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SPECIALITY FOOD

CONNECTING THE FINE FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY



GAROFALO

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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the June edition. My last in the editor's role, as the lovely Holly is now back from maternity leave with a gorgeous bundle of joy. Where has the time gone? A whole year? Largely, I've spent it having fun, meeting some brilliant people, and eating more than the waistband of my stretchiest brand of jeans can handle. A huge thanks to the team for embracing my obsession with food (particularly cheese) and making me feel so welcome. I'm delighted to announce, though, that I'll be continuing to help with content, so you haven't seen the last of me. On to this month's magazine, which is a cracker! In addition to all your favourite features, updates and product news, we've been delighted to work alongside Speciality & Fine Food Fair to bring you our Rising Stars of 2024. Twenty-five dynamic, bold and innovative folk from the fine food and drink sector, nominated by peers. There's some truly great stuff happening and we're thrilled to shine a light on them and their businesses. Our *Drinks Buyer* magazine is bagged with this issue too, and filled with plenty of inspiration for your chiller.

CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS | EDITOR (MATERNITY COVER)

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Border checks and labelling rules threaten fine food trade with EU

Post-Brexit border checks are set to prove costly for speciality retailers and risk limiting access to artisanal European food, while labelling requirements could lead to more barriers to trade

Britain may have voted to leave the European Union nearly eight years ago, but many rules and requirements are only now being put into place after years of negotiations and delays – and they're causing headaches for the food and drink industry.

On 30th April, physical border checks were introduced for 'medium risk' imports as part of the government's Border Target Operating Model.

The new rules require European businesses exporting certain plant and animal products to the UK to submit paperwork known as health certificates, signed by vets, as well as being subject to physical checks.

But it is "unclear" how prepared businesses are for these changes, and there is still confusion and uncertainty about exactly how and when the borders checks and costs will be fully implemented.

How the border rules are impacting fine food shops

Speciality retailers have warned that Brits will lose access to artisan food from the Continent because of the cost of the border checks. Panzer's Delicatessen told Reuters news agency it has already lost 37 suppliers from the EU since 2021, and more could quit following the introduction of the physical checks and charges – leaving shops and consumers with less choice from smaller, often traditional, heritage producers.

In a post on social media, Panzer's said post-Brexit paperwork is "confusing, arduous, costly and causes delays". After shipping seamlessly from Milan twice a week for the past 10 years, now the deli must place orders 24-48 hours earlier, meaning fresh products "can lie around for an extra 24 hours before they are cleared. Large supermarkets have the manpower and resources to tackle this pointless bureaucracy. Small businesses struggle."

Nick Carlucci of Italian food importer Tenuta Marmorelle added costs would have to be passed on to fine food shops. Importing just one pallet of charcuterie could cost £432 more than before Brexit. "We do our best to absorb as much as we can, but we have to pass it on to our customers, which are farm shops, food halls and delis." For example, the cost of a 150g tray of Parma ham could rise by 4%, Reuters reported.

Mark Lynch, partner at corporate finance house to the consumer industries, Oghma Partners, suggested the rules were "taking Brexitism too far". He said, "The government has insisted on introducing border checks for what, pre-Brexit, was considered OK to import without checks. The evidence suggests that these checks will be introduced in a half-hearted manner, will reduce choice and increase costs."

As part of the border rules, the government also confirmed a new 'common user charge' for importers of up to £145 for 'mixed consignments' that arrive in the Port of Dover or Eurotunnel.

'Not for EU' labels

Another issue causing concern in the industry is the requirement to label meat and dairy products sold in the UK as 'Not for EU'. The label is designed to stop products sold in Northern Ireland from ending up in the EU, ie the Republic of Ireland, as part of the Windsor Framework.

However, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) estimates the extra labelling requirements will cost between £150m-£200m. What's more, consumers have been left confused about what the label means, questioning whether the British products are of a lower standard than required by the EU.

While the labels were introduced in Northern Ireland on meat and some dairy products in 2023, they will continue to be rolled out in the rest of the UK in 2024, and in 2025, there are plans to add the labels on fruit, vegetables and fish, too.

The FDF warned the labels will "almost certainly result in growth being reversed in our largest export market [Ireland]." Over 2023, Ireland became Britain's first export market to reach £4bn, up 6.4% from the previous year.

Balwinder Dhoot, director of industrial growth and sustainability at the FDF, said the introduction of 'Not for EU' labels across the whole of Britain will "undermine" trade with EU markets.

"It's baffling why the government would want to implement something so damaging, that will reduce investment and push up prices for shoppers, whilst delivering a real blow to our exports just at the time when our businesses need more support," he said.

The British Meat Processors Association (BMPA), meanwhile, said the labels had "damaging and at times ridiculous consequences".

