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SPECIALITY FOOD

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MERRY FEASTMAS

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VALENCIA ORANGE DARK CHOCOLATE HAZELNUTS
FOREST FEAST
SALTED DARK CHOCOLATE ALMONDS
FOR SOMEONE WONDERFUL
FOREST FEAST
SALTED CARAMEL MILK CHOCOLATE ALMONDS

FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF FOREST FEAST®

ADAPTOGENIC APOTHECARY

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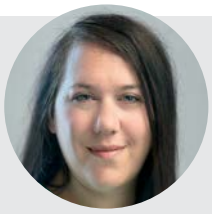
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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the September edition of *Speciality Food*. I think we can all agree it's been a bit of a washout summer. Gale force winds and driving rain have had a real impact on the fine food sector, making trading conditions even more difficult, in already trying times. But, as John Shepherd says in his column this month, it doesn't pay to look backwards. It's time to make plans to futureproof your business, and there's the prospect of an uplift in sales for Christmas around the corner - with many experts across our festive features (from chutneys to cheese) saying they believe consumers will continue to save and splurge for the occasion. This could lead to a much-needed boost for retail. In this edition we also delve into two topics that are very now - the impact of AI on the sector, and why adaptogens are causing a buzz. I hope, as ever, you find plenty to inspire you.

CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS
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Climate change is having a very real impact on the UK's fine food industry

The ripple effect of recent heatwaves in mainland Europe, and their implication on retail, is yet to be measured...but it's the weather on home soil we need to worry about, say farmers, leaders and producers

"It's a very sorry sight," said Andrew Jarvis, who's been running Sandringham Estate orchards since 1971, producing single variety apple juice that's sold on the palace grounds, and at farm shops across the county.

With most gazes now firmly fixed on the continent, he said the plight of British farmers, producers, and the retailers they supply, seems to have been forgotten.

It is, though, he insists, a very real issue. In the long hot summer of 2022, many of Andrew's apples went into 'survival' mode. His entire Cox crop for 2023 has been lost. Though Andrew grows multiple varieties, he called this the "biggest blow". His worst year since 1991.

"We usually have pick-your-own, and enough apples for the public in retail shops. It won't be the case this year. We have four Cox orchards and we've had to write two of them off completely. We won't be able to tell until after the set next spring whether they'll be affected next year."

Adapting is, of course, he added, part and parcel of farming. The orchards have invested in more robust varieties such as Discovery and Katy, and sticking to heritage apples is what sets the business apart from supermarkets. For now, despite challenges, Andrew doesn't see this changing. "There are newer commercial apple varieties grown for the supermarkets. But I don't think they've got any taste to them at all. I recommend artisans stick to their guns and keep going. The whole point of artisan is to be different."

The trickle-down effect

As Andrew Opie, director of food and sustainability at the British Retail Consortium told *Speciality Food*, the impact of our changing environment is trickling down through fine food and drink production, and onto the shop floor. "Retailers are increasingly having to manage the effects of climate change, which is creating a greater variability in the weather, and impacting local and global harvests. Thankfully, retailers have become increasingly adept at coping with disruption in the supply chain, and will do their best to ensure availability and affordability for their customers."

Jennifer Williams, founder of independent preserve company, Naked Jam, says artisans like her need to be supported and understood by fine food retail in what she calls "the most desperate times".

"Last year it was like finding a needle in a haystack," she said of sourcing raw ingredients.

Echoing Andrew's bleak picture for the UK's orchards, Jennifer said she was unable to produce some of her chutneys last year due to an apple shortage, and that piccalilli was taken off the table. "We couldn't get enough good quality cauliflower. The farmers were really struggling."

Much like Andrew, Jennifer refuses to make changes that will impact the quality of her preserves, so instead she is pivoting. Rather than focussing on root vegetables or apple-based chutney, she's reviving an old favourite – marrow chutney – based on time-honoured recipes.

Where retail can help, she added, is by embracing the changes producers might have to make because of poor harvests, and adapting alongside them. "Some shops, if you run out of a product, might go elsewhere to stock up, but what we need is for them to talk to us about what we CAN do. I can't make onion marmalade at the moment, for exa mple, because I can't get good quality red onions. But I've got a lot of tomatoes and chillies, and I'm making a new tomato sauce line.

"Retail needs to be a bit more open to the unusual and whacky, and giving these alternatives a try. Invite the artisan in, and explain to customers what's happening. Celebrate the new, seasonal flavours, and make them more of the star of the show. Seek out products made with vegetables we usually can grow well in this country, like marrows, and runner beans. We have to work with what we have, otherwise businesses like ours won't survive."

Keeping it circular

Pete Russell, CEO of Oooby, which helps British growers and makers sell their produce into retail and direct to consumers, says now, more than ever before, thought needs to be given to the circular economy.

"It seems that weather changes are certainly affecting the predictability of access to certain ingredients here in the UK," he said. "Especially for smaller scale and artisan food producers when buying from large-scale suppliers. This is because a delay in yield by even a small percentage can often mean there is only enough to satisfy the high-priority larger customers."

Pete believes artisans should start working more closely with small, market gardens, and that producers should be cautious if they choose, instead, to import ingredients. "The UK is often seen as a market of last resort for many EU producers because of the recent import barriers and fees," he added.

"So when there is a reduction in yield due to weather conditions, it means either no access to certain ingredients or, at the very least, limited access and exorbitant prices.

"Small scale growers have much more capacity than is currently being used, and they can often create the right growing conditions for specific ingredients. They are far more resilient in times of uncertainty, and can delivery very high quality with exceptional freshness."



"What's the weather got to do with it? Everything"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

Running a business in London has been compared to bubble and squeak. We operate in some sort of a bubble, and yet provide an endless commentary of complaints and grievances or squeaks.

However there's certainly a lot to 'squeak' about in recent months.

During the last few years, like emotionally punch-drunk boxers, our businesses have taken a painful hammering, and not least on the physio's table. We may have landed a few punches in return, but the overall impression, at least for me, has been 'what more can possibly go wrong?'.

Without mentioning THAT word but 'you know what', has definitely interfered with the supply chain and staff recruitment, and the cost-of-living crisis has increased prices on everything in everyday life. The extension of ULEZ to outer London has got many Londoners worked up. Stating the obvious, the energy crisis has increased costs significantly, plus political crises, national scandals, conflict in Eastern Europe and a monthly spectre of transport strikes have all contributed to creating a feeling of almost perpetual dismay.
But as I write this, towards the end of summer, yet another old adversarial James Bond-style villain has turned up to add to the struggles of daily commerce.

Though before we get to that, it is worth recording the first six months of 2023 weren't always so bad despite it all.

For example, in January our sales were nearly 13% up and customers were 8% up. The higher sales, of course, could be accounted for by the increase in retail food costs, as evidenced by the February sales being 19% up, but so was the customer count up at 12% during the quietest month of the year (although in February 2023 the weather was consistently above the yearly average). Easter provided confusing evidence, as usual, but March and April were up 5% in sales and 2% in customers. So far so good one might think. May showed sales up 5.7%, but a drop in customers of 2% - it was a rainy Coronation celebration after all. June was a fraction over 1% up, but had to compete with the previous year's Platinum Jubilee, and customers were again down this time by 0.6%. But the slightly disappointing early summer trade up to the end of June could not take away from the fact that sales overall were up 10.5% on last year and customers were still up by 3.2%. Now enter the 'villain'. Unseasonably strong winds closed our recent Saturday market, and diminished all al fresco operations on the Duke of York Square.
This is the first time ever it has happened at this time of year, with unseasonal gusts of nearly 50mph being forecast.

Bad days occur frequently, but the following week lightning struck twice in the same place literally, and we recorded our lowest sales ever in recent times for a Saturday when consistent rain stopped pay at the tills. It started at midday and didn't clock out until after bedtime.

So, as I write this, our sales are 15% down, and customers are nearly 16% down...and this is in the traditionally quiet third quarter.

It is a very disappointing turn of events for the annual shop results of course, but not hopefully terminal.

I often remember Shakespeare's insightful business tip: 'for the rain it raineth everyday' and to 'make content with (his) fortunes fit'. Which I have sort of interpreted as 'get over it - there's not much you can do about it'.

In search of any silver linings we are very fortunate to not have the high temperatures of southern Europe as many customers have reminded me. Unusual weather this unusual is another reminder of climate change, which should spur us all on to reduce our carbon footprints. And it will stop raining eventually if history is anything to go by.

So, despite Shakespeare's words, let's hope for a late summer when the rain it stoppeth, the sun it shineth and its not too hoteth. And I can find something else to write about.

> "The slightly disappointing early summer trade up to the end of June could not take away from the fact that sales overall were up 10.5% on last year and customers were still up by 3.2%"

How the active smart and intelligent packaging market is reshaping the food sector

It has the ability to help track stock, and even keep products fresher. *Speciality Food* takes a closer look at a whole new wave of packaging

"Active packaging has been revolutionising the food industry in recent years," said Aashi Mishra from Research Nester, who has been studying the emerging market. "When compared to traditional packaging, it has proved to be efficient in extending the shelf life of the products. Utilising technology that purposefully releases or absorbs substances from food or the headspace of food packaging, this packaging prevents the oxidation of lipids, microbial development, and moisture loss."

Intelligent packaging, on the other hand, said Aashi, involves interacting with consumers and others across the value chain. These two technologies are advancing at an impressive rate throughout industry, with market growth to an expected 45 billion US Dollars by the end of 2033 – a compound annual growth rate of 7%.

Advancements include RFID tags, sensors, and data transmission systems to enhance product safety, traceability and to monitor consumer engagement across the chain.

How can active packaging increase food shelf life?

There are several areas in which this kind of packaging is already being implemented, said Aashi.

- Growing adoption of sachets and pads: These are frequently used to soak up or expel gases. Foods, including coffee, pizza, baked goods, meat and poultry products, frequently contain oxygen absorbers in sachet form. Other sachets absorb carbon dioxide and oxygen and are most often found in containers of coffee.
- Use of material containing components: Recent initiatives to engage in active scavenging (mostly in recycling) have concentrated on integrating the scavenger within the package itself. This technique can be applied to numerous plastic containers, including PETE bottles.
- Anti-microbial systems: The possibility of regulated antimicrobial release from packaging materials is an innovative development in active packaging. By reducing bacterial growth and deterioration, anti-microbials included in packaging materials could boost shelf life.

Where is this market growing?

While strong inroads into smart packaging are happening across Europe, where Aaisha said demand is rising particular in the beverages market, Japan (which has seen support via various government initiatives) and North America, are leading the way, with consumers driving developments due to their increasing demands for knowledge around products, and fears over potential adulteration.

New product launches driving growth in the packaging sector

- "Italian firm FoodCODE has developed a cloud-based app using smart QR codes together with a database. The business adds nutritional information to packaging which consumers can scan with their phone."
- "Canada-based Safer offers e-smart labels that can identify and indicate the freshness of food. They adhere to packaging for meat, fish and dairy, and alter colour according to the degree of chemical and reagent deterioration.
This product, and others like it, could help reduce food waste."
- "LAMAR in the US specialises in biodegradable printed sensors, incorporated into packaging for accurate location, temperature, and humidity tracking. Data from the sensors is securely connected and transmitted to the cloud network by a mobile gateway.
This technology could be used to help lower carbon footprints."



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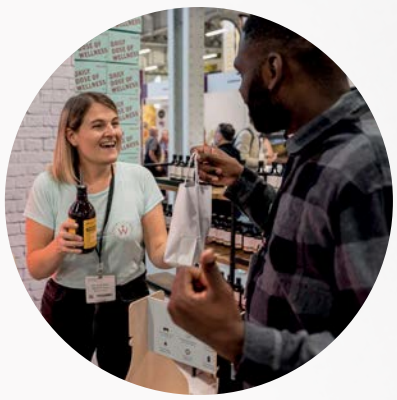


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THE STORY BEHIND THE STATS

10%

Hospitality accounted for 10% of administrations in the first half of 2023 according to data from analysis firm Shakespeare Martineau. A total of 759 businesses, 79 of which came from the hospitality industry, filed for administration between 1st January and 30th June 2023, marking a 22% increase compared to 2022. While these figures are yet to hit pre-Covid levels, insolvency and restructuring expert, Andy Taylor, said, “There is still uncertainty in the geopolitical landscape, which is impacting business confidence. With cash flow becoming tight, businesses are at a greater risk of going under. Supply chain issues and the rising cost of importing goods, especially in the automotive industry, have created a challenging juggling act for businesses to maintain profitability.”

39%

Two fifths of those asked in new research by Julienne Bruno said they want to buy more planet-friendly food, but are put off by ‘plant-based’ or ‘vegan’ labels. The study of 2,007 adults in the UK showed that, while 74% don’t think the vegan boom is over, 37% of them now dislike the term plant-based compared to vegan. Of those surveyed, a quarter prefer plant-based dairy over meat alternatives, and 40% said they would like to see more cheese alternatives in supermarkets. Julienne Bruno founder, Axel Katalan, said, “Being labelled as plant-based isn’t a unique selling point. The research suggests shoppers want their food to be original, taste good, and offer quality produce.”

8%

A new Small Brewers’ Relief now extends to all drinks businesses producing alcoholic beverages under 8% ABV. This has come into force alongside a new Draught Relief to ‘recognise the vital role played by pubs in our communities’. Draught relief should reduce alcohol duty on qualifying beer and cider by 9.2%. Mead producers particularly, who have found the duty system hard to navigate when it comes to NPD (with mead previously taxed the same at 6% and 15%), say they are delighted by the news.

£2.8 million

A sum of £2.8million has been awarded to the ruminant sector to fund a project looking at efficiency, sustainable farming and on-farm methane monitoring. Dancing with Daffodils, run by a consortium, is focussing on the development of an innovative, daffodil-derived feed additive to reduce methane emissions, and looking at the cultivation of daffodils as a cash crop for farm diversification. The consortium will work closely with farmers, industry stakeholders and policymakers throughout the project.

Geographic protection for Single Malt Welsh Whisky

Producers delighted at move to register the spirit under UKGI



Single Malt Welsh Whisky has been successfully registered under the UK Geographical Indication (UKGI) scheme, after long campaigning by producers in the country.

The status protects the whisky’s name, authenticity and characteristics, and aligns it with other protected Welsh produce, including Gower Salt Marsh Lamb, and Welsh Leeks.

It is the first new UK spirit drink application to be registered under a new scheme, created since Brexit, and gives Single Malt Welsh Whisky the same protection as Scotch Whisky, Melton Mowbray Pork Pies, and Cornish Clotted Cream.

Welsh secretary, David TC Davies, said, “UKGI status is really important for distillers and helps them market this fantastic product around the world, and consumers know they are buying a unique product entirely made and bottled in Wales. All of this helps the industry to grow, supporting jobs and driving prosperity.”

Stephen Davies, CEO of Penderyn Whisky, is one of those who fought for the recognition. He said it gives the drink ‘another building block in the credibility wall’, adding that he and other producers chose to push Single Malt Welsh Whisky forward, “Because we are still a young industry, and still an industry that is bringing new producers in. A lot of us are looking to innovate in different ways, but the one thing we have in common is we are all making Single Malt Welsh Whisky. We thought this could be well defined and well documented.”

Stephen said the achievement of UKGI status is not just a milestone for his business, but for the wider Welsh whisky industry.

“It assists in safeguarding both the quality of the product, and also its source of origin. It’s an exciting step forward and one that puts focus on an industry that has been growing steadily over the last 20 years.”

Single Malt Welsh Whisky dates back to the late 1800s and is made with malted barley and water of 100% Welsh origin. Only whiskies made this way can take the single malt label, and the product is registered to just four distillers in Wales, who export to 45 countries.

NEWS IN BRIEF

BIRA SUPPORTS OFGEM RECOMMENDATIONS

The British Independent Retailers Association (Bira) has expressed support for Ofgem’s proposed changes to address ongoing issues with energy supply to small and medium sized businesses.

Immediate changes by Ofgem to assist the non-domestic energy market include working with the industry to adapt the Retail Energy Code, aimed at avoiding excessive delays and unreasonable requests for documentation during tenancy changes. Ofgem is also urging suppliers to be more flexible with businesses which signed up for peak fixed rate prices.

The full report is available to view on the Ofgem website.

UPDATE ON PACKAGING REFORMS

Following extensive industry engagement, and in light of the pressure facing consumers and businesses, new rules to ensure packaging producers pay for the cost of recycling their packaging will be deferred from October 2024 to 2025. Environment minister, Rebecca Pow, said, “We’re determined to transform the way we collect, recycle and reuse our waste materials so we eliminate all avoidable waste by 2050 in a way that works for households and consumers.” Environmental groups and lobbyists say the news is “utterly disappointing”. City to Sea CEO, Harriet Bosnell, said, "I’m incredulous that they can roll this out as an excuse five years after promising to deliver a policy.”















FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW

WHERE THE UK SPECIALIST RETAIL SECTOR MEETS

Book now for one of the most highly-anticipated food and drink events of 2024

Farm Shop & Deli Show has become the annual meeting place for the speciality food and drink retail community. The show returns to the NEC, Birmingham 29th April to 1st May, 2024 as part of the UK Food & Drink Shows.

Visitors can experience the best quality local and regional produce, plus the latest in equipment, labelling and packaging solutions from many outstanding suppliers. Over three days, the show will be packed with new launches, exciting live events and sessions, and trend-setting food and drink to give businesses an insight into the industry and the people driving the market forward in 2024.

Farm Shop & Deli Show is highly anticipated within the sector as the event bringing together the industry's best brands with owners, directors, managers and buyers from specialist retailers focusing on local. Exhibitors know this vibrant show delivers results and can take their business to the next level.

There are still spaces left for the 2024 show, but don't leave it too late as they are booking fast. Please contact mat.rose@wrbm.com if you're interested in being part of it next year.

Farm Shop & Deli Show will run alongside Food & Drink Expo, National Convenience Show and The Forecourt Show, as part of the UK Food & Drink Shows - and one badge will provide free access to all four events. The show will also reveal the winners of the Farm Shop & Deli Retailer Awards plus the worthy winners for the Product Awards.

All this means that visitors can benefit from the vast spectrum of exhibitors, products and live sessions, whilst exhibitors will have an invaluable opportunity to showcase their products and services to a wider audience.

ARE YOU A SUPPLIER LOOKING TO REACH SPECIALIST RETAILERS?

Approximately 92% of visitors to Farm Shop & Deli Show influence or make the final decision to spend and tell us it is extremely important/important for their product sourcing and purchasing decisions. Take a look at the top reasons for exhibiting:

- Raise awareness of your brands and products
- Network with the industry
- Launch new products and services
- Showcase existing lines
- Generate new sales leads
- Meet existing clients
- Generate press and editorial coverage

FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW

29 APRIL-1 MAY 2024
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CELEBRATING AND SUPPORTING **SPECIALIST SUPPLIERS** AND **RETAILERS**

In 2024 Farm Shop & Deli Show will be inviting suppliers and retailers to shine a spotlight on their businesses and products through two award schemes, the Retailer Awards and the Product Awards.

FARM SHOP & DELI 2024 Retailer AWARDS

Free to enter, the Farm Shop & Deli Retailer Awards, in partnership with The Grocer, are highly respected in the industry for playing an important role in supporting the UK's independent, specialist retail market across 11 categories and seven regions. This year, the awards will be celebrating specialist retailers and recognising their achievements in the independent sector. Entries are open until Friday, 29th September.

The live final from Farm Shop & Deli Show will take place on Monday, 29th April and reveal the 'Best in Category', 'Best in Region', 'Newcomer of the Year' and the overall 'Retailer of the Year' winners.

FARM SHOP & DELI 2024 Product AWARDS

The Farm Shop & Deli Product Awards are a must-enter for suppliers of the specialist retail sector. The Product Awards will showcase exciting product entries and the brands behind them. An extensive judging process will take place before worthy products are awarded a bronze, silver or gold accolade. Winners across the categories will be announced ahead of the show so, if any winners are exhibiting, this is a fantastic way to reveal your achievement to a show floor full of buyers and owners. Take a look at the show website for more details, prices and how to enter.

Find out more and enter at farmshopanddelishow.co.uk/awards

> "It's really important for us because we're there to connect with independent retailers. So farm shops, garden centres, convenience stores. That is the exact kind of customer that comes to this show. Farm Shop & Deli Show benefits our business by generating new leads for us to follow up and connect with."
>
> **ALEX DIMMOCK - SENIOR CONCESSIONS MANAGER, COOK**



11 ways the future of food is changing

Set your business up for success by zeroing in on the key future growth opportunities for the food and drink sector

With an ever-changing array of new regulations, trends and consumption habits, the food industry is always transforming. Whether you run a traditional farm shop, a local cheesemonger or a deli set on showcasing innovation, keeping one eye on predictions about the food sector's future is key for understanding what products you should be stocking.

Technology, social issues and new ideas about health and wellness are among the drivers of change, according to *Future of Food*, a report on global food and drink developments by cultural intelligence firm Backslash. Discover the 11 growth opportunities these trends are set to reveal.

MINDFUL MODERATION

Moving to a more ethical food system could see several changes in consumer shopping habits, including a focus on quality over quantity. This will not only be seen in the fight against food waste, but also in moderation on meat. For example, shoppers may visit their local butcher for meat once or twice a week rather than buying cheaper and lower-quality meat products more often.

In the future, this could go even further. The report poses the idea of retailers creating reward programmes that give consumers more points for buying less meat or choosing not to use plastic bags or single-use plastic cutlery.

TRANSPARENT LABELLING

Introducing standardised carbon footprint labels on food is a clear next step for the food industry. Two-thirds of shoppers agree that carbon labelling is a good idea, and studies show that carbon labels drive purchases of low-carbon foods, the report says. In the future, trend-spotters at Backslash say restaurants and supermarkets may even refuse to serve foods that exceed a certain carbon footprint.

TASTE OF HERITAGE

Heritage flavours are in the spotlight as more consumers are keen to connect with traditional cuisines from their own culture and further afield. For example, four in five Gen Zers say dining is an opportunity to explore and connect with cultures from around the world, according to research by Sodexo, the French food services company. As this trend evolves, it will focus on putting people first to avoid appropriation. For example, retailers might reevaluate where they are sourcing from and who their products are benefitting and choose to support small-scale growers.



