Our fridge section is stacked with our own ready meals, which are prepared by hand to our family recipes. Our shelves are full of local artisan products such as West Latch jam, which is produced less than a mile away using the best Scottish soft fruit. Our breadbasket is brimming with our local bakers "Ythan Bakery" products, and our veg shed offers seasonal, Aberdeenshire vegetables and free-range eggs. We support our local dairies and cheesemakers, as well as local distilleries and breweries.

WHAT CHEESE DO YOU STOCK?
We love Highland Fine Cheeses – Morangie Brie, Strathdon Blue and Tain Tuckle Cheddar are our favourites. We also stock some great cheeses from Royal Deeside, Isle of Kintyre and Dunlop Dairy.

WHAT CHEESES SELL WELL?
They all sell very well however, the Morangie Brie is very popular and the smoked Cheddar from Isle of Kintyre is also a favourite with our customers.

HOW IMPORTANT IS PRICING?
Of course, the prices have to be right for us, but also our customers. I believe if the product is right and the customer is getting value for money, then price is not the driver.

DO YOU OFFER OTHER FACILITIES?
We have a coffee shop which is open 10am – 5pm daily serving breakfast, brunch, lunch, coffees and cakes and everything in-between. We use our coffee shop for event space and regularly run butchery masterclasses. We are also developing serviced office space.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOT SELLERS AT THE CAFE?
Our Aberdeen Angus steak ciabatta always goes down well with our customers. A new popular addition to our menu is our breakfast stack, which includes our own cured bacon, black pudding, sausages, eggs and a tomato all presented on a toasted bread.



WHAT DIFFICULTIES WERE ENCOUNTERED IN SETTING UP YOUR BUSINESS?
There were the usual planning issues to begin with, but now we are established and a local employer, we are seen to be contributing back to the local area. Finding good artisan product in our area initially was challenging, but as the local food movement has gathered momentum, we now have far greater choice.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS?
We hope to expand all aspects of our business and not have all our eggs in one basket, but to do this without forgetting what we are about. We are a farm shop with a coffee shop, and not the other way around!

WHAT ARE YOUR INTERESTS, OTHER THAN RUNNING THIS BUSINESS?
Ahh, the three F's – family, farming, and food.



IF YOU HAD TO START OVER, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?
The only organic thing about our business is the way in which it has grown, we have never been scared to try something and often the ideas don't work and I think that is what makes The Store special.

For next issue's Food Chain, Andrew has recommended Finzean Farm Shop near Aboyne, Aberdeenshire

SPICE OF LIFE

Nothing New



Something in my recent reading set me thinking that there really is nothing new under the sun. We may live in the wired up, Mars roving, comet-hopping 21st century, but really, our lives are full of ideas and devices that aren't as modern as makers claim. Everyone knows that the Romans enjoyed underfloor central heating but who knew that the Ancient Greeks used a similar thing to heat the Temple of Ephesus? At least the machine I'm writing this on is very much a thing of today. Possibly not. The discovery in 1901 of a set of sea-damaged cogs called the 'Antikythera mechanism' in a shipwreck now seems to indicate that the Ancient Greeks had computers too. It's the same in the world of food. The delicatessen and the fine foods it offers might seem to be a modern phenomenon and it's easy to imagine the food of our forebears as being plain, tasteless fare of doubtful freshness and origin. However, as noted in a recent feature on Italian foods, the 18th century painter William Hogarth designed a lavish business card for a Mrs Holt which advertised that her shop in the Strand,' sold 'all sorts of Italian wines, Florence cordials, Oyl Olives, Anchovies, Capers, Vermicelli, Bologna, Sausidges,' and 'Parmesan Cheeses'. In her new book Dining With the Georgians, Emma Kay says that Italian speciality foods weren't the only surprising items on sale in British shops of some three hundred years ago. In 1723, she says, Manchester grocer Alexander Chorley listed among his stock, coffee and bohea tea, cloves, mace, cinnamon, clove pepper, black pepper, liquorice, ground ginger, white ginger, raw ginger, saffron, senna, bay berries, gaul, wormseed, aloes, aniseed, caraway, fennel, fenugreek, rice, anchovies, capers, raisins and figs. That's a shopping list of ingredients we buy in delis today. Next time someone insists you stock something because it's new and the latest thing, don't take their word for it.



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SPECIALITY BITES

Paul Hargreaves of Cotswold Fayre offers his slant on issues affecting independent retail today

I said I would come back to the subject of Ethics in Business in Last Words several months ago, but actually never did. Now, don't accuse me of not keeping my promises, just of being forgetful! A couple of incidents within the sector I have heard about recently have made the subject of ethics come to mind again. I'm possibly naïve, but it surprises me when customers and suppliers aren't up front and honest in their business relationships.

I have never seen the point of anyone being dishonest, as apart from any ethical standpoint, it inevitably catches up with them, and therefore has the opposite effect in terms of generating sales as they intended. I remember a time when I was working for a national company selling premier tea and coffee machines to banks in the City of London. My then sales manager told the sales team to spin some fabricated yarn about some machines that were on a special deal because of a cancelled order from Barclays Bank. I told him in a sales meeting that I wasn't prepared to lie to customers. There was a heated discussion in which I was the only one against the rest. However, after the meeting had finished, two or three others thanked me for making the point. Just a shame they weren't prepared to put their necks on the line! A month later I resigned as the top sales person in the company, and have actually never been employed again! But that is not a consequence, just a coincidence!