"Apart from the significant and unnecessary cost, all of this will lead to a two-tier market in GB with consumers wondering why some goods have the 'not-for EU' label and some do not. They may presume that the former are produced to a lower standard; a 'not good enough for EU label'," said Peter Hardwick, trade policy adviser for the BMPA.



The 40 seasons of the speciality food year



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

I was recently reading an article highlighting the fact that in Japan they embrace 72 micro seasons throughout the year.

The thinking behind this, in horticultural terms, is that fleeting seasonal changes go hand-in-hand with gardening and the blooming of seasonal flowers.

Each micro season lasts only five days and is associated with specific rituals, foods, flowers and festivals. In Japan they have a word for an awareness or sense of the changing seasons – kisetsukan.

So I was thinking about how we can best utilise the micro seasons and events that could be beneficial to speciality food shops.

For many of our early years at Partridges we had very little Kisetsukan awareness. As speciality food retailers we clung onto the basic national celebrations to maximise sales and show a point of difference with the major multiples.

For us Easter and Christmas were the big ones in the 70s and 80s, followed by Thanksgiving (American foods) for the ex-pat community in Chelsea in the 90s, and Valentine's Day (chocolates), Mother's Day (more chocolates) and Halloween (pumpkins and novelties) in the 00s.

We made a helpful arrangement with a farmer around that time and did well with the asparagus season in late April and May, aided and abetted by our own brand of speciality hollandaise sauce. All of these could be regarded as retail micro seasons or events lasting a week at best, but they were small celebrations that the multiples could not pull off successfully.

However, the potential for creativity in this area is very large and I have come up with our own suggestions for speciality micro seasons that could be employed throughout the year if time and resources allow.

We have by no means done them all ourselves, but with supportive suppliers and local reference points, they may help with engaging the local community.

Here goes...

January: Veganuary, Burns Night and Australia Day (that's about the wine)

February: Valentine's Day, Pancake Day, Chinese New Year

March: St David's Day, St Patrick's Day, Mother's Day

April: Easter, Asparagus Day on the 23rd and St George's Day

May: Chelsea Flower Show (floral displays and botanically inspired products), World Chelsea Bun Day (it's a local thing)

June: English Wine Week, Picnic Week, World Gin Day, Father's Day

July: Wimbledon, Strawberries, Apples and (this year) the Olympics

August: Holiday season

September: Harvest Festival, Great Taste Awards, Fairtrade Fortnight

October: Chocolate Week, World Pasta Day, Halloween and Pumpkin displays, and Christmas Lights

November: Bonfire Night, St Andrew's Day, Thanksgiving

December: Christmas, and its popular side kick New Year's Eve

Add on some sporting events, a Royal celebration and some local festival occasions and we get to about 40.

Perhaps we can invent a speciality food day to celebrate all the wonderful foods we curate and sell?

In terms of a new celebration suggestion, I would like to give a shout out for St Tibertius Day on 14th April.

It celebrates the first cuckoo call of the year – the last being on St John's Day on 24th June.

Apparently, whoever hears the cuckoo call will have very good fortune.



> "The potential for creativity is very large and I have come up with our own suggestions for speciality micro seasons that could be employed throughout the year if time and resources allow"

Farmers call for short-term support to boost food security

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has urged farmers to grow more fruit and vegetables to reduce the UK's reliance on foreign imports as he set out its first ever food security index, but farmers say more support is needed in the short-term to bolster the industry as confidence plummets.

WHAT IS THE FOOD SECURITY INDEX – AND WHAT DID IT FIND?

Defra released its first annual UK Food Security Index to assess the state of the country's food security in 2023-2024.

It's designed to complement the three-yearly UK Food Security Report by measuring year-on-year changes and considering wider factors, like global conflicts and weather.

According to the index, while the UK is at "its most productive since records began," the fruit and vegetable sector is "significantly lagging behind" meat, dairy and grains, with only 17% of fruit and 55% of veg consumed in the UK being grown on our shores. In total, domestic production of all food in the UK stands at around 60% of consumption.

The publication of the index was part of the government's second Farm to Fork Summit, held on 14th May, which brings together government and key representatives from the farming and food sectors at Downing Street.

As part of the summit, an £80m funding scheme, the Horticulture Resilience and Growth offer, was announced for farmers and growers in place of the £40m EU scheme.

Environment secretary Steve Barclay said the announcements would "turbocharge the growth of our horticultural sector supporting the building of cutting-edge glasshouses and innovative farming techniques to put British fruit and vegetables on our plates all-year round."

IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED TO REBUILD RESILIENCE

While NFU president Tom Bradshaw welcomed the publication of the index and the long-term plans to increase domestic production, he stressed the need for immediate support to help the sector and rebuild confidence and resilience.

"Food security is national security," Tom said, adding, "we need actions in the short-term that underpin that statement, in order to rebuild confidence and resilience so farming businesses can continue producing food."

