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WELCOME

Welcome to *Artisan Essentials 2024*, brought to you by the team at *Speciality Food*.

We're very proud to present this valuable publication, packed with insight and inspiration into a wide variety of issues and topics impacting the fine food retail world – from how to bring extra revenue into your farm shop, to the trends to be aware of, and getting the best out of your team.

We hope you'll find it useful as you plan and prepare your business goals over the next 12 months.

In addition to advice and tips from fine food store owners and experts, we share profiles of some of the brands and products worth stocking to offer your customers a raft of exciting new flavours this year. Until next year.

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CONTENTS

4 How to bring extra revenue to your farm shop

11 A guide to setting up a farm shop

18 The big food and drink trends for 2024

29 Make the most of your visual merchandising opportunities

32 How to get the best out of your staff

36 The importance of social media

38 Essential tools for cheesemongers

42 Do loyalty schemes work in fine food retail?

44 How to align with eco-conscious customers

48 Are you thinking about introducing own-label products?

CONTENT

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artichoke

HOW TO ADD EXTRA REVENUE TO YOUR FARM SHOP

From accommodation to Champagne bars, greater numbers of farm shops are adding that extra little bit for customers, with positive results

Once upon a time, the average farm shop provided exactly what it said on the tin. But more modern businesses are building on and adding to their success by adding extra facilities for customers to enjoy.

Happy children means happy parents

A big draw for customers is children's facilities. As The Little Pig Farm Shop's Emma Stevenson says, "Happy children mean happy parents!"

Playgrounds or soft play centres provide a welcome distraction for youngsters while their parents go off to stock up on food and drink in the farm shop, or sit themselves down with a coffee or soft drink.

> "WE JUST WORK ON ADDING COLOUR TO PEOPLE'S JOURNEYS WHETHER THROUGH FOOD...OR EXPERIENCE"

"Children are catered for at Teals with the menus and through products (particularly in the gifting area) and wild spaces that they can explore outside," says Ash Sinfield.

Parents seeking an enjoyable but affordable outing can seek inspiration from their local farm shop, many of which have plenty to enjoy for children. The Little Pig Farm Shop has installed its own play area for children, as well as animal-based areas. Emma says, "We have 20 chickens which children love and have built the Pig Sty where children can play safely."

Creating a pet-friendly environment is another important consideration for farm shops. While Teals doesn't allow dogs in its eating area or shop, it provides a run around paddock, water bowls and hooks. This area is large scale but enclosed, allowing customers' dogs to stretch their legs and get plenty of exercise on their day out.

In 2022, Cedarbarn Farm Shop's Thornton Road Site added a 1.25-acre dog walking facility which is located next to the shop. Intended as a way of keeping dogs exercised and occupied, the field is open on a daily basis from 7am to 8pm. Lit all-year-round for use in the darker months, the field is also secured by 6ft fencing and a double-gated handling area. Booking is required, with only one allowed at a time for a session which can last either 30 minutes or a full hour.

Accommodating customers' needs

More farm shop businesses are investing in accommodation, allowing customers to extend, and really make the most of their visits.

Hilltop Farm Shop now has its own glamping site called Hilltop Hideaways. Visitors can choose from accommodation options including shepherd's huts, bell tents and cabins or, if they wish to bring their own tent, pitches are also available.

Glamping at Hilltop features a toilet block, converted horse trailers with high-pressure showers, and a barbecue area.

Meanwhile, Hollies has built five woodland lodges which are a brief walk away from its farm shop. Accommodation is designed to sleep up to four or six people, boasting outdoor



terraces, open-plan living quarters and hot tubs – and the experience extends to a Champagne Deli Bar.

Creating experiences really has become a major consideration for farm shops, enabling them to broaden their appeal beyond food and drink.

Daylesford Organic hosts its own masterclasses, helmed by qualified experts in their individual fields. These run the whole gamut, from butchery courses (including demonstrations from local butchers and practical preparation and cooking of meats) to flower arranging (featuring handy advice on making all kinds of hand-tied bouquets).

Hilltop Farm Shop offers the choice of event planning, but with a twist – in that it can go to customers rather than the other way round. Hilltop can deliver outside catering, with foods and meats brought to all kinds of celebrations, from parties, to wedding breakfasts.

Positive feedback

While finance can prove to be a potential problem in terms of growing costs, extra facilities ensure farm shops can bring in significant returns on investment. "There have been cost issues recently as prices



have increased massively in the last 12 months, explains Emma Stevenson. "But we are confident we will receive a good return in our investment."

The proof of the extra facilities is in the pudding. As well as awards, positive reviews in feedback books and on websites like TripAdvisor show that there is great demand for bigger and better facilities. Farm shops like Teals have received warmly positive reactions.

"We have had lots of good feedback from customers," concludes Ash Sinfield. "We just work on adding colour to people's journeys whether it be through food, products, environment or experience."



Mothernutter

Born out of a passion for all things natural, Mothernutter is the striking new peanut butter brand from Lake District-based preserve, sauce and chutney manufacturer Wild & Fruitful. Designed to appeal to a younger generation of health-conscious adults, Mothernutter hits the important features this audience are looking for, being all-natural, vegan, high in protein, and crafted using a deeper roast for a beautifully rich and indulgent flavour. Mothernutter's small batch peanut butters are palm oil-free and contain only the best Argentinian hi oleic nuts and a dash of sea salt. As well as popular Crunchy and Smooth types, the brand makes several bold flavours that stand out from the crowd, and they're proving a big hit with independent retailers across the country. Peanut Butter for a new generation, from Mother Earth.

01900 813335 hello@mothernutter.co.uk
mothernutter.co.uk

Cambrook Nuts

Award-winning Cambrook Nuts is a specialist in baking, seasoning and caramelising the best grades of nuts. The brand's savoury nuts are baked (not fried), either for salting or for seasoning with original recipes of spices, herbs and flavours. Caramelising is skilfully done in traditional continental roasting pans. It's a slow, gentle process and one that gives the nuts their unique taste and sparkle. Available in 45g, 65g, 80g and 140g packets along with glass jars and gift sets, Cambrook has the perfect range to suit all requirements. All products are now in recyclable packaging.

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WHAT TO EXPECT AT FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW 2024

Specialist retailers are preparing to come together again this April as one of the biggest industry events returns to the NEC

Farm Shop & Deli Show joins Food & Drink Expo, The Restaurant Show, National Convenience Show and The Forecourt Show at the Birmingham NEC from 29th April to 1st May, bringing together the very best of the grocery, specialist retail, wholesale, foodservice and hospitality sectors under one roof.

Promising a world of advice, insight and innovation shared through the lens of this specialist industry, visitors will leave with unique understanding and practical information, as well as hundreds of innovative new products, to take with them into their businesses in 2024 and beyond.

Who you can meet

With a sold-out show floor, expect to see the latest trending products from across the sector, as well as the essential services designed to help businesses stand out. Some of the most exciting





exhibitor names include Godminster of truckle fame (Stand S181), purveyors of artisan spirits Silent Pool Distillery (Stand J199), Isle of Wight Tomatoes (Stand K228), Belvoir Farm Drinks, Cotswold Fayre, Drivers Pickles, Olina's Bakehouse – plus hundreds more.
For the more practical side of running your farm shop, The EPOS Bureau Ltd (Stand M209), CXCS – bespoke health and safety and HR management services (Stand J224) and The Farm Retail Association (Stand M179) will all be on hand to offer advice and support.

Insight and inspiration

Meanwhile, The Farm Shop & Deli Stage will play host to some of the most inspirational and knowledgeable players in the industry, each primed to offer their expert take on the sector's most pressing issues and thought-provoking topics. Industry heavyweights including John Gill, head of procurement and marketing at Booths, Renee Elliott, founder and owner of Planet Organic, and Julia Kirby-Smith, executive director at Better Food Traders, are all signed up to offer their expert take.

Andrew Reed, managing director of wine and exhibitions at William Reed, says, "Farm Shop & Deli Show is a unique event in the specialist retail sector diary, allowing professionals to come together and digest the state of the industry, sharing successes and discussing challenges, and ultimately helping futureproof the sector in its entirety."

Covering the entire industry, the UK Food & Drink Shows are unparalleled in their ability to bring people together, build and foster better relationships, discover business building insight and celebrate innovation, all with the support of the multi-award-winning William Reed brand.