DECENTRALISING THE FOOD SYSTEM

Consumers have become painfully aware of the fragility of our food system since the pandemic, and the report cites a growing interest in self-sufficiency, like growing veg, keeping chickens and foraging. In this environment, it says it will be important for brands and retailers to play an educational role. In the future, the report predicts, retailers might rent out space for people to grow their own produce.

THE DINING EXPERIENCE

Consumers are keen to be more involved in their dining experience, with interactive collaborations between travel companies and restaurants taking off in recent years. Consumers keen for priceless experiences could also be interested in 'experience packages' from retailers to elevate at-home meals with added elements like music pairings, table décor or engaging interactive games.

COMMUNITY HUB

Consumers are increasingly seeking community, and retailers can give back in several ways, like integrating with community gardens, offering pay-what-you-can meals or even hosting community meals with products that are about to expire. Cafés or restaurants could open their kitchens up occasionally to create a place where locals can gather, cook and eat together.

PRECISION DIETING

The future of health food will be personalised, Backslash predicts. The global personalised nutrition market size is projected to reach $37.3bn by 2030, up from $14.6bn in 2021, according to Allied Market Research. For retailers, this could take the form of a service providing curated shopping lists made for individuals based on their nutrition needs.

BRAIN FOOD

Eating to boost mental wellbeing is a trend that is predicted to grow in the future as research provides firm evidence. This will continue to boost the rise of gut-friendly foods, and, the report predicts, could even lead such foods to becoming the new 'comfort foods' thanks to their feel-good factor.

LAB-TO-TABLE

Lab-grown meat development is expected to be on the rise, with more than 100 companies in the cell-cultivated meat space globally. By 2035, it's estimated that the industry will be worth nearly $2bn. As well as alt-meats, cultivated dairy products could be on the cards in the future. However, the question remains whether consumer demand for these products will match up with the excitement around any new product development in the future.

AI'S INFLUENCE

We've all witnessed the rise of AI over recent months, and in the future, Backslash predicts AI-human partnerships may kick-start creativity in areas like recipe creation, personalised meal plans and new product development. On the flip side, the report says the future may see brands highlighting AI fails to showcase the true craftsmanship required in making their products.

A CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR WASTE

Products made from repurposed waste are nothing new in the fine food sector, but we may see this expand in the future. By 2032, the market for global products made from food waste is projected to be worth $83.3bn, with food waste being turned into everything from shoes to furniture to renewable fuel. "The potential for B2B partnerships is limitless," the report says.





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Deposit return scheme: Retailers call for shake-up after Scotland's delays

The industry is losing confidence in the government's Deposit Return Scheme after Scotland's costly errors caused "panic" for small retailers

A strategy to boost recycling rates with a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) has been called into question, with independent retailers saying a shake-up is needed following "extraordinarily poor" guidance for small companies.

Businesses in Scotland have threatened to sue the Scottish government for tens of millions of pounds after its troubled deposit return scheme, set to be implemented in summer, was delayed until October 2025.

The delay was welcomed by industry bodies for bringing Scotland's scheme in line with UK-wide plans, but Mo Razzaq, national vice president of the Federation of Independent Retailers, told *Speciality Food* retailers were very quickly losing confidence.

"Confidence in deposit return schemes has been severely affected by the failure of the Scottish government scheme, including the failure to pay compensation to retailers who invested in machines and shopfitting for the aborted launch," he said. Many retailers and producers had invested heavily in preparation for the scheme, including buying machines for returns and preparing barcodes on products. Lorna Slater, circular economy minister in Scotland, previously said around £300m had been spent by drink producers, retailers and other businesses in the supply chain.

Will Docker of Balgove Larder in Fife told *Speciality Food* the DRS plan had been "extremely unclear".

"There is absolutely no doubt that [a deposit return scheme] is very necessary, and there is no question we're dragging our heels massively. But the implementation, the advice and the detail was incredibly poorly thought through," he said.

Despite seeking advice through various meetings with Circularity Scotland – the not-for-profit company administering the scheme – Will said the lack of detail around key elements, such as admin and processing, was causing "panic" for small retailers, including members of local food group Food From Fife, which he chairs. "We've all had an extremely tough three years, and we want to crack on and try and make the next period as positive as possible. But not getting full detail was very challenging," he said.

Future of DRS called into question

A public spending watchdog has also criticised the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) over the DRS scheme, saying its effectiveness to reduce litter from drinks containers was "uncertain".

"Defra does not have effective long-term plans for how it will achieve its ambitions for reducing waste," said Gareth Davies, the head of the National Audit Office. "Defra must now establish a clear and coherent plan for its work on waste and resources, addressing the weaknesses in the reforms already in progress. If Defra takes these steps, it will be in a much stronger position to achieve its ambitions."

However, questions remain over how the plans will be introduced in England, Scotland and Wales. Jamie Delap of the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA), welcomed the news that the delay in Scotland would bring its DRS in line with the whole of the UK in a more joined-up scheme, but he warned, "[There] are still questions about differences in Wales and its inter-operability."

Some industry insiders are even calling for the DRS plans to be dropped completely, according to reports in *The Grocer*.

For fine food retailers, many of whom champion a locally focused and sustainable approach, a workable DRS plan would be welcome.

"As many other countries have successfully brought in deposit return schemes, there is no reason the UK cannot join their ranks," Mo said recently.

Will agreed, calling on the government to look to neighbouring countries who already have similar models in place. "It seems like we're trying to reinvent the wheel," he said. "I have absolute respect for how challenging implementing these sorts of policies is, but I have very little respect if the guidance is poor, and my feeling as a retailer and hospitality provider was that the guidance was extraordinarily poor," he continued.

In order to make the scheme a success, Will said a big shake-up is needed, and the government must seek industry advice. "Learning from mistakes is vital, and this was a huge error that has cost a lot of people.





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IRELAND'S FINE FOOD MARKET IS THRIVING

Ireland's speciality food market is booming, said Philip Pitman of Pitman Berryhill, which marks its 40th anniversary this year.

"There is huge potential for this company to grow and evolve further," he added, saying the business has been buoyed by "consumer appetite for diverse foods, richer than ever."

Pitman Berryhill (trading as Pitman Agencies Ltd) is an Ireland-wide supplier that's worked closely with the speciality food sector for four decades, bringing some of the best brands from across the UK and beyond into the Irish market.

Philip and his father Bob set up the company in 1983, acquiring Berryhill Merchants (run by father and daughter team David and Hazel Crozier) in 2009.

This merger extended and strengthened the business' portfolio.

Talking about the success of the company, Philip said, "Our 40th anniversary marks a significant milestone, and one of which we are extremely proud.

"Since the beginning, Pitman Agencies has been focused on seeking out emerging trends, launching new products, and building brands in Ireland. Our mission has always been to source the best products in terms of quality and value, to meet consumer needs.

"The team still gets great satisfaction from working with new, innovative companies, alongside well-established brands, to offer our customers a refreshing range of authentic, quality speciality products."

Current successes include Pelagonia, Gran Luchito Mexican Foods, and Rocky Mountain Marshmallows.

Philip said, "Pitman Berryhill continues to go from strength to strength, and with excellent brands, customers and infrastructure in place, the business has a great foundation for the future."

5 secrets to speciality retail success as the food sector rebounds

Fine food retailers must play to their strengths as the food and drink market moves towards pre-pandemic levels

After a tough few years, the food and drink sector – including retail and eating out – is expected to stabilise in 2025 as inflation lowers and consumers' disposable incomes rise, before growing to around pre-pandemic levels by 2028, according to industry research.

This year, IGD said, food and drink retailers have seen consumers switch to discounters, convenience and online, as well as down-trading to cheaper products. During the short term, Bryan Roberts, global insight leader at IGD, said competing with the success of discount retailers will be a challenge. "[However] as costs start to level out and shoppers become more comfortable with discretionary spending over time, we will begin to see more multi-channel use."

In the meantime, what's the key to success for fine food retailers?

1 AGILITY

Edward Berry, partner at independent food consultancy The Flying Fork, told *Speciality Food* that independent retailers must play to their strengths – one of which is their ability to respond quickly, and adapt to new trends.

"We are in a position where we can be agile, which the supermarkets can't. If you want to change your range, if you want to bring in a small selection of something just to test the waters, if you want to move your business around a bit," he said, fine food shops can – and should.

2 DISCOVERY

Consumers often visit farm shops and delis to find something new, and this will remain a key strength as the market moves towards recovery.

"I like the idea that people come to our shops and get lost," Edward said. "We want them to stay, we talk about dwell time. The supermarkets don't want you to stay, they want you to go in, find what you're looking for, and leave as swiftly as possible with no interaction with anybody," he said. While supermarkets are cutting deli counters, butchery counters and fish counters to get more people through their shops, independent retailing is all about interaction.

"Their measures of success don't allow for that level of interaction or time or training, whereas we like people to go in and discover and have a bit of fun," Edward said. This dwell time can be increased by changing the layout of your shop and encouraging customers to move through the space in different ways.

3 COMMUNICATION

While fine food shops might not have the sophisticated technology of a club card that feeds them data about what shoppers are buying, they have an advantage when it comes to communicating with customers. "Talking to people, and the relationships that you build when you're in the independents, are quite different. They're very personal," Edward said. By speaking to customers, you can find out what they like and what they don't.

4 FIND YOUR USP

You might focus on local products or have an expansive and interesting range of chocolates that consumers won't be able to find anywhere else. Whatever it is, choosing your niche gives you a chance to demonstrate expertise.

5 SHOWCASE PROVENANCE

Whether you only stock products from a 10-mile radius or specialise in handmade Italian fare, shouting about where your products come from can only boost your credibility as a fine food retailer. "[Customers] like to know that there's a story behind [your products]," Edward said.

Talking about provenance proves to customers that you take your sourcing seriously and shows the real value of shopping with an indy.

Food hauliers concerned about Christmas supplies

New survey shows a third of EU businesses supplying the UK are not ready for incoming post-Brexit rule changes

The Cold Chain Federation has issued a stark warning that hospitality, food retailers and consumers could expect significant disruption during Christmas trading.

This is because, the federation says, food manufacturers in mainland Europe are underprepared for, post-Brexit customs changes, due to come into force on 31st October, 2023.

A recent survey by the federation revealed 39% of businesses surveyed were completely unaware of the new rules and timeframes announced by UK government.

CCF chief executive, Shane Brennan, said, "It is deeply worrying that well over a third of these food producing businesses supplying into the UK are not aware that these significant changes are looming. Communications from the UK government to these businesses has not been good enough, and it is the food retailers, hospitality businesses and consumers here in the UK who will pay the price with disruption, delays and losses.

"We have written to ministers setting out our survey findings and asking for the 31st October implementation of the export health certificates to be moved back to 31st January 2024. Government must use the extra time to deliver a much wider and better resourced communications campaign, starting now, to increase awareness among EU businesses."

He continued, "With so much stress, cost inflation and other pressures in the food supply chain this year, this marginal change in the implementation plans could make a big difference."

One of the most significant new import rules is that export health certificates, signed by a qualified certifying officer, will become mandatory for every consignment of medium risk meat, dairy and fish products exported from the EU to the UK. In the survey, 41% of those asked said they do not have compliance plans in place.

Additionally, 60% said they plan to continue their service into the UK at the same frequency, 10% plan to reduce their frequency, and 7% plan to stop exporting here altogether.



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Will the cultured meat trend take off in the UK?

Lab-grown meat promises to disrupt the UK's food industry, but when will products finally hit shelves, and are customers ready to eat cultivated meat?

Israel's Aleph Farms applied for regulatory approval from the Food Standards Agency at the end of July, hoping to bring cell-based steak to the UK market within a few years.

This follows a landmark filing (the first in Europe) in Switzerland, with the company's CEO, Didier Toubia, saying the "potential is huge" for the industry in Great Britain.

These European 'in-roads' come hot on the heels of developments in the US, where, in June, cultivated meat was officially allowed into the market, with the green light given to two emerging brands – Upside Foods and Eat Just.

Lab-grown meat has been available in Singapore since 2020, but as the first breakthough in a major market, American approval was big news.

Following the milestone moment, Eat Just's CEO Josh Tetrick said the approval in the US "further legitimises cultivated meat as an industry, as a technology".

So, what does the UK's cultured meat industry look like currently... and where could it go?

What is cultured meat?

Cultured meat, also known as cultivated meat or lab-grown meat, is made by culturing animal cells. This means meat can be produced without slaughtering animals, and without the environmental impact of large-scale farming.

Rich Dillon, CEO of Ivy Farm, one of the UK-based companies looking to kick-start cultured meat production here, sees huge potential in the growing sector. "The global market for meat substitutes was estimated to be valued at $1.9bn in 2021, and is projected to reach $4bn by 2027, which highlights just how considerable the market prospects for meat substitutes are," he said.

By 2035, cultured meat could make up almost a quarter of global meat consumption, according to a report by GovGrant. Much of this growth could be seen in the UK, as the report said British companies have received £28.55m in investment, the fifth highest in the world.

Ivy Farm plans to serve customers cultivated meat in the "near future", Rich says, as the business awaits regulatory approval. As well as Ivy Farm, other companies making waves in this space include Uncommon (formerly HigherSteaks) and Hoxton Farms, which is producing cultivated pork fat.

"Fat is the most important sensory component of the meat that we eat, so we make cultivated fats to sell as ingredients to plant-based meat companies, so they can make alternatives that actually look, cook and taste like the real thing," says Ed Steele, co-founder of Hoxton Farms. Having built a pilot facility in central London, Ed says the company is looking to scale up production and use its ingredient to revolutionise the meat industry.

Where do consumers stand?

As with any new trend, from functional ingredients to vegan cheese, consumers – and retailers, for that matter – have a learning curve.

Do producers anticipate any resistance from consumers about so-called lab-grown meat? Rich believes there is plenty of appetite for these alternative products.

In particular, his business, and others like it, aims to target not vegans and vegetarians, but flexitarians and those consumers who don't want to give up meat, despite its environmental impact.

"We expect the consumers unwilling to give up meat – 90% of the US still eat meat, for instance – will be persuaded to switch to cultivated meat.

This is backed up by a study in the journal Foods, which indicates a high level of openness across the UK and US – over 80% of those surveyed were either highly or moderately likely to try cultivated meat given the opportunity," he explained.

A report last year by the UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA) showed more conservative results, with a third of UK consumers saying they would try cultured meat.

"With any novel ingredient, we need to ensure we educate and inform consumers," Ed adds.

He cites several recent studies which show consumers are willing to try cultivated meat products, particularly when they understand the process involved.

"Education around cultivated meat is essential to make sure consumers have all the information they need to make informed decisions."

"We are confident that consumers who understand the benefits and the process will shift from traditional meat to delicious products containing cultivated fat," he says.

When will we see these products for sale?

Most consumers want to know if cell-cultured meat is safe or healthy. US regulators declared the products were safe for human consumption, but the FSA has yet to approve them in the UK.

What stands in the way? "The current novel food regulation in the UK, which needs to be more flexible in order to adapt to modern innovations, is one of the main hurdles our industry is facing," Rich said. "In contrast, companies like GOOD Meat and Upside Foods in the USA and Singapore already enjoy the advantages of a more transparent, agile regulatory framework that promotes the growth of the cultivated meat industry."

He believes the FSA will take a similar approach as technology rapidly advances. Ed agrees that it's only a matter of time. "We're confident that the UK will follow quickly behind [the US]."

What's more, as with any new product, costs are high. "As demand rises and we scale up production, this cost will lower," he said. Ivy Farm, for instance, has plans for a new manufacturing plant that will allow it to produce 12,000 tonnes of cultivated meat per year.

Should fine food retailers stock cultured meat?

Only time will tell how consumers respond to seeing cultivated meat on shelves. The question also remains whether stocking these products makes sense for fine food retailers.

Rich believes crossover between innovative food tech companies and artisan producers and retailers is possible. In fact, Ivy Farms has partnered with UK artisan meat producer, Finnebrogue, to produce cultivated Wagyu burgers once the industry has the green light. However, the drive for many producers of cultured meat is to replace lower-quality and less-sustainable products from supermarket shelves with a more environmentally-friendly option.

Rich explained, "We believe the partnership will also showcase how cultivated meat can work with traditional farming, helping to reduce the pressure on producers to intensify operations to meet growing demand, while boosting consumer choice and reducing the impact Wagyu meat has on the environment."

Ed envisions a future where all consumers are eating hybrid products containing both cultivated and plant-based ingredients. "There will be products aimed at the mass market, and premium structured products that can be used in recipes that have been handed down through generations," he says. "Fine food retailers will be able to create exciting new dishes and raw ingredients using cultivated fat and replicate the dishes they make today in a much more sustainable and ethical way."

For businesses that already stock lower-impact and often locally produced meat, for the time being, the continued support of producers who follow regenerative practices might be more attractive than taking a chance on new tech. While the prospect may seem far off, the approval seen in the US market should get retailers thinking about how they might respond if – or when – cultured meat makes a breakthrough here in the UK.

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Why small producers are driving innovation in new food products

SME food and drink manufacturers were responsible for 75% of all new products launched in 2022 in Europe

The past few years have seen numerous challenges for small and medium-sized food manufacturers, but new research shows that smaller producers drove innovation last year while larger businesses took their foot off the accelerator.

SME manufacturers across Europe were responsible for 75% of all new products launched, making the most of their ability to be nimble and agile amidst changing market forces, according to research firm Circana's Race for Resilience: Innovation Pacesetters report.

Small to medium producers contributed to an impressive 68% of total value sales from new products, found the report, which covered the six largest markets in Europe: the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands.

Overall, product innovations declined across the last two years as more and more businesses decided against gambling on new products amidst the cost-of-living crisis and tough trading conditions.

A competitive advantage

As larger brands play it safe, what's driving smaller producers to continue innovation? Cheerful Buddha founder James Wright tells *Speciality Food* it's often easier for SMEs to innovate compared with larger companies because they are closer to their customers and able to bring products to the market much more quickly.

"We very much have our ear to the ground in terms of listening to what our customers want, and identifying new trends so that we can then present them in unique and interesting ways." For example, the brand has launched a range of lions mane teas, which harness the adaptogen trend. "As a young brand, we're focused on building our product range, and product innovation helps us to define and secure our place in the market."

Innovation is an important sustainable source of organic growth for businesses both large and small, according to Ananda Roy, global senior vice president of strategic growth insights at Circana.

"New product launches can feel like a gamble when there is increasing competition for shelf space, especially at a time when the industry is experiencing declines in sales volumes of FMCG products," Ananda said. "However, there is no doubt that it can add immense value too, giving brands the opportunity to expand an existing portfolio or even create an entirely new one. Innovations continue to be resilient and help to drive demand despite inflationary headwinds."

For Peter Grainger, co-founder of CafePod, continued innovation is critical for finding new gaps in the market and driving sales amidst the cost-of-living crisis. For example, the brand recently launched its first half-caff coffee to add to its decaf range in the hopes of addressing the gap in afternoon and evening coffee drinking at home. Testing and innovation also help small brands to establish their niche. "We know first-hand from a list of 20 innovations that consumers prefer strong coffees every time. We're launching a new intense blend this month in response to this demand," Peter says.

James believes innovation is central to what SMEs do. "Our commitment to launching new products reflects an entrepreneurial spirit that I think is typical of SMEs: we have a buzz of ideas, we're willing to take risks, and we're committed to impacting the market with challenger-style products that deviate from the norm and get people to think about their ingredients more – and what those ingredients are doing to their wellness and to the planet," he says.

> "We very much have our ear to the ground in terms of listening to what our customers want, and identifying new trends"

This aligns with Circana's research, which found that consumers expect new product launches to:

- Add value, such as having new features (77%)
- Be better for health and wellness (71%)
- Be better for the environment (68%)
- Be trusted (65%)
- Fit with their lifestyle (73%)
- Help them achieve their goals (67%)

5 areas where are producers innovating

CHILLED AND FRESH
New product launches in the chilled and fresh category delivered the most value despite fewer products being launched, the research found. Most producers tapped into healthy eating trends such as plant-based and natural foods.

BABY FOODS
Innovation drove 6% of total baby food value sales, a growth of 75% over last year as parents sought healthier options that met a variety of taste, ingredient and diet options.

PET FOODS
Innovation in pet food jumped by 39% as more people took ownership of pets. Manufacturers in the UK and Italy particularly sought to provide healthier treats and food to pets.

FROZEN FOOD
Frozen food product value rose by 40% on the previous year, driven by consumers choosing frozen instead of chilled and fresh to meet new food planning behaviours and avoid waste.

NO/LOW AND RTD BEVERAGES
While brewers' new product launches fell, the focus on low/no alcohol and ready to drink increased. Alcohol volume sales overall showed a significant decline, resulting in 15% less value share derived from new products.

"To remain competitive, brand owners need to make the benefit of the innovation relevant to evolving consumer needs," Circana's Ananda said.

"They need to tap into and market the transformation, not just the product feature. A targeted innovation strategy can help address the relentless search for growth in 2023 and beyond, especially as we continue to see the rules of the consumer goods category being re-written.

"This evolving innovation ecosystem will be the driving force for change across an industry struggling to cope with the changing consumer landscape."



SPOTLIGHT ON: JUST GOURMET FOODS

Delivering something truly special, and building relationships with small, family-run businesses, crafting authentic, irresistible products is key to the success of Just Gourmet Foods

The word 'warehouse' doesn't exactly spark the imagination, does it? For most, it conjures an image of a soulless expanse of shelving, stacked with boxes of thousands of items plucked from a vast catalogue.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Someone who knows this only too well is Gianfranco Perri, founder of Just Gourmet Foods.

Gianfranco launched the business, on the cusp of turning 40, following a 15-year career in foodservice and food retail. Having started in a back room at his home in 2018, Just Gourmet Foods took off at a rate of knots – today spanning a 4,000sqft warehouse and office, and with seven dedicated members of staff on board.

The businessman and food lover had noticed a niche in the industry. "There are various Italian wholesalers across the country who historically supply Italian restaurants and traditional Italian delis," he says. "But I saw a gap in the market. The fact there was no wholesaler specialising in premium Italian brands."

Just Gourmet Foods takes sourcing seriously. Gianfranco only works with very carefully chosen, family-run businesses, selected from Italy's vastly different regions. Through these 20 or more brands, he is able to bring to the UK an expression of the fascinating, changing landscapes of the country. Gianfranco's mission is to demonstrate that Italian food isn't one-size-fits-all. There's a tapestry of flavours and ingredients to explore, from the heady chilli heat and fragrant bergamot of the south, via the fishing ports of Campania, to the rice growing regions of the north.