Kath Dalmeny, chief executive of Sustain, also welcomed the news of financial and policy support for the fruit and veg industry, but she said it "doesn't come close to" plans proposed last year which the government "ditched".

Currently, Kath said, half of Britain's fruit and veg growers say that their businesses "are in peril from pitifully low farmgate prices, labour shortages, unfair trading by supermarkets and the extreme weather experienced over recent years".

"True food security is built on respect and fair trading for farmers, production of food that supports affordable healthy diets, and care for the health of soil, pollinators and a stable climate that make growing food possible," she said.

To make the most of the funding, the Landworkers Alliance urged the government to focus on targeted investments for a greater number of smaller growers and to support local food infrastructure.

"Fruit and vegetable growers need a roadmap for the next 20 years so that they have security to make long-term investments in soil, equipment, infrastructure and building relationships with customers," said Rebecca Laughton, horticulture lead for the Landworkers Alliance.





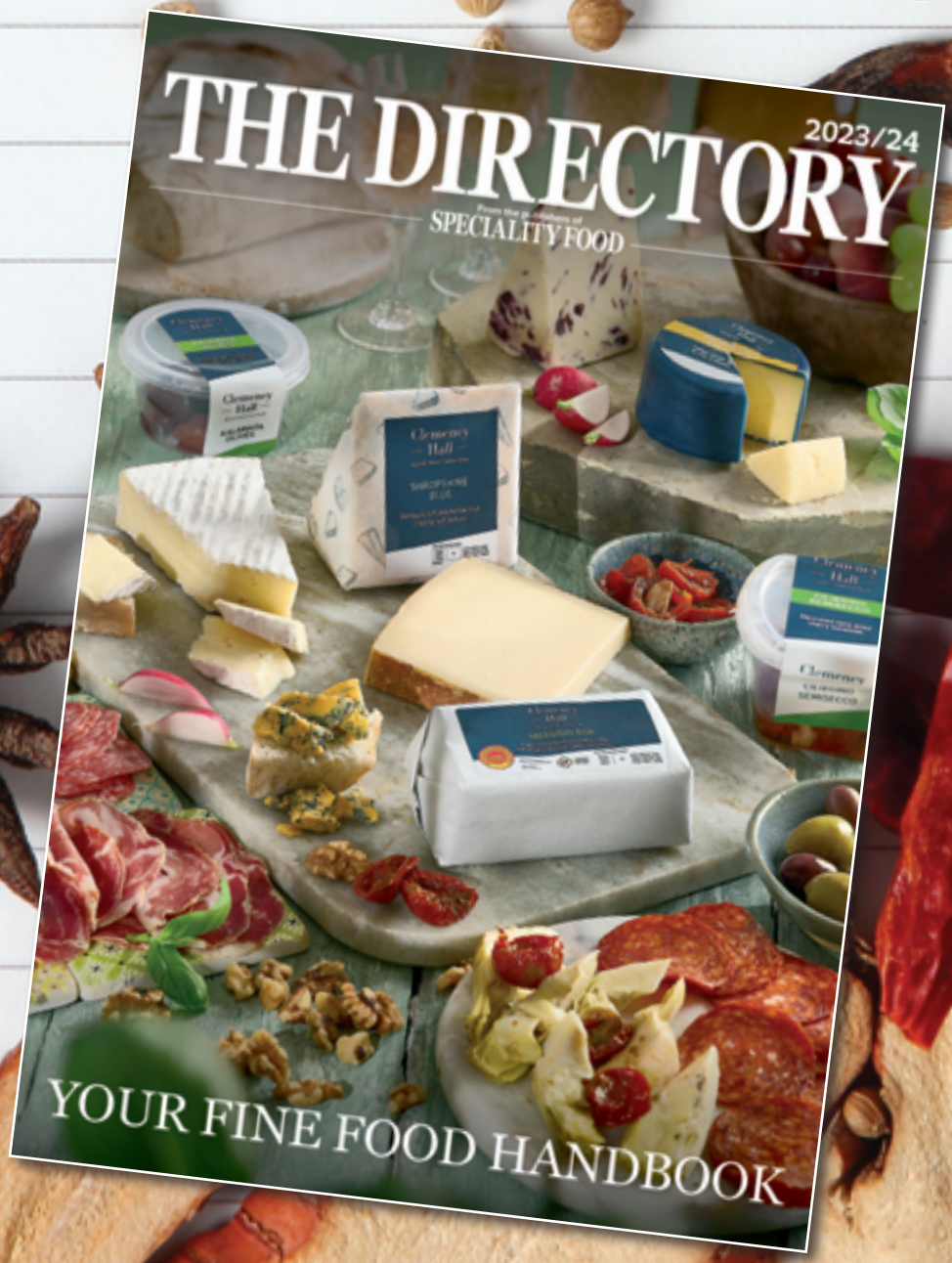
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Cake in May



STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE

The usual, seasonal conversations in food shops up and down the country at this time of year, just as the sun starts to really grip the sky, are kicked off by the heavy thump of delivered Christmas catalogues.... ahhhhh...landing on counters.