Awards and competitions

A number of favourites return to the event in 2024, including the much-anticipated Farm Shop & Deli Show Product and Retailers Awards, the latter of which will reveal its winners live on stage on Monday, 29th April. Britain's Best Loaf competition will be back once more and will be announced on stage on Tuesday, 30th April alongside a new event launched by British Baker, Britain's Best Cake, which will be announced on The Grocer Stage on Monday, 29th April.

Dragons' Pantry, the ultimate retail test, is also back after popular success last year, with a new batch of brave entrepreneurs facing big characters and big questions as they aim to secure a listing in The Grocer.

FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW 2024
NEC, Birmingham, 29th April – 1st May, 2024
Register free at farmshopanddelishow.co.uk

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SCHEDULE'S PROGRAMME INCLUDE:

- Meeting the needs of consumers in the specialist retail sector: Monday, 29th April, 11.15am
- A force for good: Why sustainability matters and how you can do your bit, Tuesday, 30th April, 10.30am
- Supplying wholesale: Dissecting your biggest route to market, Tuesday, 30th April, 11.15am
- The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the specialist retail sector: Wednesday, 1st May, 10.30am

> "FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW IS A UNIQUE EVENT IN THE SPECIALIST RETAIL SECTOR DIARY"





Welsh Lady Preserves

The team at Welsh Lady Preserves have been making award-winning preserves and condiments since 1966, having won Supreme Champion at the Great Taste Awards on two separate occasions for their All Butter Lemon Curd and Apple & Cinnamon Curd. Their sauces, mustards, chutneys, jellies and relishes are prepared and cooked by hand, using traditional copper bottom pans to retain the goodness of the finest fruit and vegetables that they use. With no artificial additives or preservatives, each jar is hand checked to ensure quality from their kitchen to your shelf.

01766 810496 sales@welshladypreserves.com
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Riso Gallo Carnaroli Risotto 1856

Riso Gallo's 1856 risottos are prepared to traditional recipes, mixing the best quality dried ingredients with premium Italian Carnaroli rice, resulting in an exquisite dish that is quick, easy to prepare and excellent value for money. The four varieties include Porcini Mushroom, Saffron, Vegetables, and Tomato & Basil. All are naturally gluten free, and suitable for vegans. Each bag serves three people. Cook as you would a traditional risotto. Place the contents in a pan, toast in some oil, and add a little wine to taste. Add 650ml boiling water and simmer for 15 to 17 minutes, stirring occasionally. Finally, stir through butter and Parmesan.

0113 834 7946 sales@gallouk.com
risogallo.co.uk





A GUIDE TO OPENING YOUR OWN DELI

Are you a café owner who wants to pivot to fine food retailing, or a keen foodie who wants to start your own business? Discover expert advice on how to open up a deli

Whether you've started a business before, or are simply a passionate food lover who wants to share your appreciation for the finer things in life, it might be your dream to start a thriving local food store. *Speciality Food* speaks to two delicatessen owners who have done just that to learn their expert tips for opening up a deli in the UK.



Getting started

For many, the dream of setting up a deli takes years to come to fruition, but Simon Jones, owner of Forest Deli, knew when the time was right after years of working in the corporate world. "I was getting older and more jaded. I knew I needed to change. My wife was (and still is) a professional photographer, and I think she was quite shocked when I got home one day and declared I was leaving work. We had looked at buying a deli many years ago, so our thoughts soon moved to that idea."

His best advice before you dive in? Find your niche in your location, and

> "ENJOYING WORKING WITH PEOPLE, BOTH CUSTOMERS AND STAFF, IS THE BIGGEST ASSET YOU CAN HAVE"



> PLAIN OLD RETAIL SHOPS ARE DISAPPEARING, SO IT'S VITAL THAT YOU MAKE IT INVITING AND WELCOMING

work with other small businesses. "We live in a small town that has two butchers, two bakers, a greengrocer, hardware shop and many more small businesses – the only thing missing was decent cheese!

"Once we had secured the premises, we spoke to all the other food shops in town, who we knew and shopped with, which was important to ensure that we were not looking to compete with the businesses in town, but to complement the existing offerings," Jones says.

For Simon Warren, owner of The East Street Deli, opening his shop in June 2020 – right in the middle of the Covid-19 lockdown – was a leap of faith, but he calls it "the greatest experience of my working career".

"We spent the first two months with a table at the door stopping customers from entering due to social distancing



restrictions," he says. But this challenge coincided with the most rewarding feeling he's had since opening up a delicatessen. "Opening the doors in those first weeks to queues down the road was incredible.

Developing your passion

What do you need to open a deli? "For me, the key in any business, especially





in retail, is to have a genuine love and passion for what you do," Jones says.

Gaining customers, he adds, is all about providing the best service. "Customers always have choices on where to shop, and making sure they always leave the shop happy and wanting to come back is the service we offer."

Warren agrees that letting your people skills shine is a must. "Prior to opening, I used to think you had to be an expert on everything you sell, but whilst that's definitely a required skill for the job, I believe that enjoying working with people, both customers and staff, is the biggest asset you can have.

"Making customers want to shop with you is so vital in the days of such a competitive marketplace," he continues. "People feed off your passion. If you love the products on the shelf and love the place you trade in, then that will be clear to your customers."

Dealing with challenges

As a deli owner, Jones says issues come up daily, but the biggest he has faced is the Covid-19 lockdown, which began around two years after Forest Deli opened.

Despite the distinct challenges, it opened new avenues for the business. "We stayed open throughout and became the central delivery business for the town and surrounding villages. We delivered from the greengrocer, bakers and butchers, and we also became close friends with many of our customers, as we were often the only person they saw some weeks," he says.

"While this was an incredibly stressful time, it was immensely rewarding as we knew we were doing the right thing and helping those who needed it," he continues. "One customer started to bake us biscuits every week when we delivered to them, and they are still a regular customer – and still bring us fresh baked biscuits every Wednesday!"

Trusting your gut and having fun

"I used to think that everything had to be pre-planned on spreadsheets and business plans. The reality has been quite different," Warren says. "Obviously, you need to consider everything, and there's a time and place for meticulously going through the numbers, but if you know your store and its customers then gut-feel and instinct is massively important."

And while there are many practical matters to sort out, don't forget to make your deli a fun place to shop. "Make it an experience," Warren says. "Plain old retail shops are disappearing, so it's vital that you make it inviting and welcoming. Kerb appeal has always been important, but making sure The East Street Deli stands out from the crowd is a high priority for us."

One straightforward way to do this is to make yourself – the owner – the face of the shop. "It's your business, so make sure everyone who works for you understands exactly what to do and how to behave with customers," Jones says.

3 PRACTICAL TIPS FOR OPENING A DELI

- Take advantage of all the tools at your disposal, including social media. "We put a lot of time and effort into our social platforms, but we make sure that 100 per cent of the content for The East Street Deli comes from us, which makes it authentic," Warren says. "It's been a huge learning curve, but we've embraced it and really see the benefits of it."
- Start small, and scale gradually. "We often wish we had a bigger shop, but it's much easier to make a small shop look full and bursting with inviting products than get a big unit that you struggle to fill," Warren says. "If you need to, make it smaller and then increase the square footage as the footfall and turnover grows."
- Learn when to say no. "The hardest thing to learn is that sometimes the right answer to the customer is 'No'," Jones says. "You can't ever do everything for everyone – but what you can do is what you do very well, and always offer an alternative. The customer will still leave happy."



Summerdown

Winner of the BBC Food and Farming Best Drinks Producer Award, Summerdown brings you a range of 100% plastic-free restorative herbal teas, all made from the essential herbs grown on the brand's Hampshire farm and recently RSPB Fair to Nature certified.
The collection includes the original Peppermint tea, which is 'twice as minty' because Summerdown's Black Mitcham peppermint leaves are dried and then infused with the essential oil from its own distillery; a relaxing and soothing Peppermint & Camomile tea which is made from camomile flower heads infused with Summerdown's pure peppermint essential oil; and for those in search of a truly comforting, shoulder-loosening brew, the mild and calming Camomile tea is made from floral camomile heads grown on the farm.

01256 780252 sales@summerdown.com
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Godminster

Deep in the heart of Wessex, where landscape and legend intertwine, lies Godminster. Born in Bruton, the brand brings the spirit of the West Country to the table. 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, and it's got something for everyone to enjoy, just the way they like it.