Of course, we and our fellow wholesalers are in a position where trust and honesty are not an optional extra, but essential to the very nature of our businesses. There may be the opportunity to 'cut out the middle man' which might lead to a potential short-term gain but a long term loss, as the sales team psychologically have to know their supplier is 100% behind them to confidently sell their products to retailers. Wholesalers make no profit at all from the first few months of a new product launch, only in the longer term with the ongoing sales. And for the longer term to really work, the sales team need to know that the producer is completely behind them and is going to act to develop their sales in the future and not go behind their back.



> "I have never seen the point of anyone being dishonest, as it inevitably catches up with them"

Fortunately, I am pleased to say that we are privileged to work in what is a very ethical industry full of genuinely decent people who are passionately committed to their brand and working within the given relationship streams. The odd few companies that aren't like this tend to stand out like a sore thumb, and it tends to be obvious to most of us who they are.

There have been murmurings recently in the trade press from some, who are concerned that our sector may be ruined by larger companies (producers and retailers) becoming involved within it. As they do, will the ethical nature of our sector remain at the high level it is now? Or do we need to be aware of the wolves in sheep's clothing? Probably not, go on gut instinct and you will be right 99% of the time.

Best Practice

Gemma Williams, farm shop supervisor explains her role



I joined Bodnant almost two years ago as a delicatessen counter assistant in the farm shop, and was promoted from there. I've always loved food, especially cheese. My dad is a professional chef in North Wales, so really I've been a gourmet since I was a child.

I went to university in Scotland to study art and design, and train as a glassblower. I got a job with a Scottish cheesemonger, IJ Mellis, which has quite a few shops, to help support me as a student. I thought about a job with a clothes store such as Laura Ashley but it didn't hit me – food is what gets me, I am really passionate about it. As soon as I got into food retail I was home, and realised it was what I wanted to do.

When I moved back to North Wales, after university, I worked at the Cheese Shop in Chester – which now stocks Bodnant cheese. However, when I saw an opportunity at Bodnant, I grabbed the chance and pestered the MD to interview me. I had eight years experience in selling cheese, and so I got the job on the deli. After a few months, I was promoted to supervisor.

I oversee a team of 16, although there's more at peak times, such as Christmas and summer, when Bodnant is always very busy. The key element of the role is communication with the team and the different department heads – we have meetings once a week to make sure we all know what's going on, which is key.

I manage all the products and supplies in Bodnant's Farm Shop, ensuring that we have enough stock, plus identifying and developing new products from Welsh suppliers. We have products from more than 100 artisan producers, mostly from Wales, but I'm always looking for new items to go in the shop to keep it fresh and exciting.

In addition, I arrange tasting days, in-store promotions and launch new products, plus I manage the visual displays in the Farm Shop. It's vital that shoppers can see what's on offer, especially if there's a new or seasonal product, so they are tempted to try and then buy.

I've been involved with developing new products to expand the deli, such as Dai's dine-in meal deal, when you get a main course and sides, wine and a pudding. There's always a chicken or a lamb dish, along with a sausage one, using products from the butchery. It changes all the time with seasonal products, and comes with rice or potatoes and vegetables. Also, from the bakery, there's fresh breads, cakes and our award-winning pies for the deli every day.

There's a lot of ordering to be done, such as from the dairy. Today, I've been making sure I've got enough butter, cream, milk and ice cream to see the shop through the weekend.

Butter is our best selling item – people absolutely love it, it's the one thing that I have to make sure that I have enough. If we have a coachful into the shop, on a day trip or staying at a Llandudno hotel, they snap it up. It's just one of those products people love: old-fashioned, hand-made butter. Then there's supervising staff – sorting out rotas and holidays – training, hiring staff, working to targets and analysing figures; there is a lot of paperwork and spreadsheets.

My job also involves maintaining standards and ensuring the flow and function of the shop, plus planning ahead for events such as Easter, or May bank holidays, when we will be very busy.

I speak to Dai Chef and to Jason, head of butchery, almost every day and discuss what promotions we've got coming up, making sure everything runs smoothly. Also we talk about ideas for the future, bouncing ideas off each other, such as making and curing our own pancetta – that can take a long time to get ready.

DO

- Share your knowledge with staff because they deal with customers daily and can advise or recommend about products that work together. For example, if they explain which cheese is enhanced by certain biscuits or crackers, then the customer can be encouraged to buy both
- Encourage staff so they are confident in what they are doing, so that their standards of customer service match yours
- Keep a close team so everybody pulls together to ensure the day flows smoothly, and problems are tackled quickly
- Trust your gut – if it feels wrong, it is wrong

DON'T

- Judge a product on what it looks like, ask for a sample. It can be nicely wrapped but you have to taste it. You'd be surprised how often a new product can look all glossy packaging while the product is devoid of taste. We'll always have time for a producer who has an amazing product because we can help with the packaging.

> "Look back at your figures and sales, at data that you've recorded, to help you accurately forecast what you need to meet customer demand, such as ice-cream and BBQ suggestions for bank holidays and the school summer breaks"



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