Enough! I am not here to be the first to herald in the inevitable flow of our commercial year, but rather champion a focal point that, left unleashed and at arm's length, illustrates the worst of our climatic trashing consumption, but at its pinnacle shows us for our collective best.

I am now into mid-May, just a week from my mother's early, summer birthday, and I have nibbled the final piece of our family Christmas cake.

The joy this brings is profound.

It may well have lasted this long due to my eldest's distracted nature, resulting in half the flour going into the mix. Essentially it is a packed array of sugar-enrobed, dried fruit... bomb proof.

As I have written before, consumption is the great ill of our age. For me, the beauty in our Christmas cake is the social currency that goes into making it. The moments of awe in which it is enjoyed during celebrations, and its subsequent ability to be savoured for months - a reminder of all that has gone into to it, both literally and metaphorically.

The importance of this cake, nestled in the corner of the kitchen, sealed shut in the evermore battered tin, the wrapped branded sweets once held within years gone, is that it reflects the very best of our family, past, present and future. It captures the essence of celebration, preservation and respect for food. The joy of a little luxury that not only delivers its immediate, easy-pleasing sugar rush, but also contemplative, deep satisfaction, reminding us of those we love and good times shared.

My mother uses the recipe that she learnt from her grandmother, and makes the cake every year with her grandchildren. The process is learned through annual repetition (mistakes made, bonds cemented) and is started way before the month of December.

The social importance of generations sharing the kitchen, keeping family narratives alive, is energising. It maintains the bedrock of our community. It is the prosaic continuity of life, the individual experience shared, generation by generation, becoming the collective reality. It affirms our family in the way that shared, positive nostalgia affirms our communities, small and large, from the market square to the state. This is no throw-away-able, supermarket-bought, overt consumption. This is real!

What the cake represents, as it sits beautifully on the sideboard, an ornament to its seasons, is the importance of managed consumption, the importance of no waste, all wrapped up in the luxurious package of celebration. The reflection that the easy focus may be on one day, but that actually the whole year has gone into it, and indeed the joy that comes not from momentary gluttony, but the evolving satisfaction of our produce in the months that follow.

Fruit and spices from across the year are cropped, enjoyed when fresh and then dried to keep. This is artistry in the banality of the daily need – precious, fresh produce cannot be wasted and so we convert it into something still more delicious. The cake demands to be enjoyed as such, not simply as another seasonal appendage, like the tag on a lesser aunt's gift.

The cake is brought to the table at the most important celebratory day of the year. Whether your inclination is sacred or profane, there is no reason that it has to be added to the black-hole consumption that ensues. Rather let it play its part in reflecting our year as a whole. The family coming together, the care and respect we have for our land and the bounty we enjoy and preserve from it. An icon that we can enjoy day after day, once the gluttonous feasts of winter are long behind us.

What that mid-May bite of Christmas cake jolted, was the knowledge that we need to consume less, we must consume better, and we need to return to the embedded joy of the community creation of what we eat, filling each and every product with meaning and social bonds. Truly reflecting on what our food says of us, not just how it sustains us.

The true joy of life is not just a speckled horizon of disparate events, rather the intertwining periods between them, so often captured through our food culture, and nothing brings this warm glow of humanity home better than Christmas cake in May.

> "We need to consume less, we must consume better, and we need to return to the embedded joy of the community creation of what we eat"



UK spirit makers toast success

The independent spirit sector in the UK is raising a glass as it has been revealed 54 new distilleries launched in the last year. The figure takes the number of registered distilleries in Britain to nearly 400 – 42.8% more than pre-Covid, with whisky worth a quarter of all UK food and drink export value.

According to accountancy group, UHY Hacker Young, which carried out the research, the rise is largely due to British drinkers' continued favouring of niche, limited-run spirits over traditional, mass-produced offerings.

England in particular has emerged as a hotbed for new independent brands, with data showing 48 new distilleries registered last year – a 20% increase.

Scotland, renowned globally for whisky production, has also seen a resurgence in launches, as three new distilleries registered in 2023.

James Simmonds, partner at UHY Hacker Young, said, "The premium prices consumers are willing to pay for higher margin, luxury brands is seeing both entrepreneurs and bigger spirits companies continue to rush to capitalise on the market. Spirits, including whisky, have been one of the UK's success stories.

"The expectation is that, longer term, there is much more growth to come in the UK's heritage spirits brands."