01749 813733 info@godminster.com
godminster.com



Garofalo

Garofalo is an Italian company specialising in the production of pasta. It combines artisan techniques with industrial innovation to produce a unique, unmistakable pasta. Garofalo wheat pasta is made with robust durum wheat (high in protein) and local spring water. It is bronze drawn for a rough, porous surface, dried slowly to prevent cracking, and packed where it is made in Gragnano, the birthplace of Italian Pasta. Only pasta made to this specific recipe, process and location qualifies for a prestigious PGI status. The unmistakable quality of Garofalo pasta extends to the Gluten Free Pasta shapes and Organic Whole Wheat Pasta shapes the brand makes.

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Rowcliffe

Clemency Hall brings quality, value and exclusive cheeses to the independent counter. The range of artisan cheese and fine foods is exclusive to Rowcliffe, and is full of character and made by artisan producers for the independent retailer. Products have been sourced from local producers in Britain and Europe, and include some award-winners. The collection also boasts a selection of the finest olives and antipasti which have been hand selected from the Mediterranean. For retailers who have little space for stand-over deli counters or store staff, the Clemency Hall range provides the opportunity to still offer speciality and premium cheeses.

01892 838999 sales@rowcliffe.co.uk rowcliffe.co.uk



THE FOOD AND DRINK TRENDS YOU NEED TO KNOW IN 2024

Want to stay ahead of the curve this year? Here are the trends industry insiders predict will be big news over the next 12 months

Sustainability

The increasing awareness of environmental impact through food and drink consumption has heavily influenced market dynamics, with ShelfNow reporting a heightened demand for sustainable food brands. "Notably, between 2020 and 2023, our platform recorded an average 120% year-on-year increase in sales of products with sustainable packaging," said marketing manager, Athena Lee.

"Concern for the planet influences the eco-minded home cook more than ever as the effects of climate change become a daily reality that we must all grapple with," added Stylus' Mandy Saven. "There is a desire to safeguard the planet, and this is reflected in people's cooking and dining behaviours. However, the stark reality of the cost-of-living crisis is that consumers must reconcile the tensions between affordability and sustainability."

"In reality, shopping behaviours are not solely guided by altruism," agrees Kate Kehoe of FMCG Gurus, whose 2023 data shows eight out of 10 people globally would be more likely to trust a company that farms regeneratively.

"They are conscious of the impact of climate change on food production systems, and the role agriculture has to play. Brands must showcase resourcefulness across the supply chain to align with consumer values." Retailers and brands should also, though, remember that "environmental messages can be overwhelming, particularly during uncertain times, and the association of such products with higher prices can deter customers. Therefore, brands should emphasise the value of environmental products by highlighting additional benefits."



Italian

Sales of Italian food soared in 2023, with indications that consumer appetite shows no sign of abating for the time being. In fact, Waitrose's trends report for 2024 says Italian cuisine will be huge. Whether shoppers are being influenced by TikTok's pasta phenomenons, or Stanley Tucci's BBC travelogue series remains to be seen, but what we do know is that must-stocks include the wherewithal to produce good quality pizzas at home (from Tipo 00 flour to San Marzano tomatoes), burrata, nduja and guanciale – essential in a classic Roman-style carbonara.

Beans

Have you got your finger on the pulse? There's been a lot of messaging on TV, radio, podcasts, and in the press around the positive impact of plant-based proteins such as beans and pulses on our gut health and microbiome. Having a diverse offering across your store will stand you in good stead – from jars of plump chickpeas and white beans, which look enticing on the shelf, to tins, and even dried pulses – sales of which are on the up due to people investing in pressure cookers to save money in the cost-of-living crisis. Stand out from the crowd by having an organic or British offering

Flavours less travelled

According to Bidfood, authenticity is one of the key drivers behind the business's 2024 trends report, with 56% of consumers saying they would pay more for a product or dish if they perceived it as authentic. "This is heavily reinforced in our Flavours Less Travelled trend, giving consumers the opportunity to feel their sense of adventure by exploring cuisines in their most original format." The cuisines most piquing interest are Caribbean, Eastern European, and Mexican.

"There's growing demand for Caribbean dishes like rich, spicy stews that feature seafood, indigenous vegetables and meats such as goat," says Bidfood, which adds that Eastern European food is also becoming more well-known and appreciated thanks to formats that are familiar to the UK market.

Speciality Food has already reported on tequila and other Mexican spirits and drinks as a huge emerging market in Britain, and Bidfood says that although 44% of consumers have already tried Mexican cuisine, they now want to experience it in its authenticity. "Operators should look towards authentic classics like marinated pork belly tacos, or charred corn elotes with chicken."

Whole Foods Market's trends report for 2024 similarly picks out Mexican as a 'must-stock' for retailers in 2024. "Ingredients and foods that haven't always been mainstream are now coming to the forefront. Consumers are exploring flavours of Mexico beyond the taco. You can now find products like botana sauces, to-go tamales and tepache ready-to-drink beverages on shelves."

> "CONCERN FOR THE PLANET INFLUENCES THE ECO-MINDED HOME COOK"







RTD cocktails

Simpsons Beverages' 2023 report on this category revealed year-on-year growth, with around 37% of adults in the UK having tried a canned cocktail. Their popularity has risen alongside consumers' decisions to dine in, rather than out – with the drinks favoured for being an easy option for entertaining that doesn't require specialist equipment or investing in multiple bottles of spirits.

Trends to tap into in 2024 include lower ABV, berry and stone fruit flavours, cocktails with a sustainable message, and premiumisation (top shelf spirit brands branching into RTD as a gateway product for potential new customers).

Passionfruit martinis and pina coladas are best sellers, and customers are also looking for smoky, spicy flavours (think chilli and lime with tequila), and cocktails made with spiced rum.

Less processed

"Scrutiny of processing use in the food and drink industry is intensifying," says Mintel. "Fuelled by discussions about highly, overly or ultra-processed food, feelings about processing will inspire consumers to look more closely at ingredients, nutrition and production."

Mintel's report projects greater potential for minimally processed food and drink that focusses on enhanced nutrition and sustainability. "Expect to see a growing interest in less processed food and drink made with upcycled ingredients rich in vitamins, minerals, fibre, protein and other nutrients."

Feeling the heat

Globally-sourced chilli peppers are taking off, as consumers seek ever more complex ways to experience heat, says Whole Foods Market. Citing products such as chilli sauce, chilli jam and hot honey as products that typify what customers are looking for. It expects speciality chillies such as Carolina Reaper, Scorpion Peppers, Guajillo and Hungarian Goathorn to be seen more widely, be that fresh, whole, ground, pickled, preserved in oil, or used in sauces, dips and relishes.

Maximising Value

FMCG Gurus' trends report shows more than half of global consumers are looking to reduce their spend on food and drink due to rising prices. The report believes they will adopt habits



in line with economic downturns, and that brand loyalty will decrease, with consumers being more open to exploring different products. "Brands should respond by introducing packaging advancements to prolong the shelf life of products," says Kate Kehoe, who also says that although cutbacks in daily essentials are being seen, customers across most categories are still "seeking more high-end indulgences through retail channels." And that it's "vital that these indulgences remain reasonably priced and do not lead to post-consumption guilt."

Clean and conserve

Brands across sectors are promoting water conservation, says Whole Foods Market's report, and consumers are listening. "New water brands use water from fruit by-products which would otherwise be discarded. As well as the growing trend of regenerative agriculture, non-governmental organisations are also showing their support of farmed oysters, leveraging aquaculture to filter water and help restore coastal ecosystems." It's worth looking at your non-consumable offering in store too – seeking out water conscious products such as dry shampoos, shampoo bars and laundry detergent sheets.

Keep it fun

During the cost-of-living crisis, everyone's looking for something to cheer them up, and provide them with something exciting and out of the ordinary. Bidfood believes food retailers and producers have a part to play here in 2024 but bringing a hint of fun to their products and environment. "Colour, playful presentation, novel styling and a touch of theatre will certainly tick the boxes to offer the experience desired," it said. "Mixing flavours is another way of adding novelty, and can really elevate a dish. In fact, 70% of consumers find the idea of flavour contrasts appealing, with sweet and sour being the most popular."

