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SPECIALITY FOOD

CONNECTING THE FINE FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY



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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the June issue of *Speciality Food*. Summer is finally, officially, here – hurrah! – and I for one couldn't be happier to welcome the lighter evenings, al fresco meals, and fresh, seasonal fare. I'm writing this having just purchased a punnet of perfectly petite, glossy red, locally-grown strawberries from my local food hall and cannot wait to tuck in – and I'm sure other shoppers as well as retailers are just as passionately enthused about summer's fresh produce as I am.

Within these pages you'll find expert advice on how to make the most of summer's bounty – and the crowds of new customers waiting to purchase it from you – as well as stocking tips and retail tricks around how to maximise the potential of storecupboard essentials such as rice and pasta, biscuits and oils.

You'll also find a section all about the future of food in the UK. From profiles of the innovators evolving the sector to insight into the forces at play, I think and hope you'll find it an inspiring read.

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‘Farm to Fork’ summit: The industry reacts

Rishi Sunak’s Food Summit failed to tackle key issues yesterday, such as inflation, soaring costs and food security, the industry says

In May, prime minister Rishi Sunak welcomed farmers, food producers and some of Britain’s largest supermarkets to tackle issues facing the food industry.

A POSITIVE OUTCOME

Some attendees at the summit came away from it feeling positive. One of these was Defra farming minister Mark Spencer, who told Farmers Weekly, “There is a huge sense of collaboration and a huge desire to solve the challenges that we face.

“I come away from it feeling quite positive that we can find the solutions together, in terms of government, farmers, processors and retailers to keep the nation fed, improve our environmental footprint, biodiversity and save the planet at the same time.”

The summit was also a success for the National Farmers Union (NFU), as president Minette Batters, said, “The announcements made today show a recognition and an understanding of the strategic importance of British food and farming to the nation. And the actions recognise the importance of coordinated action across government to support confidence, investment and growth in British food.”

LEFT OUT OF THE CONVERSATION

However, many industry bodies were disappointed with the agenda, claiming the summit was ‘no more than a PR stunt’.

Moreover, sustainable food and farming charities were left out of the debate, including Feedback Global. Lucy Antal, lead for food justice at the charity, commented, “Why were civil sustainable food organisations not invited to this discussion? We have meaningful solutions to propose rather than business as usual which got us into this mess in the first place.”

Lee Holdstock, senior business and trade development manager at the Soil Association, added, “Throwing a tea party for a narrow and restricted group of ‘trusted’ advisors was little more than a media moment. Those people and organisations who do have solutions and do share an immense sense of urgency and hope that we can finally do better and face up to the challenges – were not invited to the tea party.”

Another key group that wasn’t part of the conversation was farm retail, as the government chose to include supermarkets rather than independent farm shops and delis. This was regarded as a crucial mistake, as farm retail can be part of the solution to many of the food and farming industry’s problems.

Indeed, according to Keenan Humble, project coordinator for Feedback’s Regional Food Economies, “Local, independent food retailers are in a position to be flexible, dynamic and truly work with their community to tailor their offer for the people they serve, reducing food waste, supporting local economy, shortening supply chains, and, as an additional benefit, creating a social space and hub for the neighbourhood.”

James Woodward, sustainable farming officer at Sustain, agreed, telling *Speciality Food*, “Independent retailers can play a key role in food security by supplying from local farms. They can provide a better route to market helping farmers get a fairer return, and therefore, reinvesting in the resilience of their business and the supply of healthy food.”

A MISGUIDED ATTEMPT

The conference was also criticised for not laying out a plan to improve the food system, which is currently in despair.

As Lucy explained, “The UK Farm to Fork summit proved to be a misguided attempt by the government to fix our food system.

“There was discussion on skills and labour within the food sector, but this avoided the thorny question of pay – if we want more farmers, we have to pay people a living wage. We must also address the issues of public transport and housing within rural areas.”

Vicki Hird, head of farming at Sustain, agreed, “We are pleased that the prime minister hosted this summit. The issues around food and farming should be a priority for the government and we hope it remains high on the political agenda.

“However, the government has not really committed to anything particularly new or meaningful when it comes to tackling the many issues farmers and the food system face.”

Indeed, for Lee, “It was a bitter disappointment as the government again failed to take any real steps to tackle the food emergency we are now facing. The government has shown little sense of urgency despite the storm of things they have to address to get us out of the mess.”

THE PROBLEM OF INFLATION

The elephant in the room is the cost-of-living crisis and rising inflation. While this was on the agenda, Anna argued that it wasn’t a priority for the prime minister.

Disappointed with the outcome of the summit, she told *Speciality Food*, “We need to think seriously about how we can cope with food price inflation better than we are now, and how we can strengthen not only the resilience of our supply chains but also the resilience of families living in Britain.

“Obviously, inflation is felt more severely by those on a low income because they spend a higher proportion of their budget on food. As a result of this, we've seen a doubling of the levels of food insecurity at household level – nine million adults and four million children who are living in households that are struggling to put food on the table.”

Indeed, as Lucy put it, “There is no meaningful plan to address food access while the number of people using food banks has hit an all-time high.”



"Coronation Street"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

In previous articles I have often highlighted the importance of special events to the sales in our speciality food shops.

This is, of course, a well-recognised annual trend for the likes of Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, Mother's Day and uniquely for us Chelsea Flower Show week. But national events which generally involve the Royal family can play their part too.

Going back a decade or so, the London Olympic Games and Golden Jubilee of 2012 spring to mind. More recently, the Platinum Jubilee event and even the time around HM the Queen's Funeral were national moments when sales were positively impacted.

My expectations however for the coronation week were, for various reasons, not so high. For example, the weather was predicted to be at its good old unpredictable self, the economic mood is currently gloomy, and questions were raised more than ever about the constitutional relevance of it all.

However, I am pleased to say that for us coronation week maintained the tradition of national events giving a helping hand to our shop. There are of course caveats. We are lucky to be so close to where the action is in Central London and we benefit from the influx of visitors to ceremonial events by being on the iconic King's Road.

But we were somewhat taken aback by the general buzz created and the increased volume of British and foreign tourists who travelled to London, and especially the amount of overseas media who were looking for interviews and stories surrounding the event. Curiosity about the Coronation of the King was very great.

In fact, I think we gave about six interviews during the week to overseas film crews and had a live broadcast at 6:30am for Japanese afternoon television.

The result was a pleasing spike in sales that we were not expecting and a welcome respite from the stagnation of the cost-of-living crisis. Of course we massively underordered on coronation related articles which meant we actually had not as much to offer when the big day arrived.

Thank goodness that the very dependable Walkers Biscuits and their very attractive tins of shortbread biscuits helped us out yet again. How many times have I said that over the past 50 years!

But it is not just about souvenir items on these festive occasions. Alcohol sales rose exponentially despite being a rainy week, chocolates, teas, dining ware and all the traditional items did well too, and our outdoor street parties – of which we organised two – were a great success. The street party tradition is a great way of reaching out to the local community, and my advice is that despite the detailed planning involved, if you see a street celebration join it!

Either by having a stall selling food and drink, donating some helpful products or even just standing around with a glass of Shepherd's Ruin and a funny hat. One of our street celebrations was on the Saturday which was soggy and the other was on the Sunday which was not. Both did well but if it had been good weather on both days our sales would have been even better.

It may be some time before we have a national event like this but at the next opportunity Partridges will be putting up the bunting, decorating the shop with flowers and bringing all of our heritage and traditional products to the front of stage – especially Walkers.

As it was our sales over the week were 30.5% over the same week last year. To me that was a great success.

Long live the King!

> "It may be some time before we have a national event like this again but at the next opportunity Partridges will be putting up the bunting, decorating the shop with flowers and bringing all of our heritage and traditional products to the front of stage. Long live the King!"

Brexit food trade barriers have cost UK households £7bn

The UK has had the highest food inflation rate in the industrialised world, and new research from the London School of Economics (LSE) suggests this is largely due to Brexit

The LSE estimate that British households have paid £7bn since Brexit to cover the extra cost of trade barriers on food imports from the EU, bringing up food inflation.

The university's latest report estimating the impact of leaving the bloc on UK food prices found that trade barriers were consistently hampering imports, pushing up bills by an average of £250.

Indeed, the cost of food in the UK had rocketed by 25% since 2019, the researchers calculated, but if the post-Brexit trade restrictions were not in place, then this increase would be only 17% – nearly a third lower. Adding up the impact on all British households suggested they had paid an extra £6.95bn as a consequence, they said.

"Between December 2019 and March 2023 food prices rose by almost 25%. This analysis suggests that in the absence of Brexit this figure would be 30% lower," the report found.

This is even more devestating than last year's estimates from the LSE centre for economic performance which said that leaving the EU added an average of £210 to household food bills over the two years to the end of 2021, at a cost of £5.8bn.

> "Between December 2019 and March 2023 food prices rose by almost 25%. This analysis suggests that in the absence of Brexit this figure would be 30% lower"

Government relaxes red tape to benefit farm retail sector

One of the measures to come from Rishi Sunak's Farm to Fork summit includes plans to cut red tape to make it easier to repurpose farm buildings to use as shops.

The move is expected to make it simpler for farmers to deliver projects which are not strictly agricultural to help them diversify their incomes.

In opening remarks at the summit, the prime minister told representatives of the food industry, "We want to give British farmers greater freedoms to make the best use of their existing buildings, whether that's for a Diddly Squat-style farm shop or a processing facility.

"So,we're going to consult on targeted changes to the planning system that enable exactly that and support our rural economy."

It has been suggested that this is a result of lobbying from Jeremy Clarkson's Diddly Squat farm as he battles to allow greater visitor access to his farm and its attached shop after the success of *Clarkson's Farm* on Prime Video.

Nevertheless, the relaxing of red tape making achieving planning permission difficult will benefit farm retail businesses of all scales to utilise their resources to boost income.



Three summer food and drink trends to stock up on in 2023

With warmer weather finally here, stocking up on these three ingredients will keep you bang on trend all summer long

1 HOT HONEY

Chilli-infused honey, or hot honey, has been big in the US for a few years. Now the UK is getting a taste for it, with indie brands such as Dr Sting's Hot Honey recently launching and selling out batches in a matter of hours. It's the perfect addition to any BBQ – whether brushed onto chicken wings or grilled vegetables – making it a great stock for summer as consumers get more experimental and look for little luxuries in the cost-of-living crisis. Expect the buzz to continue well into 2023!

2 TINNED FOODS

The cost-of-living crisis is understandably influencing people's shopping habits, with price-conscious consumers seeking out healthy, affordable ingredients. While 2022 saw a revolution in tinned fish, thanks to outfits such as Rockfish and The Tinned Fish Market introducing new varieties, in 2023 cash-strapped home cooks are likely to turn to other canned goods. This theme has been picked up by Jamie Oliver, who recently listed tinned chickpeas, beans and pulses among his essential ingredients. With summer salad season finally here, now is the time to experiment with veggie and vegan-friendly offerings in your deli or foodservice counters.

3 MEXICAN SPIRITS

2022 saw one of the biggest years for Mexican spirits, with an incredible rise in popularity for tequila. Not far behind it was mezcal, which is like tequila but uses agave that's cooked over wood-fired ovens, giving the spirit its characteristic smokiness. These agave spirits are expected to further grow this year with more brands coming onto the market, particularly with a more premium focus.

Shoppers will pay more for sustainable food and drink

Despite the cost-of-living crisis, two thirds of Brits (65%) say they are happy to pay more for sustainable products, according to new research from Vypr.



Shoppers across the UK are still considering the sustainability of food and drink products they purchase in 2023. Indeed, only 16% of those surveyed by product intelligence business, Vypr, said that sustainability was not a factor at all in their shopping habits.

The research also showed people have changed daily routines to become more sustainable. This includes recycling more (58%), choosing products with less packaging (36%), choosing local produce (27%) and reducing the amount of meat consumed (26%).

Ben Davies, founder of Vypr, explained, "With such a wide choice of brands and retailers, consumers can easily shop around to find sustainable products at a price they're happy to pay so sustainability is only going to get bigger and more important. Becoming even more sustainable now and ensuring that all policies and practices are transparent will mean businesses won't be tarnished with the green-washing brush and will keep consumers' trust."

The survey also uncovered which products consumers would like to see in more eco-friendly packaging and the list included ready meals, coffee beans, fruit and veg (especially vacuum packed), products in plastic trays such as meat, crisps and biscuits, crates of alcoholic drinks and cleaning and hygiene products.

Independent retailers have a key opportunity here to offer more sustainable versions of these products for eco-conscious shoppers and cash in on the green pound, which is evidently still being spent.



"A broad mission"



RORY MELLIS
IJ MELLIS

Foundationally, every cheese retailer operates with one singular goal: to sell cheese. This is a cheesemonger's role in three words or less, but in due course, every cheesemonger finds that they are so much more than that. More than just a salesperson, they play the role of storyteller, bridge-builder and matchmaker. Occasionally, a cheesemonger is a teacher, problem-solver, or even a therapist.

The key to transforming a business from one that simply sells cheese, to a successful cheesemonger, is a well-developed and integrated mission. A well-developed mission is what drives the staff and their work every single day. An integrated mission involves the other key players in cheese retail – the customer and the cheesemaker. Every cheese retailer should be asking themselves: how do we remain mission-focused and not get lost in the day-to-day routine of simply selling cheese?

Our mission is to champion artisan and farmhouse cheese with high-quality service. The bones of this mission likely resonate with many cheese retailers. Every company chooses to uphold their mission with different methods, but there are a few practices that are key to ensuring that the mission remains the cornerstone of a business.

To champion high-quality cheese, sharing knowledge and information between cheesemaker, cheesemonger and customer is critical. The very foundation of sharing knowledge in cheese retail is training and inspiring staff. This comes from shadowing experienced 'mongers, to meeting with producers to understand the realities of cheesemaking and the stories behind the craft.

From there, it is the duty of the cheesemonger to share their knowledge with the customer. Something as simple as providing a customer with a taste of the cheese – straight off the block – makes an incredible impact on both cheesemonger and customer. There is a sense of accomplishment in finding the right cheese for someone, but this is just the start of the "quality service" piece of mission-driven work.

If we're lucky, hundreds of customers will pass through the shop every day to engage in these brief interactions, but for that customer we're a more significant part of their day. Quality service is more than a polite interaction, it's an understanding that our mission does not exist without the customer. When we build sincere relationships with customers, we create an environment where every customer feels like they are entering their own home. In turn, friendly customers generate happy staff, and this cycle of community-building further reinforces the mission.

If cheesemongers can connect and share knowledge with just a few minutes across the bench, imagine what we can accomplish with an hour at a cheese tasting event. More than just a fun evening with cheese, a cheese tasting event can break down barriers between retailers and customers, inviting opportunities to discuss everything from cheese shelf life and natural rinds to questions like, "why does my Cheddar have a blue vein in it?"

Once you've built relationships and instilled passion for product in your staff and customers, the final piece is selling a quality product. Understanding where your cheese comes from and buying into the quality of the product will reflect on your staff and eventually your customer base. Establish an ongoing relationship with your cheesemakers through regular visits to their dairy, not just to see how cheese is made, but to build a genuine relationship where the cheesemaker can also be invested in the mission. When cheese retailers invest in quality products, the mission broadens beyond the shop to impact the industry.

These are a few ideas that – at the very least – make us better at our jobs. At most, these tools help us foster relationships and create trust and understanding between retailer, cheesemaker and customer, ultimately reinforcing our mission as cheese retailers to champion cheese with the highest quality of service.

> "The very foundation of sharing knowledge in cheese retail is training and inspiring staff. This comes from shadowing experienced 'mongers, to meeting with producers to understand the realities of cheesemaking and the stories behind the craft"

THE STORY BEHIND THE STATS

17.2%

UK food price inflation remains at its third-highest level since the financial crisis, with the annual rate at which the cost of groceries is increasing at the elevated level of 17.2%, retail industry data shows. Prices barely eased during the four weeks to 14th May to only marginally below April's 17.3% figure, according to the latest release from Kantar, representing the third-highest rate of grocery inflation since 2008.

10,000

More seasonal workers will be allowed into the UK if needed, prime minister Rishi Sunak admitted. At his 'Farm to Fork' summit, he told a gathering of farmers and other food producers an extra 10,000 visas will be made available for the agriculture sector. This would be on top of the current 45,000 allocated. This comes after fruit and vegetables were left to rot in fields last summer due to a shortage of seasonal workers to pick them caused by the war in Ukraine.