Many of the suppliers Just Gourmet Foods works with have never had a presence in the UK before. "Our criteria is that they are smaller artisans, with fantastic products, and attractive packaging."

Gianfranco dedicates a lot of time to sourcing, visiting trade shows in Italy, and forming strong working relationships with producers, even helping them navigate export legislation and paperwork in the face of new rules following Brexit.

These relationships are crucial. As are the conversations struck up with Just Gourmet Foods' customers, who will find the team offers some of the best service in the industry, where they're a name, not just a number.

"We import the products, taking away the headache for retailers," explains Gianfranco. "We handle all of the transport of goods to the UK, and we can deliver anywhere in the country on our vehicles, or via the palette network."

Just Gourmet Foods' customer base reaches beyond traditional Italian delis, with customers across the independent retail sector, from farm shops, delis and cheesemongers, to food halls such as Selfridges and Harvey Nichols.

"We pride ourselves on personal service. We do a significant amount of private label work, and if a customer wants something specific, we can source it for them because we know our producers and what they can do. Having access to that network means anything is possible," says Gianfranco.

The breadth of Just Gourmet Foods' stock is extensive. From single origin olives oils and the finest balsamic vinegars, to egg and durum wheat pasta, sauces, biscuits, sweet treats, organic honey, nougat and grissini.

Orders are currently being fulfilled for Christmas, from a brochure that includes a dizzying array of gorgeous foods, many of them ideal for gifting - decadent chocolate-dipped figs and mandarins, Calabrian Christmas cakes, and one of the largest selections of panettone available to UK retailers. Get in touch now to enquire about surplus stock.

Gianfranco says he's delighted with the progress Just Gourmet Foods has made in just five years. He's looking forward to growing further. Organically, and in a way that continues to support Italy's wonderful makers, while giving the UK's fine food retailers access to extraordinary products that will surprise and delight their customers.

Meet the suppliers

Just Gourmet Foods will be at the Speciality Fine Food Fair this month with its biggest display ever, featuring six key suppliers, sharing their passion and stories.

Meet Italianavera, producer of some of the ripest, most vibrant tomatoes in San Marzano. They'll be encouraging buyers to look beyond what they know about tinned tomatoes with their stunning range, which includes single varietals, from yellow to Spunzillo.

Organic farmers Bio Orto will join Just Gourmet Foods too. "Their main business is fruit and vegetables, but they more recently started making olive oils and pasta sauces, and some antipasti products," says Gianfranco. "It's a fantastic range with beautifully simple packaging."

Olive oil is big business in Italy, but it's well acknowledged that finding supreme quality can be challenging. Just Gourmet Foods works with a handful of producers who take oil seriously.

At the show, sample oils from Tenute Cristiano, whose farmers grow single origin varieties. The company was chosen by Gianfranco as a 'love letter' to his family homeland of Calabria. "That's the romance behind this brand," he explains. "And Calabrian oil isn't very common. This is the real deal."

Also in attendance will be Frantoio Muraglia, which, as well as producing a weighty 1.5lt option, and intriguing flavoured oils (from celery to smoked), has, says Gianfranco, revolutionised the design of the olive oil bottle. "People love them because they make a great gift and look good in the kitchen. But, also, more importantly, the oil inside is delicious!"

Completing the show line-up is artisan rice producer Gli Aironi, and Armatore, which supplies Just Gourmet Foods with traceable jarred fish, caught off the wildly beautiful Amalfi Coast. Gianfranco's sure not many buyers will have tried their anchovy extract before.











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Visitors can discover over 600 exhibitors (across the three shows) ranging from premium healthy snacks to gourmet coffee and delectable pastries, functional drinks and more. Exhibitors confirmed include Biopak, Starbucks Chilled Coffee, Sproud, Fri-Jado, GRIND Coffee Roasters, Rollover UK, Biotiful Dairy, Milliways, Tony's Chocolonely, Lavazza Coffee, Magrini, Nestle Professional, Radnor Hills, Raynor Foods, TRIP drinks, Bridge Coffee Roasters, Kelloggs, PG Tips, Pukka, Whole Earth, Clipper Teas, Kallo Foods, Simply Lunch, UCC Coffee, Huel – and many more.

lunch! speaker line-up

With three keynote theatres, you can expect to hear from the biggest names in the industry, all free to attend. Their expertise is unmatched, making these seminars an invaluable resource for business growth. Experts, including Guy Meakin, UK shops and franchise managing director of Pret; Marta Pogroszewska, director of GAIL's; Jo Hayward, vice president of Convenience Europe at BP; and Rachel Chatterton, head of food and beverage development at Holland & Barrett, have been confirmed for exclusive interviews.

The show will also host exciting panel sessions, delivering profound insights and expertise across a range of topics. The first to be announced include:

THE NEXT BIG THING PANEL

Lucy Noone Blake, director of Pear talks to four new and noteworthy operators from across the country as they tell their stories of how they got their brands off the ground, and why they might just be the next big thing in food to go. Featuring; Matt Farrell, director of Bold Street Coffee/GSG; Laura Mimoun, founder and CEO at Kaleido; Shereen Ritchie, COO of Buns from Home; and Dimeji Sadiq, founder and owner of Vegan Shack.

THE OPERATIONS DIRECTOR FOOD-TO-GO PANEL

Join some of the best operation directors in the business to learn how they keep their stores and teams running successfully. Hosted by Shereen Ritchie, COO of Buns from Home, the panel will feature Stephen Clark, operations director of Tortilla; Chris Sherriff, COO at Wingstop UK; Edyta Stec, director of operations at GAIL's; and Darren Traynor, operations director at Chopstix.

THE MULTI SITE PANEL

Hosted by Jim Winship, director of the British Sandwich & Food to go Association, this popular panel looks at some of the deeper issues that matter to multi-site food-to-go operators, with a particular focus on what you need to know for 2024 and beyond. Featuring; Rusty Warren, Senior NPD and innovation manager at Subway and James Newton-Brown (Formerly M&S).

THE FOOD-TO-GO LEADERS PANEL

The CEOs and managing directors of important high street food-to-go operators, including Richard Franks, MD of HOP; and Neil Sebba, MD of Tossed, will discuss the biggest issues facing this particular sector today.

THE HEAD OF FOOD PANEL

One of our most anticipated panels each year will focus again on upcoming food, beverage, and menu trends across varying food-to-go concepts. Featuring Martyn Clover, head of food at Tortilla, and hosted by Jay Morjaria, chef/consultant, and winner of BBC's Million Pound Menu.

Jo Hayward, vice president, Convenience Europe of BP says, "lunch! is a great way to connect with new and existing suppliers and be inspired by fellow innovators in the market!"

"If there's only one event you attend this year, make sure it is lunch!, Casual Dining & Commercial Kitchen. They are a must for anyone in hospitality," says Shereen Ritchie, COO of Buns from Home.

The Return of The Innovation Challenge

The Innovation Challenge is back at lunch! Helping to shape the future of the food and drink sector, The Innovation viewing gallery is where visitors can vote for their favourite products on day one of the show. The shortlisted brands will pitch their products live on stage (on day two) in front of visitors, and a panel of industry experts. They will then decide if the innovation deserves a Bronze, Silver or Gold. It's a popular session, not to be missed.

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lunch! will co-locate with Casual Dining – the definitive trade event for the restaurant, pub and bar sector and Commercial Kitchen – the essential event for executive chefs and leading decision makers from all types of professional kitchens. You can access all three shows for free when you register in advance.

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From brand new products, to exciting developments in existing lines, and innovative introductions to the fine food and drink sector, *Speciality Food* rounds up some of the launches you need to know about, to bring added interest and excitement to your shelves and counters

Caraboo introduces the UK's first menopause-friendly 'not choc' bars

Sweet treat innovator Caraboo has just brought a collection of low sugar, vegan confectionary bars to market, aimed at perimenopausal and menopausal women, and those following a reduced sugar diet.

Some research shows that caffeine (a common stimulant found in everything from coffee, to fizzy drinks and chocolate) can heighten common, uncomfortable perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms such as anxiety and mood swings.

Caraboo's bars are formulated with carob, naturally caffeine-free, 45% lower in sugar than regular milk chocolate, and contain no gluten or dairy.

They're available in five flavours – Coconut, Orange, Mint, Salted Caramel Nutty and Raspberry & Honeycomb Crunch – and come wrapped in home compostable packaging.



Founder, Charlotte Miller, says, "We understand the challenges faced by menopausal women, and Caraboo is committed to providing them with a chocolate alternative that tastes amazing. Our choc bars offer a delicious and indulgent treat without the potential side effects of caffeine or high sugar, allowing women a permissable snacking experience while supporting their wellbeing during this transformative stage of life."

The brand supports stockists with a range of promotional materials.
eatcaraboo.co.uk

New wild venison jerky launches with five flavours



UK game specialist Wild and Game is tapping into nationwide demand for higher-protein, sustainable snacks, teaming up with Get Jerky to create a range of venison jerky.

With minimal food miles and no factory farming involved, wild venison is being embraced more than ever before by people who want their food choices to cause minimal damage to the environment.

Wild and Game (whose range includes venison ready meals, burgers and ready-to-cook meat) says the jerky is the perfect addition to the brand's offering.

"We're delighted to have worked with Get Jerky to launch these new products," says co-founder Steven Frampton. "Jerky is an increasingly popular snack, and it's ideal to carry with you when you're out and about, so it made sense to launch a venison version."

Five flavours are available in on-the-go 40g packs, from BBQ to Devil's Wrath – not for the faint-hearted.
wildandgame.co.uk

Tinned autumn panettones launch just in time for Halloween

Eighth generation family business, Lazzaroni, has just brought two new panettones to market, with a view to tap into the increasing popularity and rise in celebration of Halloween.

Available from Sacla, each panettone is made with care in Saronno near Milan to a traditional recipe, with the family saying the cakes (sold in seasonally-decorated tins) are ideal for sharing at home as the weather cools down, or gifting.



The Apple & Cinnamon variety is studded with candied apple, apple slices and a generous hand of cinnamon, while the unique Pumpkin Panettone is uniquely filled with candied pumpkin and pumpkin cream.
sacla.co.uk



Isle of Harris Distillery to release first ever whisky this month

Long-awaited single malt Scotch whisky, The Hearach, produced at the Isle of Harris Distillery, will be showcased at a private, live-streamed launch on 22nd September, before sales go live for UK retailers the following day, and for global stockists in October.

It is the first legal dram from the island, with every drop distilled, matured, married and bottled in Harris by a team of local staff.

The Hearach has been strongly influenced by its Outer Hebridean island home, and its distinctive bottle (designed by leading agency, Stranger & Stranger) will not be revealed until the launch.

Managing director, Simon Erlanger, says, "It's been 15 years since Burr Bakewell formed the Isle of Harris Distillery Company. We've always said that the whisky would be ready when it's ready, so it's a big moment to finally announce a launch date, which will be the distillery's eighth birthday."

Executive chairman and chief financial officer, Ron MacEachran, adds, "The Hearach's launch, eight years after the distillery opened, is a wonderful tribute to the efforts and support of so many people – the designers and builders of the distillery, the countless people from the island community and beyond who have supported us in different ways over the years, our investors who supported a long term vision of regeneration predicated on the creation of a distinctive whisky and – above all – the wonderful team."



The UK's first adaptogenic honey comes to market

Artisan honey brand Honey Heaven has reacted to growing consumer demand for adaptogenic products by launching the first mushroom honey onto the UK market.



The jars are filled with organic Hungarian acacia honey combined with a mix of seven organic mushroom varieties reported to have wellbeing benefits – reishi, chaga, shitake, maitake, lion's mane, cordyceps and tremella.

The mushrooms (all grown in Hampshire) are freeze-dried, powdered and blended before being stirred into the honey. Freeze drying, rather than dehydrating, is an important part of the process, retaining up to 90% of the mushrooms' reportedly potent qualities.

The brand says the resulting taste is sweet, with a rich 'cocoa'-like essence, and no savoury, vegetal notes (as customers might expect), and that it can be used in many different ways.

Honey Heaven founder, Silvia Mocasari, says, "Products containing adaptogens, like the medicinal mushrooms in our honey, are already very popular because they are entirely natural, so the positive effects they have on the body are gentle and entirely natural too.

"More and more people have become health conscious, particularly since the Covid pandemic. Medicinal mushrooms fit the bill exactly with their wonderful health-boosting properties."

Some research shows adaptogenic mushrooms can help lower cortisol levels, with other benefits including the prevalence of natural polysaccharides which support the immune system and boost energy. Honey Heaven produces a range of infused honeys, crafted with ingredients that have health-giving properties. In addition to Mushrooms in Honey, they include Turmeric in Honey, and Organic CBD Infused Premium Honey. Some of the range is available in miniature 40g jars.

honeyheaven.co.uk



Try the UK's first drinks carton with a paper straw (in paper packaging)

The eco message is strong in award-winning fruit juice brand Flawsome!'s newest product. Each of the Wonky Fruit Water Cartons is packaged with a paper straw, wrapped up in paper packaging, in a bid to help reduce wasteful single-use plastics in this sector.

The new packaging supports the brand's commitment to sustainability and reducing its carbon footprint, while providing an alternative option for children's lunchboxes – with no added sugar or artificial additives.

Since the UK government announced a ban on single-use plastic straws, companies have made the switch to paper, however the ability to continue to package in plastic has been viewed by commentators as flawed. Flawsome!'s paper wrappers have already helped save 252kg of plastic from landfill, and contributed to the brand's carbon footprint being 50% lower than the average small juice company.

Adding to its sustainable credentials, the drinks are only made with 'wonky' fruit, which could otherwise go to waste.

Co-founder Karina Sudenyte, says, "We're really excited to finally introduce both our new range of Wonky Fruit Water Drinks, and revolutionary paper straws in paper packaging. We pride ourselves on being innovators within sustainability, and prioritise this throughout the business."

The drinks are vegan, contain vitamins D and C, and come in Apple, Mango & Sweet Orange, and Sweet Apple & Sour Cherry flavours.

flawsomedrinks.com

Female-led start-up introduces sparkling wine in a can

Tapping into research [Nielson Total Market) revealing the 17% year on year growth of canned sparkling wine, compared to 8% in miniature sparkling bottles, female-led London start-up, Nice Drinks has just brought to market its first 250ml vegan Sparkling Wine (10% ABV)



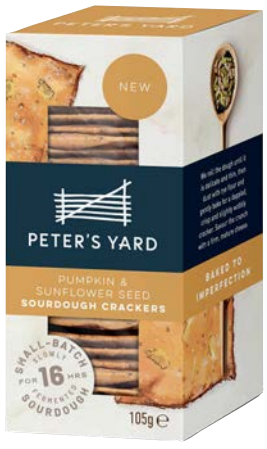
"We're here to celebrate the wins in people's lives, no matter how big or small the occasion," says co-founder Lucy Bask. "We created this sparkling white wine for a night out with a sparkly outfit, all the way through to celebrating on the sofa with a takeaway."

Nice sources its collection (including canned Sauvignon Blanc, Malbec and Pale Rose) from wineries the team love, with the intention, they say, of making good wine more accessible and less intimidating. The brand's sparkling cans are produced with Spanish Airen from La Mancha.

nice-drinks.co.uk

Peter's Yard adds to cracker collection

Artisan cracker and crispbread producer Peter's Yard has added another new flavour to its successful sourdough cracker line.



Following the success of the summer Oregano & Olive Oil launch, the brand has just introduced a tasty Pumpkin & Sunflower Seed variety.

"We're delighted to welcome two new delicious sourdough crackers to our range, Oregano & Olive Oil and Pumpkin & Sunflower Seed," says Jean-Baptiste Robert, managing director of Peter's Yard. "These two innovative flavours to match perfectly with fresh cheeses and mature cheeses. Our passion is always to support our heartland in speciality retail, and we are excited to announce that Oregano & Olive Oil will be exclusive to this sector. We are confident that these will be a great addition to the existing range found in speciality stores, farm shops and delicatessens."

The award-winning range also includes Original, Fig & Spelt, Rosemary & Sea Salt, Poppy Seed, Pink Peppercorn, and Rye & Charcoal flavours.

petersyard.com

Yorkshire artisans develop new bread dipper

North Yorkshire-based Charlie & Ivy's - which makes dips, flavoured oils and mayonnaise with award-winning cold-pressed rapeseed oil from parent company, Breckenholme – has announced a new dip, ideal for snacking.



The Chilli, Balsamic, Oregano and Thyme Bread Dipper is the brand's first new flavour in three years, combining warm chilli and herbs with a touch of sweetness from the vinegar.

Jason Thompson, part of the development team, says, "The brief was to create a grazing must-have, and I'm really pleased with how it's turned out.

"It's delicious served simply with warm, crusty bread, and can also be used to drizzle over salads, pasta or pizza, and makes an amazing base for roasting veggies."

charlieandivys.co.uk



New Greek-inspired British gin from Masterchef winner

Greek chef and 2019 Masterchef winner Irini Tzortzoglou has just launched a new Mediterranean-inspired gin alongside the award-winning Shed One micro distillery at Ulverston, on the edge of the Lake District.

Yiayia, a London Dry gin, has been in development for many months, with Irini joining forces with Shed One founder Zoe Arnold-Bennett to source, test and trial botanicals that evoke the flavours of Irini's homeland of Crete.

The resulting all-female led creation is, says Irini, an homage to the strong women who helped her forge a career in professional cooking. Yiayia (which translates as 'grandmother') is a term of endearment and love, and the gin has been distilled with evocative ingredients – from vine and fig, to olive, lemon leaves and rose pelargonium, with a savoury edge from seaweed, mushroom and oregano.

Irini says, "I'm very proud of Shed One encapsulating all the flavours and aromas of my Cretan home in Yiayia Gin. It's a very special gin. Their ethos when it comes to highlighting and showcasing local ingredients from the beautiful Cumbrian countryside is very much in sync with my love for foraging and my own food culture. Through our conversations Zoe picked up on how grateful I was to both my grandmothers for their impact on my life and my culinary journey."

Opening up with herbal, savoury notes, the spirit has a smooth mouthfeel, and lingering citrus notes that make it ideal as a sipping gin, or as a classic serve with tonic.

shed1distillery.com

Clear pre-mixed Margarita is a UK first



As Tequila-based drinks take off this season, renowned mixologist Deano Moncrieffe reveals his, new to the UK, clear margarita to the market.

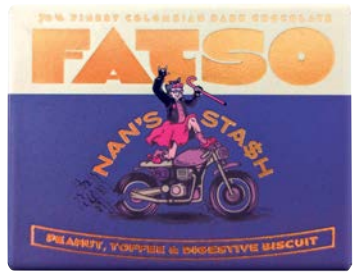
Mirror Margarita's recipe is taken directly from the menu of Deano's bar Hacha, blending 100% premium Agave Blanco Cazcabel Tequila with citrus oils and malic acid (produced naturally by the agave plant), for a sweet-sour taste with a hint of grapefruit.

Available for retail from this month, the 500ml RTD bottles each contain five serves at 15% ABV. Once opened the bottle should be refrigerated, but will keep for 12 months.

Agave expert Deano, known for his forward-thinking approach to the spirits industry, created the brand with his partner Emma Murphy. He says, "We are so excited to have our bar quality signature serve made available to audiences nationwide. We have always believed there is a gap in the market for a premium RTD cocktail which is expert-led, so people who are time poor but love good quality drinks can enjoy them without any fuss at home. What's more, we believe the new product will resonate with people who are already fans of Mexican spirits, but also the innovation behind the recipe, with its crystal-clear appearance, will intrigue new audiences."

mirrormargarita.com

Mini FATSO bars to-go are ready for retail



Quirky independent chocolate brand FATSO has shrunk its key range into a series of miniature bars perfect for the travel, hospitality, on-the-go and office catering sectors.

Available now, the 40g bars come in 100% recyclable boxes with a home compostable flow wrap inside, and are made with single-origin cacao from family-owned Luker's Chocolate in Colombia, which has been awarded the highest chocolate classification – Fino De Aroma.

Flavours in the range include Home Run (60% cacao with chunks of salted pretzel, whole almonds and honeycomb), Nan's Stash (70% cacao with peanuts, toffee and digestive biscuits), and King's Ransom (60% cacao with whole pistachios, cocoa nibs and mint).

Co-creator, Ella McKay, says, "At FATSO we believe chocolate, like life, should be less savoured and more devoured. We're all about the big chunk, which is why when we launched our delicious bars, we did so with a big bar weighing in at 150g. Our decision to go big on mini bars is in response to a clear demand for a big chunk in a smaller eat, for those afternoon pick-me-ups, highflying snacks and mini bar moments."

sofatso.com

Premium Movenpick hazelnut spreads now available for UK retail



Speciality food importer Empire Bespoke Foods has just launched Movenpick's luxury hazelnut spreads into UK retail.

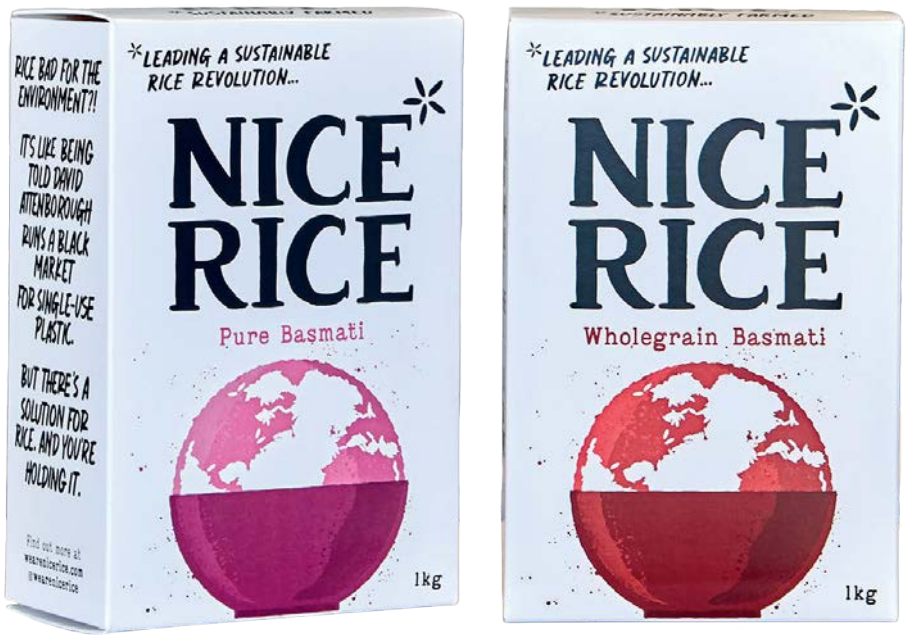
Both products, Original Hazelnut Cream and Hazelnut & Milk (available in 300g jars) are made without colours or preservatives, and are 100% palm oil free. They're packed with whole nuts, which have been expertly roasted to bring out their full flavour, and can be sold to be enjoyed as part of a breakfast offering, crepe, pancake or waffle service, or as an addition to bakes and cakes.