Plant-based goes back to its natural roots

In 2023 some products aimed at the vegan/vegetarian market disappeared from shelves, as companies failed to pivot and respond to increasing consumer desire to eat 'real' food that's as minimally processed as possible. Whole Foods Market says retailers wanting to stay ahead of the game should be stocking food that puts the 'veggie' back into vegetarian. "We're seeing new and emerging protein-forward products with mushrooms, walnuts, tempeh and legumes in place of complex meat alternatives," it reveals.

> "FEELINGS ABOUT PROCESSING WILL INSPIRE CONSUMERS TO LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT INGREDIENTS AND NUTRITION"

Know your noodles

"Shoppers have been finding ways to dress up instant ramen at home for years now," says Whole Foods Market, "but as brands step up their game, noodle lovers can take on less of the workload. Even better, brands are creating more gourmet options to rival the classics, without certain preservatives and added MSG.



Ariela's Gelato

Gelato is more than just ice cream – it's a pure taste of Italy. A truly artisan treat, Ariela's Gelato is the perfect way to indulge in an authentic dessert that is as delicious as it is decadent. When you forget tradition, you lose taste; and without the artisan, you lose the art. But with Ariela's Gelato, you experience – and can taste – a true labour of love. Churned in small batches using only the purest, highest-quality ingredients, each gelato is carefully crafted using the same traditional processes that can only be found in an Italian gelateria. You really can taste the difference in every spoonful.

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arielasgelato.com

Wild & Fruitful

Lake District-based Wild & Fruitful produces a wide range of preserves, sauces, chutneys and even peanut butter, all made in the brand's own factory in small batches. Under the direction of award-winning Keswick-based chef Jake Winter, the company is SALSA approved. With signature products like Keswick Ketchup, Kendal Curry Sauce, Very Berry Jam, Pear & Walnut Chutney and Cheese Lovers Fig Chutney, the company has grown a loyal following, and is constantly innovating, with regular new product introductions such as 2023's delicious Caramelised Onion & Black Garlic Relish. Attractively packaged, Wild & Fruitful's range of products are ideal for discerning independent retailers. The team motto is: small enough to care, big enough to cope.

01900 813335 sales@wildandfruitful.co.uk
wildandfruitful.co.uk





Mighty Fine

Handcrafted in small batches in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, Mighty Fine is the proud maker of delicious light and crispy honeycomb. Made with the finest ingredients, including blossom honey and silky Fairtrade Belgian chocolate, for a seriously satisfying crunch. Mighty Fine's range boasts a breadth of flavours, from Salted Caramel and Milk Chocolate to award-winning (Great Taste, Farm Shop & Deli) innovative Blonde or White Chocolate & Sicilian Lemon bars. Mighty Fine is also a proud partner of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, supporting national and international initiatives helping the work of bee pollinators as part of its commitment to Mighty Fine Deeds. The brand's striking packaging and tantalising taste gives consumers a reason to trade-up into premium confectionery, making Mighty Fine a must have for any shop!

01423 873920 hello@mightyfine.co mightyfine.co



Bucknbird

The brainchild of two friends (a South African affectionately known as 'Buck', and the other a Kiwi dubbed 'the Bird'), Bucknbird is igniting the snack aisle with its unforgettable Salami Crisps. Fusing the world of crisps and meat snacks, the duo's bold venture has catapulted them to stardom, landing them on prime-time TV, and earning them esteemed UK accolades, including a Great Taste Award, and Gold at the Great British Food Awards. Bucknbird's irresistible Salami Crisps boast an astounding 38g of protein per 100g, with each crunchy ridge-cut, air-dried bite packing a real punch. Flavours include the peppery Original, Warming Chili, and Wild Herb The brand is redefining snacking, one nibble at a time.

07704 604511 howsit@bucknbird.com
bucknbird.com

Maliks Honey

Maliks Honey is a mission-driven brand committed to enhancing the lives of its customers. Its raw, unfiltered honey, meticulously sourced from British hives, stands out as an artisanal masterpiece designed to elevate the taste experience. Honey sommeliers gave the brand five stars, highlighting the exceptional quality and nuanced flavours that set Maliks Honey apart. Beyond the palate, the company's commitment to rewilding the UK adds an extra layer of value for customers. With Maliks Honey, you not only enjoy a premium honey but also contribute to the restoration of British ecosystems. Every jar is a testament to the team's dedication to excellence, ensuring customers savour not just honey but actively participate in the journey towards a greener, more sustainable future.

07889 600213 info@malikshoney.com
malikshoney.com





Tiptree Patisserie

Tiptree Patisserie is a wholesale artisan bakery and patisserie based in Witham, Essex, and is part of the Wilkin & Sons business, famous for its Tiptree jam. Tiptree Patisserie prides itself on the quality of the ingredients it uses, the individual skill and attention that goes into baking by hand, and ultimately the exceptional quality of its finished delights. Customers range from coffee shops and delis, to luxury hotels, zoos and garden centres. From a classic Victoria Sponge, to a rich Cookies & Cream Cheesecake, Tiptree Patisserie's cakes and desserts are so delicious that customers keep coming back for more.

01376 509101 tiptreepatisserie@tiptree.com tiptreecakes.com

Asiago DOP

To sample a bite of Asiago DOP, is to taste a slice of Northern Italy's lush, Alpine terroir. The beloved cheese relies on the quality of raw milk from herds who spend their days grazing and foraging in the beautiful, biodiverse landscape of the Asiago Plateau. Produced since the year 1,000, the cheese can only be made within the provinces of Vicenza, Trento and part of Treviso and Padova. Whether enjoyed fresh, when it's young and delicate, or aged - when the cheese develops a more complex, savoury personality - there's an Asiago DOP for every taste and every table.

0444 321758 info@formaggioasiago.it asiagocheese.it/en





Suma

Worker-owned co-operative Suma has been stocking kitchens with award-winning, delicious and responsibly-sourced vegetarian, vegan and free-from ingredients since 1977. The brand's new Italian-made organic Oat Pasta has the texture of wheat, but is certified gluten free. Combining oat, corn and rice flours for an authentic and delicate taste and tender texture, it's an ideal alternative for those seeking exciting new gluten-free pasta options. Packaged in cardboard sourced from sustainably managed forests, it's 100% plastic free and has a shelf life of 36 months. There are three varieties in the range - Linguine, Rigatoni and Casarecce - and this premium deli look comes in at a highly competitive RRP.

01422 313848 sales@suma.coop suma.coop/wholesale



Gruyère AOP

Made in western Switzerland, Gruyère AOP has been produced in the same way since 1115AD, using raw milk from cows fed on grass in summer and hay in winter. It is the only cheese that has won the title of Best Cheese in the World at the World Cheese Awards four times, and is available in different maturities. The Classic is matured for six months and has a delicate, nutty, creamy flavour. The Reserve is matured for 10 months and has a drier, more grainy mouthfeel. Gruyère AOP, aged for 14 months or more, has a much stronger flavour.

gruyere.com



HOW TO WOW WITH INSPIRATIONAL DISPLAYS

Retailers share their top tips for eye-catching merchandising that will entice new customers into your shop and encourage them to spend

In the world of fine food retailing, taste is king – but looks can be almost as important to build a thriving independent business. "Our displays are key to our sales," says Maria Henshaw, owner of Mainsgill Farm Shop. "As soon as we display food or gift items differently, it can have an instant effect on the sales."

When it is done well, merchandising can be a crucial component of an engaging shopping experience for customers. This is something that Cobbs Farm Shop, which has four locations as well as a new build site in the works, prides itself on. "It's a vital part of the customer journey as we try and provide these points of interest that draw people in and, hopefully, lead to a purchase!" says Tom Newey, CEO.

10 MERCHANDISING TIPS RETAILERS NEED TO KNOW

Keep these 10 key considerations in mind to create impressive displays in your own shop.

● Use design techniques to make products look as aesthetically pleasing as possible

There are a number of design methods and psychological tricks that retailers can use to entice customers and create a more multisensory shopping experience that leads to more sales. "We tend to use

> "ABUNDANCE IS A SIMPLE WAY OF ENSURING THE MESSAGE IS SEEN – IN YOUR FACE"



symmetry and work from the centre outwards. Height is important too to draw the customer's eye across to the display," Maria says.