£218m

Take-home grocery sales rose by nearly 11% over the past month, as consumers stocked up on supplies to enjoy over the coronation bank holiday weekend. Despite the pressure on household budgets, consumers spent an extra £218m on groceries during the week of the coronation, with a rise in sales of wine and quiche. Sales of sparkling and still wine shot up by 129% and 33%, as shoppers planned to raise a glass over the long weekend. Fraser McKevitt, head of retail and consumer insight at Kantar, said, "Sales of coronation quiche ingredients like chilled pastry surged by 89%, while frozen broad beans by 57%."

57.7%

Footfall in retail locations was lower than expected over the coronation weekend, according to data from MRI Springboard. However, in some locations across the UK footfall increased. For example, in Knightsbridge, footfall rose by 57.7% versus the week prior between 10am and 3pm when the ceremony took place, while in other parts of the UK where screens were erected to allow the public to watch the coronation high streets and towns saw spikes of footfall. In royally named high streets such as King Edward Street in Hull, footfall was 3.9% while in New George Street in Plymouth, footfall was 7.8% higher.

NEWS IN BRIEF

LAB GROWN MEAT COULD BE WORSE FOR ENVIRONMENT THAN ANIMAL AGRICULTURE

New research published by *New Scientist* found that meat produced from artificially cultured cells could be up to 25% worse for the environment than standard beef. Such products have until now been seen as a more sustainable alternative to ordinary meat because the production uses less water, antibiotics and land than rearing livestock. However, the study found that because the liquid used to grow the product contains salts, amino acids and vitamins that all require energy-intensive techniques, it actually comes with more environmental costs.

TEALS FARM SHOP RAISES CAPITAL FOR EXPANSION

Africa-inspired farm shop and restaurant Teals is to expand its Somerset business after landing £2.3m in funding. It will create 50 additional car parking spots at the current shop and increase retail space by 250 sq m to develop its homeware, gifting, pet and children's ranges, alongside a new community and wellbeing space. The funding will also enable Teals to begin developing an additional site, which it hopes to open next year. According to co-founder Ash Sinfield, expansion would increase opportunities for local producers and makers, as she commented, "We're passionate about supporting small businesses and local producers so we're looking forward to expanding our services."



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Farm shops set to benefit from further fruit and vegetable shortages

Supermarkets are touted to experience further shortages of certain fruit and vegetables while farm shops could see a boost

Warnings have been issued that retailers may face more fruit and vegetable shortages, as temperatures in southern Spain soar to unprecedented levels while the UK growing season gets off to a late start because of cold, overcast weather.

Temperatures are expected to reach a new April record of 39 degrees Celsius in parts of Andalucía amid a long-lasting drought that has affected the production of vegetables in Spain.

In fact, Spain has been in drought since January last year and this is likely to be the hottest, driest April on record.

This has been amplified by the fact that British growers have also been facing weather challenges, particularly the cold start to the spring growing season and a lack of sunlight, resulting in less British-grown produce.

A BOOST FOR FARM SHOPS

As a result of shortages of cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers during March, farm shops and markets saw a much-needed boost in demand and footfall.

With further shortages on the way, farm shops are set to see the same uplift in the coming weeks.

Emma Mosey, owner of Yolk Farm and chair of the Farm Retail Association, explained, "As happened previously, the shortages in supermarkets will hopefully drive shoppers to look for fresh, local produce at farm shops and farmers' markets.

"We are uniquely positioned to ensure that shelves are full, as many farm retailers grow their own produce, and when sourcing from overseas, we are willing to pay higher prices than the supermarkets for better quality produce."

This is something that Gareth Morgan, head of farming policy at the Soil Association, also recognised. "Generally, we find that shorter supply chains are more resilient. Farm shops and independent food retailers can be more flexible with their pricing and suppliers."

In order to communicate this to shoppers, Emma recommends farm retailers tell the stories of their produce on social media. "The media also has a huge role to play in communicating that farm retailers are likely to have full shelves too," she added.

A NEED FOR MORE DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

However, Gareth warned that SMEs may feel a strain filling in the gaps left by supermarkets. "We also know that these smaller operations might struggle to cope with a sharp increase in demand.

"What we'd like to see from Defra is better support for UK farmers and growers at a time when they are struggling with increasing costs and diminishing returns."

According to Emma, this is an industry-wide problem that is having a knock-on effect across the supply chain. "The shortages in the supermarkets are caused by bad weather, but they are also caused by the fact that the supermarkets have driven suppliers so far on price that with rising energy prices and costs of production, many farmers have refused to supply or left the industry, which has driven up prices further", she told *Speciality Food*.

Therefore, James concluded, "It is critical that Defra tackles unfair and low returns from the supermarket chain, plus ensure that growers can fully participate in Environmental Land Management schemes and other supporting grants.

"On top of that, we need a government who will tackle the issues around labour shortages and poor working opportunities in the sector."

> "We are uniquely positioned to ensure that shelves are full, as many farm retailers grow their own produce, and when sourcing from overseas, we are willing to pay higher prices than the supermarkets for better quality produce"

Retailers hopeful for summer season as sales start to pick up

After wet weather dampening sales on the high street in March, sales began to pick up again in April, giving hope to retailers in need of a busy summer season.

The volume of goods sold in stores and online climbed 0.5% from March, when sales fell 1.2%, according to new data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The rebound indicates consumers are surprisingly resilient in the face of a cost-of-living squeeze, with sales gaining in three of the past four months.

Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, commented, "Despite households still feeling the squeeze from the high cost of living, sales growth improved in April. Nonetheless, consumers continued to adjust their spending patterns, looking for lower price alternatives on many key products, leading to falling sales volumes.

"Sales should improve further as we enter the summer months, especially with inflation starting to ease and consumer confidence slowly stabilising. Government must ensure it does not sabotage this momentum by adding cost pressures onto retailers from new policies, as these will mainly serve to push prices back up for people up and down the country."

However, for independent retailers, it is imperative that pressure is eased more quickly. As Andrew Goodacre, CEO of the British Independent Retail Association, explained, "It is always good to see retail sales increases, but in reality these figures show that sales growth is well behind inflation and so volumes are down. In simple terms, consumers are buying less and this is adding to the considerable pressure already being felt by smaller shops on the high street.

"One positive sign from the figures was another loss of market share for online retailing, a further indication that consumers still prefer shops and vibrant high streets. Shops and high streets are needed for communities and local economies, and that is why we are asking the government to provide the support and policies that allow these places to grow," he added.

> Shops and high streets are needed for communities and local economies, and that is why we are asking the government to provide the support and policies that allow these places to grow



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Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Kaytea refreshes iced tea range



Iced tea maker Kaytea has launched a new flavour into its range, and repackaged one of its popular existing flavours.

The new White Peach is the perfect balance of green tea and delicate white peach flavours, and is a light and refreshing option for the warmer months.

Sparkling Rosay, a 95% rose tea infusion combining cherry, apple, radish and sweet potato, is a sophisticated effervescent iced tea and has been repacked in aluminium.

Kevin Tang, founder, said, "I realised long ago that there's a significant void in the soft drinks aisle that resides between bland sugary pop and overtly worthy functional brews. Our primary focus has always been our tea prowess, which is why we visited over 250 tea estates to unearth the best providers of quality teas (black, white and green). Yes, we could have easily added blends of lab made vitamins and minerals to claim some arbitrary health claims but that seemed counter-intuitive to our quest to be known for best-in-class, organic ingredients.'

kaytea.co.uk

Super premium look for award-winning brewery

Crumbs Brewing has announced a new look for its mission-driven business to better communicate its mission to combat food waste by turning unsold bread from local bakeries into beer.

The success of the brewery's award-winning most recent beer, the Naan Laager, proves that the new super premium visuals are already catching valuable attention. The new look, supported by Martin Barfoot at Brightsky Design, brings a metallic feel with a stamp which communicates its mission and a highlight of the business's 'grain' design.

Elaine Arnell, co-founder, said, "As we've matured, we've taken the time to reflect on our journey so far. We've assessed what's working well, what could work better, and how we can continue to make waste wonderful. Though we left the security of our corporate jobs behind, we have no regrets as we embrace the excitement of running our own business. Even though it only feels like we are six months in not six years, we knew it was time to freshen up the brand."

crumbsbrewing.co.uk





Zesty launch from H!P

Plant-based chocolate brand H!P has launched a new zesty bar into its oat milk range.

A celebration of the classic combination of chocolate and orange, designed to satisfy plant-based consumers, the bar is a blend of smooth and creamy oat m!lk chocolate, zesty orange and crunchy waffle cone pieces.

The bar has been sustainably produced and is sold in plastic-free packaging, as well as containing sustainably sourced single origin Columbian cocoa.

The new launch joins the H!P line-up of oat milk chocolate bars including Creamy Original, Salted Caramel, Salty Pretzel, Cookies No Cream, Salted Honeycome and White Berry Crunch.

James Cadbury, founder, said, "Nothing beats the iconic combination of chocolate and orange. Orange oat m!lk chocolate has been one of the most demanded flavours from H!P customers for months, proving that this timeless classic remains massively appealing to a younger adult audience. We can't wait to see what everyone thinks of it."

hipchocolate.com

Rude Health launches No Sugars



Dairy-free brand Rude Health has launched two new no-sugar plant-based milks to cater for the growing consumer demand for sugar reduction.

No Sugars Oat contains four natural ingredients including 10% gluten-free oats, and has been made sugar-free by altering the production process so that the oats don't release any sugars. Meanwhile, No Sugars Almond relies on the natural sweetness of almonds and therefore requires no sugar. It is a blend of three ingredients: organic Italian almonds, spring water and carob seed flour to make it creamy.

As with the rest of the Rude Health range, the two new plant-based products are made using nothing artificial and are entirely organic, gluten-free, dairy-free and non-GMO.

Camilla Barnard, founder, said, "I am even more excited than usual about our No Sugars range innovation. It's personally a dream drink because I don't have a sweet tooth, but I'm big on flavour and we've managed to get all the flavour of Oat and Almond with none of the sugars. Health is very close to my heart – we are called Rude Health after all – and creating a flavourful milk with absolutely no sugar helps to further our goal of making healthy eating a celebration not a sacrifice. It's also a great technical achievement for the team. All grains contain some sugar, naturally, so the challenge of making a delicious creamy milk out of them without getting any of the sugars from them is something I'm very proud of."

rudehealth.com



MOMO unveils latest collaboration

Certified organic kombucha producer, MOMO Kombucha, has revamped its branding with a new simplified bottle design and resealable cap as well as a collaboration with Caravan Coffee Roasters.

The new launch, MOMO X Caravan Gesha Coffee Kombucha, is a blend of MOMO's unfiltered organic kombucha and Caravan's cold brew Gesha coffee which provides a complex new flavour experience of rich caramel, ripe strawberry and apple, which finishes with the tartness of kombucha.

Laura Harper-Hinton, Caravan Coffee Roasters founder and CEO, said, "We are absolutely thrilled to collaborate with kombucha experts MOMO on a collaborative coffee kombucha, especially as we've been big kombucha fans for years. We put a lot of thought into which coffee would work for this, as we thought the average coffee would get lost, but this Gesha is no average coffee, with rich caramel and bright red fruits, it works perfectly with the refreshing, tart qualities of the kombucha. A great example of how coffee can be used in wonderful ways!"



Josh Puddle, MOMO Kombucha co-founder, said, "We are so grateful to have partnered with Caravan and to have been able to combine their expertly roasted Colombian Gesha with our kombucha. The result has really surpassed our expectations, with the kombucha amplifying the fruity notes of the Gesha. We're happy to be supporting Project Waterfall through this partnership, a fantastic organisation working hard to provide access to clean water and sanitation in the countries and communities that grow coffee around the world."

momo-kombucha.com

Fresh new look for Black Bee Honey

Award-winning single origin honey company, Black Bee Honey, has undergone a rebrand to strengthen their message 'To Keep British Honey Wild'.



As well as combating climate change with their circular business model, which includes initiatives such as Meadow Mission – a commitment to create 1,000 acres of new wildflower meadow habitat in order to ensure the future of British honey bees, and to donate 2% of their turnover to UK-based charity Plantlife – the brand is passionate about showcasing the very best of British honey.

In Black Bee Honey's core range is Spring honey, Summer honey, Autumn honey and Starflower honey, while on limited release are Winter honey, London honey, Orchard honey, Seaside honey and Honey+ Pollen.

Chris Barnes and Paul Webb, co-founders, said, "We created an iconic brand, but its foundations were never fully defined. With so much to say, we wanted to build a brand identity based on our enduring principle of nature first."

blackbeehoney.com

Clearspring releases Matcha innovation

Pioneers in organic and Japanese fine foods, Clearspring, has launched the UK's first Organic Japanese Kuwa Matcha.

The new launch is a vibrant green, finely ground powder made using mulberry leaves rather than green tea – making it naturally caffeine-free.

Made using the finest quality organic and sustainably grown mulberry leaves grown in Kagoshima, Japan, once harvested the leaves are steamed, dried and ground into the powder which is as versatile and delicious as traditional matcha.

Maria Dawson, director, said, "Mulberry leaves have been enjoyed in Japan for centuries in either loose leaf or ground powder form. We're extremely excited to be the first to offer a premium quality authentic and Organic Japanese Kuwa Matcha in the UK. It perfectly complements our existing organic Matcha range whilst tapping into the growing demand for low or no-caffeine hot and cold beverages.



"Clearspring Organic Japanese Kuwa Matcha also delivers on flavour. It has a very similar taste to our premium Matcha, with a mellower taste that is smoother on the palate, especially when enjoyed as a latte. You can also use it for cooking and baking!"

clearspring.co.uk



SUMMER DELIGHTS

We spoke to independent retail experts to find out how to make the most of the opportunities a fine food summer provides



We all love a Great British Summer – the sun's out (when the weather plays ball), a sense of positivity is in the air, and the appetite to get outside and enjoy the great outdoors is never greater. The season brings a raft of opportunities; people are taking any opportunity to eat al fresco, whether that be in the garden, on a park bench or at a bells-and-whistles picnic, and it goes without saying that barbecues are being fired up across the land the moment the mercury hits 18 degrees... And that's all before we explore the kaleidoscope of edible treasures now on the menu.

A taste for local

"With a combination of fine weather and holidays approaching, it's obvious to state what we all know, which is that we will have an abundance of seasonal fresh produce," begins Edward Berry of The Flying Fork. "It's also an enjoyable time for picnics, so good to be prepared for well-made grab and go offers. If you sell drinks, make sure the drinks fridge is well stocked, and if you run a butchery counter, don't wait for the first sun to get your added value barbecue items prepared."

With so much local produce available to speciality food retailers across the UK, the opportunity is ripe to cash in on the growing demand for quality and story. "Consumer buying trends continue to point to the fact that provenance and artisanal food – created drawing on specialist skills and expertise – remain a key consideration for consumers, placing farm shops and delicatessens in a strong position," says Edward.

"Summer is a great opportunity to showcase some of the best local produce from our area," agrees Michelle Steele, owner of Earsham Street Deli. "People visiting often have a real interest in what is produced nearby... whether that's a cheeseboard and wine for an al fresco evening, or a box of chocolates to take home as a gift."

Good-value treats

This offers an opportunity to stand out from the supermarkets. "We have seen horrendous supply chain issues that took the multiples by surprise – shortages from Spain, and of course the Covid log jam," says Edward. "It can happen again, so make sure you have a well-stocked display of fresh local produce. The independent offers yet another excellent opportunity to drive sales and assert the role of these businesses as not only pillars of the local community but increasingly the shopping destination of choice."

In the current cost-of-living crisis, offering true value is worth its weight in gold. "Value is a word with so many definitions – but qualifying your offer with a genuine value for money message can earn respect," he continues.

"With the cost-of-living crisis it feels like there's a real sense of snapping back to reality after the post-Covid summers," says Michelle. "But whilst that means people may be being cautious with their spending, it also means that there's an opportunity in which people will feel that need to treat themselves. Maybe customers won't be making larger purchases or going on expensive holidays, but at the end of a busy day or long week we can make them feel happier with something delicious to eat!"

The year of the staycation

"Domestic holiday tourism sales will be strong," says Edward, which means that destination and/or out-of-town independents might well see a boom in new customers seeking out delicious ways to make the most



SUMMER SELLS

Key takeaways for a successful retail season

Michelle Steele, Earsham Street Deli: "Just keep it bright and happy. People want to come in, relax, and be inspired to indulge. For the coronation we used an antique Union Jack flag along with crowns in our window, and we've now switched that to displays inspired by picnics and weddings."