Junior brand manager at Empire, Benjamin Moody, says, "The Swiss brand Movenpick is extremely high quality and well known around the world, so it is a great opportunity for Empire Bespoke Foods to launch these into the market."

Hazelnut Cream is made with 20% hazelnuts and cocoa, while Hazelnut & Milk is a thick, white cream with 10% whole roasted hazelnuts and milk.

empirebespokefoods.com





Sustainable rice brand seeks to educate customers across the UK

Nice Rice, a new sustainably farmed rice brand, has launched on a mission to create a demand for better rice without compromise on taste or convenience.

The impact of rice production on the environment has been well documented, with some research calling it out as the second highest emitter of greenhouse gases in global food production. It also reportedly uses more water than other crops (63 full bathtubs per 1kg).

Nice Rice sources from a group of farmers whose method (which achieves a 49% reduction in CO2-equivelent emissions per tonne compared to the natural average) is endorsed by the UN and IPCC for being significantly more sustainable, and with a 10% improvement on yield.

Additionally, the method reduces the water used for irrigation by 3,300 litres per kilo of rice.

Known as 'alternate wetting and drying' (AWD), farmers allow their paddy fields to dry out during the growing season, rather than permanently flooding. This aerates the soil, disrupting the methane-emitting bacteria that thrive in anaerobic conditions.

Founder Fergus O'Sullivan spent two years researching farms and supply chains. He says, "Our goal is to inspire people to be part of a positive change for the planet by connecting pioneering farmers with people looking for more sustainable ways to enjoy their food. We're confident that our products provide better-tasting rice that's better for the planet, and we're trying to be a better kind of business too."

Nice Rice's range includes single heritage white and wholegrain dry Basmati, as well as ready-to-heat rice packs in flavours such as Chipotle and Provencal Herb.

wearenicerice.com



Kombucha maker squeezes out a juicy new flavour

One the UK's leading kombucha brands, Remedy Kombucha, has just launched a new flavour – Orange Squeeze.

Available in 250ml and 330ml can formats, the kombucha is free from sugar and artificial sweeteners, while being laden with beneficial functional additions – live cultures, organic acids and antioxidants – that are reported to support gut health.

The kombucha is made in a 30-day brewing process, which enhances its complex flavour. Across the market, kombucha is seeing rapid growth as shoppers actively cut back on sugar. Remedy's own research showed the kombucha category as expanding a rate of 22% year-on-year.

Orange Squeeze is available now alongside the existing flavours – Cherry Plum, Raspberry Lemonade, Ginger Lemon, and Wild Berry. Remedy Kombucha can be stored ambiently and chilled before consumption.

remedydrinks.co.uk



Gut Health Doctor's single-serve prebiotic yoghurts are the first with scientific backing

Gut-friendly yoghurt brand Bio&Me, created by The Gut Health Doctor (Dr Megan Rossi), has just launched a series of single serve pots, ideal for on-the-go snacking.

Available in 130g portions, in Original and Vanilla flavours, the products brim with billions of live active cultures – reportedly more than any other yoghurt in the UK.

Approximately 18 different culture strains are present, including Dr Rossi's favourites, BB-12 and LGG.

The products contain no added sugar, artificial sweeteners, thickeners or emulsifiers, are low in lactose, high in protein, and a source of calcium, B12, B2 and phosphorus.

Bio&Me is the only UK brand currently able to carry the Good for your Gut health claim, due to its EFSA-approved ingredient, backed by clinical trials.

Dr Rossi says, "Enjoying yoghurt regularly has been linked with enhanced health benefits compared to the milk it comes from (ie unfermented dairy). This is down to the combined actions of the fat, proteins, calcium and bacteria.

"The bacteria helps transform the fats and proteins into beneficial chemicals. In fact, studies have shown consuming the right kind of yoghurt is linked with a healthy weight, better bone health, healthy immunity, heart health, and reducing the risk of Type 2 diabetes. One study found those who consumed 80g of yoghurt a day had a 14% lower risk of developing Type 2 diabetes than those who didn't eat any."

bioandme.co.uk



COMMENTATORS



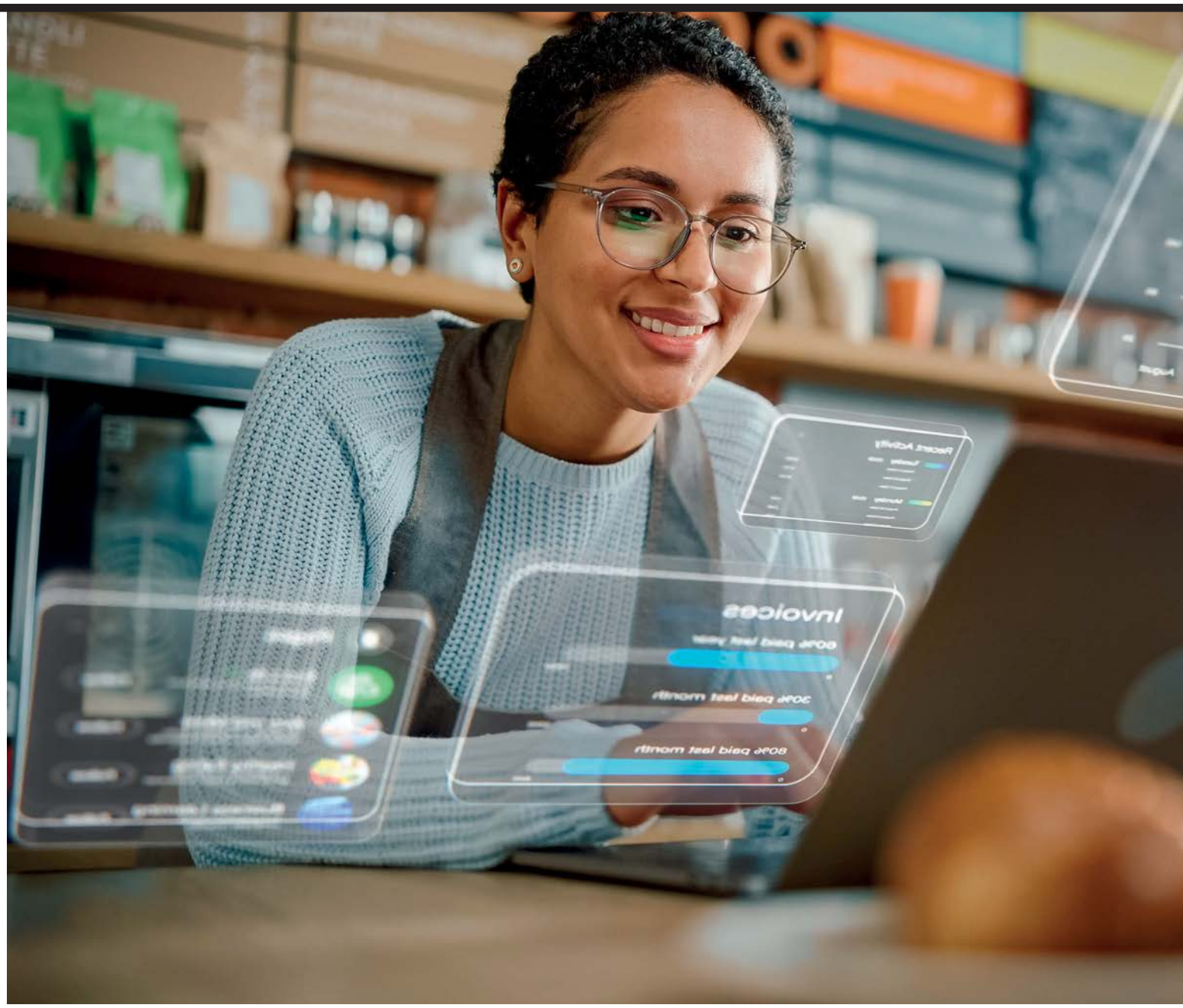
COLIN CAMPBELL
BONNIE & WILD



HARRY HIGGINSON
THE DELI SOCIETY



LIZZIE DOWLING-NASH
FLOURISH



AI: WHAT DOES THE TECHNOLOGY MEAN FOR RETAIL?

It's growing at a pace, with its creators warning there could be severe consequences if it is misused. We delve into the world of artificial intelligence, and how it might affect fine food businesses

Whether you love the idea or find it utterly terrifying, AI is here to stay. It's seeping into every corner of our lives, so the question for businesses is, how to use it. How can it help? So far, for food retailers, this has been in the form of tracking what customers browse and buy, learning how they behave and what they are looking for, but AI is set to do a lot more than that. Should we be scared?

"It's easy to become anxious about the future - perhaps we should be," says Colin Campbell, communications director at Bonnie & Wild. "But Bonnie & Wild strives to make a positive impact on people's lives, and we remain stubbornly optimistic. You'll always receive a genuinely warm welcome when you visit our food hall."

Valuing the human touch

While AI is becoming more normal in our everyday lives, whether we're aware of it or not, there is a school of thought that believes the rise of AI will only make human interactions and human creations more appealing to us. As we rely more on artificial intelligence, it's real intelligence that becomes more meaningful. In fine food retail it's that human interaction that's most important, and that's something that can't be replaced.

"I don't see front of house being affected much, at least for premium and independent venues," says Colin. "As well as the quality food and drink, people come to our food hall for that customer experience. They want to be greeted by a warm smile, to be looked after by people who genuinely enjoy working with people, and to experience heartfelt hospitality. I think the same goes for the entrepreneurs we work with. It's their passion, creativity and people skills that drive their businesses, as well as their love of food. This is what appeals to our customers. I don't see AI competing with people's appetite for an authentic human experience."

So, if it can't replace us on the deli counter, what can AI do for fine food retailers? Colin notes the differences for fine food retailers compared to other industries, but also acknowledges that AI will affect everyone.

"Hospitality is generally subject to wider socioeconomic forces.

As the Covid lockdown and cost-of-living crisis demonstrate, so if the advent of AI technology has a significant impact upon wider society, then of course that will impact us too. I think it will absolutely affect the operational and backend of our businesses."

Tracking and suggesting

It is, so far, the operational side of fine food retail that's seen the biggest growth area for AI. This is where businesses can really make use of this new technology. Harry Higginson, co-founder of The Deli Society, has already seen the benefits of AI to online operations.

"The Deli Society is a free food and drink members' club. Upon signing up, you can take our two-minute quiz so our AI technology can begin to learn about your favourite foods, wines and the 'absolutely do not serve me this' (blue cheese for a lot of our members). You'll then have a percentage match across every single product across the platform, and the more you rate and review products, the more accurate this becomes. This way, consumers get a fully personalised experience and are able to make more informed



purchasing decisions.

Just like your local butcher, cheesemonger, fishmonger, salumeria and bottle shop, but all in one centralised online location."

For Harry this is a game changer, but he doesn't believe it's inevitable that every business will have to use AI, and some will still thrive without it.

"I wouldn't say it's vital, as there are plenty of businesses succeeding without it and you have 1,000 other variables determining this outcome. However, it certainly helps targeted e-commerce sales through improved personalisation, and trends are showing that over time, consumers are only becoming more demanding for enhanced online experiences."

Like all new technology, there's a bit of a race right now to get ahead with AI, and Colin believes it's a race indies probably won't win.

"Forward-looking businesses that adopt it will be at an advantage when it comes to improving the customer journey. I think larger groups and



chains will be at an advantage here as they'll have more of a resource to implement, although they tend to be less flexible."

Counting the cost

And that brings us to one of the biggest sticking points for indies. While larger chains have the resources to implement new technology, indies will find this a bit more of a stretch. Is it worth the cost? Harry thinks it is.

"In terms of a financial cost, it's an investment to differentiate our offering, engage our community, and develop a new-gen online shopping experience in what's historically been a very traditional and 'stuck in their ways' industry. In terms of more macro costs, of course there are implications of job replacement, fake news etc. However, these are implications for larger companies utilising AI in specific industries. Our technology simply enhances the consumer online experience by providing a more personalised service which we see as only a positive change."

Ironically, Colin sees AI as being able to help with the viability of the cost of implementing AI!

"Any spend will have to be analysed and justified. Perhaps AI will be able to help with that! I suspect there'll be an explosion of agencies offering AI services."

Can AI be an environmental tool?

While there are some obvious uses for AI in businesses in general, there are some more specific uses that apply to food businesses. Lizzie Dowling-Nash, marketing and events assistant at Flourish has found a way to put AI to positive use for the planet.

"At Flourish we use AI technology to minimise food waste. We find this extremely beneficial to helping cut down on wastage and keep track of how much food is used and not used. This kind of technology makes it much easier for us to do better when it comes to food waste. Around 26 tonnes of food are thrown away each day in the UK. Having something like our AI technology can be a simple but effective way to reduce that number."

Lizzie sees this area of use as being in its infancy and is excited about where this road might go. It's one area where every business can get behind.

"As the world is evolving and technology is becoming more and more involved in everyday life, we aim to use it for the best. Welcoming these technology changes can be a step in the right direction, especially for businesses. AI has the ability to help our planet, making a bigger impact on our eco-friendly practices. We have started with reducing food waste by using AI technology but who knows what will come next?"

> "Forward-looking businesses that adopt it will be at an advantage when it comes to improving the customer journey"
>
> **COLIN CAMPBELL, BONNIE & WILD**

> "It certainly helps targeted e-commerce sales through improved personalisation, and trends are showing that over time, consumers are only becoming more demanding for enhanced online experiences"
>
> **HARRY HIGGINSON, THE DELI SOCIETY**

While understanding peoples' wariness of AI, Lizzie sees it as a tool we can all learn to use for good.

"Technology can be a confusing thing, but it can also be used to help businesses like us who source locally where we can and aim to be as eco-friendly as possible. AI can help guide and monitor these important goals of ours and hopefully this can inspire other businesses to do the same."

The future is intelligent

Some small businesses are going to resist AI - because of costs, because it doesn't seem relevant to them, or because of the fear of where this path is leading us all. But now this train is on the tracks it's moving, and none of us can halt its progress. So, should we all get behind it?

Colin is already looking at the ways in which AI can be useful, but understands it's not for everyone.

"It's early days, but we're already exploring ways that AI can improve our service offering, particularly in better understanding our customers and analysing our footfall. In regards to the customer-facing side, we have just had a 3D scan of our venue done. I'm working with the developer, Caledonian Insights, to incorporate AI into the scan with the aim of giving users a more immersive experience of our food hall from the comfort of their homes. I think some independent food businesses may struggle to adapt and utilise, however; and it's one of the benefits of the collective and collaborative approach we take at Bonnie & Wild that we're able to look at this."

It is early days, and we don't yet know the full potential of AI for businesses, but in the end, Colin knows fine food retailing always comes down to human interaction, and AI can never replace that.

"I remain optimistic. While no one can truly predict what impact AI will have, I think people will increasingly come to value the idea of authenticity. Human contact, and friendly, genuine interactions with other people will become increasingly sought-after. Perhaps the rise of AI could see the resurgence of the traditional British pub!"



GET CREATIVE WITH CHUTNEYS THIS CHRISTMAS

Pickles and preserves are an essential part of the festive table, bringing out the best in artisan cheese, charcuterie and cold cuts. Industry insiders share their tips for stocking in 2023

COMMENTATORS



SARAH NORRIS
GODMINSTER



CANDI ROBERTSON
CANDI'S CHUTNEY

A dollop of onion relish with bolshy, aged farmhouse Cheddar. Floral pear chutney with a sliver of brie. A spoonful of sharp pickles to cut through a platter of salami. Preserves are one of the bedrocks of fine food retail, with the ability to elevate any dish. At Christmas time, they really come into their own, transforming the festive lunch, and those cheeky late-night leftovers.

Stocking a good selection, combining old favourites with enticing new varieties, and sampling regularly, showcasing the versatility in each jar, is crucial this season.

Make sure you sample... and support local

Times are tough for independent producers, who've (like every other industry) had to battle rising energy, ingredient, and even glass costs.

The message from the smaller, artisan maker, who can offer traceability, supreme quality, and a point of difference on your shelves is, 'use us or lose us'.

Chef and chutney/pickle producer Candi Robertson of Candi's Chutney, says sourcing has been difficult for her in the last 18 months. "Because, like many others, we only use British produce, it's been tough. We had the weather against us last year, with the heat, which has impacted us this year. We're forever having to think outside of the box. I'll put my order in on a Monday for sugar, and by Thursday, the price will have gone up by 100%."

In a move taken by many others across the supply and production chain, Candi says she's had to nudge up prices – the first time, for her, in six years. "We had to, to continue to be a viable business. There's no choice."

Candi says higher prices shouldn't put buyers off working with independent producers like her, who are able to very quickly adapt their product lines to the seasons, or to pivot if a key ingredient is no longer available. "We've had to learn to be very creative," she adds. "If a retailer wants to try something new, smaller artisans can do it for the next week, which is something larger companies can't do. We can offer bespoke products. In fact, at the moment we're doing a lot of white label work for larger companies who realise their money is better invested in someone else making their products on a smaller scale, in smaller batches, for better quality and consistency."

In terms of trends, Candi says it's that word - 'quality' - that's absolutely key, particularly at Christmas, when customers may up their spend, seeking a treat. "I think, at that time of year, people are willing to pay for what they get. And, like always, they like a story, and to know who's behind what they're buying. Small businesses can give them all of that crucial information."

Candi sees a key ingredient in preserves going into Q3 and Q4 being alcohol. "We've really pushed the boat out and launched three new products this year, all alcohol based. People have had a hard time in the last year, and we know they will want to be a bit more indulgent where they can. They will buy a decent piece of cheese rather than a piece of plastic, and will spend more on gammon, for example. People also want to sit down with sharing platters and charcuterie and grazing boards, and pickles and chutneys are a key part of those."



Look out, says Candi, for chutney infused with ale, cider, or Port wine, this season.

But, she adds, it's always important to stock a few very good, well-made traditional chutneys. "People love a bit of 'different', but with money being limited, they also want to spend on products they recognise and understand. Umami and miso are great, but 90% of Joe public don't understand them."

Sampling is absolutely crucial to the Christmas selling season, allowing retailers to explain new products, and share their old favourites, with customers. Getting producers into store can make a huge difference too, says Candi. "We have such a wealth of information about









our products that we can share with customers. We can tell them which crackers might go with what we make...or suggest a cheese...that can all help boost sales. At the end of the day, we're all here to sell products, and if we can do it together, there's power in that!"

If your shop is on the smaller side, and hosting a producer for sampling might prove tricky, Candi says getting to know your stock is even more crucial. And, again, that's down to having in-depth conversations with the makers.

"We can give retailers lots of advice to pass on to customers. That onion marmalade can boost a lacklustre gravy, the leftover spoonfuls of Christmas piccalilli can be baked into a quiche base, or traditional chutney mixed with sausagemeat makes the best sausage rolls. Chutneys and pickles can be used in a lot of different ways – not just dolloped on the side of the plate."

Creating a centrepiece

As Candi says, charcuterie boards and grazing tables are big news. And often it's what sits alongside the star attractions (cheese and cured meat) that can make or break a platter. Increasingly consumers are looking to 'up their game', seeking the likes of truffle honey, gourmet nuts and dried fruit and, of course, a range of decadent chutneys and pickles.

This is one of the reasons Godminster decided to introduce a series of new chutneys to its product line this year, says head of marketing, Sarah Norris.

"We don't just want to be selling truckles," she explains. "We had to think about who our end customers were and how we can add to their experience. Cheese is fantastic on its own, but we've seen a huge trend for grazing boards. People aren't just going out and buying a blue, a white mould and a Cheddar, they're being super-creative with flavours, textures and colour. So we wanted to think about how we could help elevate their experience and, for us, chutney was key. What is cheese without chutney?" Key to the development was recognising that tradition, and the classics, are still important. "We weren't going to reinvent the category. We wanted to make some fun, quirky flavours, but realised people come back time and time again to those classics."

Taking something recognisable and giving it a twist, has proved the way to success, with the brand launching a Sticky Fig Chutney and Cider Apple Jelly, to sit alongside its traditional Beetroot and Apple Chutney, which has been made to the same recipe for a decade.

Sarah agrees that sampling is important – partnering chutneys and pickles in stores with ingredients that complement and enhance them."Fig chutney with a truffle brie is transformative. There's just something magical that happens when you put those two lovely flavours together."

Cider-based chutneys and jellies could be paired in tastings with smoked and traditional farmhouse cheeses. "Also think about pairing products from the same territory or geography together in store. If you're in Somerset a good hunk of Cheddar with apple chutney speaks of the West Country."

Sarah says the importance of chutneys and pickle sales at Christmas shouldn't be underestimated. Not only do customers align them with a sense of luxury, but there is also a nostalgic hook too. "Those traditional flavours are evocative and comforting and rich, and people will naturally buy them to go with their Boxing Day leftovers or in leftovers sandwiches."

Sample these, she advises, alongside 'modern and funky' flavours that can bring something different to the Christmas table. "Mango chutney could be a trade up for the caramelised onion relish most of us know and love.

"Cross selling and thinking about pairings is a no-brainer. Customers want to be inspired at this time of year, and to be steered towards what goes with what. Make it as easy as possible for them to understand what works best with your chutneys."



SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE 2023 STOCK CHECK



TRACKLEMENTS CHRISTMAS SPICE CHUTNEY
A rich, gently spiced, traditional chutney for the festive table.
tracklements.co.uk



WELSH LADY PRESERVES HOT BANANA CHUTNEY
A rising star and top award-winner for the brand. Nice and spicy and very popular with customers.
welshladypreserves.co.uk



THE GARDEN PANTRY CELERIAC, APPLE AND BEER CHUTNEY
A tempting festive chutney made with homegrown apples.
thegardenpantry.co.uk



THE ENGLISH PROVENDER CO CARAMELISED RED ONION CHUTNEY
A chutney with a satisfyingly crunchy texture and hint of sweetness.
englishprovender.com



BRAMBLE FOODS BREWER'S REAL ALE CHUTNEY
A hearty chutney with a slug of real ale made to a vegan recipe.
bramblefoods.com



ROSEBUD PRESERVES SPICED PICKLED ORANGE
A fresh and piquant savoury marmalade – perfect with ham.
rosebudpreserves.co.uk

SPIRITS SET TO RISE THIS SEASON

You might have your cheese, charcuterie and crackers on order for Christmas, but what about the holes left on your drinks shelves by those long-gone summer beers and spritzes? Now's the time to get into the festive spirit

COMMENTATORS



LIAM BELTON
MASTERS OF MALT



ABBEY MATTHEWS
THE COCKTAIL CO



ROB WALLIS
MOTH



DEANO MONCRIEFFE
MIRROR MARGARITA



TOM MAYES
EDMUNDS COCKTAILS



The amount of shop floor space dedicated to spirits is growing. While there's been a heavy leaning in the last five years towards gin...is it still considered the nation's go-to drink?

Not according to some industry insiders, who say there are lots of other options vying for buyers' attentions this season, as consumers expand their palates and seek something shiny and new for their Christmas celebrations.

Liam Belton, trade lead at Master of Malt, says he's seen some very interesting developments in the industry during the past year. "We've seen some of the biggest growth in the flavoured categories for the on-trade. Flavoured vodka has seen an 18.5% increase, and there has been a 36% growth in flavoured rums," he explains.

Another area Liam says has "boomed" is dark rums (a 111% increase in sales from 2021 to 2022). "We put this down to the fact that bartenders are likely swapping out more expensive whiskies for dark rum to look after their margin."

And the drinks expert has seen massive interest in premium Mexican drinks. Mezcal had a 60.9% uplift in the first quarter of 2023 compared to 2022, and some brands of cachaca and tequila have reported sales up over 250%.

His best bets for buyers over the coming months?

"Luxury-inspired home imbibing. Premium spirits and high end serves that will impressive Christmas guests. And I'm seeing the return of the retro serve, but with a twist - swapping spirits in Christmas classics to bring them bang up to the moment."

Tequila takes centre stage

It might seem the tequila trend has just popped out of nowhere, but according to the Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) that's not the case. Their report last summer showed an 83% rise in tequila sales compared to pre-Covid levels, up in value by 94% in British shops and supermarkets.

Award-winning bartender and tequila expert, Deano Moncrieffe, is delighted the drink is finally making a splash in the industry.

"In my opinion Mexican spirits and agave spirits are the most versatile category in the world," he says. "This plays a huge part in why tequila (and mezcal) have become the second largest category in the US, only being outdone by vodka."

He says this is "huge news" for two reasons. "Number one, because the UK is heavily influenced by US drinks trends. And, number two, this has never happened before.

"Previously the two big categories that had an unbreakable partnership at numbers one and two were vodka and whisky. Now tequila and agave spirits have vodka in their sights."

And Deano is confident this 'takeover' will happen. "It's just a matter of time."

Rum is the spice of life

Like Liam, Ken Schro of The Rum Shop, has seen a keen growth in the spirit in recent years. More than 70% of the shop's stock is rum, or rum-related, and Ken says spiced rum is flying high at the moment.

"We've had all this talk, for years, about rum being the 'next big thing'. It's always happening. Talk to anyone about it, ask them when, and they'll say 'oh we had Covid', or 'it's the interest rates'. I say, yes, rum will be the next big thing. I don't know when, but it's coming."

Ken says the industry as a whole has seen a huge increase in overall rum sales.

"From our point of view there's been a lot of interest in British spiced rum. Lots of micro distilleries are being set up here. They import the molasses or the liquid and do their own production, putting their own twists on it, with ageing and blending with spices."

While spiced rum is proving a heavy hitter, there is a new (ish) kid on the block in this sector – botanical rum, picking up cue from the marketing and language that's been so successful in the gin-making world.

Ken explains, "Botanical rum is not very different, but it's used as a term in the sale of the rum. When you say 'botanical', people think floral, and a bit of spice, some herbs. Ask them about spiced rum, and they'll go to those heavy spices, but spiced rum can also contain flavours of fruit or berries. This is a bit of education. To make people understand spiced rum is so much more than they know."

So botanical, spiced and British rums look to be solid choices for buyers this season. Ken also advises looking for the unusual and extraordinary, so you have some 'showpieces' that will really stand out as gifts on your shelves.

"The great thing about rum," Ken adds, "is, depending on how it's made, where it's from and the different molasses used, you can find something for everyone. It's so versatile as a drink, being white, dark or agricole, with a variety of different ways of ageing it."

The rise of Ready-To-Drink

Are you ready for a more sophisticated kind of cocktail in a can? It appears the British public is. In 2020 and 2021, deep in lockdown, there was a surge in cocktail culture.

As we looked to entertain ourselves within the confines of our homes, makeshift bars sprung forth in back gardens, granny's old side table was fashioned into a drinks cabinet, and sales of spirits soared. According to analysts at Kantar, an additional £199m was shelled out by consumers on wine, beer and spirits in the four weeks to March 2020, while during that month alcohol sales in general were up 22%.

A market leader that took advantage of the sales bump was hard seltzer heavyweight White Claw, which moved an enormous 65 million cases in 2021, helping solidify RTD spirits-based drinks as a major player

According to IWSR's Drinks Market Analysis, the ready-to-drink category is expected to increase its market share to 8% of the total alcohol sector by 2025, with a strong consumer demand for better, bar-quality products. The IWSR also discovered 56% of those buying RTD products said flavour was the most important factor when they considered how premium a drink was, followed closely by branding and packaging.

Rob Wallis, co-founder of MOTH, says he's seen significant growth in RTDs since founding his premium cocktail company. "It's a result of premiumisation in the category when it comes to ingredients, taste and packaging.

"RTDs take the pressure off hosting at home, especially during busy times like Christmas. All you have to do is take a can out of the fridge, then shake and pour it into your favourite glass and serve to your guests."

This season Rob expects Espresso Martinis to remain a hit, closely followed by the Margarita, and a classic Pina Colada.

Abby Matthew, director of The Cocktail Co has also seen a burst of interest in the sector and agrees with Rob that it's been largely consumer-driven as shoppers "increasingly seek convenience and quality".

"With busy lifestyles, people are looking for ready-to-drink options that offer the high-quality cocktail experience without the need for extensive preparation."

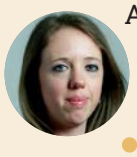
Abby has seen, what she calls, significant improvement in the overall quality of RTD cocktails in recent years, propelled by the explosion of exciting craft cocktails in bars. Brands are, she adds, increasingly choosing premium ingredients.

Several flavour trends have been noted too. "During the summer cocktails with refreshing, fruity profiles have been most sought-after. Drinks with passionfruit, pineapple and citrus fruits evoked a really tropical vibe."

As the weather cools, the demand for seasonal, unique offerings is expected. "Hot-serve RTD cocktails have emerged as a top trend," Abby says. "During the festive season, consumers are looking for quick



THE INSIDER



Anna Ward, senior research consultant at Euromonitor shares her three hot predictions for the drinks sector this Christmas

- Cost-of-living pressures will continue to influence purchasing decisions over the festive period – the desire to celebrate with friends and family will be balanced against the need to cut back on discretionary spending. Some socialising occasions that would previously have taken place in bars and restaurants may be moved into the home due to the comparative affordability of retail prices.
- No and low-alcohol drinks will be an important part of the picture over Christmas. Younger legal drinking age groups, in particular, are prioritising moderation and a mindful approach year-round. The range of alcohol-free adult beverages available continues to grow, providing choice and sophisticated flavours across occasions.
- Rum has been attracting attention for some time but is still worth mentioning as a growth category. Super premium rum is gaining popularity as a complex, sipping drink, adding to the category's versatility. Rum also benefits from the range of flavour profiles covered and suitability for different cocktails. Production spans many countries with distinct production methods and varied brand stories, which aligns well with ongoing demand for provenance in spirits.



and hassle-free options to entertain guests and enjoy themselves. RTDs are the perfect solution, allowing hosts to offer a variety of premium drinks without the need for extensive mixology skills or time-consuming preparations."

Abby picks out flavours such as hot apple gin, and spiced rum punch, as leading the way this season.

Tom Mayes, co-founder of Edmunds Cocktails thinks the Gingerbread Espresso Martini will be one of the hottest drink in RTDs this Christmas. "Cocktail menus can be bamboozling," he says. "A twist on a classic, like the Espresso Martini, is always popular, and a nice way of pushing people slightly out of their comfort zone. We've also seen the Cosmopolitan being really popular this year, perhaps part of the 90s revival and the pink Barbie craze?

"Looking ahead, we're also expecting tequila to continue its strong growth, so we're investing in developing Margaritas, Palomas and Picantes."

THE ONE TO **WATCH**

Tequila might be shining bright at the moment, but a new drinks category is growing apace – plant-based cream liqueurs.

With Mintel reporting 26% of households avoiding dairy products in 2022 (a figure that shows no signs of slowing down), and with British palates tuned to luscious cream liqueurs as the weather cools, the new-wave of plant-based bottles could well prove worth investment in fine food retail.

Market leader Baileys has Almand, but looking beyond the obvious, there are some quirky talking points to discover. They include the completely clear, but luxuriously-textured Wild Abor. Made with natural ingredients, beyond the warm, vanilla/chocolatey original flavour, the brand has launched Cherry & Almond, and Fine Cinnamon & Sweet Cardamom.

While Dirty Cow, puts a fun touch on the category with its quirky branding, offering Loaded Chocolate and Sooo Vanilla no-cream liqueurs that deliver on mouthfeel and flavour, without any dairy.

2023 STOCK CHECK



ADNAMS SLOE GIN

A fruity, jammy infusion of sloes with Adnams' award-winning Copper House Dry Gin.

adnams.co.uk



OATNOG

A dairy-free take on eggnog, filled with wintery spices. For every bottle sold five meals are donated to The Felix Project charity.

blacklinesdrinks.com



FILEY BAY PEATED SINGLE MALT YORKSHIRE WHISKY

Yorkshire's first single malt whisky. Finished in ex-peated casks from Islay. Light, fruity, smoky with hints of vanilla and caramel.

spiritofyorkshire.com



CHRISTMAS GLOBE SPICED ORANGE & CRANBERRY GIN LIQUEUR

A festive light-up bottle, holding flakes of edible 23kt gold leaf in the orange and cranberry-flavoured liqueur.

gravitydrinks.co.uk



SILVER CIRCLE BLOODY MARY

The classic cocktail, in a playful soup can. Made with award-winning black garlic vodka. Each can serves two.

silvercircledistillery.com



MIRROR MARGARITA

The market's first clear RTD margarita, made by an award-winning master mixologist. Each bottle serves five.

mirrormargarita.com



TIPTREE CHRISTMAS PUDDING RUM LIQUEUR

Small-batch craft English rum, distilled with Tiptree's handmade Christmas puddings.

tiptree.com



THE NED NOBLE SAUVIGNON BLANC

A rich, sticky dessert wine, with ripe Sauvignon flavours of gooseberry, nectarine and honey.

marisco.co.nz



8TRACK SPICED RUM

Fine Caribbean rum, infused with eight-year vintage rum from Barbados, Seville orange peel, vanilla, cloves, ginger and cinnamon.

8trackrum.com



JACOB MARLEY'S MULLED WINE

Vegan, gluten-free and only 5/5% ABV. A balanced tipple of cloves, cinnamon and orange with a dry finish.

celticmarches.com



COMMENTATORS



ALISON LILLY
LILLYPUDS



REBECCA WOODSEND
WOODSEND PUDDINGS



GEORGE HOLLYWOOD
GEORGIE PORGIE'S PUDDINGS



PERI EAGLETON
SEGGIANO



THE PROOF IS IN THE (TRADITIONAL)

PUDDING

Christmas puddings and cakes are part and parcel of the festivities, but what should retailers be putting on their shelves in this category in 2023?

According to the data experts at Kantar, British consumers bought one million more Christmas puddings in 2022 compared to 2021.

Being able to celebrate together, after Christmases mired by lockdowns, probably has a lot to do with the uplift. As does, say artisan producers, the desire to connect to a sense of nostalgia.

Multiples may try to sway shoppers with newfangled varieties, but, when all is said and done, it's tradition that continues to sweep the board when they head out to stock up on festive provisions.

Keeping it classic is key

Alison Lilly of LillyPuds predicts traditionalists will continue to insist on a 'proper' Christmas pudding at the table this year, but so-called 'dislikers' will always be exploring the market for an alternative twist.

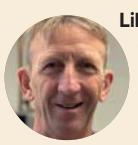
"Most families will serve two puddings at Christmas to meet all tastes," she says, adding that retailers should balance having a range of classic offerings, with a smattering of alternative choices.

"Christmas is the time of year to be nostalgic and, faced with bleak headlines, people do look to food for comfort," she adds. "Whether that's leaning into familiar favourites that feel like a warm hug, such as porridge, pies or toast, or harking back to humble childhood favourites. I think that's why Christmas puddings remain so popular and intrinsic to the celebration, despite the divide between lovers and haters."

Craft pudding maker Rebecca Woodsend of Woodsend Puddings agrees that selecting a high-quality range of traditional puddings is what will stand retail in good stead this Christmas. "There are a lot of options these days, but people do seem to like an old-fashioned pudding. Sampling the puddings is very important because you sometimes really can change people's minds about them. I do a lot of Christmas fairs, and it's wonderful when children taste them. There's no end of amazement from parents when they see that they actually like it."

Rebecca has seen the classic side of her business grow every year, and says that apart from the allure of an artisan product, made by hand, customers are drawn to the fact her puddings have low food miles. Sustainability, Rebecca reflects, is becoming even more important to them. "They appreciate the puddings haven't travelled a long way, that

TAKE THE **CAKE**



Like puddings, Christmas cakes have a special place in most people's homes each year, aligned with a sense of family and sharing.

Todd Lewis, founder of Grandpa's Cakes, says that while new puddings and cakes, putting a spin on the classics, are exciting and innovative, it's tradition that signifies Christmas for most people – varieties drenched in rum or brandy. He's seeing an uptick in rum-flavoured cakes particularly.

"Brandy has always been the go-to alcohol," Todd explains. "Some might say it isn't Christmas without brandy in the cake. When we started making Christmas cakes we followed that trend, but we introduced rum a couple of years ago and were overwhelmed with the response. There's a richer flavour with rum, which marries with fruit so well. They also smell amazing when we're baking them too."

Rum could, then, could prove a good option for your stocklist this year. Todd also suggests having in a few cakes that don't contain nuts. "We don't add any nuts to our cakes. Whilst walnuts add a lovely flavour, we've had more demand for no nuts."

The beauty of Christmas cake, says Todd, is that it's not just for Christmas. In fact, he sells fruit cakes all-year-round, fuelled by customer demand. It's worth spending time doing tastings, and reminding shoppers a well-wrapped cake, stored in an airtight container, will last as a cut-and-come-again treat, sometimes for many weeks, making it one of the most cost-effective goodies they can buy for the festivities.

"I suggest stocking them from early November," says Todd. "They mature with age and will taste even better by Christmas. They have a long shelf life, usually six months or more, so there's plenty of time to sell them."

In addition to fruit cakes, another category is growing in popularity and becoming a staple in foodies' yuletide larders – the panettone. A beautifully-packaged panettone has become a significant part of the Christmas retail offering in the UK. Bound in glossy printed wrap and ribbons, hat boxes or tins, they can help entice customers through the door via a well-thought-out window display, or lure them over to a display stand.

As well as being enjoyed in the home, they are excellent for gifting.

Peri Eagleton, co-founder of Seggiano, says panettones are every Italian's Christmas indulgence. "Unlike bread, the sweet sensation is more lavish and richer in both taste and price," she says.

"It is considered a celebratory and seasonal cake, so it is traditional to gift and eat panettone at Christmas."

The delicacy, revered and loved in Italy as much as us Brits favour our Christmas cake, has its roots in an ancient seasonal tradition in Milan, where family patriarchs would burn a log in the fireplace, and cut up three loaves of wheat bread, offering a slice to their loved ones.

"Only the most skilled producers can create real, authentic panettone," says Peri. "The mother yeast is very difficult to care for."

Peri says to look beyond the packaging, only buying the finest panettones, with a good provenance and long heritage.

Seggiano, for example, works with a master baker in Brescia, who produces each one by hand. The best are made without industrial emulsifiers, stabilisers, binders or



I've made them with my own apples and local ingredients, and they're certainly not mass produced. They can tell the difference."

Alison has also noticed customers becoming more savvy with their choices, but from a financial stance. "They're saving ahead for Christmas to treat themselves to something indulgent or luxurious, while also spoiling their family and friends. We're hoping this year will be the same. Everyone has had to flex their selling strategy to suit behaviours since 2020."

Handmade makes a real difference to quality

Georgie Porgie's Puddings makes 170,000 Christmas and sponge puddings every year, with founder George Hollywood insisting they're all made by hand – as they have been for nearly 30 years.

He says you cannot replicate the flavour and texture of a proper handmade pudding on the mass market, and that retailers who value quality should look to makers of proper artisan puds this season to offer their customers the very best.

"Handmade puddings are lighter and moister than mass produced," he explains. "That's due to the fact we don't use combis to cook them – it's natural steam. A low heat, and slow cooking. That low, moist heat is what makes a pudding special.

"If you use a combi, yes, you can whack up the temperature and it will be quicker but, to me, that isn't a steamed pudding. Ours steam for eight hours. And we make them in batches of 80. The texture and flavour are incomparable."



Like Rebecca, George says sampling is key. He's had lots of new customers buying at shows after taking a tentative bite, discovering the gourmet puddings aren't "dry and heavy, like the ones they've had from the supermarkets".

The handling of the pudding batter is a contributing factor here. "Ours are genuinely handmade. The only machine we have is a paddle mixer. We lightly ball them by hand before steaming them. You can't replicate that with a machine. It's what gives that light, open nature to the pudding."

Maturity is another consideration for buyers. George says a pudding made today is perfectly good to eat tomorrow, but that, "Artisan matured puddings are like fine wine. Maturing gives time for the spices to mingle and all those flavours to come out.

I prefer the flavour of a six-month-old pudding. If your granny was making a pudding, she'd have cooked two or three. One would be for the following Easter, and then the other for the Christmas after. She'd rotate them that way. For me, Stir Up Sunday is too close to Christmas." He advises retailers choose puddings made a minimum of six months before reaching the shelves or, even better, 12 months.

preservatives.

Choosing products that taste good, are made in the proper manner, and with the best ingredients possible, should keep customers returning year after year for their panettone fix.

"Our classic panettone uses cocoa butter, candied fruit paste, natural vanilla, linseed flour and turmeric to add fragrance, moisture and colour to the dough, which is naturally-leavened using a 40-year-old mother yeast, and baked for over 36 hours," says Peri, picking out the finer points of their artisan variety.

Three things, she says, are important to buying – authenticity, quality, and sustainability.

STOCK CHECK



TIPTREE ORGANIC CHRISTMAS PUDDING

A rich pudding, plump with organic vine fruits, French brandy and tawny marmalade. Presented in an earthenware basin with a cloth cover.
tiptree.com



SAL DE RISO CLASSIC MILANESE PANETTONE

Winner of the 2021 World Panettone Championship, made in Campania to the recipe of chef Salvatore De Riso.
sacla.co.uk



VIVEK SINGH'S GARAM MASALA CHRISTMAS PUDDING

Bring a hint of The Cinnamon Club to your customers' Christmas with this headily-spiced number.
cinnamonclub.com



MINDFUL BITES CHOCOLATE VEGANETTONE

A vegan take on the sweet Italian bread, made with sustainably-sourced ingredients.
mindfulbites.co.uk



MACKNADE CHRISTMAS PUDDING

Filled with dried fruit, apples, apricots, almonds and ginger, with a kick from ale and brandy.
macknade.com



SIMPLY DELICIOUS CAKES CHRISTMAS CAKE

A rich, traditional, fruit-filled cake, topped with marzipan and icing. Serves six to seven.
simplydeliciouscakes.co.uk



PUTTING CHEESE CENTRE STAGE THIS CHRISTMAS

Any deli owner or cheesemonger knows Christmas is a key time to clinch sales, as customers seek out the finer things in life. But what should be taking pride of place in the counter this season?



COMMENTATORS



PAUL HEASMAN
ROWCLIFFE



TOM CHATFIELD
EUROPEAN FINE CHEESE



SAM WILKIN
FOOD CONSULTANT

What is Christmas without a fridge full of cheese? From Stilton, with its voluptuous creamy bite and ripples of blue veining, to clothbound Cheddars, tawny at the edges with maturation, there are some key players to consider when building up that stocklist.

But it's worth going off-piste too. Christmas is a great time to introduce customers to new flavours and products, and Mintel's 2022 UK Cheese Market Report indicated innovation and flavour are key drivers for this sector.

Paul Heasman, purchasing manager at Rowcliffe, says a cautious approach should be sought out though, for anyone looking to innovate this festive season. "Cheese has always been a mainstay of Christmas dining; featuring as part of a main meal, occasions, or a major component of casual eating.

"As such, people tend to still use it in this format, with innovation primarily focusing around hot eating occasions. This 'traditional' seasonal eating is not something we anticipate changing. If anything, it should become more prevalent as people's desire to understand artisanal producers and the provenance of their food develops."

A point of difference

Tom Chatfield of European Fine Cheese says sales of cheeses containing truffle continue to soar, likely because of the pungent ingredient's luxury status. He says it's definitely a category cheesemongers should consider stocking for the festive period this year. "We see about 60% of our annual truffle cheese sales in the two months to Christmas," Tom reveals. "It's become a huge category and we've noticed a lot of shops have expanded their truffle lines. It's a staple for many customers at Christmas now, and I really don't think we've reached 'peak truffle' yet – for better or worse!"

Tom also thinks we're in for a renaissance of heated cheese this season, which could entice new customers, hunting for a warming lunch, through delicatessen doors. "Raclettes and fondues seem to be making a comeback," he says. "I think the market has been a bit tired recently in terms of the same repetitive things on counters through the summer. Adding value with a raclette could be a good shout. And investing in some higher quality cheeses with a high price point, which will make a better cash margin, of course.