Change your displays often

Keeping things fresh will ensure regular customers stay interested. "Displays have to be different each year and season," says Maria. "Customers like to see something new and even more creative than the year before." And don't try to pull the wool over their eyes with a repeat from last year, she warns: "They remember!"

> "HEIGHT IS IMPORTANT TO DRAW THE CUSTOMER'S EYE ACROSS THE DISPLAY"

Don't be afraid to go big

"Abundance is a simple way of ensuring the message is seen – in your face," Tom says. Maria agrees that more is more. "If we're displaying a food item, this is often better displayed in a bulk format – the bigger the better! Food does not sell in a minimalist format," she says.

Keep it practical

Creativity should be welcomed in the display creation process, but be wary of putting form over function. While floor-to-ceiling shelves might make your shop look full to the brim of exciting food and drink products to try, Maria suggests that when it comes to vertical displays, stacking goods as high as possible doesn't work, simply because they become inaccessible. "

Stay relevant

You may be buzzing with ideas for an unconventional display, but if you go too far off the beaten path you may cause customers to lose the thread of the story your displays are telling. "Relevance allows the customer a chance to better relate to the message or story and, again, hopefully lead to a purchase!" Tom says.







Make the most of your seasonal displays throughout the year

"Many customers return maybe twice a year at most when they are travelling and are always amazed at how different the shop looks," Maria says. "We also have a lot of customers who shop with us each week, and they soon pick up on new displays and they know that means new, exciting stock!"

Create displays with a clearly recognisable theme

In addition to seasonal merchandising, retailers can use local events of significance to create various themes throughout the year. These can be as simple as sunflower-themed displays in late summer, or sports-themed sections ahead of big sporting events, like the World Cup. "We like to make displays around themes like strawberry season, orange/citrus flavours, or lambs/farmyard animals to coincide with events that may be going on," Maria says.

Know your audience

Be sure to create displays around themes that your customers will connect with. You can also target different generational groups or age ranges with your merchandising, Maria says. "For example, at Easter we often have a kiddy-themed Easter display, and a separate grown-up Easter display in a different area of the shop."

Cross-promote food with other products

If your shop has multiple floors or a large square footage, you might not be able to count on customers walking through every single aisle. Get creative with product combinations that will draw their attention to the variety of products you offer. "We try to merge both areas of food retail and gift/homewares retail together," Maria says. "We often capitalise on sales of special days like Valentine's, Halloween and Easter for both departments by merging them together."

Flex your creative muscles – and don't be afraid to make mistakes

"We encourage our teams to be as creative as they can," Tom says. "Whilst they tend to work to an annual plan, the final set-up we will often leave to sites. We don't always get it right, but we'd rather people gave it a go and got stuck into what is one of the more fun parts of the job."

When it comes to creative displays, there are many routes your shop can take, from the big Christmas blowout to smaller seasonal changes. Above all, make it unique. One of the worst things an independent fine food retailer can do is fall into a predictable supermarket style. "We try to stay away from the typical supermarket or home shop styles with the shelving you expect, and with the stock in very boring lines on the shelves," Maria says. Keep these tips in mind, and your shop will be looking better than ever in 2024.

> "ABUNDANCE IS A SIMPLE WAY OF ENSURING THE MESSAGE IS SEEN – IN YOUR FACE"



6 WAYS TO GET THE BEST OUT OF YOUR STAFF IN 2024

Set yourself up for success by taking a new approach to managing your team

Ensuring employees are happy can be challenging for the time-stretched small business owner, but it's key to keeping your customers engaged and your tills ringing throughout the year.

"The hospitality and retail industries are ones with typically high staff turnovers, so to alleviate staffing issues, to foster a healthy workplace, and to maximise sales, it's important to motivate and empower your employees," says Alan Price, CEO of BrightHR.

"Engaged employees can play a crucial role in boosting sales," Alan continues. "Motivated teams tend to be more productive and committed to their work, not to mention provide excellent customer service that helps build strong relationships with customers and increases repeat business and positive word-of-mouth referrals."

Or, as Polly Robinson, leadership training and development coach for managers and business owners, says, "Happy staff equal happy customers." Employee engagement, she says, "drives higher productivity and ultimately a more successful business.

"It boosts retention and reduces stress. Paying someone a competitive salary is not enough to ensure that they are engaged, loyal and committed to their job."

So, how does a fine food retailer achieve this?

1 A shared vision

"Engagement starts with having a shared purpose, bringing everyone together around the reason you exist," Polly says. "Managers need to connect employees with the mission and vision of the organisation by connecting their

work to the bigger picture."

Sometimes that means looking beyond your daily to-do list. "Instead of focusing on the day-to-day tasks, highlight how you want to make a difference to your customers and deliver a memorable experience. If you can communicate the vision with your team, the 'WHY', and give them the opportunity to contribute to the 'HOW' then you will build commitment. A culture where people have a sense of how they are part of creating something amazing."

2 Form strong relationships

"The number one reason people leave a job is because they don't get on with their manager," Polly explains. If you've had a spate of leavers, it might be time to look at how you're communicating with your team – and how they engage with one another. "The relationship between a manager and employee is vital, as is fostering good relationships between peers."

3 Reward and recognise hard work

"Perhaps one of your team has received a rave review from a customer, or has gone above and beyond to help a colleague out," Alan says.

"It's important to call out positive behaviours and reward them, whether that's in the form of bonuses, promotions, or even just a simple thank you."

"It's human to want to feel seen, heard and valued," Polly adds. "You can work as hard as you can, and be the best you can be, but if you don't feel seen and heard, you will lose motivation and become disengaged. When we're busy it is easy to forget to acknowledge people."

4 Trust your team

Handing over responsibility can be hard, especially if you've been used to running the whole show yourself. But, as Polly explains, it can lead to growth opportunities for your team.

"In a culture where there is mutual trust and respect, staff trust leaders to make the best decisions and leaders trust staff to do their best work without needing to micromanage. When you give people responsibility and autonomy, they are likely to exceed your expectations."

> "PEOPLE DON'T JUST LEAVE A JOB FOR MORE MONEY - THEY LEAVE BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT CHALLENGED"

5 Foster career development

"Encourage your employees to grow and develop their skills by offering training programmes and opportunities for advancement within the company. With a goal to work towards, employees will generally be more engaged and have more purpose," Alan says.

"People don't just leave a job for more money – they leave because they're not challenged, because they're not learning and because they don't see an opportunity for career development," Polly adds.

6 Offer flexibility where you can

"Flexibility means giving your staff the opportunity to enjoy their life outside of work as much as possible," Polly says. While she acknowledges that flexibility on rotas isn't easy to achieve, it's important as an employer to be aware of your team's other commitments, such as childcare or their studies.

"Try to provide rotas with as much notice as possible, and avoid last-minute changes so people can plan their time away from work."





A l'Olivier

A l'Olivier, creator of perfect pairings since 1822, selects, prepares and bottles its extensive aromatic oil range at its plant in the Nice countryside, a stone's throw from the olive trees. The team's unique expertise brings together sun-soaked olives harvested from its partner farms, and delicious aromatic herbs, citrus fruits, vegetables and spices. All these ingredients allow A l'Olivier to create wonderful olive oils and vinegars bursting with flavour that will add a new culinary dimension to your dishes.

07845014242 rhian.hooper@daregalgourmet.co.uk oilmerchant.co.uk

Original Biscuit Bakers

The aromatic taste of ginger, the smooth velvetiness of liquid golden syrup, and the delicate crunch of fine sugar. Only the finest ingredients are used to create The Original Biscuit Bakers' gingerbread biscuits before they are lovingly hand iced by a team of talented artists to create a wide variety of fun and beautiful designs. Based in the heart of the Shropshire countryside, the business bakes gourmet biscuits for the whole family to enjoy – designed for those looking for fun in a traditional treat. The products are perfect for the fine food and gift market for every season, and make an exceptionally eye-catching pick-up line for customers.

01630 650780 info@originalbiscuitbakers.co.uk originalbiscuitbakers.co.uk



HOW TO GO SOCIAL IN FINE FOOD RETAIL

There's never been a better time to up your online game. Find out how and why to take your business online in 2024

Shoppers are spending more time online than ever before, and on all sorts of platforms – from e-commerce sites to social media and beyond – so it makes sense to boost your assets while the iron's hot.