Edward Berry, Flying Fork: "As ever shout loudly about the things that matter to your customers – freshness, local, provenance, supporting our growers and makers, community, packaging and above all taste! I always bang a drum for the independent sector being as different to the supermarkets as possible – that means offering choice, flexibility, entertainment, information and of course real interaction and customer service."





of the season – both customers from outside the region who have travelled for a week away, and locals who find themselves with extra time on their hands while the kids are on their school holidays.

"Why not bring the med home with Greek, Italian or Spanish inspired recipes?" suggests Edward. "Those choosing to take a self-catering UK-based break will be seeking meal solutions that offer a magnificent home dining experience, but without too much preparation and stress. Holiday makers will be keen not to spend their precious leisure time in the kitchen, however they still want to sit down to appreciate delicious food, often replicating the traditional menus enjoyed whilst abroad."

"Summer is our chance to showcase what we do to a new audience who are visiting or holidaying in the area and who may not have shopped with us before," says Michelle. "Once a family or group have discovered us (after seeking out an ice cream or something for lunch), they often become a regular for the week or whole time they're on holiday."

Of course, customer service is key to success. "For us, it's always about exceptional service and making sure our customers leave feeling looked after and like they're part of something. When people are visiting the area they can chat to us about particular products or ask for recommendations, and for our local, regular customers we maintain the feel-good vibes of summer even on the rainy days!" says Michelle.

> "We maintain the feel-good vibes of summer even on the rainy days!"



1 RISO GALLO: Carnaroli Risotto 1856 range

Italian rice and grain experts Riso Gallo introduce their new Riso Gallo Carnaroli Risotto 1856 range to the UK. The 1856 risottos are prepared with traditional recipes by mixing the best quality dried ingredients with the premium 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, suitable for vegans, and made from 100% Italian Carnaroli rice. Each bag serves three portions of risotto.

risogallo.co.uk



2 JAMU WILD WATER: Sparkling Botanical Water

Wild and wonderfully delicious, Jamu Wild Water is a sparkling botanical water designed for kids! Bursting with natural fruit flavours, these drinks contain zero sugar or artificial sweeteners. Instead, they benefit from the naturally sweet stevia leaf and when combined with powerful botanicals they create a healthy, sparkling and super tasty drink for kids to enjoy (without the nasties!). Jamu Wild Water is on a mission to reconnect kids with the magic of the natural world. They have pledged to give 10% of their profits to rewilding projects that serve to improve biodiversity and greater access to green spaces, for children to learn and play in nature.

jamuwildwater.co.uk

3 FIELDFARE: Chocolate Fondant

Frozen food experts Fieldfare have added to their range of single-portion ready-to-heat desserts with a modern classic: the Chocolate Fondant. This award-winning treat is a favourite with all the family thanks to its rich and velvety melted chocolate centre, making it an ideal finish to any summertime meal.

Whether your customers are catering for a solo indulgence, a family meal or are hosting a feast for 20 people, this is a versatile and delicious option for dessert.

Sold individually, each pudding cooks from frozen in in the microwave in just a few seconds.

The range also includes White Chocolate and Salted Caramel Chocolate Fondants.

field-fare.com





4 TRACKLEMENTS: Special Edition Rhubarb & Ginger Chutney

Storecupboard specialist Tracklements has launched a new Special Edition product perfect for celebrating the summer season. Rhubarb & Ginger Chutney is a delicious and perfectly balanced combination of tart rhubarb grown on a family farm in Norfolk, warm ginger, sweet sultanas and an expertly chosen blend of spices, and is an ideal accompaniment to a range of summer dishes – including cheeseboards, sandwiches, curries and smoked mackerel. As well as being vegan and gluten-free, this new addition to the range supports Tracklements' B-Corp-certified mission to be a force for good via sustainable production, traditional recipes and techniques, and using the best quality ingredients that are locally-sourced wherever possible. Available from 19th June.

tracklements.co.uk

5 CORNISH CHEESE: Cornish Blue

Cornish Blue is the perfect blue cheese for summer – with its sweet, creamy flavours and a dense buttery texture it can become a real crowd pleaser.

It's a great alternative for those that don't like traditionally strong blues, with its creamy notes becoming the predominant flavour and allowing the cheese to almost melt in your mouth.

The cheese works fantastically with salads, red meat or a selection of fruits and nuts on a cheeseboard.

Cornish Blue is hand made on the Stansfield's family farm on the edge of Bodmin Moor using traditional farmhouse methods, creating a cheese full of flavour and unmistakably Cornish!

cornishcheese.co.uk



A COMFORTING CRUNCH

We find out what shoppers are looking for in their sweet and savoury biscuits, and how indies can successfully stock and upsell them in 2023

Biscuits are somewhat synonymous with British culture – you'd struggle to find a Brit that doesn't love a teatime dunk or savoury cracker snack. But with consumers becoming increasingly demanding and financial crises changing the way they shop, independent retailers need to carefully consider their stocking choices when it comes to biscuits.

Successful stocking

In the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, shoppers are thinking more carefully about where their hard-earned pennies go. As Hayley Waters, marketing manager at Springvale Foods, explains, "Consumers want to spend their disposable income on products that gives them a sense of luxury and the feeling of indulgence. They want to enjoy foods that spark positive emotions that they can share with family and friends or give as thoughtful gifts. Most importantly, they are looking for quality products that they can return to time and time again."

Indeed, every consumer is different, but the trend towards little luxuries in times of financial strain is well-established. Therefore, independent retailers have a key opportunity to offer high-quality biscuits that feel like a real treat.

For Matt Hodgetts, speciality manager at Peters Yard, "The light, crisp and clean bite that the sourdough brings to our crackers is very popular with our consumers and it's certainly a point of difference over other crackers. We believe that consumers who are buying quality cheese and other toppings are looking for a cracker range that is neutral enough to allow the pairing to sing but also shows off their unique flavour and crunch."

Familiar flavours are always a winner, but according to Daniel Smith, sales and marketing manager at Stag Bakeries, consumers want more than this in 2023. "In our experience, consumers are still looking for their favourite staple products, the classics that never let them down, but in addition also want to experience different flavours, textures and colours, and have the chance to experiment. Our product development team has been busier than ever trying out new additions in our water biscuit and oatcake recipes to see how far they can push the envelope."

As Dawn Reade, director at Island Bakery, puts it, "There is a time and a place for a cheap packet of custard creams or digestives, but they perhaps don't quite hit the spot in making you actually enjoy and relish your tea break with something much more flavoursome and, we think, fabulous!

"It's the same with the savoury biscuits. Our Isle of Mull Cheese biscuits have a unique provenance, but they are more than a good story. Their texture and taste deliver a striking eating experience."



Indeed, provenance is a key consideration for shoppers looking to spend on small treats, as Daniel explains. "Provenance and brand story are more important than ever – consumers want to know what goes into the biscuits they see on the shelves and why, and where the producer is from and how they make their biscuits."

Catering to conscious consumers

Shoppers are looking to brands and retailers to offer a better choice in 2023, whether that is seeking out sustainably sourced ingredients or free-from options.

As Matt explains, "Consumers are looking for natural, high-quality ingredients in addition to health benefits such as high in fibre and low in sugar. All our products are made with natural, high-quality ingredients including Shipton Mill flour and Hillfarm rapeseed oil."

Another brand catering to conscious consumers is Island Bakery. "With the exception of the Isle of Mull Cheese biscuits, all our products are certified organic", Dawn tells *Speciality Food*. "The flour, butter, sugar and everything else are produced to organic standards which means no artificial fertilisers or pesticides are used in their production, and the milk for the organic butter comes from cows which have the highest organic welfare standards. We don't use palm oil either."

Also keeping free-from shoppers in mind, the Island Bakery range includes oatcakes and gluten-free cookies which are both free from animal products.

Similarly, at Peters Yard, "We







have also seen a growing demand for vegan-friendly products, and we offer a selection of seven products to cater to the growing demand in this category," Matt adds.

Indeed, free-from products are increasingly becoming more popular amongst consumers. According to Daniel, "Different dietary requirements are an important consideration and have been for several years, but consumer interest in product categories like biscuits suitable for vegans or gluten-free biscuits has never been higher than it is now."

Retailers don't need a specific vegan or gluten-free shelf to cash in on this demand. Mash Chiles, partner at Gourmet Partners, explains, "the Simply Seed and gluten-free ranges that Olina's Bakehouse produces sit in both the free-from and core range areas, offering a unique opportunity for the retailer and unexpected health benefits to the consumer, even if they are not seeking them out. In fact, it's a shame if they end up sitting in the free-from aisle when, in reality, they can be enjoyed by everyone."

Upselling savoury snacks

Unlike sweet treats, savoury biscuits and crackers are primarily big sellers during foodie occasions – you'd be hard-pressed to find a British Christmas spread without a cheeseboard complete with crackers and accompaniments. But according to Matt, retailers shouldn't just focus on these big days.

"There's a demand for savoury biscuits and crackers throughout the year beyond Easter and Christmas", he tells *Speciality Food*. "Our range of sourdough crackers, crispbreads, flatbreads and bites can be recommended as a light lunch or snack option using various toppings like smoked salmon, avocado and cream cheese."

When it comes to upselling savoury biscuits outside the big occasions, pairing is paramount. As Matt explains, "We would always advise retailers to place savoury biscuits as close to the cheese counter as possible to encourage impulse purchase. The cheesemonger can also recommend and upsell certain cracker flavours to suit different cheeses. To assist cheesemongers and retail staff with this, we've created an interactive 'Peter's Yard Pairing Wheel' which customers can use to match cheese with different cracker flavours."

Daniel agrees, "When Stag are in the process of creating our savoury biscuits, we always imagine how the biscuit might lift whatever accompaniment consumers look to pair with it. Pairing suggestions for the different flavours of crackers on offer can be a huge help in this sense, as we find that providing consumers with some ideas on how they could use the crackers as a base for all sorts of toppings fires their imaginations."

With the rise of cheese, charcuterie and butter boards on social media, there is increased interest in pairings and a key opportunity to upsell savoury biscuits for these occasions. "The great thing is that consumers are so educated and interested in cheese now that it becomes all about offering a spread of crackers that can pair up with them", Daniel tells *Speciality Food*. "Variety in flavours, textures, shapes, and colours are what consumers seem to be looking for when creating their cheeseboards, so there is more scope than ever now to stock a broad selection of crackers to provide plenty of options."

Of course, to further help demonstrate these pairings, indies can try their hand at sampling. According to Dawn, "Allowing customers to try before they buy is one great way of stimulating sales. Independent shopkeepers could combine a sample of our oatcakes with one of their best pates and showcase two products in one mouthful.

> "With such a variety of teas and coffees available too, we think more unconventional sweet biscuit flavours will really come to the forefront and shine in the future"

STOCK CHECK



RENDLES DARK CHOCOLATE & GINGER

Containing the truly luxurious spiciness of old-fashioned ginger, these biscuits are coated in cocoa-rich dark chocolate.

loverendles.com



OLINA'S SIMPLY SEED ROSEMARY CRACKERS

Olinas Bakehouse Simply Seed Rosemary are light and crispy gluten-free and vegan crackers, perfect for snacking or entertaining.

olinas-bakehouse



HEBRIDEAN BAKER MARMALADE SHORTBREAD

This small batch baked shortbread is light, crisp, and packed with a delightful marmalade flavour.

hebrideanbaker.com



PETERS YARD RYE & CHARCOAL CRACKERS

These sourdough crackers are made in small batches with Peters Yard's signature sourdough starter.

petersyard.com



SWEET FA DOUBLE CHOCOLATE COOKIES

These melt-in-the-mouth cookies will please any chocoholic, whether vegan, gluten-free or simply after a teatime treat.

islandbakery.scot



WALKERS THICK & CRUNCHY OATCAKES

These thick and crunchy oatcakes make a satisfying oaty snack baked with high-fibre oats and olive oil.

walkersshortbread.com



"Pairing the cheese biscuits with a wine, or even a portion of the Isle of Mull Cheese, perhaps with a small discount if you purchase together, would also work well."

Offering something special

Of course, to stand out from the multiples, independent retailers need to make sure they are stocking something special that customers can't get anywhere else.

As Hayley tells *Speciality Food*, "It is so important for retailers to understand the other retail outlets stocking the brands they choose to list. The supermarkets are applying more pressure than ever on independent retailers, winning basket spend from price-conscious consumers.

"Sourcing products that are unique to the speciality food sector has never been so imperative for the independent retailer. Rendles is a brand that will hold its value as it will always remain exclusive to the independent food sector, allowing retailers to retain their customers and promote repeat purchases."

This is something Dawn wholeheartedly agrees with. "Independent retailers need to offer something that can't be found in the run-of-the-mill supermarkets. Shoppers in independent shops are expecting to find products which have an authentic provenance with exceptional taste and quality ingredients. Many supermarket biscuits are made with palm oil or cheaper margarines. We use all butter in our sweet recipes. It is more expensive, but it does taste miles better!"

While classic combinations will always remain popular, Daniel suggests spicing things up in independent retail to stand out from the crowd. "Different textures and flavours seem to be the order of the day as consumers look for something special to have as their afternoon treat. With such a variety of teas and coffees available too, we think more unconventional sweet biscuit flavours will really come to the forefront and shine in the future," he adds.

Hayley concludes, "Retailers should look for brands that bring distinctness to their store and their sweet and savoury biscuit categories, building a portfolio of quality unique brands to attract footfall to their store."



RETAILER INSIGHT



Simon Warren, owner of The East Street Deli, talks us through his must-stock sweet and savoury biscuits

WHAT ARE YOUR BEST-SELLING SWEET AND SAVOURY BISCUITS AT THE EAST STREET DELI?

Our best-selling sweet biscuits are our locally made artisan ones that we get for seasonal occasions such as Easter, Valentine's, 'Thank you teacher' etc. We recently sold a huge number of coronation biscuits that our local biscuit producer made. They're great as they are good stocking fillers, table presents and small, affordable gifts that are only available at The East Street Deli.

We also stock the local Moores biscuits from the other side of Dorset which are good sellers. We are probably most famous for cheese in Wimborne and so we stock a wide range of savoury biscuits and crackers from Spanish supplier, Brindisa, which are fantastic. Popti Thins from Cornwall are also very popular.

WHAT DO YOUR SHOPPERS LOOK FOR WHEN BUYING BISCUITS?

I think there are two types of biscuit shoppers for sweet biscuits. There are those that want something for their coffee break and are quite happy with classic flavours, and then there are those that want a gift for a dinner party or if they're visiting a friend for coffee. Those customers are looking for that little bit of luxury that they can't find in a supermarket. Spanish Cigarrillos biscuits are great for such an occasion.

DO YOU HAVE A FREE-FROM RANGE? IF SO, WHY, AND HOW POPULAR IS IT?

Our free-from range is constantly growing although we don't have a specific free-from section. We try to display on new shelf edge labels the items that are free from gluten, sugar, dairy etc. We have trialled gluten-free gift hampers at Christmas as many people struggle to find gifts for friends and loved ones that have certain dietary requirements. Making it easier for them to shop with us is becoming more and more important.

DO TRENDS AFFECT YOUR BISCUIT RANGE?

We don't find that trends affect our biscuit range too much, although seasonal changes and annual events are worth adapting your range for if possible. Having a local producer that can make small, bespoke gifting ranges has been helpful for us.

WHAT TWEAKS ARE YOU PLANNING TO MAKE IN 2023?

We haven't really noticed too much change in the biscuit department so far this year but it's an area we could probably develop. Our savoury range is extensive and compliments our cheese sales but we're looking to work with new suppliers and producers for the sweet biscuits section.

> "The great thing is that consumers are so educated and interested in cheese now that it becomes all about offering a spread of crackers that can pair up with them"



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FUTURE-PROOFING THE STORECUPBOARD

Rice, pasta and cooking sauces are storecupboard staples, but how can indies ensure they are future-proofing their stocks? We find out

COMMENTATORS



CLAIRE HARCUP
SUN VALLEY



FINN DUNLOP
MACKNADE



ATHENA LEE
SHELFNOW



PERI EAGLETON
SEGGIANO



OLIVE WALKER
WINDMILL ORGANICS



OLIVE WALKER
WINDMILL ORGANICS

Rising costs across the board are evolving consumer trends in 2023, with customers choosing to dine in and save money with storecupboard staples such as rice, pasta and cooking sauces. But premium quality, health and sustainability continue to be the key drivers of consumer choice, and independents are well placed to cater to demand.

The cost-of-living effect

The cost-of-living crisis has had a significant effect on food and drink across the board, but one key product that skyrocketed in price was wheat – a fundamental ingredient for pasta. This pushed up the price of basic storecupboard staples throughout 2022 and into 2023.