"We've found having two or three 'hero' products has been a good move. We've been pleasantly surprised that higher priced cheeses are moving."

Know the story of your cheeses

Specialist cheese and drink consultant Sam Wilkin (known in the industry as The Cellarman) says that at an incredibly important time of year, when people are feeling the pinch and watching their pennies, selling the 'dream' and 'story' around cheese is almost as critical as how the products taste.

"Customers want to splash out on the good things in life," he says. "Things that are delicious and bring pleasure – and cheese is top of the list. In a cold hard retail sense, it is a bumper time of the year. The silly season for cheese. But if people are going to part with their money, they want to know more about what they're buying."

As an advocate of British cheese, Sam says he always recommends pointing shoppers in the direction of local varieties, adding that new EU import laws this autumn, will

CATERING FOR ALL TASTES



Johnny McDowell, Indie Fude: "So many customers will only splash out or indulge on cheese at Christmas, so it's important to cater to all tastes, that way you might snare some new real cheese lovers for the future. Maybe have a try with some festive flavourings yourself, such as truffling your own brie, or infusing your Stilton or favourite blue with Port. Also, pre-built cheeseboards are a must, and will help those customers struggling to make up their own mind, or those wanting a cheesy gift!"

Johnny's Christmas stocklist: Young Buck (last year we infused a few rounds with Buckfast Tonic wine and called it Buckie Buck), Single Rose Brie-style cheese by Ballylisk (we truffled ours up last year for a real sense of Christmas luxury)

MAKE SURE YOU'RE WELL STOCKED



Alex Hunt, The Cheese Locker: "Christmas and the general festive season are times where family, friends and loved ones get together to celebrate and reflect on the past year and look forward to the future. Food, especially cheese, is often seen as a luxury, and representative of good times. By having a large and varied range of cheese as well as cheeses that are particularly suitable for the festive period, you can enhance the experience of customers and ensure that those fond cheese memories are ever so more perfect and everlasting.

"As many other retailers will likely echo, it is important to plan early. Even if it is just pondering about the coming Christmas many months before. Keep in mind aspects of changes within the economy, and the changes that your wholesalers are going through. It's crucial to stay connected with them more and more as the festive season closes in.

"Also, communicate with your customers. Many will have already started thinking about Christmas; especially when it comes to cheese.

"And watch your growth. Keep in mind and consider the number of new customers you have acquired since last Christmas, and make steps to get ahead through communication via online systems, pre-orders and discussions with neighbouring businesses. It's near impossible to get it perfect, but I would say it's better to have a bit too much cheese than lose out on sales."

Alex's Christmas stocklist: Delice de Bourgogne, P'tit Valley, buffalo milk Camembert, scooping Gorgonzola, Godminster Vintage, Jacquin Buchette Aux Fleurs (one of 2022's bestsellers), Mayfield Swiss



affect the cost of cheese coming in from the continent, making cheese produced on UK soil appear more keenly priced.

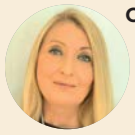
"I definitely predict an uptick in British cheese sales because of the new legislation around paperwork and the consignment of cheese," Sam explains. "Cheeses people might have enjoyed traditionally at Christmas may be more expensive, so they might be encouraged to look more domestically."

In addition to mainstays such as Stilton and Cheddar, he recommends stocking Baron Bigod (particularly the truffled variety). "But there are so many other producers to seek out too. Pevensey Blue, which is Gorgonzola-like, is excellent. Or a nice Ticklemore. I also highly recommmend Yarlington – a savoury showstopper washed rind that's a collaboration between a cider maker and a cheese maker."

Sam thinks 2023 should be the year fine food retail looks closer to home for drinks pairings too. "More and more shops, including La Fromagerie, are carrying a good amount of stock of cider now. They are perfect with cheese at Christmas. Well, any time of year really. I mean 100% crafted cider from juice. There are some brilliant ones coming out of Devon, Somerset and Herefordshire, made by people who have as much crediblity as cheesemakers. If you go back over 100 years, many of the farmhouses in Somerset made cheese in one room and cider in another. There's a real affinity between the two. What better time of year to celebrate that affinity?"



CURATE FANTASTIC GIFTS



Caroline Blaydon, Wildgoose Fine Foods: "Amongst all the culinary traditions at Christmas, there is one that no festive celebration should be without – the Christmas cheeseboard!

"Cheese has a long history of being associated with Christmas. In centuries gone by, before the advent of refrigeration, its long shelf life allowed diners to enjoy a feast of varieties throughout the winter months.

"For the majority of small retailers, the week leading up to Christmas is the busiest and most lucrative time of the year and there are a number of ways we can maximise the selling opportunities.

"Firstly having a diverse selection. This is the cornerstone of a successful festive season. Offer customers a wide variety, ranging from those traditionally found on the festive cheeseboard (from mild and creamy Camembert and Stilton, to aged Cheddar – to more unsusual varetiies which add an element of excitement and discovery for them to impress their guests.

"Next, think about creating gift sets. Presentation is key when looking to maximuse sales. Design and prepare festive cheese boxes which showcase an assortment of cheeses, along with complementary accompaniments such as crackers, chutneys and, if licsensed, a bottle of wine or Port. Beautifully-wrapped sets are perfect presents for loved ones, or business customers looking to purchase staff gifts.

"Consider hosting tasting events at your store and, if possible, invite a local cheesemaker to come in and talk to your customers about their cheese. Again, if you're licensed, offer wine pairings too. These interactive events encourage customers to be more adventurous."

Caroline's alternative Christmas stocklist: Old Weydeland Gouda (a fabulous alternative to Cheddar, aged for over 1,000 days with a deep, nutty, caramel flavours and subtle crunch of salt crystals); Oxford Blue (described as a French-style English blue – soft, creamy and moist with aromatic, tangy, spicy qualities); Wigmore (a soft, hand-washed curd cheese with sweet, fruity tones that mature to hints of burnt caramel and nuts); Redwood Smoked (a firm, mild Cheddar, aged for nine months, smoked and dusted with paprika for a complex, savoury flavour with a hint of spice and smoke); Oxford Isis (a beautiful British alternative to Epoisses, washed in Oxford Honey Mead which gives the cheese its fantastic colour and sweet taste)

> "Design and prepare festive cheese boxes which showcase an assortment of cheeses and complementary accompaniments"





GODMINSTER BLACK TRUFFLE VINTAGE ORGANIC CHEDDAR
A punchy, smooth Cheddar, rippled with fragrant truffle.
godminster.com

SNOWDONIA CHEESE COMPANY ROCK STAR
Aged in Welsh slate caverns. Mature with a lovely bite.
snowdoniacheese.co.uk



PITCHFORK CHEDDAR
Clothbound with lard, then matured for 10 months for its signature flavour.
trethowanbrothers.com



TWO HOOTS BARKHAM BLUE
Made from Channel Island milk for a buttery, rich taste.
twohootscheese.co.uk



LONG CLAWSON SUNBURST
This crisp and tangy white Stilton is tempered and sweetened by the addition of dried apricot.
clawson.co.uk



COLSTON BASSETT STILTON
A classic, award-winning Stilton. A must-have for any Christmas cheeseboard.
colstonbassettdairy.co.uk



CLEMENCY HALL SHROPSHIRE BLUE
A classic well-rounded blue with a creamy texture and balanced flavour.
rowcliffe.co.uk



VILLAGE MAID DAIRY MINI MAIDA VALE
Tangy and punchy with a buttery flavour.
villagemaidcheese.co.uk



LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

THE CLASSIC CHOICE FOR CHRISTMAS

Le Gruyère AOP has been savoured at celebrations since the 12th Century. Artisanal and versatile - it's the perfect centrepiece for your cheese counter this festive season



In family-run village dairies located in the picturesque western cantons of Switzerland, the internationally-renowned cheese Le Gruyère AOP is made by expert hands using skills passed down the generations for centuries.

A heritage cheese

The history of Le Gruyère AOP begins in 1115, when the inhabitants of five neighbouring regions of Switzerland – the town of Gruyères in the Canton of Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Jura and Bern – transformed the milk of their cattle herds into cheese. In the 900 years since then, the knowledge and techniques established by its original makers have been upheld to the delight of cheese lovers across the world. By 1762 the cheese was officially named and its provenance noted in the dictionary of the Académie Française, but despite this, the style of the Le Gruyère AOP was often imitated to create lesser-quality wheels until – following discussions held across Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – it was awarded AOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) accreditation across Switzerland then certified AOP (Protected Designation of Origin) across Europe.

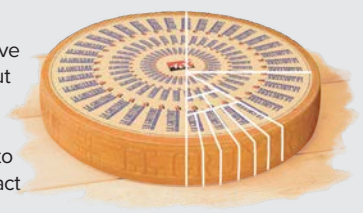
The 170 dairies which produce Le Gruyère AOP are expected to uphold the rigid specifications set by the accreditation at every stage of the production process, from the cows producing the milk to the ageing of the cheese – keeping the high quality and unique, delicious flavour of Le Gruyère AOP consistent.

Unique and versatile for all ages

This consistent flavour has played a huge part in earning and maintaining the worldwide popularity of Le Gruyère AOP, as well as numerous awards. Its distinctive yet subtle flavours are both unique and versatile, making it popular with consumers of all ages as well as delicious served in a number of ways, from a flavourful addition to a cheeseboard to melted in a fondue.

HOW TO CUT LE GRUYÈRE AOP

Cut the wheel in half using a cheesewire then cut into quarters using a double-handled knife – halve these quarters into eighths, then cut the top half into three wedges and the bottom into six slices. Wrap the cut portions with clingfilm in order to avoid the cheese getting into contact with the air.



TASTING NOTES

Le Gruyère AOP is available in two ages, each of which displays subtle differences in flavour:

- **Le Gruyère AOP Classic** (aged six-nine months). Nutty, sweet and refined – delicious melted and popular with fans of mild cheeses
- **Le Gruyère AOP Réserve** (aged 10 months and up). Aromatic and full of flavour – its complex, mature flavours make it a popular choice for a cheeseboard

DID U KNOW

LE GRUYÈRE AOP IS NATURALLY GLUTEN AND LACTOSE-FREE, MEANING THAT COELIACS AND LACTOSE-INTOLERANT CHEESE LOVERS CAN ENJOY THE CHEESE TOO.



> "Le Gruyère AOP's distinctive yet subtle flavours are both unique and versatile, making it popular with consumers of all ages as well as delicious served in a number of ways"

SUISSE SVIZZERA SWITZERLAND SCHWEIZ

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SAMPLING

Letting your customers try before they buy could make a huge difference to your bottom line

Ah, the allure of the deli counter. A feast for the senses. Layer after layer of temptation – from wheels of fine artisanal cheeses, to cured hams, neatly tied salamis, and terrines glistening under aspic.

This is the heart of the operation, isn't it? The place most mongers and deli owners will dedicate a significant amount of time to.

But, have you ever considered that the altar of delights you curate week after week, might be a little... overwhelming for the average passing customer?

Dizzied by choice, there is a chance they might walk in, have a cursory look, and slink back out the door.

This is where the power of sampling – and good product knowledge – comes in.

How to sample

Gently ushering customers up to the counter, and letting them have a nibble of a few of your wares is a vital part of any deli operation. Not only is it an ice breaker, but it could be the beginning of an education. Mark Kacary, owner of The Norfolk Deli, says deciding what you'd like to promote, slicing it into morsels and allowing people to try for themselves, "Works, but has its disadvantages, in that it encourages the 'I haven't had lunch yet but I'm hungry' brigade, who will pick as many pieces as they can before scuttling off. But it does allow for some others to taste and ask about the cheese and, more often than not, if you combine sampling with customer engagement then a sale is the net result."

If his pre-cut samples aren't a customer's cup of tea, Mark sees this as a chance to open up another suggestion, but adds, "I never believe somebody when they adamantly state that they hate all blue cheeses. 'You just haven't tried the right blue cheese', I would say. 'What type of blue cheese have you had? Was it something like this?'. As I point to the Stilton 'yes' is often the reply, in which case I suggest that just to satisfy a pet project I have, they try a little piece of Montagnolo. 'What's the worst that could happen?'.

He says around 80% of the time he manages to win an unsure customer over, and that tasting and sampling is the most crucial part. "Unless you taste the cheese, or give people the opportunity to do so, don't be surprised if you're not selling as much as you would like."

Simon Jones of Forest Deli says he always lets customers taste new cheeses, or ones they haven't happened to have tried before.

Like Mark, he's less of a fan of ready prepared samples, saying trying products should be a more personalised experience. "We definitely find that just having a plate of some samples to try with a cocktail stick doesn't really get the customers engaged! Getting customers to talk about cheese and what they like is always fun, and helpful, as that makes it easier to recommend other cheeses to them, and ones for them to avoid."

Simon also sees sampling as a way to share on his expertise. "We'll talk about the importance of taking cheese out of the fridge quite a while before eating," he explains.

"A really sharp Cheddar straight from the fridge does not give all of its flavours up!"

Creating events around samples and tasting are key too, Simon adds. "We have tasting events every Saturday afternoon. We offer three cheeses with the relevant crackers and condiments, along with local beer, cider or wine. The area only seats eight, but every week all the participants chat with each other and recommend cheeses to others, which gets people wanting to try more."

Ross Parrock, of Mill Street Store & Deli says there's another advantage to sampling. "It's beneficial to us, because it helps us control our stock. For example, I over ordered on Morbier recently. It was the biggest piece ever! So I've been getting everyone who comes in store to try it, and it's almost gone. It would have just sat there if we hadn't sampled it. So we do this strategically quite a lot to rotate stock, giving us the opportunity to clear our space in the counter to bring exciting new products in regularly."

> "Getting customers to talk about cheese and what they like is always fun, and helpful, as that makes it easier to recommend other cheeses to them"

Striking up a conversation

Mark's favourite way of selling is to see every single conversation as a chance to get a prospective customer to sample some cheese. "Talk to customers. Ask them questions. Work out what they mean by 'strong cheese'. 'Have they heard of X or Y? If not, why not try a sliver?'. At the end of the day, getting someone to try a tiny amount could be the difference between a sale and seeing them walk out the door as they march off to the local supermarket. I want people to discover the miracle of cheese. How a single ingredient can be turned into so many different varieties."

Ross agrees this is the best approach. "Anyone can order in 40 to 50 cheeses, but you can't just expect customers to know what everything is."

Ross's store is active on social media, letting regulars and new customers know that Wednesday is 'new cheese day'. But he says it's also important for whoever's at the counter to be approachable. "Chatting with customers we can get to know them and what they like. But it's also so important to know your stock so you are ready, when you're sampling, with a few bullet points about each cheese. Who made it. How it's wrapped. Where the milk comes from. Something more interesting than the fact it might be a cow's milk cheese, or that it has a washed rind.

"We can put in leading questions. What do they like? What wines are they interested in? And sometimes from that we can tailor-make the rest of their shopping for them."

Building brand identity is another big reason to strike up those chats, he adds. "We very much promote British cheese, especially cheese from Suffolk and Norfolk, where we're based. Tastings are a good way to showcase 'local', especially to people from out of town, or tourists. Often they'll end up buying the whole local range because they want to take home a reminder of their trip to the countryside."







EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ADAPTOGENS

Adaptogens are mainstreaming and becoming big business. But what should retailers consider before investing?

Adaptogens have swept through the food and drink sector, attracting the attention of health-conscious consumers. But for the uninitiated, what separates these products from other healthy alternatives?

Adaptogens were traditionally an area for the health food stores and supplement shops alone. However, as more research indicates the health and wellness benefits they can offer, they're quickly becoming more attractive, and mainstreaming into other independent food stores. Now is the perfect time to read up on them, and learn which products to stock.

What is an adaptogen?

Simply put, adaptogens are certain herbs and mushrooms believed to have health and wellness benefits, such as managing stress. Increasingly, they are added to food and drink products rather than being available as powders and capsules only.

"Adaptogens are a unique class of herbs, medicinal mushrooms and medicinal food that support the body's response to stress and improve health parameters, including immunity, reducing inflammation and supporting longevity," explains the expert medical herbalist and chief formulator at Adaptogenic Apothecary, Sara Rooney.

In the food sector, adaptogens are part of the growing interest in functional ingredients.

How do adaptogens work?

Adaptogens are said to help consumers adjust – or adapt – to stressors, supporting the body to restore balance, also known as homeostasis, by triggering stress-protection responses.

Silvia Mocsari, founder of Honey Heaven, which has created a honey made with adaptogenic mushrooms, explains, "Adaptogens are plant extracts that work by affecting certain body tissues and organs to reduce stress and fatigue, and restore the body's natural balance, especially when you're under



pressure. They can also improve performance, focus and mood."

As with many growing areas of interest at the intersection of food and health – like gut-friendly foods – more research is needed to scientifically prove these claims.

Why are adaptogens so popular?

"The concept of adaptogens has made a big and exciting shift in the food market," Sara says. "Since the pandemic, customers have become a lot more invested in their health and wellbeing and how, as intelligent consumers, they can proactively support their wellbeing through their food and drink choices," she adds. Silvia agrees that the Covid pandemic has made more people conscious of their health.

"They are increasingly interested in trying to find alternative, natural medicines that work with the body," Silvia says.

"Medicinal mushrooms and other sources of adaptogens fit the bill exactly with their wonderful health boosting properties, making adaptogen products increasingly popular."

Are adaptogens safe?

"The key point about adaptogens is they are non-toxic, safe to incorporate into food and drinks, and support the body's stress response," Sara explains. "An adaptogen is effectively a tonic. They have been used safely and extensively in Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine through millennia." Health experts recommend anyone thinking about trying adaptogens should discuss them with their doctor – particularly if they're taking medications. This is an important factor in the selling of any adaptogen product.

What are the types of adaptogens?

There are dozens of plants considered adaptogenic, but these are six of the most well-known types commonly available in retail:

MACA

Maca root, from the Peruvian Andes mountains, "increases libido in both male and females without overstimulating like caffeine. It was used traditionally to increase stamina and support hormone balance in indigenous communities in South America," Sara says.

ASHWAGANDHA

Research has linked this shrub, which grows in India, the Middle East and some areas of Africa, to stress relief. "It is a prime example, calming and supporting the nervous system whilst reducing anxiety," Sara says.

GINSENG

This herb, which has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for centuries, is believed to boost memory and promote calmness, while also claiming to improve the immune system.

LIONS MANE

If you've heard of a medicinal mushroom, it was likely lions mane. Sara says it "originates from China and has been clinically researched to improve cognitive function and productivity, as well as reducing brain fog in peri menopausal women".



TURMERIC

A spice originating from India, which is touted for its ability to reduce depression. It is also thought to have anti-inflammatory effects.

TULSI, OR HOLY BASIL

This plant, which is native to southeast Asia, is believed to reduce physical and mental stress, as well as anxiety and depression.

How should fine food retailers approach adaptogens

If your customers are interested in foods that boast health and wellness benefits, introducing an adaptogenic product to your shelves might give your sales a welcome boost.

Adaptogenic coffees, wellness drinks and adaptogen powders are some of the most common forms these products take, according to Sara. "Ashwagandha, lions mane and maca are key examples of how these ingredients can be incorporated into food and drink for ultimate wellness options for the health-conscious market."

Other examples include Brite's adaptogenic soft drinks and Fungtn's Lions Mane IPA.

But more and more, producers like Silvia are beginning to experiment with adding adaptogens to their formulas, and we could soon see an increase of more options for stocking. "There are already a raft of adaptogenic products available: coffee, gummies, ice cream to name a few, and we believe we are the first to market with our Mushroom Honey," Silvia says. "I expect there will be increasing experimentation with adaptogens in the coming years – anything's possible!"

With many consumers leaning towards naturally healthy products, retailers who take a punt on adaptogenic products could see success by emphasising their natural benefits. "Adaptogens, like those from the medicinal mushrooms in our honey, are entirely natural, so the positive effects they have on the body are gentle and entirely natural too," Silvia says. "Adaptogens are a fantastic way to restore balance when under pressure and improve performance and focus, naturally."

With so many options available, Sara recommends consulting with an expert to choose the right combination for your market, product and customer. "Each adaptogen has its own unique benefits and strength so it is important to combine correctly for the best result," she says.

Snowdonia ramps up for Christmas with two exciting new product launches

Award-winning British cheesemaker, Snowdonia Cheese Company, has invested in not one, but two new product launches this autumn.

On the heels of rising consumer interest in hot cheese, the brand is releasing two cheese bakes, presented in eco-friendly, reusable terracotta ramekins for consumers to pop into the oven at home.

Each 150g serving is crafted with the finest natural ingredients, designed to share.

Black Bomber Welsh Rarebit combines the best-selling extra mature Cheddar with wholegrain mustard, Worcestershire sauce and a splash of craft ale, while Rock Star Fondue Cheese Bake will take customers to the Alps, melding the vintage cave-aged Cheddar with black pepper and Sauvignon Blanc.

A perfect match to either of these is Snowdonia Cheese Company's second major launch – three varieties of premium crackers, designed to work with any of the brand's 12 cheese truckles and chutneys.

Handcrafted in small batches with all-natural ingredients, the selection includes Wholemeal & Extra Virgin Olive Oil Crackers, Spelt & Natural Yoghurt Crackers, and Fig & Cranberry Crackers.

Commercial director Richard Newton-Jones, says, "Since the launch of Snowdonia Cheese 22 years ago, we have been committed to crafting exceptional cheeses, created using only the finest ingredients. Now, we're excited to further expand our product offering with a new collection of crackers designed to pair with our existing range. The natural next step as the brand continues its growth in both the UK and international markets."



St Helena makes its international debut

Putting your products out on the global stage is all at once thrilling and nerve-wracking, says cheesemaker Julie Cheney of White Wood Dairy (at Fen Farm in Bungay). Julie and Blake Bowden's washed rind variety, St Helena, will make its first international appearance at the Slow Food Movement's Cheese event in Bra, Italy this month.

"The event has been out of kilter in recent years because of the pandemic," Julie says, "But it's now in full swing again, and I am delighted St Helena will be there for the first time."

Julie says, as a small batch maker, the chance to have a moment in the spotlight is vital to the growth of her business, adding that it's a "joy" for St Helena to represent the 'best of British' in what has become a showcase for traditionally-made cheese. "The fair used to be all sorts of cheeses," Julie said. "But five or six years ago Carlo (Petrini, founder of the Slow Food Movement) said it's become an unwieldy beast and he wanted to get back to its roots. So now it's only raw milk cheeses, which is a real boost for all of us who work so hard to get it right. It's a delight to show what we do to our European counterparts and friends."