A strong online presence could amplify your store in more ways than one. Not only will it raise the profile of your business beyond your immediate area – potentially attracting new locals as well as consumers from further afield to check out your wares – but it could cement your existing customer base and generate some much-needed extra sales.

Diving into socials

Social media is certainly worth an investment of time (and potentially funds). Its various platforms offer a wealth of community-building opportunities for any food business.

> "IT'S A GREAT WAY TO COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY WITH PEOPLE DURING AND OUTSIDE OF SHOP HOURS TOO"



One staunch advocate of social media for indie retail is Laura Roberts, owner of Laura's Larder. "Social media has been so important for the growth of Laura's Larder", she tells *Speciality Food*.

"We share the lunch specials on it daily. I'm told it's an appointment to view by many, whether they are thinking of coming for lunch, or just want some inspiration for something to make at home. We share products and their stories, recipe ideas and so much more. Weary people sent on shopping tasks show me their phones and declare they've been sent to get what's in the picture. It's just brilliant.

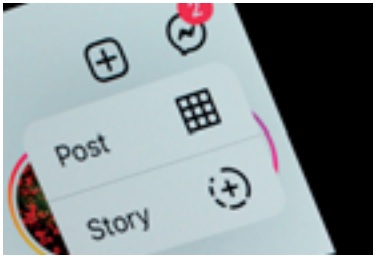
"It's a great way to communicate directly with people during and outside of shop hours too, to respond to questions and comments, and to take orders for things like afternoon teas and Christmas cheese boxes, if you can manage it all", she adds.

Embracing e-commerce

Social media is increasingly being used for e-commerce, with Instagram and Facebook pages allowing retailers to display their products and consumers to buy via an app. Charlie Wells, director and head of marketing at The Farm in Stratford, uses these channels to promote her store.

"I wouldn't say it helps a great deal [with sales] but it certainly works as another point of advertising our products or seasonal specials, which hopefully creates a sale. It also allows advertising on Facebook shopping pages as well which, if you have a large Facebook following plus Instagram, gives you double the chance to sell through your





social media channels. The Farm has a very different audience on Instagram than Facebook, so we cover all potential customers."

What to post

Thinking about what to post on social media can be daunting, but it should be fun at heart, and allow retailers to be creative. Laura advises, "Approach social as an extension of the store. Use it to replicate all the detail that makes your customers loyal - sharing products, their stories, and examples of them being used such as demos and recipes.

"It's a great way to broadcast menus, specials, events and more. Also, if you can manage the communication channels it's a great way to engage with people. Engaging also gives you the opportunity to get to know your customers at scale in a way you could never do in-store. You can ask questions, run polls and even share special offers.

"But don't be too sales-y, use the same tone of voice as you would if face to face, you'll quickly lose those followers if you post nothing but promotional content. I always ask myself before I post something, what one thing do I want people to think or do from this post? And if there's no answer or not a positive answer I need to rethink, rework, or redo it."

The bottom line is that whatever you choose to post, it needs to look good. As Charlie concludes, "Make sure it's an attractive photo that's going on! I know that seems obvious, but I've seen some terrible photos recently. A bad photo can be just as influential as a good photo! It represents your brand so make it a good one and make that product pop!"

> "IF YOU CAN MANAGE THE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS IT'S A GREAT WAY TO ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE"



WHAT DO YOU USE DIFFERENT CHEESE KNIVES FOR?

Our guide to the range of cheese knives available sheds light on the best tools to stock, and the products cheesemongers swear by

If a man is only as good as his tools, as the saying goes, then whether you're an experienced cheesemonger or simply a curd enthusiast, it's wise to choose your cheese knives with care.

Not only are knives used at the cheese counter, but cheese knife sets also provide a potential upsell opportunity over the throughout the gifting seasons.

What type of knife is best for cheese?

There are many cheese tools on the market, including wires, knives, chisels and forks, and different knives suit different cheeses.

Svetlana Kukharchuk of The Cheese Lady, based in Haddington, Scotland, swears by cheese wires, also called lyres, while Gemma Williams, owner of The Little Cheesemonger in Rhuddlan, Wales, finds Oasis floral knives surprisingly effective.

"There are various knives for different occasions, whether you're serving on a counter, cooking or enjoying a cheeseboard," says Gemma.

Choosing the best cheese knife sets will help your customers eat their cheeses in style.

Whatever knives you choose, Svetlana makes one thing clear: make sure you have enough. "When serving cheeses as wedges on a cheeseboard, it's essential to include a separate knife for each variety of cheese to avoid flavour contamination," she says. "Some cheeses, like really soft and gooey ones, may require a spoon to handle them effectively."

Gemma agrees. "Don't just use one table knife for the whole cheese selection or cheeseboard at home, it makes them all muddy and messy.

Separate knives for the cheeses – the cheeseboard deserves a bit of class!"

What is the difference between cheese knives?

Here, we'll break down the different types of knives to consider stocking, including which cheese knives go with which cheeses.

Soft cheese knives: As well as having a thin, curved blade, you can easily spot a soft cheese knife as they often have holes on the side of the blade and tines on the tip.

With this knife, you can cut through a soft cheese perfectly, and pick up the cut piece of cheese with the tines. Use them with cheeses like a traditional Brie De Meaux, Baron Bigod or a soft blue cheese.

Cheese cleaver: A cheese cleaver is essentially a smaller version of a meat cleaver. Its long, hatchet-shaped blade and sturdy handle make it a great choice for easily cutting through hard or semi-hard cheeses in one motion. Think aged Cheddar or Parmigiano Reggiano.

Cheese chisel or flat-blade knife: This knife has a wide, flat blade with a handle on top. Its paddle-like shape makes it perfectly suited to chipping away at small areas of hard cheeses, such as Gruyère.

Parmesan knife or grana knife: The almond-shaped blade of this knife is ideal for cutting hard cheeses like Parmigiano Reggiano, hence the name. "They are chunky, squat blades, and the technique is known as the 'flat wedge method'," says Gemma. "They are used to break through a Parmesan by cracking it wide open."

Other knives and tools

A cheese knife set isn't complete without a few additional implements – these are the most popular tools and their uses.

Cheese wire: A cheese wire is a versatile tool that will help you produce clean slices of soft to semi-hard cheeses. "For soft and blue cheeses, a cheese wire (also known as a lyre) is ideal as it allows for precise cutting without any loss of cheese," says Svetlana. At her shop, she sells cheese wires for clean and effortless cutting. "I believe they are indispensable for any cheese lover."

Cheese fork: Cheese forks are typically included in cheese knife sets, and they have two long prongs to help pick up cut pieces of cheese, as well as cheeseboard accompaniments like fruit or charcuterie.

Cheese plane: To get very thin shavings of semi-soft cheeses, use a cheese plane. They're often found on standard cheese graters as well.

Stilton scoop: Consumers might be surprised to see a scoop-shaped knife on your shelves, but this tool is perfect for those serving a whole wheel of Stilton. Simply scrape from the middle out.

Offset cheese knife: With a handle that's set at a higher level than the blade, offset knives ensure you won't catch your knuckles on the cheeseboard while cutting through harder cheeses.

> "A CHEESE WIRE IS A VERSATILE TOOL THAT WILL HELP YOU PRODUCE CLEAN SLICES OF SOFT TO SEMI-HARD CHEESES"





When you need to be seen

Flags
Banners
Signs
Stickers
Tablecloths
A-frames

banners@bridportbanners.co.uk



Marriage's

This year Marriage's proudly celebrates 200 years of milling quality flour. Using proven techniques and traditions passed down through six generations, Marriage's was founded by twins William and Henry Marriage in 1824. They knew that consistent, quality baking requires the same passion mirrored in their milling process, which blends modern techniques with time-honoured expertise. Sourcing locally where possible, by harnessing the prime growing conditions of the Essex area, Marriage's mills the highest-grade wheat into award-winning flours. The range includes artisanal, speciality, organic and traditional stoneground varieties for Britain's artisan bakeries, chefs, and home bakers. Marriage's flour is supplied by national and regional fine food distributors.