Indeed, as Athena Lee, marketing manager at ShelfNow, explains, "The cost-of-living crisis has had a significant impact on the purchasing behaviour of shoppers when it comes to staples like pasta, rice, and cooking sauces. With rising costs and financial constraints, consumers are becoming more price-conscious to eat out and seeking ways to stretch their budgets while still meeting their essential needs.

"As a result, we have observed a notable increase in the sales of low-price items in the pasta, rice, and cooking sauce categories. Over the past three months, there has been a substantial 50% increase in the sales of low-price items. This surge in demand for affordable options can be attributed to shoppers looking for more budget-friendly choices without compromising on quality."

According to Claire Harcup, head of sales and marketing at Sun Valley Rice, "Consumers are now often buying larger packs of rice and often catering sizes which provide better value for money. Consumers are shopping around, and even though microwavable pouch sales have slowed, they still offer convenience for time poor cooks."

The financial crisis has also changed the way shoppers are consuming food, with them choosing to cook at home more often – favouring staples such as pasta, rice and cooking sauces to create meals. "The cost-of-living crisis has prompted consumers to evaluate their spending habits and prioritise value for money," Athena tells *Speciality Food*.

"In general, we observed a notable 28.57% increase in home cooking ingredients. As consumers seek to save money and exercise more control over their food budgets, the popularity of preparing meals at home has soared."

But Peri Eagleton, founder of Seggiano, has noticed that consumers are still trying new things despite tightened purse strings. "Best-sellers like the Seggiano Raw Basil Pesto, the Italian Extra Virgin Olive Oil, tomato-based sauces such as the Organic Melanzane Pasta Sauce and the organic pasta range remain popular at Seggiano, but there is also more demand for less mainstream products such as gluten-free pasta and flavoured oils that can elevate an inexpensive meal to a new level," she explains.

The importance of quality

Despite financial challenges, shoppers are still looking for something special in 2023, even when it comes to storecupboard staples.

As Athena explains, "Authenticity is a significant factor for consumers when it comes to home cooking ingredients. Whether it's a traditional Italian pasta sauce or premium Greek olive oil, consumers want products that deliver an authentic taste experience, reminiscent of homemade or restaurant-quality meals."

For Finn Dunlop, group buying manager at Macknade, the most important thing is that customers can trust the independent retailer to provide quality and value. "Whether shopping for a bag of pasta or a tin of tomatoes, given the volatility of food prices and the world in general over the last few years, what customers want more than anything is trust. Trust that we will continue to deliver quality and value in tandem, trust that we have considered the environmental, social and ethical impact, and trust that we will continue to innovate our range."

Demand for healthy, sustainable options

Consumers have not abandoned their environmental and health concerns in the cost-of-living crisis, instead, they continue to make it a focus in 2023.

"As consumers become increasingly aware of how their diets impact their health and with many converting to vegetarianism and veganism, health remains one of the driving factors for consumer choice and a willingness to be adventurous with ingredients and cooking," Peri tells *Speciality Food*.

Indeed, according to Athena, "Consumers are placing a strong emphasis on high-quality ingredients in their pasta, rice, and cooking sauces. They want products that are made with authentic, natural, and wholesome ingredients, free from artificial additives or preservatives. The demand for transparency in ingredient sourcing and production methods is on the rise, as consumers prioritize products that align with their health-conscious and environmentally-friendly lifestyles."

It's not just consumers' own health that is a concern – they are also looking for ways to help their children eat better. Olive Walker, marketing executive at Windmill Organics, explains, "Our new range, Little Foodies, focuses on fun foods that are nutritious and fun for younger children with an aim to make delicious food easier to prepare. We recognise the need to teach children healthy eating habits early on and inform them of the importance of



> Consumers are looking for quality products which offer value and great taste and versatility with sustainable farming practices

protecting our environment. We understand the need for quick, easy, healthy meals that are good for you, great for the planet."

Pasta brands are innovating in this space to offer nutritious and sustainable staples, and one brand certainly doing this is Pastifico Carleschi. Pasta is primarily made from durum wheat, a grain that does not do well in the UK climate. "You have to import it, meaning more carbon in your process, longer supply chains — we didn't want to copy what everyone else is doing, just multiplying those problems," says founder Giovanni Carleschi.

"That made us search for grains that were grown right here in Britain, which means less food miles to produce, better for the soil, but also, something very different in terms of texture and taste.

"Spelt, emmer, einkorn — they are not usually associated with pasta making, but they really do create a pasta that is unique — with a much more interesting flavour, texture and nutritional benefits than simply having a wholegrain version of the typical pack of spaghetti."

Looking to the future

Of course, the pasta and rice industry is heavily affected by the cost-of-living crisis, but as inflation gradually drops, consumers will continue to look for quality, sustainability and health.

As Peri explains, "Products with true sustainability credentials are beneficial to the health of consumers, meaning those who have the means to put the health of their bodies and environmental awareness above cost, will always drive demand for sustainable products through independent retailers.

"There is currently an appetite for less processed, healthy and highly sustainable products among consumers. The wide range of Seggiano products caters to all health conscious and sustainably minded consumers with the majority of its products certified vegan and many organic choices."

Indeed, sustainability is the way to future-proof the food industry, with pasta and rice being important parts of this.

"We all took notice of the slow-food idea, the idea of 'farm to fork'. It was a good start, but that's not enough if we want to protect biodiversity in our food chains," says Giovanni.

"We love the fact that our producers are using grains that are totally right for the soil they have, with no modern 'help'. And they are not driven by yield alone, so they are not pulling all those amazing nutrients out of the soil, they really are looking to future-proof their production."

THREE WAYS TO CATER TO DEMAND



Athena Lee, marketing manager at ShelfNow, highlights three ways independent retailers can cater to customer demand with pasta, rice and cooking sauces

In 2023, independent retailers can effectively cater to the demand for pasta, rice, and cooking sauces by considering the following strategies:

High-quality and authentic products: Independent retailers should prioritise stocking high-quality pasta, rice, and cooking sauces made with authentic ingredients. Customers value products that offer true flavours and deliver taste and quality that will encourage repeat purchases.

Embrace health-conscious options: Health-conscious consumers are increasingly seeking pasta, rice, and cooking sauces that align with their dietary preferences. Independent retailers can cater to this demand by offering options that are organic, gluten-free, vegan, or cater to specific dietary needs. Providing healthier alternatives can attract a broader customer base.

Educate and engage customers: Independent retailers can engage with customers by providing information and education about different types of pasta, rice, and cooking sauces. This can be done through informative signage, recipe suggestions, or even hosting cooking demonstrations and tastings to showcase the versatility and potential uses of the high-quality products that they stock. The human touch will also differentiate independent stores from retail chains.

By implementing these strategies, independent retailers can effectively meet the demand for pasta, rice, and cooking sauces in 2023, ensuring that they remain competitive and relevant in the evolving market landscape.

STOCK CHECK



GALLO TRADITIONAL
This plump stubby grain has a high starch content, which gives it a perfect balance of creaminess and bite, making it ideal for a traditional risotto.
risogallo.co.uk



LA MOLISANA MEZZI RIGATONI
This short pasta has an important thickness and an incredible roughness thanks to the bronze drawing.
lamolisana.it/en/



GAROFALO FARFALLE
A shape of short pasta with a smooth surface that intrigues both adults and children, perfect for simple sauces or for cold pasta salads.
pasta-garofalo.com/uk



NICE RICE WHOLEGRAIN BASMATI
This heritage variety basmati has a nutty flavour, produced using sustainable farming methods.
wearenicerice.com



SEGGIANO RED LENTIL FUSILLI
Following the artisan tradition of bronze forming and slow drying at low temperatures, this expertly crafted gluten-free organic pasta is made from 100% red lentil flour.
seggiano.com



BIONA ORGANIC SATAY PEANUT SIMMER SAUCE
Made with an enticing blend of peanuts, coconut milk and chilli, this sauce brings a complex balance of oriental flavours.
biona.co.uk



CENTRE



Tick all your customers' picnic boxes with these summery picks from Northern Ireland

1 TROUGHTONS PREMIUM LEMONADES

Troughtons Premium is an extension of Armagh Cider Company, run by the well-known Troughton family, at their home farm in the heart of the apple county in Armagh, Northern Ireland. The company have created a new suite of lemonades using spring water from their estate, available in three zesty flavours: Valencian Orange, Sparkling Blush and Sicilian Lemonade – the ideal accompaniment to any picnic.

troughtonspremium.com

2 ONiT! CRISPY ONIONS

ONiT! Crispy Onions are the perfect accompaniment for a multitude of dishes, including steaks, burgers, chicken, salads, sandwiches, hotdogs and soups. Produced at the Miller's farm on Northern Ireland's north coast, where onions have been grown on the family lands for over 30 years, ONiT! Crispy Onions have been a huge hit in homes since their launch in November 2022.

onitonions.com

3 MCCOLGANS SAUSAGE ROLLS

Renowned sausage roll producer McColgans has launched 'Gourmet by McColgans', a scrumptious sausage roll made with 64 layers of indulgent puff pastry unveiling a crisp yet flaky texture that cradles the exquisite savoury filling. These are delicately hand-finished with spices to make your taste buds sing. Get ready to savour the legacy of McColgans' pastry expertise and indulge in every single bite.

mccolgans.ie



4 TOM & OLLIE
MEZZE AND DIPS

Tom & Ollie buyers travel all over South America, Europe, North Africa and Turkey looking for innovation, and bring back recipe ideas. The team trials new recipes at Belfast's award-winning Irish food market every weekend, and then turns them into finished handmade products, hand-packed by the family team of colleagues. They currently locally produce 85 items and have a big following online from visitors to Ireland.
tomandollie.com

5 SHINDIGS
CRISPS

Shindigs have relaunched their range with the most exciting and delicious crinkle cut crisps in new, bold, award-winning flavours: Mature Irish Cheddar & Sweet Onion, Whiskey Smoked Bacon, Sour Cream & Shamrock Flavour, and Irish Salt & Vinegar. The range is perfectly packaged in a unique 90g box which makes it ideal for sharing or enjoying individually.
weareshindigs.com

6 SHORTCROSS
GIN

Distilled at Rademon Estate, an independent family distillery who source many botanicals from their gardens and forests, Shortcross creates gins that are big on flavour and use many wild foraged ingredients. Rosie's Garden Pink Gin has no added sugar and uses wild strawberries and raspberries from their gardens, winning double gold at the San Francisco World Spirts Awards.
shortcrossgin.com

7 CORNDALE FARM
MIXED CHARCUTERIE PLATTER

If you are looking to elevate your picnic or outdoor gathering, then the Corndale Farm Mixed Charcuterie Platter is the perfect summer stock. The finest free-range pork is delicately seasoned and cured to produce a multi-award-winning selection of salamis, chorizos and whole muscle products that are pre-sliced for your customers' convenience.
corndalefarm.com

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PREMIUM FROZEN FOOD

Goodbye chicken dippers, hello Moghul Chicken Curry. Time to make your customers a frozen offer they can't resist says Sally-Jayne Wright

Sales of fresh food are down, but frozen sales are holding steady. So supermarkets have invested in upright display freezers to increase impulse buys and visibility. There's lots of temptation: whether it's Beef Fillet Wellington and All-butter Brioche Dough, seen at Marks & Spencer; retro spam fritters at Iceland; or Hackney Hot Cross Bun Gelato at Arena Foods deli in Tooting.

TELL US MORE ABOUT THAT

At Arena, our nearest indie, we discovered Little Moons (rice dough-encased ices) in flavours we'd never heard of; also the range of Filosophy Greek Feta & Courgette Pies, and Aquahawk king prawns. We bought the prawns. Plump and delicious, they didn't shrink when the ice melted and were £7 a kilo cheaper than Taste the Difference at Sainsbury's Local – so the fine food sector can add value as well as variety.

WHY IS FROZEN COOL AGAIN?

- Handy products for free-from eating and healthy diets. Think gluten-free Yorkshire puds, mini no-chicken kievs, frozen avocados and high welfare chicken breasts (all seen at Marks & Spencer)
- Sustainability. Less food waste and less packaging
- Value for money. Frozen is cheaper than fresh across the board (Which? survey, February 2023)

ISN'T FROZEN LESS NUTRITIOUS THAN FRESH?

Actually, no. Former broccoli farmer, Rupert Ashby of the British Frozen Food Federation, declared, "Fresh broccoli can be up to five days old when it hits the supermarket shelves unlike frozen which is freshly frozen."

AND WHAT ABOUT COST?

When news got out that frozen berries were cheaper, sales soared. By 2023 they were in the national shopping basket (ONS).

WHAT'S A BARRIER TO FROZEN FOOD SALES?

"Getting customers to the freezer." said Rupert. "Typically, it's situated against an exterior wall." Claire Postans, brand director at COOK, said, "We find ready meals sales are best when freezers are positioned close to chilled, bakery or fresh products. That way customers are in the mind-set of 'dinner tonight' while having the flexibility of storing the meals for later."

TELL US MORE ABOUT BRANDED READY MEALS IN DISPLAY CHEST FREEZERS

COOK leads the way in upmarket frozen food. The new kid on the aisles is By Ruby, now in 250 independents and 54 Waitrose stores. Retailers buy a brand new freezer for about £1,000 from a specified supplier, may sell only the named brand's goods in it and receive full merchandising support. By Ruby co-founder, Milly Bagot, said, "We can normally order freezers and brand them within one month. You should see a return on investment within four months."

We've visited destination farm shops with up to 10 COOK freezers. They sell takeaways, puds, everything. If you're tight on space, all is not lost. Claire Postans said, "Our top 20 best-selling lines are very similar across the country so a two-freezer set-up will have our best-selling one- and two-portion meals."

WHY DON'T THESE COMPANIES USE UPRIGHT DISPLAY FREEZERS?

Because they cost much more to buy and run, and hold less.

ARE RESTAURANT-BRANDED FROZEN MEALS A TREND?

Yes, and 63% of UK adults agree they purchase ready meals as an alternative to having a takeaway (Mintel, 2022).

WHAT FROZEN TAKEAWAYS DO YOU SUGGEST?

We recommend the authentic Indian range made in Somerset by Bini Ludlow and stocked by Macknade Food Hall. "Multi-buys go well, said Bini. "Customers pick up two rice dishes and three different curries." Another supplier of quality Indian frozen is Mandira's Kitchen. "Chicken curries far outsell other lines," advised Mandira. We tasted our way through a range of Indian meals. Standouts were the new, evocatively-named Railway Mutton Curry by Mandira's Kitchen, By Ruby's fragrant Chicken Tikka Masala and Bini's Moghul Chicken Curry.

FROZEN IS CHEAPER THAN FRESH ACROSS THE BOARD

SOURCE: WHICH? SURVEY, FEBRUARY 2023

WILL CONSUMERS WANT TO RUN OVENS FOR 55 MINUTES TO COOK A FROZEN MEAL?

Most can be microwaved in 15 minutes or defrosted overnight for next-day cooking.

WE FANCY THOSE FIELDFARE FREEZERS WITH SCOOP YOUR OWN GOODS.

Some retailers are concerned it might impact sales of fresh farm veg. In fact, it may increase your sales. On Fieldfare's website in May, we saw active promotion of the fresh asparagus crop at farm shops with Fieldfare freezers.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO TEMPT OUR CUSTOMERS TO FROZEN?

Colourful point-of-sale material and frequent tastings. Promote in-store and on social media. You could try a Friday discount on fish. However, Claire said, "We've found value promotions don't necessarily drive long-term sales growth, only short-term freezer filling."

HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE TREND?

- Keep freezers pristine and full, using back-up freezers to restock
- See what nearby shops offer. Any gaps you can fill?
- Ice creams are affordable indulgence. Hand-held ices sell well
- Don't forget shortcuts for canny cooks like triple cooked chips for air fryers and ready rolled, all-butter pastry

WILL THE TREND LAST?

With more food price inflation to come and environmental concerns, frozen makes sense. There's new product development aplenty. Now it's up to buyers to make frozen food ranges irresistible.

> "It's up to buyers to make frozen food ranges not just inspired, but irresistible"



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FUTURE FOOD ICONS

Meet the people who are poised to transform the food and drink sector in the coming years

From the chief executives of trade bodies who help shape policies to the famous faces sharing recipes on our televisions and phone screens, the food and drink sector is chock full of influential voices. Here, we shine a light on the people who are set to shape the future of the sector.



Nicola Woods, event manager for Speciality & Fine Food Fair, reflects on some of the most important trends set to define the future of food and drink.

It's always fascinating to see how trends and topics in the fine food sector evolve, and nowhere are they more clearly on display than along the aisles of Speciality & Fine Food Fair.