UK drink exports increased by 13% in 2023 from £8.3 billion in 2021/22, to £9.4 billion. Success stories include Stirling Distillery, which launched in 2023, reviving whisky production in Stirling for the first time since 1852. The company will release a limited-edition whisky biannually from 2026.

Last year, Edinburgh's Port of Leith Distillery unveiled the UK's first vertical whisky distillery in the city, while Ad Gefrin launched a £14 million whisky distillery and museum in Northumberland, and Mutley Distillery launched its premium rum production in a former bank vault in Plymouth.

"Strong levels of demand are seeing new distillers continue to enter the market, while savvy entrepreneurs in the business are also taking advantage of additional revenue streams such as distillery tours and tastings," James added.

"During the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, people found themselves looking to recreate a bar experience at home and treat themselves to artisanal spirits. Interestingly, this taste for luxury has not tapered off - it's only got stronger."



Industry welcomes news of DRS delay

Leading voices from across the UK food and drink industry have responded positively to recent clarification from government on timelines for the DRS (Deposit Return Scheme), but with some concerns around the scope of glass.

All four nations were consulted on plans for single-use drinks containers, with costly delays to Scottish implementation (poised to begin in 2021) causing outrage. A later date of October 2025 was set for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but this has now been set back to a revised date of 2027, giving businesses more time to prepare. In a joint policy statement, the government said the new deadline aims to allow more time for consumers, retailers and producers to understand the DRS, while recognising devolved waste and recycling policies.

Clarifying its position, the government said PET (polyethylene terephthalate) drinks bottles and metal drinks cans sized 150ml to 3litres will be in scope across the UK, and will be excluded from disposal fees and labelling obligations, while the position on glass bottles will be set out by each nation individually. Defra has confirmed they will not be in scope in England, while the Welsh government has restated that Wales will consider glass bottles in scope.

Andrew Opie, director of food and sustainability at the British Retail Consortium (BRC) said though the organisation is happy with the decision to delay the DRS, it is disappointed by the moves from Welsh government to keep glass in scope, adding that it's "vital that the DRS scheme is aligned as far as possible across the UK to keep business costs down and maximise the benefit for consumers, whilst allowing clear messaging across the whole of the UK about how the scheme will function."

The DRS will target single-use drinks containers, with government saying it will work with industry to support voluntary trials of reusable and refillable bottles and cartons.

Deposit Management Organisations (DMOs) will operate on behalf of drinks packaging producers, with consumers being charged a small deposit when they purchase a drink in an in-scope container. This will be refunded only when the consumer returns the container to a designated collection point, from where it will go on to be recycled.

Dr Joshua Wells, principal political consultant for the environment and climate change said implementing the scheme is vital for the UK to achieve its ambition of moving towards a circular economy, but recognised attempts so far have faced numerous obstacles – notably a disagreement between Scotland and England over the scope of glass.

"Questions will remain about the fate of glass containers, which each administration will address in separate statements. Once these statements are made, the glass debate, which divides industry and stakeholders on grounds of cost, practicality, and environmental benefit, is likely to continue," he said, pressing how urgent it was for the UK to catch up with other countries, such as Norway, Denmark and Sweden "all of which have had DRS for decades".

Karen Betts, CEO of Food and Drink Federation echoed Dr Wells' concerns, saying it is critical for UK governments to work closely together now, to ensure the scheme is "easy to use and understand, operating under the same rules and with the same labels across the four nations. A consistent, UK-wide approach is the best way to ensure value for money and to drive up the UK's disappointing recycling rates."

"The rest of Europe has moved with the times to create a circular economy for drinks containers, so it's only right that the stopwatch starts again in the UK's race to build an effective Deposit Return Scheme," adds Carol Robert, COO of Suntory Beverage & Food Great Britain and Ireland. "As well as long term benefits such as reduced litter and increased recycling rates, a DRS is also a critical step for businesses, and the UK, to achieve net zero. We've seen a positive start for Ireland's DRS and it is now essential that we work on an interoperable UK-wide approach with detailed, prescriptive and consistent DRS regulations. SBF GB&I has been poised on the starting line and we're ready to give our full backing to make DRS a reality and a contributor to our goal of achieving 100% sustainable packaging by 2030."



HEALTH-CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS HUNGRY FOR AUSTRALIAN SUPERFOODS

Austrade reveals where flexitarian, plant-based and keto consumers can get a taste of Australia's trendiest new products

Holland & Barrett and Harrods are just two of the top retailers where health-conscious consumers can try innovative and delicious Australian health foods newly available in the UK.

Thanks to the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement eliminating tariffs on over 99% of goods between both nations, more Australian companies are targeting the UK market and tapping into high demand for functional foods with natural ingredients.