Red Fox refresh and major marketing campaign set to boost sales

Belton Farm's best-selling Red Fox aged Red Leicester has undergone a major brand refresh as it looks to widen its appeal. Central to this is the adoption of a more eye-catching pack design, featuring a vibrant colour palette, and greater emphasis on the brand's 'jaunty Fox'.

The new-look Red Fox packs and shelf-ready packaging will start appearing in leading national and independent retailers this month, with similar pack refreshes for the wider 'Fox Family' of White Fox and Smoked Red Fox, being introduced later this year.

Since its launch in 2017, Red Fox has become the leading branded Red Leicester on the market, building a loyal fanbase of predominantly older ABC1 consumers. The new pack design aims to retain these loyalists by keeping much of the brand's core visual identity, but at the same time is intended to attract new, younger consumers through its more colourful and contemporary on-shelf presence.

The refresh is being complemented by a major social media and influencer campaign focused on reaching a younger demographic and in particular food-loving Millennials, with high profile PR, sampling activity and in-store promotional activations. Red Fox's online campaign will run from September through to Christmas, primarily being delivered through increased presence on Facebook and Instagram.

Justin Beckett, managing director of Belton Farm, says, "As the leading brand of Red Leicester, Red Fox has always been the essential signpost on the cheese fixture for consumers seeking to extend their cheese repertoire beyond simply Cheddar. Since its launch, Red Fox has added value, excitement and incremental sales to the cheese category, and our investment in refreshing the brand and enhancing its marketing support is set to reinforce this. We believe that our new more vibrant and colourful pack designs will not only retain our loyal Red Fox consumers, but also attract new younger cheese lovers looking for a taste and texture sensation."





'Time to appreciate our artisans'



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

In the UK cheese world, the word 'artisan' and its use is not protected, therefore making things a little tricky. Real artisan Cheddar is largely made by hand using a single herd's milk, or bought from a trusted farm. This includes adding the cultures, rennet, cutting the curds, salting, pressing, and wrapping the cheeses in cotton muslin. Each cheesemaker will have their own unique Cheddar recipe, some going back hundreds of years.

If you join in with the Great British Cheddar Challenge GBCC (a six-cheese blind online tasting on 16th September) you will be amazed how different artisan Cheddar tastes - largely due to the terroir and aspect from which the cows graze. The biome of the ageing rooms is totally unique to the cheesemakers, with each carrying its own characteristics. Just like a fingerprint is unique to every one of us, so the same is true of artisan Cheddars. Let me explain the differences.

Artisan Cheddar is more often made with raw milk. This helps to give each handmade cheese its unique identity. Every batch will be wonderfully different according to the cows' diet and lactation cycle, and the biome where the cheese is aged.

Block Cheddar is made on a huge scale. Imagine an artisan producer that makes circa 150 tonnes of cheese a year. In comparison to an industrial block Cheddar factory that can easily produce more than 200 tonnes of cheese a day.

Block Cheddar is pasteurised, as the milk comes from many sources. This reduces the depth of flavour, which is clearly present in artisan varieties. Often block Cheddar uses other cultures not associated with true artisan Cheddar production to give a sweeter taste.

Artisan producers will often have their own herd of dairy cows, or buy milk from a good local dairy. Industrial block Cheddar producers will have milk delivered from hundreds of dairies up and down the country and even from overseas.

Cheese vats used in factories are generally closed and contain thousands of litres of milk. Some giant vats contain as much as 30,000ltrs.

Artisan producers use open vats that are sized according to the yield of their herd. Sizes of artisan vats generally range from 200 - 5000ltrs. The size will only mirror the milk yield of their herd, or the local milk sourced. Industrial closed vats are mechanised, reducing human intervention. Open vats used in artisan production allow producers to see the milk and work it by hand.

Block Cheddar is cut into large blocks and aged in vacuum packs. This is done to avoid wastage. It gives each product a uniformed taste with, I think, little character. Artisan Cheddar, though, is generally aged in cloth, with a fat coating the cheese. There is natural shrinkage, giving a unique rind micro flora, leading to a complexed paste.

Artisan producers encapsulate the biodiversity of their flora and fauna in each cheese. This is done by careful land and animal management. True artisan Cheddar producers will only use sustainable and ethical methods. Their hard work shows itself in the quality and taste of the cheese produced – with a full, complex flavour that is expressive and keeps giving. Artisan raw milk Cheddar can naturally contain probiotics great for our own micro biome. Pasteurised block Cheddar does not contain probiotics although occasionally they can be added.

Block Cheddar has less length on the palate and depth of flavour. The milk used is pasteurised and normally from numerous farms.

Learn more! Join The Great British Cheddar Challenge on 16th September at 7pm with host and funny man, Marcus Brigstocke. You can buy tickets through various retailers or go to 2poundstreet.com for more information.

> "Artisan Cheddar is more often made with raw milk. This helps to give each handmade cheese its unique identity. Every batch will be wonderfully different according to the cows' diet and lactation cycle, and the biome where the cheese is aged"

CHEESE OF THE MONTH: ASIAGO DOP



Milk: Cow's
Variety: Hard, pasteurised
Colour: Pale straw to golden hay
Size: 11-15kg wheels
Country of Origin: Italy

Asiago is an expression of its landscape – a wild, lush region that was largely chosen by settlers after the Roman Age for its 'hidden' 'away from it all' location. Many settlers crossed the border from Germany, which led to the creation of a new native language, Cimbro.

Eponymously named for the decoratively colourful village in northern Italy, close to the foothills of the Alps, Asiago DOP is produced to exacting standards, approved and presided over by the Veneto-Trentino Consortium for the Protection of Asiago Cheese.

Criteria dictates these cheeses may only be made with milk from cows (five varieties, from Grigio Alpina to Burlina) which graze in the hilly Vincenza region, and that Asiago DOP can only be produced within four provinces in north-eastern Italy.

Any Asiago DOP produced and matured at dairies within these boundaries and located more than 2,000ft above sea level, will have the additional identifying label 'Product of the Mountains'.

Asiago Pressato is a whole milk cheese, heated twice, salted, wrapped, pressed into rounds and dried in a frescura. It's cured in brine and typically rested for 20 to 40 days.

Asiago D'Allevo, on the other hand, is produced with whole and skimmed milk that's heated three times, with a longer salting, turning and brining process. It is either finished by dry salting or soaking in brine. Asiago D'Allevo must be matured for at least 60 days and is usually aged from four to 15 months.

Tasting: Asiago DOP is available in many states of maturity. Chosen young, it is fresh, light and citrussy, a 30-day matured Product of the Mountain variety will give over grassy, almost floral notes, and there are cheeses taken to 10 to 15 months, becoming intensely savoury with a touch of spice.

Drinks Pairing: Asiago Pressato is a good match for pale Belgian beers and German weiss beer. As you work your way up the maturity levels, pairs could include Riesling, Pinot Gris, Soave, and lighter red wines. Elvira Dmitrieva from Independent Wine, which specialises in bottles from small, family-owned farms in Italy, suggests a Sauvignon Blanc. "Italy offers several distinct styles of Sauvignon wine. This is because it boasts a great diversity of soils and climates, from Mediterranean to Alpine. For Asiago we recommend a Sauvignon from Marche, grown on pebbly soils in a warmer climate, it's full of tropical flavours with notes of guava, lime, gooseberry and lemongrass with a hint of white flowers."

A retail perspective: Olivia Contini is part of the family that owns Edinburgh's Italian speciality food shop Valvona & Crolla, and is responsible for the store's cheese buying. She says, "Asiago is such a popular cheese, especially amongst our Italian customers. It's one of the ones that if we stopped stocking it, there would be riots. Perhaps not to the degree of Parmigiano or Gorgonzola Dolce, but it's up there as one of the four standard cheeses we have to sell.

"It's quite a simple cheese really, but lovely. We sell Asiago Pressato. It's semi-hard with little holes in, and a fairly delicate taste. I like that it's not an overpoweringly smelly cheese. I'd liken it to having the qualities of a French Raclette because it has lovely melting properties.

"The majority of our customers just eat it as it is. But you can cook with it. In our café-bar we have a lovely dish of chicken wrapped in pancetta and we often put a strip of Asiago in the middle as it melts so nicely."

Cooking tips: Encourage customers to use Asiago in dishes from the Veneto region – enjoying mature versions with radicchio rosso di treviso, or melted over risotto. It can also be incorporated into chichetti snacks. Italian chef Giampiero Romani tells *Speciality Food*, "In Italy Asiago is a table cheese, with a sweet and delicate aroma. Its flavour is characterised by notes of walnut and a lemon aftertaste. The texture of 'really old' Asiago is very hard, grainy, intense and penetrating.
This is excellent with polenta, mushrooms and red wines. It is possible to use Asiago for quiches, salads, polenta and pasta."





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CLEAN VEGAN

Opportunity knocks for indies who can offer low and no-meat and dairy dishes made from real ingredients, says Sally-Jayne Wright

In 2018, more new vegan products were launched into the UK than anywhere else in the world (Mintel). A feeding frenzy ensued where everyone from Tesco to Marks and Spencer launched their own 'plant-based' range. But in 2023, there are signs the bubble has burst.

In June, Meatless Farm, supplier of meat alternatives to Byron Burgers, Itsu and Pret went into administration. Oatly, maker of the hugely successful oat milk, chose to withdraw its ice cream range from the oversupplied UK market. Heck reduced its meat-free range from 10 to just two products.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE FLATLINING OF BRANDED VEGAN SALES?

- the market is overcrowded
- now that fake meat, cheese and fish are no longer novel, there's scrutiny of their ingredients
- consumers associate soya, included in many of these foods, with climate damage
- there are health concerns about ultra-processed foods especially after a BBC Panorama documentary and a book Ultra-processed People by Dr Chris van Tulleken
- The cost-of-living squeeze. In December, Which? found plant-based alternatives could cost twice as much as meat

ARE VEGAN FOODS ULTRA-PROCESSED?

Many shop-bought fake foods are. A typical fake meat burger contains pea protein, canola oil, coconut oil, rice protein, flavouring, methyl cellulose (a stabiliser) and potato starch and is, as one critic put it, 'the equivalent of a Turkey Twizzler in vegan form'.

WHAT ABOUT PLANT-BASED MILKS?

More than one-in-three consumers buy these (Kantar). They count as ultra-processed if they contain more than five ingredients, and additives such as vitamins count. Current legislation doesn't allow organic plant-based milk to be fortified. Consumers are confused and some avoid milks with even rapeseed oil believing it to be inflammatory.



WHERE DOES THE TERM ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS (UPFS) ORIGINATE?

It comes from the Nova system of food classification which originated at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Endorsed by the World Health Organisation, Nova groups all food as: un- or minimally processed; processed culinary ingredients; processed foods; and ultra-processed food. It's believed soaring rates of cancer, obesity and diabetes are associated with too high a proportion of UPFs in the diet.

I'M A FINE FOOD RETAILER. HOW IS THIS RELEVANT TO ME?

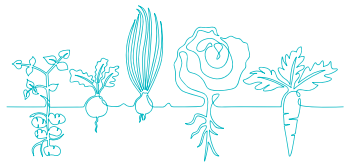
Consumers want food that's good for the planet and also good for their bodies. Dezi Dalton of the Rye Deli says, "Staples that our customers return for are authentic curries. Drawn from my own heritage, these recipes were vegan generations ago and have a provenance. They pre-date the age of artificial additives and preservatives."

HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE CLEAN VEGAN TREND?

- dump the rigid carnivore-versus-vegan thinking. Only 1-2% of consumers are full-time vegans but many more are flexitarian. Meat, but not dairy-free options, appeal to a wider proportion of customers.
- modern foodies love world flavours and often choose them on meat-free occasions. Offer dishes that have always been vegan whether a Japanese tofu, mushroom and seaweed broth or an Ethiopian stew
- exotic flatbreads and toppings make vegan stews and soups more substantial
- be imaginative with salads. Dezi offers broad bean and pea with lemon vinaigrette, edamame gluten-free spaghetti with fresh seasonal veg, and sweet chilli chickpeas. She replaces honey in recipes with agave syrup to make dishes suitable for all.

WHOSE BRANDED 'CLEAN VEGAN' INGREDIENTS DO YOU LIKE?

At IFE this year we tasted an excellent Malaysian curry containing jackfruit imported by Buckley and Beale. Sustainable jackfruit grows like a weed in India, doesn't need irrigation and would go to waste if not sea-freighted west by the Jackfruit Company. Adrian Beale says, "Forget canned jackfruit; it's too waterlogged to take on seasonings and spices. Raw jackfruit sold in pouches can be marinated and works in everything from pulled pork tacos to shepherd's pie."



IT'S BELIEVED SOARING RATES OF CANCER, OBESITY AND DIABETES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH TOO HIGH A PROPORTION OF UPFS IN THE DIET

OUR CUSTOMERS LOVE MEAT. HOW DO WE MAKE THEM FEEL LESS GUILTY ABOUT EATING IT?

Less but better is a good start. Sell them real stews made from wild British venison. Or put a cull yaw mutton curry on your menu; it's made from retired ewes that have lambed for the last time. Eating goat meat from billy goats born into the dairy industry uses up what would otherwise be a waste product. Educate staff and explain on your socials why such meat is sustainable.

AND WHOSE MEAT-FREE READY MEALS ARE HONEST?

Christina Baskerville was ahead of the trend when she launched Easy Bean in 2008. She worked in tropical agriculture in Latin America and Africa, and learnt that pulses can be both nutritious and tasty. Colourful dishes made with 100% natural ingredients include French green lentil and sweet chestnut ragout, and Moroccan chickpea and aubergine tagine.

We are also big fans of the award-winning frozen dahls made by Bini Fine Foods of Somerset.

WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF THE CLEAN VEGAN TREND?

Delicious, hopefully. Helping to judge vegan ready meals at the Great Taste Awards this spring, I noticed a step up in quality. Whereas in 2021 and 2022, entries had been politically correct but monotonous eating, this year, much more care had been taken.

If we stick to real food, with culinary heritage - rather than edible industrial substances and fakery – the future should be tasty indeed.

> "One in three customers buy plant-based milks today"

The Life & Soul of the Pantry

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CELEBRATE ALL THINGS NEW AT THIS YEAR'S SPECIALITY & FINE FOOD FAIR

One of fine food and drink's biggest events is back this September, filled with inspiration

Speciality & Fine Food Fair returns to Olympia London on 11th-12th September, celebrating the latest new products, initiatives and trends in the world of food and drink.

For more than 20 years the Fair has been a trusted product-sourcing resource for buyers across the UK, from independent retailers and delis, to supermarket multiples, from café owners to restaurant chains, and from global wholesalers to speciality distributors of artisan food and drink.

Buyers and industry professionals are eagerly awaiting this year's event, with Steve Reice, CTO of Artisan Food Club, commenting,"For me to leave my desk to attend a trade show, it needs to be something special. When it comes to Speciality & Fine Food Fair, there is no decision to make. Hands down the best trade show in the UK. I achieve more in one day at SFFF than I do across all the other shows combined."

Nicky Wildin, sourcing manager at Mudwalls Farm, adds, "I've been visiting Speciality & Fine Food Fair as a buyer for 14 years. As a buyer, it's my duty to hunt and seek out the best possible food and drink products, and understand emerging trends.

The Fair connects me with producers and industry experts. It's a brilliant community, and I always leave feeling inspired and fuelled with knowledge."

This year's event welcomes back food development consultancy FDReviews for the Producer Advice Hub, a section of the show where visitors can book a 15-minute session with an industry expert to fast-track their food and drink product or idea.

Nicky Woods, event manager at Speciality & Fine Food Fair comments, "We can't wait to welcome the who's who of the food and drink sector back to the Fair for two inspiring days, discovering delicious new products, hearing from insightful industry leaders, and networking with peers."



ARNA FALCO



Arna Falco redefines indulgence for the conscious consumer. Handcrafted in Valencia using natural plant-based ingredients, Arna Falco offers premium vegan chocolate that combines exquisite taste and exceptional mouthfeel. Made with sweet tigernut milk, its creamy tones and silky smoothness make it the perfect alternative to dairy milk chocolate. Visit its stand to sample the award-winning chocolate-coated Marcona almond bonbons that are 'a boon for those who can't have dairy but also a treat for those who can', according to Great Taste Award judges in 2023.

Stand 2764

rbrunt@arnafalco.com
arnafalco.com

COSMAN & WEBB FARM



Established in 1977, Cosman & Webb Farm has been producing the finest, most pure, organic maple syrup for nearly half a century. Nestled in the Eastern Townships of southern Quebec, Canada, the brand sustainably taps maple trees in a traditional sugar bush. Naturally, the business believes that its dedication to clean and ecologically sound practises is reflected in the exquisite taste of Cosman & Webb Townships Organic single forest maple syrup. Simple, pure, and tastefully packaged, they hope you enjoy it as much as they do.

Stand 2632

info@coswebb.ca
coswebb.ca

STAG BAKERIES



Based in the Scottish Outer Hebrides, Stag Bakeries is a family-run bakery with a heritage dating back to 1885. Traditional recipes and time-honoured methods remain at the heart of every product their skilled craft bakers make. The result is a product range trusted on quality and provenance. Stag's signature product is its Seaweed Water Biscuits. Named Best Scottish Speciality Product in 2013, the product pairs a classic water biscuit recipe with a blend of three seaweeds to provide a truly unique flavour full of character. A great option for canapés, this biscuit provides a delicious platform for fantastic snacking combinations.

Stand 1601

sales@stagbakeries.co.uk
stagbakeries.co.uk



THE START-UP VILLAGE

The Start-Up Village is a bustling hub at the heart of the Fair, packed with over 60 exciting, up-and-coming food and drink businesses. Visitors will have the opportunity to meet with passionate brand owners as they launch innovative new products, pushing the boundaries of taste, and pioneering in the field of sustainability.

From artisanal chocolates to craft spirits and niche superfoods, the Start-Up Village also cultivates an atmosphere of collaboration, allowing like-minded entrepreneurs to connect, learn, and grow.

This year's event will showcase the likes of CHO26, a business that takes pride in its crafted jelly cocktails made from natural ingredients. The jelly cocktails, which include flavours such as Negroni, Old-Fashioned, Roasted Apple Sangria, Passion Fruit Martini, and Wild Berry and Peanut Butter, are vegan, gluten-free and non-GMO.

The section will also feature LIQUEURIOUS, a small-batch award-winning liqueur brand. The business has a unique range of tea and coffee liqueurs, and its mission is to share the excitement, adventure and theatrics a little tipple can convey.

For buyers looking to spice up their product range, Chili Maven & Mi Adelita brings magic to meals with the flavour and fire of authentic Mexican salsa macha, handmade with a special blend of dried chillies seeds and nuts.

Spanish brand Arna Falco will be at the Fair showcasing its plant-based milk chocolate-coated almonds, handmade in Valencia using tiger nut and sunflower seed milk.

For fans of delightful Korean flavours, BOMBOM creator and chef Seji will be on hand at this year's event to share the company's range of products with buyers.

BOMBOM began with a supper club in Wimbledon in 2018, which led to a range of exciting collaborations and pop-ups in East London restaurants. It was clear customers liked Seji's food and sauces, so she took flavours that people love and developed them into her very own line of Korean sauces. Visitors can expect traditional condiments with a twist, packed with umami flavour, and naturally vegan. Charcuterie buyers will be spoilt for choice as they meet with Bray Cured, an award-winning British charcuterie brand offering a range of artisan cured meats.

As they explain, "We call it new British charcuterie, because alongside the other great artisan cured meat producers across the country, we're making Britain's mark on the traditional world of charcuterie.

We use exceptional British rare breed meat, experiment with new techniques, put twists on old favourites, and create new flavour profiles from British food influences, especially the things that grow around us locally."

Deukes is on a mission to change our relationship with honey.

With a long history of beekeeping on the family farm in Moldova, the team know how incredible different varieties of honey can taste. Rich. Sweet. Earthy. Deep. Woody. And yet, all too often, the factory process of mixing varieties and adding sweeteners, makes every jar on the shelves taste exactly the same.

Deukes' collection of raw monofloral varieties, each with a distinct taste and harvested using sustainable practices, is here to make honey extra special again.

Crafted in Kansai on the island of Honshū since 1889, KIYOKO is an extraordinary Japanese aperitif infused with freshly squeezed yuzu, one of the world's rarest fruits, handpicked on centuries-old farms of unparalleled serenity and beauty. Visitors won't want to miss the opportunity to sample this unique and delicious drink.



NEW PRODUCTS AT THE FAIR

It's not just the Start-Up Village which will be brimming with new products at this year's event. The Fair will be awash with exciting new product launches from brands of all sizes.

Visitors will have the chance to sample FHIRST Living Soda, the 'fhirst' of its kind, all-natural, zero sugar, gut lovin' living soda that combines the benefits of both probiotic cultures and prebiotic plant fibre. A next-gen soda which not only tastes great but is good for you too.

The Cambodian farmers involved in the Ibis Rice project grow a regionally specific variety of long-grain jasmine, locally called Phka Rumdoul - voted best in the world five times.

At the Fair visitors can sample rice cakes and cereal manufactured through Ibis Rice and packed in Cambodia using locally-grown ingredients.

In addition to showcasing its diverse range of bakery products, Arundel Bakery will be at the event to launch its exciting new vegan range. Meanwhile, Mademoiselle Macaron is attending with its new, large handmade French macarons, perfect for the foodservice sector.

Also, The Truffle Guys will be showcasing their exciting new truffle hot sauce, and Hatari by Fiesty Foods will be bringing a wide range of brand-new sauces, jams and salts to the event, including Smoked Habanero Chilli Salt, Chunky Chilli Oil, Smoked Chilli Oil and Chilli Mash Pots.

EXPERIENCE INTERNATIONAL INNOVATION

In addition to an amazing range of UK businesses, the Fair will also showcase products from over 30 countries around the world.

Fiji Ginger, as the name might suggest, is a specialist in preserved ginger from Fiji Islands. The business imports and exports ginger as syrup, crystalised and pickled for sushi, packed in the company's own facility in Holland for the retail and foodservice sector.