For example, a decade ago, free from was arguably still at the start of its transformation into the thriving product category it is today. Natasha's Law, HFSS, and more continue to ensure this topic stays in the headlines and remains a focus for product developers. There's still so much innovation in the free from category, and so many niches to explore. It has become one of the most exciting and creative categories in the world of food and drink.

An issue close to our hearts at Speciality & Fine Food Fair is that of food waste. Issues stemming from the cost-of-living crisis and supply chain challenges show no signs of slowing down, which makes the issue of food waste even more important. Like many London retailers and hospitality businesses, we partner with City Harvest to reduce our impact and ensure excess food goes to a good home. Technology has a hugely important role to play in reducing food waste: from accurate forecasting to connecting food with those who need it, we're only as good as the infrastructure we rely on. The UK food and drink sector has made huge strides in this area, and we expect this to continue to evolve in the years to come.

Finally, and not to sound like a broken record, but sustainability continues to be the defining issue facing our buyers and producers at the Fair. Strong ESG credentials have rapidly gone from a nice-to-have to a vital part of any business plan, and this eco revolution shows no signs of slowing down.

Discover the future of food at Speciality & Fine Food Fair 2023, taking place on September 11-12 at Olympia London. Visit specialityandfinefoodfairs.co.uk to learn more.



Holly Shackleton, editor of *Speciality Food*, is excited by what's to come for the fine food and drink sector – and the role we all play in shaping it.

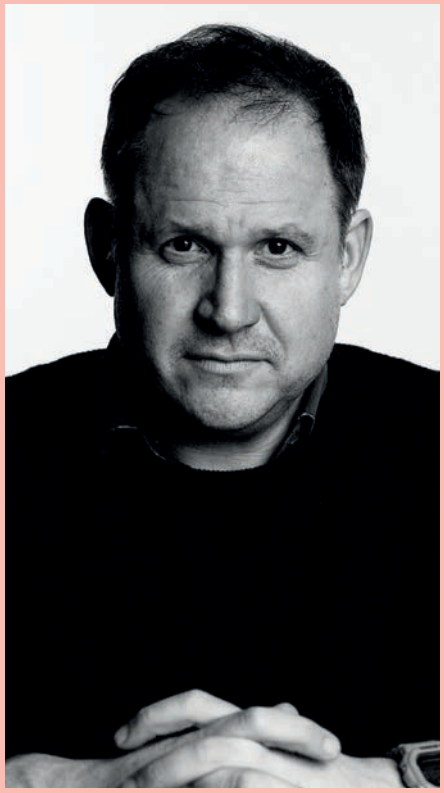
In curating this series of features about the future of food and drink, particularly how it pertains to our sector within it, I was instantly struck by the size of the task at hand. After all, what I – and others who work within the industry, I'm sure – find so exciting about food and drink is just how wide-reaching its scope is, as well as how varied the influences that shape it are.

We are all very well aware of the connections between food and drink and the natural environment — after all, it is what sustains us – and the importance of doing right by it, however much others may choose to ignore the importance of this. Government could be seen to be guilty of this, in some cases at least, so we're also drawn into regulations. Whether the rulings that are needed are there, if they're being followed, and how they should be adapted. Speaking of evolution, technology also plays a part. Making grand ideas into tangible business moves is often down to the technology we work with, and so while it perhaps plays a bigger role in larger industrial-scale businesses than SMEs, it absolutely shapes what we do.

But the largest impact is made by people. Passionate innovators who work incredibly hard and make sacrifices to make the world a better one for all of us. So that is where we shall begin.

Henry Dimbleby

FOOD CAMPAIGNER AND CO-FOUNDER OF LEON



Having shot to fame in the foodie world as the co-founder of the restaurant chain Leon, Henry Dimbleby has become better known in recent years for his work on food policy. After co-authoring The School Food Plan, which outlined how to transform what children eat in schools and how they learn about food, he became the lead non-executive board member of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in 2018. In 2020 and 2021, he published the two parts of the landmark National Food Strategy, which was hailed as the most ambitious review of the UK food system for 70 years. But this year he quit his role in Defra over frustration at a lack of strategy from the government. He accused the government of "ignoring" the ticking time bomb of health issues stemming from food and of giving up on their pledges on public health and going backwards on the issue of obesity. Despite leaving his advisory role, he is not giving up on the cause. His new book, *Ravenous: How To Get Ourselves and Our Planet Into Shape*, written with his wife, columnist Jemima Lewis, tackles the current health and climate crises in a way he hopes will be more accessible to the average Brit than a government whitepaper. With his big ideas about the UK's food and farming systems, there is no doubt he'll continue to be a significant figure in the sector in the coming years.

Renée Elliott

FOUNDER OF PLANET ORGANIC



This year, Renée Elliott is stepping back into the food and drink industry with a bang. In 1995, she founded Planet Organic, the UK's first organic supermarket, and caused a huge shift in the way Brits think about food. But she decided to step away in 2009. This year, Planet Organic was facing collapse having come under pressure from high inflation and overheads. When she was called in March and told the business would be going into administration, she had no intention of returning to the helm of the business. "Brian, my husband, and I decided to look for a buyer, help raise money and put a small team together," she tells *Speciality Food*. "Over four very intense weeks of the situation changing and moving continuously, we decided we are the safest hands for Planet Organic, so we put a bid together to buy the business from the administrator," she says.

Now, she's set to return to her mission of promoting healthy food and drink, challenging conventional retailing and showing that values-led business is good business. With 30 years of experience in business and personal development, Renée also mentors start-ups and small businesses on purpose, resilience and strategy through her second business Beluga Bean. "I'm most looking forward to re-building a beautiful business that people love to work for, that promotes the health of people in our communities and supports the earth's biodiversity," she says. "And to do all that while having fun."

Jamie Oliver

CHEF, AUTHOR AND CHILD HEALTH CAMPAIGNER



As one of Britain's foremost celebrity chefs, Jamie Oliver has played a huge role in shaping Britain's food and drink industry in recent decades. He has authored more than 30 cookbooks and fronted dozens of TV programmes following the success of his 1999 debut, *The Naked Chef*. Going beyond his role as TV chef, he took up the baton for raising awareness about processed foods in school lunches, and in 2005 he campaigned to improve standards. Following his success in highlighting this issue, he's still fighting to make progress in child health today, with his organisation aiming to halve childhood obesity in the UK by 2030.

However it's not only his work in schools that earns him a place on this list. Jamie Oliver is a true champion of British food and drink, and when the country faces challenges, he doesn't shy away from the limelight. In the midst of the Covid-19 lockdowns, he started a new TV programme, *Keep Cooking and Carry On*, which showcased flexible, simple meals and even involved filming on Jamie's and his family's phones. More recently, *Jamie's £1 Wonders* has highlighted budget-friendly meals during the cost of living crisis. "We just responded to what you guys were asking for," he said of *Keep Cooking and Carry On*. Indeed, listening to the public and quickly responding with just the right thing is what Jamie Oliver does best.

Jason Gibb

ENTREPRENEUR AND CO-FOUNDER OF BREAD & JAM



The indie food industry is at its best when brands are sharing their knowledge and working together to achieve great things. This collaborative attitude is the driving force behind Bread & Jam, the UK's biggest food and drink founders' festival. Jason Gibb launched Bread & Jam with co-founder Tara Mei in 2016 to support the growth of innovative food and drink brands.

After working as a TV producer, a book author and a qualified biochemist, Jason dove into the food and drink sector when he bought an abandoned olive grove in Le Marche, Italy, and created the olive oil brand Nudo. After 10 years working to make the business a success, he decided to change gear to co-found Bread & Jam, an annual conference that aims to be a one-stop shop for emerging and scaling brands. Each year, 16,000 food and drink brands emerge into the market in the UK, but 90 percent of them don't make it past their first year of trading, according to Bread & Jam. It's a shocking statistic, but perhaps not surprising to food and drink industry players. By bringing together entrepreneurs, investors, retailers and other industry leaders, the event has become a place to learn and grow – and a mainstay in the independent food and drink sector's calendar. With innovative brands cutting their teeth at Bread & Jam, it's the place to look for the entrepreneurs of the future.



Michael Thomson

CHEESEMAKER AND OWNER OF MIKE'S FANCY CHEESE

Belfast-based Michael Thomson has been making Young Buck, a raw milk blue cheese, in Newtownards for nine years, but he's more than a farmhouse cheesemaker: he's a proper champion of great cheese. After learning his trade at the School of Artisan Food, Mike worked for David and Jo Clarke on Sparkenhoe Farm, the team behind Leicestershire Handmade Cheese Co. He returned to Belfast to start making his own cheese in 2013, and in 2019, he opened his shop, Mike's Fancy Cheese, inspired by the growing local cheesemaking scene. From his shop, he works directly with producers selling Irish cheese with a focus on Irish raw milk cheese and small farmhouse producers. "I came from a retail background and really enjoy having a shop in the centre of Belfast," he says. The shop has become a hive of activity: "We run beer and cheese pairings and work with lots of local businesses around us to try to create a vibrant community in what would be seen as quite a neglected part of Belfast," Mike tells *Speciality Food*. He enjoys building connections with producers, many of whom can't keep up with demand. He feels this start-up phase is the trickiest for producers in the region. "Cheesemaking has such high start-up costs for equipment, and a lot of legislation and paperwork to get started and can be a daunting task and definitely a reason that puts off home makers getting any bigger," he says. He sees a gap in the market for a forum connecting farmers who want to be start-up cheesemakers – but in the meantime he is happy to take on this role himself: "We try to be that in the shop."

Minette Batters

PRESIDENT OF THE NFU



Minette Batters has a rich history in the world of food and farming. Alongside running a tenanted family farm in Wiltshire, which includes a 100-cow herd, as well as sheep and arable crops, she has been president of the National Farmers' Union since 2018. In her role, Minette has faced no shortage of significant twists and turns in politics and policy, from her influencing voice in Brexit negotiations to the Covid-19 pandemic, where she championed British farmers at some of their most dire moments. In 2020, she led a hugely successful petition, bringing together a coalition of chefs, including Jamie Oliver, farmers, environmentalists, consumer groups and animal welfare experts – resulting in over one million people signing the NFU food standards petition. Campaigning on behalf of NFU members about the critical role of British food and farming in health, sustainability and food security has been central to Minette's role since becoming president of the organisation.

In her message to members at the start of the year, Minette said, "The importance of British farming to deliver food and energy has never been clearer." This year, she has prioritised putting British food security on the agenda and setting the pathway to reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2040. "I am hopeful that 2023 will be the year that the government gets serious about British food and farming," she said.

Tristram Stuart

FOUNDER OF TOAST ALE AND FEEDBACK



From rearing pigs and chickens on food that was destined for the bin as a teenager in Sussex to starting his own environmental campaign organisation, Tristram Stuart has helped to put the food waste issue on the national agenda. His work highlighting the perfectly good food that could be recovered from supermarket bins led to seismic change in the industry. In 2009, he published his international prize-winning book, *Waste: Uncovering the Global Food Scandal*, and that same year he organised a 'Feeding the 5,000' event in Trafalgar Square, where 5,000 people were fed lunch with ingredients that otherwise would have been wasted. The event caught the attention of the press, as well as ministers from the government, and this led to a quick shift in supermarkets' policies on donating food waste.

Following this success, Tristram founded an environmental campaign charity, Feedback, which he ran until 2017. Having helped numerous start-ups in the food waste space, he decided in 2016 to launch his own: Toast Ale, which crafted beer using bread that would otherwise go to waste. Since Tristram started raising awareness about food waste, he cites a significant, measurable reduction in food waste. "People are wasting a third less per capita than they were back then," he tells *Speciality Food*. But he sees his work as far from finished. "Food waste was always the first step in what is a much bigger global transformation that we need to go through," he says, "and I'm very much focused on how we can use food to transform the food system."

Helen Browning

CEO OF THE SOIL ASSOCIATION



Today, sustainability stands front and centre as a key pillar in the food and drink industry – but it wasn't always this way. The Soil Association has worked for over 75 years to transform the way we eat, farm and care for the natural world, and as such it has become an important and influential voice in the food and drink sector. The charity's *Organic Market Report* is a closely watched gauge of demand for organic food and drink, and the group regularly throws its weight behind issues facing the sector.

Helen Browning has been at the helm of the organisation since 2011, and she also works as a commissioner for the Food Farming and Countryside Commission, which was established to encourage ideas about where our food comes from, how we support farming and rural communities and how we invest in the benefits the countryside provides. Having held a number of key roles in agri-politics over the years, including the Government's Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food (also known as the Curry Commission), Helen is deeply embedded in the food and farming communities. With sustainability set to be a significant influence in the future of food and drink, her role in leading the Soil Association and commitment to building farming systems of the future will only become more influential.

Poppy O'Toole



CHEF, AUTHOR AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

Michelin-trained chef Poppy O'Toole has been described as "the Millennials' answer to Delia Smith" and "the poster girl for TikTok cooks". After gaining 10 years of experience in professional kitchens, her engaging approach to food has won hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram and over four million followers on TikTok. TikTok is the new arena for home cooks and serious chefs alike, with the site's algorithm sending trends exploding onto the food scene left and right, from viral veggie corn ribs to the Feta pasta that no one can forget.

Poppy is one of a wave of young chefs using the platform to share their love of food with younger audiences – and her position as a judge on *Young MasterChef* solidifies her position as one of the key voices shaping younger generations' view of the food industry. With easy-to-follow recipes and simple tips, she is helping to make the foodie world more accessible. While her first cookbook provided a "no judgement" beginner's guide to basic skills and recipes, a new book on sale this summer promotes fool-proof air fryer recipes, emphasising the quick, low-energy cooking gadget on everyone's minds during the cost of living crisis. Having shot to fame over just a few years, we're excited to see what she does next.



Karen Betts

CEO OF THE FOOD AND DRINK FEDERATION

Ever since the Brexit vote, there's been a growing movement to champion British food and drink manufacturers both at home and abroad. Karen Betts, who was appointed as the FDF's CEO in 2021, has worked to do just that by representing the huge range of companies that keep food on our tables and make up the UK's largest manufacturing industry. "These are rapidly changing times, with challenges and opportunities for the industry to grasp in everything from addressing climate change, to skills and livelihoods, and healthy diets," Karen said upon her appointment to the role. Since then, she has been involved in everything from campaigning the government to tackle food and drink inflation to discussing accelerating the sector's journey to net zero carbon emissions. Recent moves have also shown the organisation's focus on supporting manufacturers both large and small. For example, the FDF launched a new online platform to help manufacturers invest in innovations like new technologies, automation and sustainability: the Food and Drink Innovation Gateway. "The UK's food and drink businesses are the lifeblood of our homes and our communities," Karen said at the time. "But these companies are often small and struggle to find the bandwidth and the right support to invest in the right technologies and innovation to help them grow to their full potential." With access to technology likely to be a defining feature of the future of food, it's only right that Karen champions the industry's many small businesses.



4 FORCES
SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE FOOD SECTOR

Courtney Goldsmith examines the movements that will have a lasting impact on what and how the UK eats

Trends come and go. For each craze that becomes ingrained in the way British consumers eat, there are dozens more that have been lost to time. While short-lived fads can certainly provide value for retailers, when it's time to get the crystal ball out to gaze at where the sector is headed in the next decade, they tend to fall flat.

To understand where the food and drink sector is headed, we need to look at the deeper movements underpinning these passing trends. By understanding these, independent retailers can get ahead of the curve and be at the cutting edge of the industry. Here, we'll look at four forces shaping the future of food and drink.

1 CLIMATE **CHANGE**

Anyone working in the food and drink sector knows that sustainability is much more than a trendy buzzword. The impact of the climate crisis on the global food industry is not only poised to reshape supply chains and define the crops of the future, but as consumers become aware of the impact of their diet on the planet, eating habits are shifting too. Kantar's *Global Trends Report* found that consumers are driving 920,000 monthly average searches for 'fair trade' and 254,000 for 'sustainable agriculture'.

"As the growing consciousness around sustainability gains momentum, consumers are paying more attention," the report says. It cites a "genuine interest" in learning about sustainable agricultural methods and regenerative practices. Reading the tea leaves shows that consumers are looking at sustainability from a long-term perspective, with a growing interest in areas like soil health, managing food waste and sustainable packaging. Interest in 'regenerative agriculture' grew by a whopping 85 percent. "Consumers are vested, aware, and willing to hold brands accountable," the report says.