Similar to Australia, the number of meat-free consumers in the UK is soaring. Currently 16% of the population follow a meat-free diet

As a result, high protein foods are increasingly popular. Waitrose revealed in its 2023 Food & Drink Report that consumers aged under 35 years rated 'high in protein' as the most important health quality in a food, while a third of all survey participants sought out high protein foods.

Alongside natural health foods, there has been a wave of new and exciting premium products gaining new UK customers for their uniquely Australian flavours and provenance.

PHYCOHEALTH'S CRUNCHY SEAWEED GRANOLA

Stocked at Holland & Barrett, PhycoHealth uses sustainably farmed Australian seaweed to create seaweed pasta, muesli, kombucha and fruit straps.

In March 2024, PhycoHealth won the IFE Food Manufacturing Ingredients Award for most innovative protein source. Its product, PhycoTein, is the world's first green seaweed protein-rich ingredient, packed with essential amino acids, iron, and B12 – nutrients that are often rare in plant-based proteins.

FABLE FOOD'S MEATY PULLED MUSHROOMS

Fable Food is reimagining mushrooms. It is made from Shiitake mushrooms whose dense, fleshy fibres and umami flavours are naturally meat-like. Fable's plant-based meaty pulled mushrooms have the texture of slow-cooked 'beef'.

Fable is available in shops across the UK, including at Holland & Barrett and Planet Organic. The brand has also partnered with restaurants such as Honest Burgers and Côte Brasserie.

KEEP KETO'S GARLIC BREAD CRACKERS

Global interest in the ketogenic diet is expected to continue growing, with the market projected to reach $12 billion by 2028.

Keep Keto was founded in 2017 by pharmacist and medical scientist Katherine Kwee. Its vegan keto crackers, relishes and jams are low carb, keto, gluten free and refined sugar free.

Keep Keto is rapidly expanding internationally with a presence in the US, the Middle East and Asia, and now looking at expanding into the UK market. The delicious snacks have already attracted significant interest from UK retailers.

AUSTRAL FISHERIES' GLACIER 51 TOOTHFISH

Austral Fisheries' Glacier 51 Toothfish is a truly unique product. In the past, people have compared it to Chilean sea bass, but its taste, texture, and flavour profile is very different.

It has been recognised by renowned chefs around the world and is served at high-end restaurants such as Nobu, Sexy Fish and Rockpool. Glacier 51 Toothfish is currently available in Selfridges and Whole Foods Market. The brand is exploring other major UK retail channels.

YARRA VALLEY CAVIAR'S SMOKED SALMON ROE

Yarra Valley Caviar recently launched its high quality First Harvest Salmon Roe, Smoked Salmon Roe and Trout Roe at Harrods. The product range is also available through UK-based independent retailer Fine & Wild.

Located at the base of the Rubicon River in the Yarra Valley region of rural Victoria in Australia, Yarra Valley Caviar uses a bespoke breed of Atlantic salmon, purely bred to be humanely hand-harvested once a year, creating bright, plump pearls.

It is already the salmon roe of choice for leading restaurants worldwide and the brand was most recently selected by chef Miller Prada of one Michelin starred restaurant and wood-fired dining concept HUMO in London's Mayfair.

The number of Australian products available in the UK is likely to continue rising as word spreads throughout the market and demand grows among consumers for premium offerings that are a bit out of the ordinary to them.

Discover the latest Australian suppliers and products entering the UK - contact the Food & Beverage team at the Australian Trade & Investment Commission (Austrade) at london@austrade.gov.au.

How can technology help beat shoplifters?

Retail crime continues to plague British retailers. What reforms are being made, and what innovative solutions are available to provide support?

Recent data has shown a concerning rise in shoplifting in the UK as new measures are introduced to protect shop workers from abuse.

Shoplifting offences rose by 37% to more than 430,000 instances of theft for the year ending December 2023, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

With almost 1,200 offences a day marking the highest figure on record, the home secretary has urged the police not to view theft in shops as a minor crime. "Crime is crime – it's black and white. Criminal activity should be policed," said James Cleverly. "When people see videos of shops being robbed, that has a corrosive effect – so we have to deal with it, which is why we've made it absolutely clear they [police] will pursue every reasonable line of inquiry.

"We will make sure that we send a very, very clear message that you don't just get away with it," he said.

Not all crime experienced by shop workers involves theft, however. Bira, the British Independent Retailers Association, found in its 2024 retail crime survey, that 35.5% of respondents had experienced verbal abuse in their shops, and nearly 8% had experienced physical attacks, including threats with weapons.

Retail crime has been on the rise because of several factors, including the cost-of-living crisis, the sharing of 'viral' events on social media, the increased use of self-service tills and a reduced police presence.

NEW LAW SET TO PROTECT SHOP WORKERS

Industry groups have welcomed a new law to make assaulting a shop worker a separate criminal offence in both England and Wales. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the law aims to send a clear message to criminals at a time when retail theft and abuse of shop workers are both on the rise.

Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira, said the sector has been crying out for greater protections for retail staff. "For some time, Bira, along with the wider retail sector, has been calling for more protection for people who work in shops.

We are delighted with this announcement, especially as we are dealing with a significant increase in retail crime."

Under the new law, the offence of assaulting a shop worker will carry a maximum sentence of six months and perpetrators could also receive an unlimited fine, and ban from the premises where the offence was committed.

Repeat offenders may be forced to wear tags to track their movements, and £50 million is to be spent on facial recognition technology, with dedicated units placed on high street to catch criminals and prevent shoplifting.

In more serious cases, those found guilty of GBH (grievous bodily harm) will face jail sentences. However, anyone convicted of the new offence would not routinely go to prison. The Sentencing Bill, would mean sentences of 12 months or less would be suspended and served in the community, although a prison sentence could be imposed in exceptional circumstances.

ADDITIONAL REFORMS AND RESOURCES NEEDED

While Bira was "encouraged by the government's commitment to tackle this unacceptable abuse," Andrew Goodacre said the figures underscored a need for "real reform and resources to ensure shopkeepers feel protected".

Indeed, Bira's own research showed that many incidents experienced by shopkeepers are never reported to the police. Its 2024 retail crime survey found a whopping 66% of those subjected to verbal abuse chose not to report it. For incidents reported to police, 29% said authorities did not even attend the scene. I

n cases where police did respond, 57% did not lead to prosecution – an increase in non-prosecution levels compared to the trade body's previous survey.

Physical attacks and threats remain prevalent too, as nearly 8% of shopkeepers said in the report they experienced violence, including being threatened with needles, knives and hammers. Around 70% did not report these incidents to police.

Chain retailers like the Co-op that are facing serious retail crime are beginning to use AI technology to fight back with a more proactive approach.

JD Sports even announced a forensic tagging spray that will leave a synthetic DNA and UV marker on stolen property and criminals.

Independents, too, are more open to the idea of using new technologies to fight crime. "Better technology would make it harder for the perpetrators to do what they want to do and would take pressure off the polices forces," Andrew said, speaking on Bira's High Street Matters podcast.

Liam Arderne is the operations and sales director at Facewatch, a company that uses specialist facial recognition technology to help retailers reduce crime. Speaking on the podcast, he said one retailer using the service had cut crime (including staff abuse and assault, theft and vandalism) in their stores by 70%. Facial recognition technology, he said, is a preventative measure, adding, "It's easier to prevent a crime than to let a theft happen and try to get the items back."

The tech works by alerting shop owners – whether in stores, cafes or even garden centres – when someone on Facewatch's watch list enters their store. Within about five seconds, employees will be alerted on a handheld device with a picture, and they can choose whether they need to take any action. People can be on the system for theft, fraud, assault and more, Liam said.

Elsewhere, companies like Veesion offer AI-powered surveillance systems that can be plugged into existing cameras to spot suspicious movements. One London-based retailer told Convenience Store the technology has helped them to report shoplifting much more accurately and efficiently and to stop 15 shoplifters in just two weeks. What's more, the tech also reduced staff stress.

Users of Facewatch also reported that staff felt safer and morale improved.

The tech can be used by retailers of any size, but Bira's Andrew notes the cost of systems like these can be "a lot of money for small businesses," so it's important they calculate the cost against how much stock they are losing.

"If they believe it can reduce the amount of crime that takes place... there is a trade off."

Andrew noted that the West of England has made a fund available for retailers to apply for a grant for technology to fight shoplifting, like CCTV or other surveillance systems. He said he would like to see similar action taken elsewhere in the UK, or even on a national level.

"This is in the government's interest," he said.



Speaking at the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers's (Usdaw) annual conference, Labour leader Sir Kier Starmer pledged to do more. He said his government would crack down on shoplifting and retail crime, boosting neighbourhood police numbers by 13,000 and reversing a rule that means the theft of goods under £200 are not investigated. Shockingly, in over 248,000 shoplifting cases last year, no suspect was found or further action was considered not to be in the public interest. "If Labour takes power, we won't stand by while crime takes over our streets," he said.

"Nobody in Britain should be in any doubt about the scale of the crime wave on our high streets at the moment. The epidemic levels of shoplifting and the persistent plague of antisocial behaviour," Sir Kier said. "Some people call this type of crime 'petty'. But they don't work in your shop. They don't walk in your shoes. Don't see the damage this does to your community."

If retail crime isn't enough of a problem to invest potentially thousands of pounds into new technologies, Andrew suggests that retailers who still want to take action can rethink their product displays – ensuring that pricey products are not easy to grab – and work together with other shops in their area, for example forming Whatsapp groups where one business can alert others if known perpetrators are in the area. "No one shop is isolated from this crime," he said.