01245 354455 floursales@marriagesmillers.co.uk
flour.co.uk

Stag

Made using a blend of three seaweeds, Stag's Seaweed Shortbread is a moreish treat that blurs the lines between sweet and savoury. Taking a traditional shortbread recipe as its base, the satisfying and familiar sweetness is then offset with sea salt and seaweed for a truly unique but strangely irresistible flavour profile. Inspired by the landscapes of Stag's location in Stornoway, what could be more evocative of the Outer Hebrides than a classic sweet biscuit with a hint of the sea? The Seaweed Shortbread was awarded two stars in the 2022 Great Taste Awards and is a biscuit with a difference.

01851 702733 sales@stagbakeries.co.uk
stagbakeries.co.uk



DO LOYALTY SCHEMES WORK IN FINE FOOD RETAIL?

As the multiples ramp up loyalty schemes, we discover whether they can give independent retailers a competitive advantage

Finding new ways to attract loyal customers is increasingly important for independent retailers amidst the cost-of-living crisis. With larger businesses doubling down on their loyalty schemes, how can fine food shops make the most of these digital schemes?

According to research by digital product agency Future Platforms, almost two-thirds of Brits said they joined a retail scheme to benefit from member-only pricing, and over three-quarters said they are motivated to change their shopping behaviour in return for benefits like free products or money off.



Should indie retailers use loyalty schemes?

"There is an argument that people are a bit sick of having cards," Edward Berry of The Flying Fork tells *Speciality Food*, "but I think you have to bear in mind that that there is a generational challenge. A lot of the independents do appeal to slightly older people, and they have no problem with cards. They like to hand in their cards and get a couple of points off," he says.

But Edward adds that retailers should choose their loyalty schemes wisely.

"Decent EPOS systems will give you some internal data on the customers, and because you're an independent you can actually respond independently." For example, whether you market through emails or letters in the post, you can identify individual customers who haven't visited and send them offers for the products they typically buy.

"You can be a lot more tailored to individuals," Edward says. "The reality is that loyalty customers spend more than non-loyalty customers."

What's more, building up a loyal base of customers is essential for independent retailers, and loyalty schemes offer a key way of doing this.

"It costs more to attract new customers than retain older ones," Edward says. "Existing customers are key to any business." With a loyalty scheme, you can not only discover who your most loyal customers are but also reward them for visiting your shop.



Perspectives on loyalty cards

"We decided to introduce a loyalty scheme because we thought it might encourage people to buy their meat and groceries regularly from our shop instead of from a supermarket," says Matthew Homfray, managing partner of Forage Farm Shop in Wales.

Previously, he says, the shop had manually stamped cards, but this was "clunky and open to fraud, plus it wouldn't make people buy their milk from us every week," he tells *Speciality Food*.

After some research, he and the team chose to partner with TapMango, which allowed them to 'white label' their app. "The scheme has been received well by customers. Lots of them really care about collecting points. It also has fun perks like 'miss you' text messages if they haven't been for two months, and 'happy birthday' text messages offering a free slice of cake," Matthew says.

Whether the loyalty scheme has increased sales is difficult to gauge, Matthew says. "Sales have increased, but we are a young and growing business so they would have anyway. I suspect that it has been financially beneficial because most of the 'rewards' that people get for their points are high-margin products made in house."

Jon Edwards, managing director of Ludlow Farm Shop, says the business set up a scheme after launching, with 10,000 loyalty card holders. The system the farm shop uses is fully integrated with the shop's tills and sales data, making it simple and straightforward to learn about customers' shopping behaviour.

"We have specific offers that are just targeted to our loyalty database," he says. For example, if the shop launches a new gin, they can target the customers that have typically bought alcohol in the past.

> "THE REALITY IS THAT LOYALTY CUSTOMERS SPEND MORE THAN NON-LOYALTY CUSTOMERS"

Loyalty cards do two things for Ludlow Farm Shop: they help boost sales by encouraging customers to buy, and they give the shop useful data to make informed business decisions and better understand their customer profile.

For independent retailers, loyalty cards are also about making customers feel part of something. "We can target communications that are more beneficial for us and more beneficial for them, and they get the feeling that someone's talking to them about things they're interested in."



HOW TO ALIGN YOUR BUSINESS WITH CONSCIOUS CUSTOMERS

With mindful consumerism becoming more apparent than ever before, how can the fine food industry cater to demand? Two experts weigh in

The idea of a business's 'mission' is not a new one; nor is it a topic which focuses purely on a singular level of sustainability. For too long, naysayers have chalked this key issue up to the socks and sandals brigade demanding that energy and funds be funnelled into 'unnecessary' causes, but now that the impact of unsustainable business is clear for everyone to see, there has never been a more vital time to act – for the sake of people and prosperity, as well as the planet.

Amongst conscientious fine food and drink businesses and consumers, the proactivity around holistic sustainability is strong. No wonder the number of businesses within the sector that are now B Corp-registered – proven to be using business as a force for good – is growing.



"I think the B Corp is rapidly becoming the golden standard in terms of validating a company's mission driven marketing claim, and in the next 12 months it's going to be increasingly recognised and understood by the consumer," says Jason Gibb, founder of Bread & Jam – a network which hosts events and training to support emerging and scaling food businesses.



Defining 'mission-driven'

For Jason, today's smart businesses are focused on securing a better future for us all. "A mission-driven business is one that wants to change the world for better. And they want their customers to be part of that change," he begins. "The majority of the businesses that come into the Bread & Jam community are mission-driven to some extent. It may be that they are focused on their supply chain, their carbon footprint, or maybe they want to rid the world of plastic. Whatever their purpose, they do tend to better that brand with no mission as the belief in what they are doing gets them through the challenges of starting up a food business."

While interest and passion might be high, it's easier said than done to make a sizeable difference, says social impact and sustainability consultant Amirah Jiwa. "It requires meaningful investment — not necessarily of money, but of time, thought and energy," she says.

"In the current economic environment this can be hard for brands to find. Coming up with the best way to communicate impact efforts is another challenge."

A challenging trade-off

"There is no silver bullet when it comes to any social or environmental issue — no perfect solution that has benefits all round," explains Amirah. "For example, buy-one-give-one schemes could displace local entrepreneurship efforts while increasing access to an important good; switching to compostable packaging could reduce your impact as long as it doesn't make it harder for consumers to correctly dispose of your packaging; and sourcing locally might reduce shipping emissions but it might also reduce the earning potential of communities in the Global South."

A smart approach, making sure that you're aware of both the positive and negative impacts of your decisions, is vital. "Almost all choices involve trade-offs, and it's important to be as aware of any potential negative effects of your efforts, as you are of the benefits. Understanding the full impacts — good and bad — of a choice will help you make informed impact decisions and avoid accidental greenwashing," Amirah says.

The danger of greenwashing

"Every time I see a business claim that a tree is planted for every item sold, beer drunk or internet search made I think to myself 'where the hell are all of those trees?' Surely we'd be drowning in trees if it were true," says Jason.

With a disappointing number of businesses 'greenwashing' their work there is a lot to be said for consumers educating themselves. Thankfully resources are available.

> "IT REQUIRES MEANINGFUL INVESTMENT - NOT NECESSARILY OF MONEY, BUT OF TIME, THOUGHT AND ENERGY"

"There are a lot of BS claims around carbon neutral, carbon negative and offsetting in the food and drink world, but the robust framework that the science-based targets (SBTs) give us are really helpful," says Jason.

Eternal potential

The good news for businesses wanting to define their mission is that the boundaries are only defined by the work you want to do. "The 'missions' are endless," explains Amirah. "You can focus on issues that are relevant to your consumers, connected to the ingredients you source, affect the communities involved in your value chain, or have particular resonance amongst your employees."







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WHAT TO KNOW IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT INTRODUCING OWN-BRAND PRODUCTS

Are you considering selling products under your shop's branding? *Speciality Food* finds out what you need to know

Fine food retailers are known for their passion for great food – and for some, this goes beyond the day-to-day managing of a shop and naturally expands to make their own products too.

Whether an on-site butchery or bakery producing fresh products each day, or a side-hustle creating store cupboard goods like chutneys and jams, crafting own-branded items will take a significant amount of time and effort. But for those who successfully make the leap, the payoff can be great.

Building a USP

Fork Kitchen & Deli is a family-run deli with on-site dining. As well as running the shop and restaurant, co-owner Kairi Kett says the team makes its own range of products, including jam, granola, biscotti, ice cream, fresh pasta and ready meals.