> "Stakeholders in the UK food industry must continue to adapt to ensure food is affordable, sustainable and nutritious"

The growing interest in a sustainable food industry may not be so surprising when we consider how present climate change has become in our daily lives. "We can no longer consider climate change as a future threat," Jayne Brookman, EIT Food's chief partnership officer tells *Speciality Food*. "Every corner of the globe, including the UK, is experiencing change now, from unpredictable weather patterns, extreme climate events and seasonal shifts, to increased health risks, rising food insecurity and rapid biodiversity loss." And the food and drink sector is at the centre of this quickly shifting arena. "The food system is both a cause and casualty of these challenges, and stakeholders in the UK food industry must continue to adapt to ensure food is affordable, sustainable and nutritious," Jayne says.

Farmers are at the frontline of these changes, but consumers will also play a key role, and Jayne only expects their understanding that dietary changes are needed to grow. For retailers, this means you can expect to see more consumers seeking out local meat and produce, alternative proteins or brands with high environmental standards.



A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Where are technological innovations making the most impact? Jayne sees big opportunities in circular economy solutions. "Food waste in the UK accounts for approximately 15 billion meals being thrown away every year and 25 Mt of greenhouse gas emissions. A recent UK Food Standards Agency poll also revealed that 60 percent of people in the UK are concerned about food waste, showcasing an appetite for greater guidance and solutions," she says. "Innovations such as Mimica's accurate expiry date food labels and envoPAP's waste valorisation solution are helping to support consumers and industry alike to design out the concept of waste and contribute to the circular economy, but further investment and support is needed in order to scale solutions at speed."

2 DISRUPTION FROM **NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

The continual need to create solutions to address challenges like climate change has fostered an innovative growth spurt in the food and drink sector. From developing new materials for planet-friendly packaging to expanding the concept of animal-free protein, there are countless areas where innovation in technology will have huge impacts on the food system in the years to come.

Kantar found a 17 percent growth in interest around 'cultured meat', also known as lab-grown meat. This year, a team of scientists created the world's first 100 percent cultivated steak. Made of pork cells, the fillet reportedly replicated traditional pork meat in look, flavour and texture. The 3D Bio-Tissues team called it a "cruelty-free fillet" and said it exceeded expectations. However, researchers at the University of California, Davis, this year claimed that lab-grown meat's environmental impact is likely to be even worse than retail beef. As this technology is only in its infancy, it is hard to predict where it will end up, but with the market valued at $246.9m in 2022 and predicted to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 51.6 percent, we are certainly likely to see more results sooner rather than later.

Another area ripe for innovation is sustainable packaging. There are several avenues being explored today, from recyclable to biodegradable – and even edible. Australia's Good-Edi has crafted an edible coffee cup which is made from natural ingredients like flour, wheat bran, oat bran, salt, sugar, coconut oil and water.

Technology is not only disrupting materials and ingredients, but it's also making the global food sector more transparent. As consumers demand transparency through the global supply chain, businesses are developing ways to trace products and ingredients through data and cutting-edge technologies. With consumers quick to lose trust, retailers should be on the lookout for brands that find ways to showcase their sustainability credentials with hard data in the years to come. shoppers don't want to sacrifice flavour. "The quest to find something that is 'better for me' while satisfying the sweet tooth continues," the report says. "It's about satisfying cravings by mimicking feel good foods through healthy, plant-based ingredients or through the creation of new recipes that continually engage." Brands that do this successfully will be the ones to watch.



3 HEALTH REGULATIONS

Restrictions on retail placements of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) came into force in October 2022, and a ban on multi-buy offers is set to take effect in October 2023. Meanwhile, the junk food watershed – a ban on advertising HFSS food before 9pm on television and online – will now come into effect in 2025.

Originally, the price restrictions and TV advert bans were set to come into force earlier, but the introduction has been delayed due to the cost-of-living crisis. Delayed or not, the rules have already led more businesses to invest in reformulating their products. Food and drink from members of the Food & Drink Federation (FDF) now contribute 13 percent fewer calories, 15 percent fewer sugars and 24 percent less salt to the average shopping basket than they did eight years ago, according to analysis by the FDF.

> More support is needed to help smaller businesses match the innovation and output of the larger companies

"These latest figures show the fantastic achievements the UK food and drink industry continues to deliver," says Kate Halliwell, the FDF's chief scientific officer. However, the research showed that small and medium-sized businesses in the UK are having more difficulty reformulating HFSS products, with larger companies managing to achieve improvements that are four times that of smaller companies. "With 97% of the food and drink industry made up of small to medium-sized companies, these companies can play an important role in providing healthier options but many do not have the resources, or technical expertise, to reformulate their products."

With health in the sight lines of the government, companies and the public, there is no doubt the shift towards healthy food and drink products will continue to be a huge force of change in the coming years. Of the 10 trends Kantar's report identified for 2023, half related to consumer health. But while health is important, shoppers don't want to sacrifice flavour. "The quest to find something that is 'better for me' while satisfying the sweet tooth continues," the report says. "It's about satisfying cravings by mimicking feel good foods through healthy, plant-based ingredients or through the creation of new recipes that continually engage." Brands that do this successfully will be the ones to watch.

4 LESSONS FROM COVID-19

While many of us would like to put the challenges of the past few years behind us, what we learned about our food systems during the pandemic years can't be brushed under the carpet. The Covid-19 pandemic showed us how fragile global supply chains are, and that to ensure resilience in our food systems, we need to shift from global to local. "In a 2020 EIT Food study, 35% of European consumers said buying locally produced food was more important to them during the Covid-19 pandemic, and, within this group, 87% also said this will very likely continue to be the case in the future," Jayne says.

Food shortages seen during the pandemic, as well as supply problems caused by everything from adverse weather conditions to Brexit to poor economic conditions, underlined the importance of creating a resilient food system. According to Global Food Security, the UK imports 48 percent of the total food consumed, and this is rising. The farming industry has spoken about the importance of creating a 'farm to fork' supply chain to build a more sustainable and resilient food system. However, the recent Farm to Fork Summit held by prime minister Rishi Sunak drew criticism from many corners of the sector, including charities and sustainable farming organisations.

While the question of food security needs a joined-up approach, according to Jayne, there are technological solutions to boost local, circular food systems in the UK, too. "This includes controlled environments agriculture (CEA) methods. Whether in urban or rural areas, CEA enables people to grow food on land in a more diverse range of locations, providing the opportunity for producers to locate their production closer to consumers," she says. "This includes production methods such as in-land aquaculture systems, greenhouses, and vertical farms." While a holistic solution may seem a long way off, we can expect to see more steps in this direction over the coming years.

Amid current challenges like the cost of living crisis, it can be difficult to see the wood for the trees, but another lesson to take away from the Covid-19 pandemic is the way the sector rallied together during a difficult time to make the impossible happen. From building a resilient food system to adopting innovative technologies, these industry-wide movements will be most successful when the sector bands together. As Jayne says, "We must continue to work together, share ideas, and innovate to ensure food is not only healthy and sustainable, but also affordable and accessible for everyone."

> We must continue to work together, share ideas, and innovate to ensure food is not only healthy and sustainable, but also affordable and accessible for everyone



DEFINING YOUR MISSION

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 key issues up to the socks and sandals brigade demanding that energy and funds be funneled 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 – and host of May's Future Summit – which saw mission-driven food and drink businesses group together to learn and collaborate for a better future. No wonder there are now over 1,300 B Corp-certified businesses in the UK alone.

Defining 'mission-driven'

But what makes a business mission-driven? Amirah Jiwa, an independent social impact and sustainability consultant, defines it as: "A business that aims to make a positive impact in a specific social or environmental issue area, alongside making money."

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 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 impact, says Amirah. "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: it can be tricky to come up with messaging and campaigns that are clear and compelling while also capturing needed nuance (and complying with the Green Claims Code)."

A bright future

Within the fine food orbit, there is an impressively large – and growing – proportion of people who are making proactive choices to make what they consume less damaging for the future of people and the planet. This means that by toeing the line between a sustainable business model and the challenges today's consumers are facing, independent fine food retailers, producers and beyond can appeal to both shoppers and their bottom line.

"Given a choice consumer want to do the right thing and will prefer something that is ethical and sustainable. But the key is that you give them a genuine, price-comparable choice – so, for example, the packaging-free products need to be the same price as the packaged product and the Fairtrade, sustainable coffee has to be at a similar price point to a premium coffee," says Jason. "Otherwise there is definitely an action intention gap on the part of the consumer – they'll say they strongly believe in something, but when it's time to put something in their basket they'll base that on price."

Amirah agrees. "Between the pandemic, extreme weather events happening with more regularity and divisive politics, the future feels increasingly fraught. Consumers are looking for ways to make a difference, and purchasing from brands whose values align with their own often seems like one small but accessible way to do that. Given two brands with similar products,



one with an added social or environmental benefit and one without, why wouldn't you choose the more impactful option?"

A challenging trade-off

While one would hope that every business approaches becoming mission-driven with an entirely holistic mindset, the fact is that any kind of solution to one problem will bring up a linked issue somewhere else down the line. "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

"With so many companies large and small shouting about their missions, their ethics and their eco-credentials it can be nigh on impossible to distinguish the fakers from the bona fide," says Jason. "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 tree if it were true!"

With a disappointingly large number of businesses 'greenwashing' their work to make it appeal to conscious consumers, there is a lot to be said for consumers educating themselves – as well as *Speciality Food* readers, industry players and producers picking up the mantle – so that they are able to sort the fact from the fiction. Thankfully, resources are available and there are bodies doing the work to provide clarity. "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."

With such a wide scope for working for the good of people and the planet – attracting conscientious shoppers along the way – the future is an increasingly exciting place for mission-driven ventures.

> "The 'missions' are endless. 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"

THE FOOD OF THE FUTURE

The food industry is unavoidably shaped by large-scale forces, but what does this mean in terms of what we produce, sell and eat? Tastehead's Brandt Maybury digs in

Having read Courtney Goldsmith's feature on the aspects of our lives that are impacting the food industry in huge ways (p26-27), you'd be forgiven for thinking that the evolution of our industry remains outside of our control. Government regulations, planet Earth's environments, and scientific advancements all play a sizeable role in what we consume, but to ignore the valuable position the fine food sector – consisting of passionate, knowledgeable and dedicated small and medium-sized enterprises of all descriptions – would be to do it a disservice.

We caught up with Brandt Maybury, co-founder and managing director of Tastehead – a food and drink development agency – to gather their thoughts on how these huge market forces are set to impact the day-to-day of food industry professionals in the coming years.

Powerful influences

According to Brandt, we need to look beyond the obvious to learn the full extent of the forces shaping food and drink. "I think it's fair to say that more external forces than I can ever remember are currently affecting our industry. The obvious ones include: Covid-19, Brexit, the war in Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis, global warming, various strikes... The less obvious ones include the advent of artificial intelligence. It might sound silly to think it's going to have a significant impact on the F&B industry, but in a similar way to how rapidly the pandemic evolved the DTC (direct to consumer) channel, I think AI has the potential to change our day to day lives enough that it impacts our supply chains, consumer habits, marketing strategies and much more."

A topic that *Speciality Food* readers will be far more familiar with is the evolution of the plant-based category. "This in a pivotal position at the moment whilst consumers, brands and retailers all try to better understand the role that plant-based alternatives play and how much they should/shouldn't copy existing animal-based products. The plant-based revolution will probably drive diversity in flavours and products as we explore new ingredients to replace animal derivatives. Clinical studies, data and news articles will continue to debate what is best for us, best for the planet, and ultimately the most ethical decision to make which will continue to be a huge influence on the trends and NPD in this category.

"Finally, HFSS is still on many people's minds. We're still waiting to see what the final outcome will be, but brands and retailers are continuing the work towards changing and developing new offerings in anticipation."

Speaking of new offerings, format will play a vital role in the future of what we eat and drink. Today's consumer is more conscious than ever of the danger of single-use packaging, leading forward-thinking businesses to rethink the materials



they are using to package their produce.

The differing ways in which consumers shop is having an effect too. "The rise in DTC will likely see an increase in online-exclusive brands and personalised products, changing the way we shop and consume food and beverage products," says Brandt.

An opportunity for indies

"The first noticeable impact will most likely be on availability and diversity of products," says Brandt. "External pressures like Brexit and global warming may impact supply chains, potentially leading to a more locally-focused, sustainable product offering. This could result in a resurgence of traditional British flavours and ingredients, while exotic ingredients may become rarer or pricier."

How will consumer tastes adapt to fit the new reality? "They may become more accustomed to local flavours, seasonal availability and a lean towards healthier taste profiles. With continued efforts to reduce sugar consumption I would expect this to have a real impact on the general population's acceptance for sweetness levels in the long term. It will be interesting to see how the latest news around sweeteners not actually helping people to lose weight (and potentially being linked to health issues) impacts HFSS and the overall approach to reducing sugar in sweet foods.

The health halo

The world's consumers have become more aware of their health than ever since the Covid-19 pandemic kicked it into the headlines, and British shoppers are becoming increasingly keen to add an element of health-giving functionality into their diets – ideally via convenient formats. This push is coming from potentially unexpected places. "For starters, the push towards sustainability will give rise to the exploration of new, under-utilised local ingredients, potentially unlocking novel natural sources of nutrients," explains Brandt. "Furthermore, the growing focus on health and well-being will create opportunities for functional foods that offer additional benefits beyond basic nutrition, such as immune support or gut health. And the adoption of AI and other advanced technologies will open up opportunities for precision nutrition and hyper-personalised products."

While it may seem niche now, the American market offers a taste of what's to come. "I was over in California last year on a research trip, and adaptogens, nootropics, prebiotic fibres and other functional ingredients are now featuring in almost every category, even in the larger/mainstream retailers such as Ralph's and Target," explains Brandt.

How to make it happen

"The entrepreneurs of the industry will view these as opportunities for growth and transformation, rather than a cause for anxiety," he says. "However, it is essential to acknowledge that these changes require agility, adaptability, and a willingness to take some risks. Traditional models may need to evolve, and I'd suggest that businesses should be prepared to invest in technology and sustainable practices to facilitate this.

"It's a transformative time for the food and beverage industry. We're at the cusp of significant change – much of it driven by external forces. But it's also a time of great innovation and potential. Despite the challenges, I firmly believe that the industry's future is bright. As we navigate these changes, it's important to remember that at the heart of it all is the need to nourish and delight consumers in a sustainable and ethical way, whilst keeping taste at the heart of any food or beverage product. Let's not lose sight of that amidst the whirlwind of change."

> "As we navigate these changes, it's important to remember that at the heart of it all is the need to nourish and delight consumers in a sustainable and ethical way, whilst keeping taste at the heart of any food or beverage product. Let's not lose sight of that amidst the whirlwind of change"



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THE BENEFITS OF LEARNING AFFINAGE

We find out how mastering the skills of maturation can level up your business

Cheesemaking is both an art form and a science. As well as being rooted in flavours, feelings and smells, cheese is ruled by biochemical reactions and fractions-of-a-degree differences in temperature or humidity.

Maturing is an important stage of the process which can significantly impact the flavour and texture of the finished product. In fact, learning the art of the affineur offers cheesemongers a way to differentiate themselves from competitors.

Inside the maturing room

In order to dive into the world of affinage, a cheesemonger could invest in a maturing room to complete the process.

Patricia Michelson, owner of La Fromagerie in London has multiple hidden locations for her affinage processes. She tells *Speciality Food*, "I have rooms in my warehouse and under the shop in Highbury especially for keeping cheeses in their right place, at the right temperature and with humidity to enhance their ripening process.

"These rooms hold hard, soft, washed, fresh and blue cheeses which are tended every day and turned, brushed and racked according to their needs. There is also a special room for working on specific cheeses to see how the maturing process grows from their fresh status until fully ripened. This is for members of the team to learn and assess hard, soft and blue cheeses – just one cheese each – to work on them and make notes as well as discuss."

Maturing is the backbone of Mike's Fancy Cheese, as founder Mike explains. "We wanted to be able to make sure that the customers are getting the cheese in its peak condition, so we created a maturing room to be able to achieve this.

"We have turned our whole shop into a maturation store with a refrigerated counter to enable us to control the softer cheese, too. We can keep the harder cheese in the same maturing temperature and humidity to keep the flavour vibrant. It also helps us bridge the seasonality of some of our cheeses."

The benefits of affinage

In many ways, learning the art of maturing is what helps an independent cheesemonger stand out from the crowd and draw in more customers.

As Patricia explains, "Affinage/ripening is so important for us to put our thumbprint onto a cheese to show when it is at its best, or when we think it is at its best, but also show the stages of ripening. We like to have a fresh cheese, a ripened one and then a fully matured and maybe 'funky' one in the shop cheese rooms to show the very end of the maturation.