H & A Nader - Lebanese Fine Foods & Wines, has delved into Lebanon's rich and diverse cuisine to import top ambient brands, including seasonally preserved foods, distilled flower waters, olive oils, aromatic zaatar, zesty sumac and highly regarded and delicious Lebanese wines.

Flanders producer, The Nutty Farmer, has developed a delicious range of Fairtrade cashew nuts, handmade on its farm in Belgium. Able to be enjoyed as a snack or a topping on a dish, they come in four adventurous flavours, including Burning Buffalo (smoked herbs and hot spices), and Happy Hippo (pomegranate and Oriental spices).

Food Export USA Northeast will be presenting a range of products including hot sauces, barbecue sauces, bitesize pretzels and delicious snacks from the Spritzal Cookie Company, while Daesang Corporation, Korea's leading general food company specialising in fermentation, will be showcasing brands including Jongga and O'Food.

Elsewhere at the Fair, visitors can discover Banhoek Chilli Oil, which is handcrafted in small batches in the beautiful Banhoek Valley near Stellenbosch, South Africa. Using only the highest quality rapeseed oil and Thai birdseye chillies, Banhoek Chilli Oil delivers the perfect combination of flavour versus heat. It contains no preservatives, and is 100% natural and GMO free.







THE TRENDS THEATRE

The Trends Theatre will be the go-to place for visitors to the Fair to get bang up to date with the very latest trends in food and drink and the speciality retail sector.

Research and industry insights are at the heart of this year's seminar programme. Waitrose & Partners innovations manager, Lizzie Haywood, will be offering five top tips for retail success, and Charles Banks of thefoodpeople, with Kelly Dowson of F!S Group, will be presenting a deep dive into the 2023 Future Food Trends Tracker.

Banks comments, "It's always a pleasure to speak at Speciality & Fine Food Fair. The team make participation so easy, and do a great job of raising awareness of the stages and presentations that sit as part of the event. It goes without saying that it's an amazing opportunity to come together with the wider sector and share our trend foresight to support visitors and exhibitors in shifting the future of food and drink by harnessing the power of trends."

Belle Lawrence, associate director at Immediate Future, Matthew Bond, creative director at Project D, and Olivia Vachon, marketing manager at Eataly London, will be taking to the stage to unveil their closely held social media secrets, and providing insight into how retailers and hospitality professionals can elevate their brands.

Later, Vhari Russell, managing director of The Food Marketing Experts, Louis Bedwell, managing director of Mission Ventures, and Alexander Mair, founder and managing director of All In A Box, will be joining forces to discuss the current state of NPD, and whether recent product launches are prioritising novelty over the genuine needs of the consumer.

Bedwell comments, "Speciality & Fine Food Fair is the leading event in the industry for the discovery of the top brands of tomorrow. The best new brands meet an important consumer need.

"As issues of sustainability and health become more important, it's great to see the benefits of great new product development and how it can solve challenges for both industry and consumer. I'm looking forward to taking part in the discussion."

In a panellists session entitled 'Exploring the Power of Insights for NPD', food industry coach Amy Wilkinson, food industry consultant Lucy Wager, Food Industry, Differential Insight founder Mark Whalley, and Mintel associate director Ayisha Koyenikan, will be discussing how food and drink professionals can spice up with NPD strategy with actionable insights and thought-provoking talking points.

Wager comments, "It's such an honour to be speaking at Speciality & Fine Food Fair. For years I attended as a brand owner gaining so much from the event. To now be able to come back and speak at the Fair, sharing my knowledge, and hopefully helping other producers is a full circle I am so proud of."

Wilkinson adds, "I am excited to be chairing the panel on the power of insights for NPD. As someone who has worked in both functions in the food industry, I can see how insights may often be misunderstood as a term by those working on new product development and I know this discussion will help to debunk the myths about the term and be really helpful for the audience."

Sarah Horssnell, head of buying at Appetite Me, will also be presenting a valuable session on optimising the customer experience though visual identity.

She says, "The importance of visual merchandising in a retail environment can often be underestimated. Join us to discuss the impact that great visual merchandising can have in transforming a space, improving commerciality and setting your business apart. We will discuss the thought process behind great display and how to use visual merchandising as a powerful tool to improve the customer journey."



Also in the Trends Theatre, culinary consultant and chef Steve Walpole will be welcoming a host of industry experts to explore the latest trends, flavours and opportunities in global cuisine and using a range of products from the Fair to cook up some delicious dishes.

Walpole will be covering topics including how to celebrate sustainability in the kitchen, going back to basics with natural products, showcasing the best of British, and demystifying Japanese ingredients.

"I can't wait to be back at Speciality & Fine Food Fair, cooking up a storm with some amazing guest speakers," says Walpole. "Join us to discover some of the most exciting trends in food and drink, and to sample some of the best products on offer at this year's Fair."

Another exciting addition to this year's content programme is the launch of the Power Breakfast, in partnership with Flanders Investment & Trade. This year's edition will see retail and business expert Kate Hardcastle MBE taking to the stage to discuss the very latest trends in food and drink retail, and the state of the UK high street. This exclusive event is open to senior industry leaders across retail, hospitality and foodservice, and takes place before the Fair opens on Tuesday, 12th September.



THE SPECIALITY & FINE FOOD FAIR AWARDS

Each year the Speciality & Fine Food Fair Awards are a highlight of the two-day event, celebrating innovative independent retailers and quality brands. This year's awards include recognition of the best small and large independent retailers, in partnership with BIRA (the British Independent Retailers Assocation) and a brand-new category for the very latest NPD from producers at the Fair.

The 'Not Yet on the Shelf' category is open to products that are not yet listed in any retailers: truly new products representing an exciting future for the food and drink market.

"The introduction of the 'Not Yet on the Shelf' award is a fantastic idea for both the brand and the retailer," comments Adrian Boswell, food buyer at Selfridges and awards judge. "In an industry where it's becoming increasingly difficult to have a point of difference, a focus on this area plays an important part of giving retailers the opportunity to be first to market and provide a launch pad for exciting new brands."

The shortlist for this category is:
- Cherry and Almond Jam by Winnie's Original
- Truffle Hot Sauce by Truffle Guys Ltd
- Chestnut Gnocchi by Cornwall Pasta Co
- Spherika Date Pearls by Pescaviar S.L.

The New Product of the Year – International category celebrates products from international businesses taking part in the Fair, with entries from all around the world sampled by the panel of industry judges.

The shortlist for this category is:
- Truffle Chocolate by chocoMe kft.
- 16 Chocolate Tasting Box by Culinaris UK Ltd
- Dark Chocolate with Jerk Seasoning by Pure Chocolate Jamaica
- Marshmallow Crunchies by Turtle

New Product of the Year – UK showcases exciting new products being launched at this year's event by producers at the Fair.

The shortlist for this category is:
- Goldstone Rum by Goldstone Rum
- Tiny Tee's Dirty Martini by Whitebox Cocktails
- Non-Alcoholic Ginger Wine by Jackson Roze

Sustainability Pioneer of the Year is a category which can be entered by businesses, individuals or initiatives demonstrating a pioneering, industry-leading approach to ESG and environmental concerns.

The shortlist for this category is:
- Date Sultan
- Bay Coffee Roasters
- Golden Hooves
- Two Farmers

The Small Independent Retailer of the Year award, in partnership with BIRA, is presented to a pioneering smaller retailer at the heart of their community. The winner will be a forward-thinking independent retailer with less than £500,000 annual turnover and/or 10 or fewer employees.





The shortlist for this category is:
- Date Sultan
- Willow Tree Delicatessen
- Refill Therapy Ltd
- Drapers Lane Delicatessen

The Large Independent Retailer of the Year award, in partnership with BIRA, is presented to a pioneering retailer with over £500,000 annual turnover and/or more than 11 employees. The winner is a forward-thinking retailer, a real advocate for independent businesses, and leads by example to push for change and development for the industry on key agendas.

The shortlist for this category is:
- Flourish at Glenavon Farm
- Cobbs Farm Co Ltd
- Grasmere Gingerbread®
- The De Beauvoir Deli

Outstanding Industry Champion, nominated by leading professionals in the sector, will be announced alongside the award winners on day one of the Fair on 11th September at Olympia London.

The judges for this year's event were Selfridges food buyer Adrian Boswell, Minall co-founder Stephen Minall, Food Marketing Experts managing director Vhari Russell, Tara Mei, founder of Mahalo Supplies, culinary consultant Steve Walpole, and Laura Roberts, owner of Laura's Larder.

Roberts comments, "It was a wonderful experience being a judge for the Speciality & Fine Food Fair Awards. The session was emotional and opinionated - as it should be! We were challenged and excited in equal parts by an array of interesting, fun, and purposeful products. I'm looking forward to the year ahead!"





THE DRINKS CABINET

At the centre of the Drinks Cabinet, the heart of all things drinks at the Fair, the Inspiration Bar will see in-depth sessions across the two days from Mixology School, providing advice and guidance for visitors looking to make the most of the drinks products they stock.

The team will be taking deep dives into topics such as low and no, the Bloody Mary, the Daiquiri and the Spritz.

Zoe Cunliffe, director at Mixology School, says: "We can't wait to head back to Speciality & Fine Food Fair this September to provide key insights into the latest drinks trends, highlight some fantastic new products and pairings, and advise speciality retailers on how to upsell and elevate their drinks offerings." Visitors to the Drinks Cabinet will also be able to meet with brand owners for a wide range of quality drinks brands such as Bemuse, a company that has reimagined the world's oldest brewed drink – mead – to create a refreshing, non-alcoholic, sparkling, low-calorie drink for modern tastes.

Other businesses taking up residence in the Drinks Cabinet include colourful gin liqueur brand Reverand Hubert, quality RTD cocktail brand Whitebox Cocktails, and organic tea brand Tea Bird Tea.

Squeezed will be launching a new RTD fresh orange and vodka can, plus Jamaican rum punch brand Punch Daadie will be showcasing a new 'rum punch in a pouch'.







Join the who's who of the retail and hospitality sector at Speciality & Fine Food Fair 2023, taking place on 11th-12th September at Olympia London. To learn more about everything happening at this year's event, and to register for your complimentary trade ticket, visit **specialityandfinefoodfairs.co.uk**.

CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABILITY AT THE FAIR

An exciting new addition to Speciality & Fine Food Fair this year is the launch of the B Corp Guide, in partnership with Cotswold Fayre.

Sustainability has sky-rocketed up the agenda for many buyers, and B Corp has emerged as one of the leading certifications for businesses demonstrating a high level of verified performance, accountability and transparency across their ESG efforts.

The process to achieve B Corp certification is a rigorous one, requiring engagement from teams, departments, partners and suppliers throughout a business, which is why these suppliers are being particularly highlighted at this year's event.

Itself a B Corp, Cotswold Fayre has been leading the way when it comes to sustainability in food and drink wholesale, and has been a source of inspiration for many in the sector.

Among the producers set to be showcased in the guide is Tracklements, offering more than 50 handmade pickles, chutneys and more, including Strong Horseradish Cream, Sweet Mustard Ketchup and Fresh Chilli Jam. The business sources UK ingredients wherever possible, supports British farmers, generates its own electricity, and reduces food waste by embracing wonky fruit and vegetables.

The guide will also feature English Tea Shop, a global business with sustainability at its core, using 100% organic ingredients and predominantly sourcing from small-scale organic farmers in Sri Lanka.

Another proud B Corp, Golden Hooves, produces delicious, award-winning cheese made from 100% regeneratively farmed milk. The business is on a mission to preserve land for future generations by reversing diversity loss and sequestering carbon.

Sustainable snack brand and B Corp John Altman wants to make our world a little more fun and beautiful. John Altman's popcorn, sweet potato chips and nuts are 100% natural, artisan made and without unnecessary additives or e-numbers.



GOLDEN HOOVES



Golden Hooves is a brand new award-winning, planet-positive, British farmer-supporting Cheddar cheese, made with milk from happy cows farmed traditionally and regeneratively, encouraging increased biodiversity in our wonderful countryside. Oh, and did we mention that it is absolutely delicious too? Don't just take our word for it, try it for yourself. As part of First Milk, the regenerative co-op,Golden Hooves is working with 700 farmers across Britain to make a change for good and you can really taste it in this rounded and rugged cheese.

Stand 910

leonamcdonald@firstmilk.co.uk
goldenhooves.co.uk

TRACKLEMENTS



The life and soul of the pantry. B Corp certified Tracklements handmakes a range of over 50 of the highest quality mustards, condiments and relishes in a sustainable, ethical and traditional way. Voted best supplier of pickles and chutneys for 12 years on the trot, the brand has won over 180 awards and continues to make its products in small batches using the very best ingredients, sourced locally and regionally wherever possible. Available in retail and foodservice formats.

Stand 1910

sales@tracklements.co.uk
trade.tracklements.co.uk



GODMINSTER



Deep in the heart of Wessex, where landscape and legend intertwine, and character and curiosity are around every corner, lies Godminster.
Born in Bruton, the brand brings the spirit of the West Country to the cheeseboard. Every truckle tells a tale – of myth and mystery, taste and tradition – made hand in hand with the land.
Godminster's mission is to be at the heart of the cheeseboard of life. Why? Because a cheeseboard is a centrepiece that brings people together around the table, and it's got something for everyone to enjoy, just the way they like it.

Stand 1420D

info@godminster.com
Godminster.com



FINAL CALL

We talk a lot about small luxuries in these pages, and that's because fine food so often takes a starring role in the celebrations, occasions and little happy moments in our daily lives. Something as simple as a special tipple brought to a family do, or a few artisan cheeses for a dinner party with friends, can brighten a day and bring smiles to everyone involved.

We're living in strange times. Food price inflation is slowing, but it's still much higher than last year. Yet affordable luxuries provide an unrivalled pick-me-up. Fine food retail shops are Aladdin's caves of exciting treats. They're places for customers to wander and explore. Discovering new products from local makers, traditional heritage brands and innovative producers is a huge selling point for those visiting a farm shop, deli or food hall, so it's critical to keep your finger on the pulse of new and exciting product launches.

So what's in store over the autumn and beyond? It's safe to say that this summer wasn't what most of us expected. After a warm start, July was a washout. But as I write this, the weather has taken a sunny turn and things are looking brighter for retailers again. With fingers crossed for the coming months, we're looking even further ahead to that north star on the retail calendar: Christmas.

After a summer that didn't quite live up to expectations, it feels only natural to expect shoppers to make the most of the festive season when it comes. This seems to be where the expert research is pointing, too. Over the summer, data from Kantar revealed that planned spending on Christmas food echos the numbers we saw last year, when shoppers sought to celebrate in style after the end of Covid-19 restrictions. Half of adults surveyed agreed with the statement, "I like to splash out at Christmas," and 4.7 million intend to spend more than usual on Christmas presents. The countdown to Christmas is well and truly on!

We love hearing from our readers. Do you have a story to share or expertise to pass on? Please get in touch with courtney.goldsmith@artichokehq.com

5 MINUTES WITH
DOMINIQUE WOOLF, FOUNDER OF THE WOOLF'S KITCHEN

WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I'd be a singer-songwriter. I did this pre-kids and even played a gig at Glastonbury once!

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
Double glazing sales.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Hearing the behind-the-scenes stories from successful entrepreneurs. Knowing they all experienced failure and that success didn't happen overnight really inspires me to keep pushing on.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
My double-glazing sales job - I'm so glad to have done it, but we had to call through the phone book, and calling elderly people in their homes felt quite intrusive. I was only 16 at the time though.



WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?
I love being creative in the kitchen and coming up with new products.

AND THE LEAST?
The operations and accounts.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
Food is such an exciting industry - I love hearing about new products and brands. Again, the worst bit would be to do with the logistics and red tape.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
Champagne and crisps (ready salted), followed by a Thai street food meal. Chargrilled satay and pork skewers (moo ping) would be up there, along with prawn miang and a really authentic pad Thai. For dessert I would have something really chocolatey, doused in a caramel.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
Start before you're ready. And don't be a passenger. Life is too short!

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
Fermented pressed fish roe in Milan.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE COOKBOOK?
My own - Dominique's Kitchen. So many people tell me how it's transformed their mealtimes, and that they've never cooked so much from a cookbook before.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
As a cook, savoury is my thing. But I have a wicked sweet tooth.

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SOUL FRUIT 100% KEO MANGO CRUNCHY CHIPS

These new snack packs from Soul Fruit (joined in the range by jack fruit and dragon fruit crisps) tick a lot of boxes. Each 20g pack of naturally gluten-free and vegan crisps is made with sustainably sourced Keo mango, and counts as one of your five a day. *Speciality Food* was very impressed with the results. Many of the fruit crisps or chips we've tried have been disappointingly chewy. But that's not the case here. Every bite has a satisfying snap, and the fruity, exotically aromatic flavour of mango shines through. With no added sugars or artificial preservatives, flavourings or colours, we think they're a nice addition to the 'healthier snack' market.

soulfruit.co.uk

RESERVA, THE CHESHIRE CHEESE COMPANY

Formerly known as The Cheshire Cheese Company's Rioja and Caramelised Onion variety, this cheese has had a glow-up, being encased in the new branding, featuring a cheeky cat. Reserva is one of the tastiest truckled cheeses we've eaten. It's made with the cheesemakers' signature extra-mature Cheddar and has been expertly balanced. Often cheeses infused with caramelised onion miss the mark, being overly sweet. However that's not the case here. Reserva is creamy, smooth and rich with savoury Cheddar notes, with the lightest of tangs from onion and wine, which allow the cheese to shine through. A nice addition to those Christmas cheese counters, and available as 200g truckles for retail.



cheshirecheesecompany.co.uk

NAKSHA ASAM PEDAS

Naksha has teamed up with renowned chefs and leading international bodies to create a series of easy-to-use meal and dessert kits. We were pretty impressed by the Asam Pedas kit, which drew on the deep tradition of layering in Asian cooking, adding different ingredients at different times. Taking less than 30 minutes, the stew was silky and rich in texture, but with a light, fragrant flavour, and a creeping spice.



nakshacollections.com

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Sam Idione, head chef, Roots + Seeds Kitchen Garden

We recently opened on the edge of Grade I listed Cirencester Park, close to Cirencester town centre. We're an all-day, farm-to-fork café/restaurant using homegrown ingredients (we have a ¼ acre kitchen garden on-site), and other produce sourced from within a 25-mile radius. It's our ambition to supply the kitchen with all our own fruit, vegetables and herbs by 2025. Having a ready supply of freshly picked produce at its absolute prime, delivered to the kitchen door every morning, makes getting into work every day so exciting for me.

Sustainability is very much core to everything we do here. Produce is prepared on a weekly cycle, with daily-changing blackboard specials to maintain low to zero food waste, and I use locally-reared beef, lamb, pork and poultry from Jessie Smith Butchers in Cirencester. They've been around for decades, and know an amazing amount about their suppliers, and exactly where every animal comes from.



This autumn we'll be buying game from Deer Park, who source direct from the Bathurst Estate and its neighbouring shoots. And we take daily deliveries of fresh, sustainably sourced fish and shellfish from Kingfisher Brixham.

We always have vegetarian and vegan options on our menus, so keeping a good supply of fresh fruit and vegetables is key for us.

We take delivery of extra locally-sourced produce from Four Seasons Fruiterers in nearby Cricklade. The quality is outstanding, and they always keep us posted in advance of any necessary price hikes because of unavoidable shortages due to last summer's drought and any other rising production costs.

This really helps us stay ahead and prepared to adapt and change menu plans and swap out ingredients for those more readily available quickly.

I'm very much inspired by this produce. My food is influenced by innovative ideas and contemporary twists on modern British and traditional French cooking.

I've worked for Rick Stein in Padstow, at The Clove Club in Shoreditch (which showcases the best produce from the British isles), and two-Michelin Star restaurant Patrick Jeffroy in Brittany. I've also headed up the kitchen for one of David Beckham's legendary summer garden parties.

I like to take my knowledge and experience to create light dishes that are beautifully presented and made with the best ingredients. Fortunately, we're really spoilt for choice in this part of the country.

There are an incredible number of small independent farmers and suppliers in the Cotswolds.

> "Sustainability is very much core to everything we do"

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo

SMALL PASTA - MIGHTY DIFFERENCE

Get to know your tiny pasta shapes this autumn



Cast your eye across the dry goods section of your fine food store. Undoubtedly there will be pasta. And lots of it. Long spindles of spaghetti. Palm-sized shells. Bendy elbows of macaroni. The versatility of pasta is vast. But while the average consumer is largely clued up on all the classic varieties, ask them what they know about the teenier cuts and they'll likely be stumped – unless they're partial to whipping up the occasional minestrone.

Understanding your stock is absolutely key in independent retail, for pointing customers in the right direction...and endowing them with inspiration to try new things regularly.

Why not take the opportunity, as we move into the cooler autumn months, to get to know dried pasta shapes better?

To start, it's worth letting your customers know that properly made, bronze-cut pasta from an artisan producer is infinitely different to what's typically available in vast quantities at supermarkets. Bronze-cut pasta's porous nature allows it to draw in sauces, so every strand and curl is coated with flavour.

As for those tiny pasta shapes. Let's take a look...

Capellini Spezzati: These thin, wispy strands are just perfect for bulking out brothy soups.

Stortini: A squiggly pasta that lends itself to unctuous, creamy sauces.

Farfalline: Lovely little 'butterfly wings' which scoop up chunkier sauces beautifully.

Lumachine: A teenier version of those giant snail shells. Pair with a wine-rich sausage sauce.

Orzo: A filling, substantial alternative to rice in risotto, or dressed with seasonal vegetables, herbs and good olive oil.

Pepe Bucato: Like macaroni...but smaller. A nice choice cooked down into a cheese sauce for feeding up fussy toddlers.

Semi di Melone: Fashioned into 'melon pips'. Use in broths and soups to add body.

Stelline: Wistful miniature stars which never fail to delight children in sauces, and a perfect addition to soups...for all ages.

Ditali: Thimble-like tubes that work brilliantly with lentil stews and soups.

Ditalini rigati: A ridged pasta that has extra clinging power. Use with your best sauces.

Directing your customers online or in store towards classic Italian recipes that showcase tiny pasta is a nice way to drive engagement. Think of Italian wedding soup (meatballs and pasta in broth), pasta e fagioli (beans, pasta, crumbled sausage and seasonal vegetables), pasta e cece (pasta with chickpeas) and pastina soup (a soothing blend of chicken stock and pasta often dosed out when people are under the weather).



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