Finding the right mix of products took a bit of trial and error from the team, as well as a constant review of customer demand, Kairi says. "When we first opened in 2020, we made a whole lot more, but we have since then discontinued a lot of items as our business and customers' 'wants' have changed."

However, making the decision to craft their own products has helped to build the brand, Kairi adds. "Making our own products gives us a point of difference on the market, and it mirrors our ethos of making all our counter items on site. For example, you can buy a fruit scone



from our counter that's made by us and choose a jam that's made by us to go with the scone!"

One of the key reasons to go own-branded is to help raise the profile of your shop and give it a unique selling point. Combining artisanal brands with goodies your customers can't get anywhere else gives them a reason to keep returning – while getting your shop's logo onto customers' shelves at home.

"Selling own-brand products is in itself a branding exercise," adds Nick Punter of Suffolk Food Hall. "A lot of customers take our products off-site to their homes or friends for parties or gatherings, and our logo and name is then spread. We pride ourselves on quality, and we hope this is spread through these interactions so that we gain potential customers who want to visit us for themselves."

Nick believes having the ability to quality control products is another benefit of selling items under the shop's branding. It goes back to the company's mission. "Whilst we do stock a lot of products from further afield, there is a buying and sourcing directive for local products, and you can't get more local than in-house!"

Choosing the right products

Another benefit of producing food in-house is the flexibility it gives to adapt to changing needs and customer demands.

Suffolk Food Hall sells its own branded Red Poll and Angus beef cuts via its butchery, as well as 'Made @ Suffolk Food Hall' branded bread, rolls and sweet treats, and ready-to-eat products produced in-house by the kitchen team for the deli. "The bakers are in every morning producing our range of loaves, rolls and specialities and are always coming up with new ideas and seasonal products. They are a very skilled team, and it's great to be able to see them in the food hall baking," Nick says.



5 KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

● ARE YOU CONFIDENT IN QUALITY?
"If you are producing an item yourself, have you got the costs correct, can you produce to a high standard with a high volume, and would the customer price be accepted?" Nick asks.

● ARE YOU WORKING WITH A SUPPLIER?
"If you know a supplier that can produce to a high quality, do you have a good relationship with that supplier and are there any previous examples of their products? You have to know you can trust that supplier," Nick cautions.

● WHAT ARE YOUR PACKAGING OPTIONS?
"Being a small producer and only making a small amount of each item makes packaging cost very expensive," Kairi warns. "We also use compostable packaging for most of our range, and that makes the cost more expensive also."

● WHAT ARE YOUR LABELLING REQUIREMENTS AND COSTS?
"We got a lot of advice from Environmental Health Officers," Kairi says. "Also remember to research label designing and printing costs."

● DO YOU HAVE A LABEL DESIGN?
Nick advises ensuring your label design is right from the start. "Choose a label design that you're happy with and that fits your brand. Try to keep that consistent when you move forward with new products. You want brand recognition as you grow!"

> "MAKING OUR OWN PRODUCTS GIVES US A POINT OF DIFFERENCE ON THE MARKET AND MIRRORS OUR ETHOS"



> SELLING OWN-BRAND PRODUCTS IS IN ITSELF A BRANDING EXERCISE

A team of skilled chefs located in the food hall's commercial kitchen in its restaurant building create deli products like the shop's famous sausage rolls, samosas, tarts and scotch eggs. In addition to this, Suffolk Food Hall sells several products made by suppliers but repackaged with the shop's branding, from fudge, to Champagne.

Weighing the pros and cons

While there are a number of benefits to creating own-branded products, it's important to carefully consider whether this is the right move for your business.

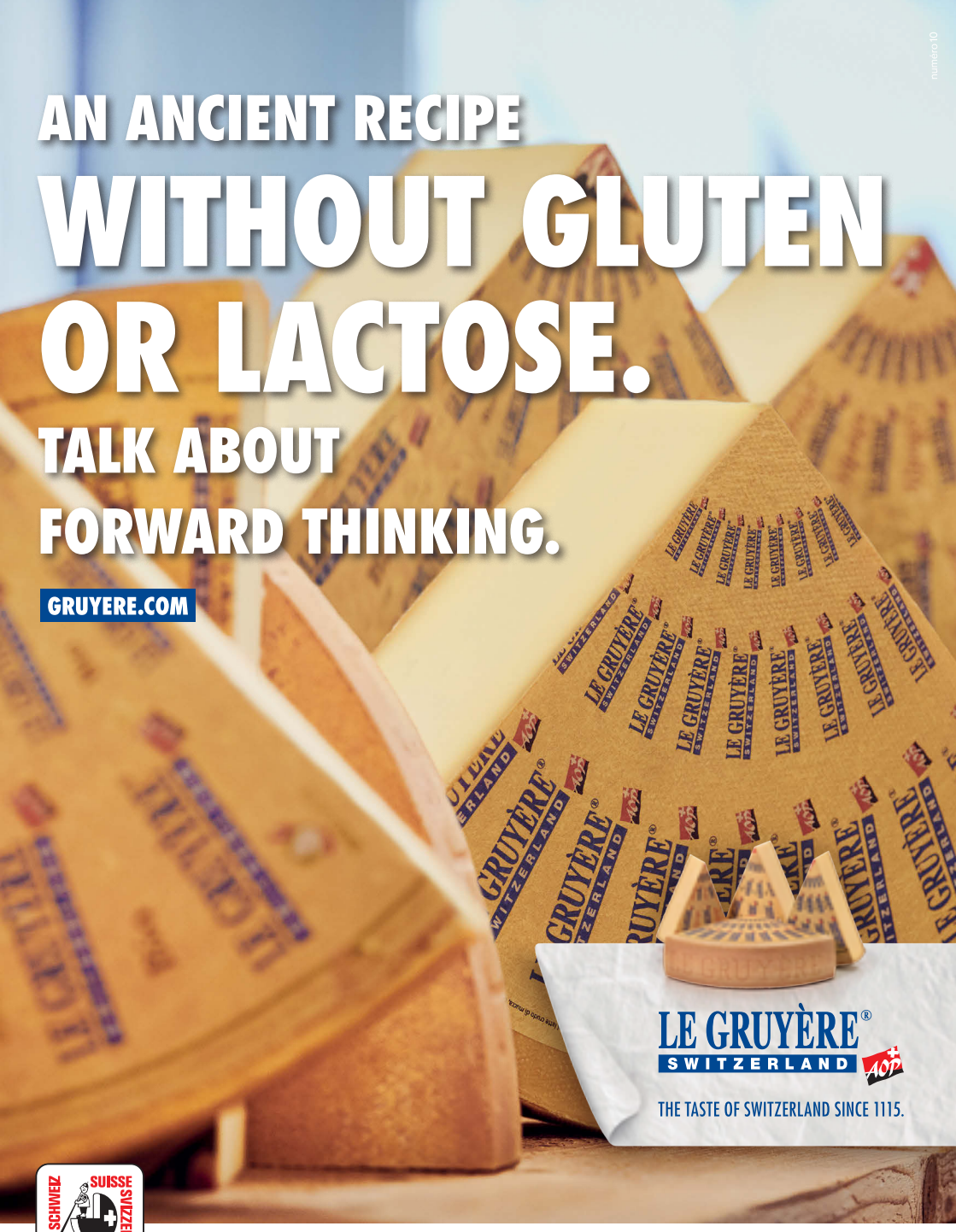
"There are lots of costs to producing your own products, from ingredients to packaging and marketing," Nick says.

And while it can be rewarding for your brand, it can also be a risky move if the product quality isn't up to scratch, or if your price point is off. "There is a fine balance of customer perception in terms of price. You cannot price yourself out in terms of competition or similar products," Nick warns. Plus, he continues, "If anything goes wrong it can affect your brand. If a mistake is made in terms of quality or taste, then it can affect the brand as a whole and the perception of other products being sold."

On the other hand, if you choose to sell items made by another supplier under your brand name, it's critical that you trust the supplier to produce good-quality products. "You have to put a lot of trust in that supplier to keep to your level of expectation," Nick says. "This is tough when you want to have full control over quality and product. When you're outsourcing, it can be a little nervy at times, but you have to find the right people and producers," he adds.

Once you are confident in your ability to create quality products or have found the right supplier to work with, and you have weighed the pros and cons and worked out your costs, there's nothing holding you back from taking the leap into own-branded products.





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