This is something Mike also values. He adds, "Allowing the customer to see full wheels of cheese is the main reason. I think it gives them more of an idea of how cheese is made, the differences between smaller producers and mass-produced cheese, and connects them with the product with visual dates of production – it helps them appreciate the effort that goes into small-scale cheesemaking."

Of course, promoting artisan cheese is what cheesemongery is all about, and learning how to develop the flavours through affinage celebrates the multiple complexities within the cheese. We are not always looking for consistency; we are looking to see how each stage changes, and when to say stop – it's now at its best and don't go further as the flavours will start falling away and the texture become brittle or dry," Patricia says.

Learning the art of affinage

The purpose of maturing is to elevate a high-quality artisan cheese even further. As Mike puts it, "I remember someone saying once in affinage you can make a good cheese great, but you can't make a bad cheese good, so only if proper conditions space and procedures are in place can you elevate the cheese."

> "Do not think that experimenting blindly will get you to understand the world of affinage. You need to get under the skin and read a lot of books"

But more than that, affinage is an art and requires a lot of hard training and research to develop the skill. As Patricia warns, "Do not think for one second that experimenting blindly will get you to understand the world of affinage. You need to get 'under the skin' of the cheese and read a lot of books.

"Creating the right room and temperature and humidity takes skill and expertise, as all sorts of negative pathogens can develop and grow on rinds and crusts which need monitoring. I feel it is very dangerous indeed to just say I have a room in my shop or facility where I mature and ripen, and just leave a load of different cheeses in there without any knowledge of how they are going to react to each other.

"The mind boggles, and you need to understand right from the start how this is not just a romantic notion, but rather a science requiring knowledge and insight."



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"Championing Farmhouse Cheddar"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

Cheddar cheese's roots go back to the 12th century. The name Cheddar does not have a Protected Designated Origin. This means that Cheddar can be produced all over the world. West Country Farmhouse Cheddar, however, does have a PDO and is really a labour of love. There are many exceptional examples of artisan farmhouse Cheddar throughout the UK.

Sadly most Cheddar is industrially produced, with some factories producing 200 tonnes a day. This is more than most artisan makers produce in a year – now there's food for thought.

Over the past few years cheese has become very hip. In fact there are a lot more super cool beards, cheese-inspired tattoos, hipster haircuts and fashionably-clad cheesemongers and cheesemakers out there. It is a brilliant time to be involved in the cheese business. What are you waiting for!

To be cool with cheese means knowing your field well. You'll need to know how cheese is affected by where it is made. Well, it is a combination of the cow's lactation cycle, breed of cow, location, feed, animal welfare and biome in which the cheese is matured or ripened in. These factors all bring amazing flavour and subtle nuances to the final product. The subtle flavours are finally now being talked about with newfound confidence.

So why are we getting so cool at cheese? To start, we now have an Academy of Cheese. When I talk to people about this they get very excited. "Really? An Academy of Cheese? That is so awesome... how do I join?" There are more magazines that feature cheese regularly and all are available at the click of a button. We now have celebrities championing cheese. Jamie Oliver made a lot of noise during lockdown about artisan producers. Brian Turner was recently involved with The Virtual Cheese Awards. Comedian and chat show personality Marcus Brigstocke has judged at The World Cheese Awards on numerous occasions.

In our towns and villages we are seeing more independents championing artisan cheese. In recent years the popularity of local cheese and wine tasting has risen. Learning about cheese is both fun and informative. Your customers really want to understand their food. This helps people make informed decisions to help buy tastier, better for you, ethical and sustainable food.

To bring cheese to the forefront of everyone's mind this year, No2 Pound Street will launch The Great British Cheddar Tasting. Why am I doing this? There are a few reasons here and all good I think. Firstly, I want to help open people's palates to the fabulous taste of Farmhouse Cheddar.

Well over 360 metric tonnes of Cheddar was produced in 2022, most of which was industrially made. When most households place their grocery order, standard block Cheddar is the choice. I want to be able to champion Farmhouse Cheddar to the masses and show how different this is when compared to the cheaper alternative.

Indeed, our food budgets are pretty tight at the moment. The rich keep getting richer whilst we struggle to pay the mortgage and feed our families. Am I mad suggesting buying a better Cheddar? If it tastes better, is better for you and we do not need to use as much because of its quality, then why not?

Join me on 8th September with host Marcus Brigstocke, cheese celebrities and friends for The Great British Cheddar Tasting. For those of you selling cheese this is an opportunity to engage your community. Get in touch with No2 Pound Street to find out how to be part of the largest online blind tasting of Farmhouse Cheddar.

> "In recent years the popularity of local cheese and wine tasting has risen. Learning about cheese is both fun and informative. Your customers really want to understand their food. This helps people make informed decisions to help buy tastier, better for you, ethical and sustainable food"

Elite Imports launches Grand Noir waxed cheese wedge

Elite Imports, the UK and Ireland's sole importer of award-winning Bavarian cheese producer Kaserei Champignon, has partnered with Carron Lodge to launch an innovative 150g portioned waxed Grand Noir Wedge.

The gold medal-winning wedge has been launched exclusively for independent retailers and cheesemongers and has a spicy blue character.

While wax has traditionally been used to preserve hard cheeses like Cheddars or mini festive Stiltons, this is the first time a wedge portion of a blue cow's milk cheese other than Stilton has been waxed.

This increases the shelf life up to 55 days compared to a wheel of cheese, which means a fresher cheese for consumers, and allows retailers to offer a range of cheese options – which is particularly valuable if they don't have a large cheese counter.

Discussing the launch, Mick Acuta, sales manager at Elite Imports Ltd, said, "We've worked closely with Carron Lodge to develop the Grand Noir Wedges which we're thrilled to launch to trade this month. Sales of Grand Noir have been increasing year-on-year, so it was the right time to create a shelf-ready option for customers.

"We believe this is the first time a blue cow's milk cheese wedge portion has been waxed, so we're excited to see how shoppers react. Sales of soft blue cheeses are rocketing with a huge jump in sales 2021-2022, so we hope this new format will introduce more cheese fans to the exceptional taste of Grand Noir."

Tom Rhodes, operations manager at Carron Lodge, added, "There's an increasing demand for premium grab-and-go waxed cheeses, which is predominantly led by Cheddars and Wensleydales, so it's exciting to launch a blue portioned waxed cheese. We've worked tirelessly to add a new line to facilitate the production of Grand Noir Wedge to ensure that it's the best quality."



FIVE BEST-SELLING CHEESES

Robin Hudson, owner of Ashburton Delicatessen in Devon, shares his five best-selling cheeses with *Speciality Food* readers

1. **Baron Bigod** – Suffolk
2. **Ticklemore Goat** – Devon
3. **Kaltbach Creamy** – Switzerland
4. **Delice de Bourgogne** – France
5. **Fosseway Fleece** – Somerset



Virtual Cheese Awards 2023 crowns its winners

Last month, the Virtual Cheese Awards revealed the best British cheesemakers for 2023 in an eight-hour-long live final, hosted by BBC broadcaster Nigel Barden. On Wednesday 17th May, the winners of the seven Virtual Cheese Awards were announced.

Out-competing over 250 British cheeses, Montgomery Mature Traditional Cheddar was crowned Supreme Champion and Best of British Cheese at the Virtual Cheese Awards 2023.

The traditional and handmade Somerset Cheddar, wrapped in muslin cloth and matured on wooden shelves for 12 months, won over the judges with its sweet, savoury, nutty and caramel notes which together create a complex depth of flavour.

Jamie Montgomery, owner at Montgomery Cheese, commented, "We are really very lucky to be able to produce the interesting flavours here on our farm and very proud to be appreciated and work in such a great community of cheese people."

Scottish Connage Aged Gouda – an organic pasteurised cheese which the judges noted had a complex sweet, nutty flavour with lots of depth – came in second place. Third place was awarded to Mrs Kirkham's Tasty Lancashire, a regional artisanal cheese from the last remaining raw milk producer in Lancashire. It is a two-day curd which is pressed on traditional presses and then cloth-bound and matured for three to four months.



Sarah de Wit, co-founder of the Virtual Cheese Awards and cheese and dairy consultant, said, "Montgomery's Mature Traditional Cheddar is an iconic British cheese and it consistently scored nines in all our blind judging round. It is an exceptionally complex and delicious cheese and everyone wholeheartedly agreed.

"We had 250 cheeses enter in our 2023 awards from 85 British dairies, which even in a tough economic environment shows that cheesemakers want to celebrate and showcase their expertise."

VCA 2023 WINNERS

The winners of the Virtual Cheese Awards across the final seven categories were:

BEST ENHANCED SPONSORED BY SPECIALITY & FINE FOOD FAIR
Lynher Dairies
Cornish Yarg

BEST SPECIALITY SPONSORED BY SPECIALITY & FINE FOOD FAIR
Connage Highland Dairies
Connage Aged Gouda

BEST TERRITORIAL SPONSORED BY MANOR HOUSE CONSULTANCY
HS Bourne
Bournes Unpasteurised Cheshire Cheese

BEST ARTISAN HARD SPONSORED BY THE CHEESE MAN
Mrs Kirkham's Lancashire
Mrs Kirkham's Tasty Lancashire

BEST CHEDDAR SPONSORED BY HARVEY & BROCKLESS
Montgomery's Cheese Company
Montgomery's Mature Traditional Cheddar

BEST BLUE SPONSORED BY HOMAGE2FROMAGE
Long Clawson
Blue Stilton

BEST ARTISAN SOFT SPONSORED BY NEAL'S YARD DAIRY
Pexenement Dairy
Devils Rock Blue





Bradburys strengthens partnership with award-winning producer Yorkshire Pecorino

Bradburys cheese has strengthened its links to artisan cheesemakers through an investment partnership with Otley-based award-winning cheesemakers Yorkshire Pecorino Ltd

Bradburys has been working with artisan cheesemaker and owner of Yorkshire Pecorino, Mario Olianas, for a number of years by supporting the business and helping it to design new premises, achieve the correct technical status and increase capacity.

The investment in the business has allowed Yorkshire Pecorino to increase capacity by 70% with a new 800-litre vat.

The investment builds on Bradburys' current links with other artisan cheesemakers including Leicestershire-based White Stilton maker, Shirevale, artisan maker Northumberland Cheese Company, and Norfolk Goats' cheesemaker, Fielding Cottage.

Michelle Jackson, managing director at Bradburys, commented, "We're delighted to be partnering with Mario and his business, working with passionate artisan cheesemakers and seeing their businesses grow. We want to broaden the cheesemakers' horizons and allow as many people as possible to try these quality, award-winning cheeses."

NEWS IN BRIEF

CHEDDAR AND MILK SOAR ABOVE UK HEADLINE INFLATION

The new shopping prices comparison tool published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed the soaring cost of basic items such as Cheddar cheese and milk in the 12 months since March 2022, up 42% and 39% respectively. This is well above the annual rate of food inflation, which hit 19.2% in April. "The milk, cheese and eggs products category has recorded one of the highest annual inflation rates in groceries throughout the last year," noted the ONS.

BRITISH CHEESEMAKERS AT RISK OF GOING BUST WITHOUT BETTER BREXIT TRADE DEAL

Industry experts have warned that more British cheesemakers risk being cut out of the EU market and even going bust if the government does not secure improvements to the Brexit deal. Dairy firms trading their products with the EU are required to complete export health certificates that can cost around £200 to £300 per load – a significant price for small artisan cheesemakers. As Robin Skailes, cheesemaker and managing director at Cropwell Bishop Creamery, commented, "The additional paperwork is quite painful."

FAMILIES UNABLE TO AFFORD CHEESE SANDWICHES TOLD NOT TO EAT THEM

Former Brexit party MEP Anne Widdecombe was criticised as being 'out of touch' when asked what she would say to consumers who could not afford to pay for basics such as the ingredients of a cheese sandwich in the cost-of-living crisis. She told *Politics Live*, "Well then you don't do the cheese sandwich. None of it is new. We've been through this before. The problem is we've been decades now without inflation, we've come to regard it as some kind of given right."

INTERNATIONAL CHEESE & DAIRY AWARDS **2023**

The ICDAs return for another year to celebrate the best of the cheese and dairy industries from around the world



One of the most exciting events for cheese professionals across the world, the International Cheese & Dairy Awards, is returning to Staffordshire County Showground on 29th June 2023, and this year's occasion is set to be the best yet.

It's not for nothing that the ICDAs are a destination for cheese lovers from across the UK and far beyond; with its unique combination of trade and consumer events where cheese and dairy fans can sample some of the world's best cheeses and meet their makers, and an iconic judging process which sees over 250 industry experts taste, rate and judge hundreds of cheeses and dairy products lovingly produced by cheesemakers and dairies from Britain, Europe and far flung destinations, this occasion is truly one of a kind.

Winning one of these prestigious awards means being part of an elite group, and success brings high profile



recognition by retailers, buyers and on the international stage.

"2023 sees the third year in our excellent weatherproof venue, and as we build on the foundations of the last two years plans are well underway for another excellent competition, trade and consumer event," begins Ian Luxton, chairman. As ever, the team behind the International Cheese & Dairy Awards, co-located with consumer event Love Cheese Live – a day which







SCHEDULE HIGHLIGHTS

- The International Cheese & Dairy Awards continue its support for the Society of Dairy Technology by hosting the symposium and annual dinner on Wednesday 28th June in the Ingestre Suite of the Members Pavilion. If you would like to know more or become a member of the society, please contact execdirector@sdt.org

- Full Trophy presentations will start at 1pm on Friday 30th June from the Trophy Dias and immediately after the Trade networking event. The presentation should finish around 3pm. A representative from each trophy winner will need to be present to collect their award and for official photographs

- The Trade Day Lunch will continue to host the SDT/ICDA Student Award, the Dairy UK Award for lifetime achievement and the reserve and Supreme Trophy Announcements for Cheese, Dairy and Retail. Arrival time for lunch this year is 1.30pm

> As we build on the foundations of the last two years plans are well underway for another excellent competition, trade and consumer event

offers an array of demonstrations and other interactive activities – are keen to evolve and improve for optimum visitor experience. "We have listened to feedback and continue to strive for improvement," Ian says.

Revamped retailer awards

One such portion of the event is the retailer awards, which have undergone some changes for this year's event. The awards are now limited to one entry per class and are judged on the quality of the cheese or dairy product entered on the day. A fully anonymous process, the Supreme Champion Retailer is no longer based on the wins accrued following the judging process but on the quality of the class entry, cheese or dairy. "This creates a level playing field and a meaningful, credible competition for retailer participants and, ultimately, a Supreme Champion Cheese or Dairy Retailer," explains Ian.

A new networking opportunity

Recognising the value the supplying trade industry brings to the overall event, the team behind the International Cheese & Dairy Awards have joined forces with some key sponsors and created a networking opportunity extension on Friday 30th June. This networking event will run from 9am until 1pm and will host a number of speakers delivering updates on current and future topics. Numbers are restricted so anyone wishing to attend must register on the website.

A bright future ahead

Not only do the International Cheese & Dairy Awards have a rich history behind them – 2023 sees the 126th edition of the event – the team is looking forward to an exciting future thanks to the support of the wider industry. "On a personal note, I would like to thank the entire committee from their unwavering support for this show and its wonderful heritage borne out of volunteer support for 126 years," says Ian. "Without them, the support of sponsors, the trade, retailers, entries and the consumer days, it simply wouldn't exist. Particularly pleasing has been the interest and participation from the next generation, who have joined the committee over the last 12 months. This is essential to maintain momentum and drive future success."

NEED TO KNOW

WHERE: Staffordshire County Showground **WHEN:** 28th June - 1st July
WEB: internationalcheeseawards. co.uk





HE'S BACK

James Martin has returned to the fold after a year's break, and he will be demonstrating his impressive skills to consumers on Saturday 1st July. The event's organisers have extended the allocation of VIP tickets in 2023, with a chance to meet and greet James. Consumer tickets can be purchased for Friday 30th June and Saturday 1st July 2023 directly from lovecheeselive.co.uk

DID YOU KNOW?

The 2022 event attracted over 1,750 trade visitors and over 5,000 entries to the International Cheese & Dairy Awards and Cheese Board Awards



COMMENTATORS



JOHN KIRKBY
DESIGN FUTURES



CATHERINE CHONG
CLEAR



SIAN SUTHERLAND
A PLASTIC PLANET



PATRICK FORD
BARTEC



RICHARD MCILWAIN
THE VEGETARIAN SOCIETY

FOCUS ON: SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING

With more pressure on producers than ever before, we explore what consumers want to see from the labelling and packaging industry in 2023



Labelling and packaging – it's the first thing a shopper sees and can often be the deciding factor in whether they purchase the product or leave it on the shelf.

But the sector is facing a plethora of new challenges, bringing sustainability, provenance and transparency to the forefront of packaging and labelling considerations.

We find out what consumers are looking for in 2023 and how producers and independent retailers can cater to demand in a challenging environment.

The shift towards eco-friendly labelling

In 2023, consumers are becoming more demanding about knowing where their food comes from and the impact of its production.

According to Catherine Chong, ESG expert and engagement lead at CLEAR, there is an apparent lack of system thinking on food labelling regulation. "At the moment, the socioecological data infrastructure in agrifood is yet ready to support a fully transparent impact labelling system. We need policy change to drive the necessary innovation and commitment.

"But it is never too early to take consumers with us, along the journey, whether it is enacting laws to create a conducive environment for sustainability-focused labelling or envisioning the kind of SFL they want to see," she tells *Speciality Food*.

In terms of what consumers want to see food and drink producers declaring on their labels, it appears that they are increasingly interested in environmental impact. Indeed, a new UK-wide survey commissioned by the Vegetarian Society has found that over half of all young adults agreed they would choose to eat more sustainably if carbon footprint labelling was included on food packaging. With the government committed to reducing UK greenhouse gas emissions by almost 80% by 2035, these findings suggest that carbon footprint labelling could play a key role in reducing the consumption of high-carbon foods such as beef and lamb.

It's not just the younger generations who would be keen to move to sustainable eating habits. Over one in three adults (37%) aged 55 and over agreed that they would choose to eat more sustainably if given the information, according to the same survey.

Richard McIlwain, chief executive of the Vegetarian Society, explains, "Carbon footprint labelling could be a game-changer in the fight against climate change and it is heartening to see that so many young people are eager to make sustainable choices. We are therefore calling on the government and food manufacturers to act urgently in rolling out clear carbon labelling on food packaging."

Indeed, as Catherine argues, "The journey to understand the linkages of food production and consumption with human and planetary health is incomplete without the information on how our food is farmed, processed, and manufactured.

"For instance, the socioecological impacts of food consumption in the global north have transgressed planetary boundaries such as climate change, fossil resource use, freshwater ecotoxicity, and freshwater eutrophication, many times beyond the limit of the planet."

A question of sustainability

Like labels, consumer demand for sustainability is driving the packaging industry away from plastic.

Sian Sutherland, co-founder of A Plastic Planet, explains, "Plastic is an indestructible material that is the product of amazing engineering. However, it is a material that is overengineered and overused in the modern world. We don't need to be wrapping our food in a material which will not decompose for hundreds, if not thousands of years.

"These facts are becoming increasingly at the forefront of the public consciousness and therefore the sector will be forced to change. We now see consumers looking to brands to take the lead on creating sustainable change and global regulators are beginning to take serious legal action against greenwashing."

But shifting away from plastic isn't a simple swap. According to John Kirkby, creative director at Sheffield Hallam University's commercial design consultancy, Design Futures, "Companies seeking alternatives to plastic packaging need to ensure the overall life cycle of the pack is considered to avoid creating harm to the environment whilst trying to save it. This includes understanding what



> We are committed to future-proofing our offerings by sourcing and supplying new and innovative materials that can be either reused or recycled





happens to materials in the waste stream and how some seemingly environmentally responsible materials can cause more problems than the less green alternatives.

"Product development can play a significant role in packaging reduction. The right sizing, hydration and dilution, as well as efficient supply chain systems, can all play a part in reducing packaging materials and carbon footprint."

The cost-of-living effect

Despite consumer demand, the packaging industry was severely affected by the war in Ukraine and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis, putting sustainability concerns at risk. Indeed, as John explains, "The current economic situation has put an unbelievable strain on the finances of food and drink producers. With a steep rise in all costs, there is currently no spare money for non-essential expenditure."

With prices rising across the board for production, John warns there is a danger that financial pressures could force a move away from sustainable packaging solutions which are often more expensive than less responsible alternatives. Coupled with the Plastic Packaging Tax (PPT) which came into force last April, charging producers who have manufactured or imported plastic packaging components which contain less than 30% recycled plastic, producers are facing tough decisions in 2023.

"Of course, a brand must look at its margin and the future of the business, but I urge business owners to look at the demand by consumers for change, the mounting evidence of plastic's toxic impact and the impending legislation that is bound to affect a business in the sector, whether they like it or not," argues Sian.

Despite mounting costs, according to John, "Customer awareness regarding the impact of packaging waste is so acute that a decision to move away from sustainable packaging solutions might affect sales more than it might save in reduced expenditure. Well-considered structural packaging design can create alternative packaging solutions that are sustainable but also more cost-effective rather than just swapping one material for another."

> "The current economic situation has put an unbelievable strain on the finances of food and drink producers"

The future of packaging

Producers have a lot to consider when it comes to packaging choices, but what does the future look like?

When asked this question, Patrick Ford, director at Bartec Paper & Packaging Ltd., sees the future of packaging as, "A definite shift away from single-use materials. We are committed to future-proofing our offerings by sourcing and supplying new and innovative materials that can be either reused or recycled."

Indeed, according to John, "Future packaging needs to be fully sustainable. The materials and processes used need to avoid a negative effect on the planet. Closed-loop packaging systems, reduction of materials and efficient recycling systems need to be implemented to reduce the negative impact packaging waste has on the planet. A change in the way we use packaging is intrinsically linked to the way we produce and retail food and drink."

In order to do this, Sian suggests a shift towards permanent packaging as a solution. "This is not a new model, but with smart tech and adoption at a mass level, it will give the shopper the convenience that will always be key and reward them for micro shifts in behaviour.

"Any solution now needs to be approached as a significant step forward; no more talk of trials and pilot schemes. We've been doing that for years with zero impact. Now we need collective commitment from the big brands (and polluters) to change not just the material, but the entire system of how we take, make, and waste.

"Businesses should not fear such legislative shifts. The industry needs clarity and a level playing field for the wholesale change we require to be realised. A legislative framework that fosters creative solutions to the plastic crisis over the carnivorous corporate inertia of the past decades."



INDUSTRY INSIGHT



Patrick Ford, director at Bartec Paper & Packaging Ltd., shares his insight into the biggest problem facing the packaging industry right now

WHAT DOES BARTEC OFFER IN ITS FOOD PACKAGING RANGE?

We offer a diverse range of bespoke products that we convert into sheets or cut into shapes across a wide selection of food-safe papers, films, and cushion pads in various grades, either plain or printed. We supply these to leading chocolatiers, confectionery producers, bakers, cheesemongers, delis, fish and seafood suppliers and many more.

We pride ourselves on our service and being able to supply lower minimum order quantities than other companies, which enables us to support not just SME or multinational companies but also smaller independent businesses.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ISSUES WITHIN THE PACKAGING INDUSTRY, AND HOW DOES BARTEC'S RANGE CATER TO THE NEEDS OF THE FOOD SECTOR?

The main issue is ensuring materials we use are created from a sustainable source to take into consideration the environmental impact.

Therefore, we offer, when requested, FSC-compliant paper, biodegradable and compostable paper and films, and cellophane made from wood pulp instead of petroleum-based (making it compostable). Also, new products like vegetable waxed paper and brand-new product Ovtene Film which is 100% recyclable with plastics and because it's made from 60% calcium carbonate comes with the bonus of not being subject to the Plastic Packaging Tax.

Food safety and hygiene is always a big talking point for our customers, and we have achieved top-level accreditation with BRCS for over 20 years, so we meet the high standards required in this industry as standard practice.

We are also finding the demand for more personalised packaging has increased over the last few years, which we have been able to meet head-on and can offer printed designs for any customer on most materials.

HOW HAS CONSUMER INTEREST IN SUSTAINABILITY AFFECTED PACKAGING CHOICES?

We are increasingly asked for 'green' materials and a lot of customers are moving away from traditional packaging and incorporating more paper/films and moving away from plastics and non-recyclable materials, so we are always looking at new innovative solutions like Ovtene which keeps produce fresher for longer to improve the quality and range of our offerings.



FINAL CALL

The past month has certainly been a busy one, bringing with it indecisive British weather and a mix of highs and lows. But as we enter the summer period, there is plenty to be cheerful about.

May began with a double-bank holiday as we celebrated the coronation of King Charles III, bringing with it a unique opportunity for fine food retailers and the Great British high street.

There were uplifts in footfall in towns and cities across the UK, as big screens were erected in some high streets to enable shoppers to watch the proceedings. Royally-named high streets such as King Edward Street in Hull and New George Street in Plymouth saw footfall 3.9% and 7.8% higher respectively.

Later in the month, prime minister Rishi Sunak hosted his 'Farm to Fork' food summit, inviting farmers, food producers and some of Britain's largest supermarkets to Downing Street to tackle issues facing the food industry. However, it failed to include both the independent retail sector and sustainability charities, and some claimed it as nothing more than a PR stunt. There is plenty of work that needs to be done to address the key issues facing the UK food industry, and fine food retail needs to be included in the conversation.

Despite a disappointing start to the warmer months, summer is finally here, bringing with it long days of sunshine, socialising and sales. Picnics and barbecues are coming into the fold – so make sure your summer-ready products and on-the-go options are front and centre over the holidays. With consumers looking for little luxuries in the face of rising costs, fine food retail has the opportunity to provide something special in the midst of a crisis.

Everyone could do with a little sunshine in their life right now, whether that's highlighting discounts to cost-conscious customers, handing out free samples or serving up vibrant deli salads with a smile. Let's embrace the joy that the warmer weather brings and make 2023 a summer to remember.

We love hearing from our readers. Do you have a story to share or expertise to pass on? Please get in touch with us via victoria.smith@dcthomson.co.uk

5 MINUTES WITH
AXEL KATALAN, FOUNDER OF JULIENNE BRUNO



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I always dreamt of doing something in the world of film. It would be about crafting a world, a feel, a story around short films to start with, then building to larger full motion pictures.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
An R&D associate in helping food brands launch into new markets. The first project was launching Peroni into the Paraguayan market! I spent a few months on the ground understanding market dynamics, key thought leaders, brands, price points etc.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Film, music and design, and the cross-pollination of these trees into each other's categories.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
I worked as part of the cleaning team at Shakeshack in Leicester Square. Both the worst and the best, as I learnt so much but at the same time it was physically challenging (night shifts, rude customers and small space). I have a few good stories from that experience!

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR JOB?
Moving from thinking/brainstorming to building.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
Waking up to "emergency, this machine has broken down, again" messages on a Sunday.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
It's my biggest passion. I follow, explore, and try new concepts almost every week. Keeping the pulse on what is new, what is trending and beyond.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
My partner's Ukrainian Mushroom Vareniki.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
"It's all good!"

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
I wouldn't call it weird, as it's a delicacy in Mexican cuisine, but novel to my palate was 'Huitlacoche' which is also known as corn smut or Mexican truffle. Huitlacoche is a fungus that grows on corn, causing the kernels to swell and turn into blue-grey, mushroom-like galls. It has a unique earthy, smoky, and slightly sweet taste.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Good Luck: Creating the Conditions for Success in Life and Business by Alex Rovira.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Savoury all the way! Even if I have dessert, I like to have something a little salty afterwards to finish it off in the right way!



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TRIED & TESTED



THE UNCOMMON BUBBLY ROSÉ
This bubbly rosé wine is made from 100% Pinot Noir grapes handpicked from The Uncommon's vineyard in Kent. Light and bright, this rosé is one of strawberries and dreams – perfect for sipping in the sun all summer long! With consumers increasingly looking for quality alcoholic drinks on the go as picnic and BBQ season begins, indie retailers should focus on stocking great brands like The Uncommon to cater to demand.
wearetheuncommon.co.uk



CHEEKY NIBBLE VICTORIA SPONGE GRANOLA
Encased in beautifully hand-drawn boxes, Cheeky Nibble is a nut-free, gluten-free and vegan granola brand inspired by nostalgic British desserts.
The Victoria Sponge granola is inspired by the iconic Victoria Sponge cake, featuring vanilla oat clusters with jammy strawberry pieces and creamy white chocolate chips. It's a true classic, combining the quintessentially British flavours of strawberry, vanilla and cream, minus the dairy!
cheekynibble.com



PLANTED PULLED BBQ
This pea and oat-based alternative generously coated in a smoky BBQ marinade ensures your meat-reducing or veggie customers won't miss out. Packed with protein and produced with 81% less CO2 and 43% water than pork, it's a great sustainable swap to have on your shelves. Why not experiment with your vegetarian and vegan food service offerings? It works great packed into a wrap or pitta with plenty of salad and sauce, as well as topping a plant-based burger in a bun!
uk.shop.eatplanted.com

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Adam Spicer, head chef at Retreat East

Retreat East is set on a former dairy farm in the middle of the Suffolk countryside, surrounded by meadows, woods and fields. It is a true escape for our guests, complete with our beautiful restaurant set in The Great Barn.

We are so lucky at retreat east to have our own organic kitchen garden, bees for honey and amazing grounds for foraging. Anything we cannot source ourselves we get from some of the best food producers, farmers and merchants in the country, who supply the most incredible ingredients we can for our guests. We are also passionate about reducing food waste and sustainability at Retreat East so where possible use every part of the ingredients we use.

Our beetroot dish is a great example of this. We collect the beetroots in the morning, use the leaves for a salad, pickle the stems, remove the skin and dehydrate it to form a powder that is used to



make gnocchi. We also juice all the trimmings and offcuts to cook the beets in.

The suppliers we use have a real passion for what they do, which comes across from the produce we purchase. We have the likes of Mark from Dingley Dell Pork who produces some of the best pigs in the country right on our doorstep; he also has a great passion for the environment and wildlife, which echos our ethos at Retreat East. The pork from Mark is used in a range of dishes from breakfast to our delicious afternoon tea featuring Dingley Dell Pork sausage rolls.

We also have Jon, our fish supplier, who buys some incredible line-caught Wild Suffolk bass for us daily and a fantastic selection of local seafood such as Cromer Crabs, Colchester Oysters and Native Lobsters. Our seasonal menus mean the dishes we serve to our guests are always changing, fresh and full of flavour. Cromer Crabs are currently featured on our dinner menu in a delicious Cromer Crab Waldorf tart with seaweed. There is always a great range of delicious local produce on our menu whether guests join us for breakfast, lunch, dinner or afternoon tea!

We have other outstanding producers such as New Hall Wine, Tosier Chocolate, and Fen Farm Dairy to name a few. We really are spoilt for choice in and around East Anglia.

Having worked in the industry for a long time, it is vital to build excellent relationships with your suppliers; we look after them as best we can, and they do the same for us, which in turn enables us to give the customer the best experience we can.

> "It is vital to build excellent relationships with your suppliers; we look after them as best we can, and they do the same for us, which in turn enables us to give the customer the best experience we can"

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo



LIVING LA DOLCE VITA ALL SUMMER LONG

No one does summer with quite so much sophistication and flair as the Italians, so it's the perfect time for independents to stir up this passion for Italian cuisine once again

While lasagne, ragu and cacio e pepe are top choices over the colder months, for Italians, something lighter and fresher is more preferable during the summer.

Revitalising your Italian offering for summer can help bring vibrant sauces and fresh ingredients back to the fore. Indeed, many Italians spend their vacations near the sea or the lakes, so the summer brings an increase in fish-based dishes such as pasta alle vongole, asparagus or grilled fish and seafood, often paired with white wine.

But no Italian dish is complete without the classics, and your customers will be looking for summer flavours such as nutty basil pesto, juicy tomatoes, sweet balsamic vinegar, and light and creamy Mozzarella. Sourcing local seasonal veg grown in the UK such as courgettes, aubergines, tomatoes and rocket will also help customers add a local British twist to their favourite Italian dishes. Indeed, salads and fresh vegetables triumph on Italian summer tables.

Providing all the ingredients needed to create authentic wood-fired pizzas in their gardens will have home cooks flocking to your store to impress guests. For the more time-conscious, take a fresh look at your dried pastas and risottos as well as flavour-packed, stir-in sauces to ensure your shop offers something different to the multiples this summer.

Of course, the classic Italian drink is the Aperol spritz, so stock up on the spirit of summer and upsell the experience of suntrap pizzas under azure blue skies. For non-alcohol-drinking customers, get that spritz-feeling with premium adult softs and alcohol-free spirits.

The warmer months are a great time to fall in love with Italian cuisine, as simple, fresh and vibrant ingredients are at its core. Feel the warm embrace of pizza, pasta and risottos and get ready to live la dolce vita all summer long.

Are you passionate about Italian food and drink? Get in touch via victoria.smith@dcthomson.co.uk.



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