While fine food retailers are not the stereotypical victims of retail crime, as Andrew says, no shop is immune.



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BONE BROTH

Some call it the 'original superfood', and it's certainly popping up everywhere, but what's driving the growth in broth brands? *Speciality Food* finds out

If you thought collagen was purely a buzz word in beauty – think again. Claimed to boost the appearance of skin, hair and nails, and to aid achy joints and inflammation, it's found a way out of the health sector, and into the mainstream where it's being enjoyed by a diverse array of consumers in multiple formats.

The most popular mode of consumption (other than powders to scoop into smoothie bowls and that morning cuppa) being bone broth!

WHAT IS BONE BROTH EXACTLY?

It's simply a stock made from animal bones, usually taking the form of chicken or beef broth. The difference between a broth and a plain old stock cube is that the former is simmered for a long time (often 24 hours) in order to release key nutrients.

It's traditionally used in Chinese medicine to aid digestive and kidney health, says nutritionist Reema Patel of Dietician Fit, but its roots are far from the kitchen. "The origins of bone broth come from hunter-gatherers who would use the entire animals when cooking over fire, including the bones," she says.

More recently, broths are still used across numerous countries and cultures, from 'Jewish penicillin' (classic, nourishing chicken soup) to Vietnamese pho and Japanese ramen. "For centuries," says Ros Heathcote at Borough Broth Company, bone broth "has been a staple in cooking to utilise the whole animal, from nose to tail, and has long been the go-to healing and nourishing drink of choice for convalescence."

WHAT'S DRIVING THE TREND FOR BROTH?

Jessica Higgins, founder of Freja, thinks considerable celebrity endorsement and marketing investment in the category is putting it on an upwards trajectory.

"Prior to the industrialisation of the stock cube, almost every home had a stock pot on the go," agrees Ros. "Plenty of celebrities and wellness bloggers are leading the current trend for bone broth, coveting the anti-aging benefits and low-calorie nutrition it provides."

Consumers are becoming more aware of the benefits bone broth can offer them too, Jessica explains. "As bone broth overlaps with many wellness concerns, from skincare and beauty to gut health and sports nutrition, it's a product which can benefit consumers of all ages and interests. As people also become more aware of the negative impacts of ultra processed foods (UPFs), they are actively seeking out natural products and solutions for their problems."

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS?

Good quality broth is a restorative tonic that can be used to soothe the body and support the immune system, says Ros.

"Protein, collagen, and gut health are the largest functional health requirements for food and drink consumers," Jessica adds, and bone broth ticks all these boxes. She calls it a 'foundational health food' that is a natural source of protein and key amino acids. Its naturally occurring electrolytes make it a good choice pre or post-workout, Ros continues.

Bone broth is also a rich source of glucosamine, a compound of the skin, Reema says, which can help improve elasticity, connective tissue and support joint health.

Marrow from the bones provides a source of vitamins A and B, as well as nutrients such as iron and selenium.

What's more, it provides sources of calcium, magnesium and phosphorus, which are all essential nutrients for healthy and strong bones, Reema says. "As it also provides a source of zinc, this can also support our immune health. Because of the amino acid profile of bone broth, it may help with chronic inflammation as part of an anti-inflammatory diet," she says, though more research needs to be done in this area.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD BONE BROTH?

Jess says, as all foods, it begins with top quality ingredients. "As the nutrients are extracted from the bones during cooking, the standards of animal welfare are of the utmost importance.

This is why our beef is grass-fed, our chicken is free-range and our fish bones come from sustainably sourced Norwegian white fish.

A good bone broth contains nothing other than collagen-rich animal bones, vegetables and seasoning.

That's it. The cooking process is where you can see some variation, with different temperatures, durations, and liquid to ingredient ratio providing different levels of flavour and nutritional value in your finished broth."



GOOGLE SEARCHES FOR 'BONE BROTH' HAVE GROWN BY MORE THAN 300% IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

WHY SHOULD I BE STOCKING BONE BROTH?

Compared to the bone broth market in the USA, the UK is about five to 10 years behind, but consumer awareness and demand continues to grow quickly.

Google searches for 'bone broth' have grown by more than 300% in the last five years, and Freja estimates the total category to be worth approximately £20m RSV this year. "It's only getting bigger," says Jessica.

DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS FOR OUR BUYERS?

- Quality is key. Source a product that's been simmered for a long time using the bones of free-range or grass-fed animals. Avoid broths with high levels of added salts, sugars, preservatives or artificial flavours.
- Think carefully about positioning. Bone broth could be placed with fresh meat for home cooked casseroles, but also with ready-made soups for sipping as a warm drink.
You might even place it with noodles and stir fry kits.
- Consider provenance. If you make your own bone broth on site, list your ingredients and talk up any sustainability credentials you might have. Or buy broths that are organic certified, and that can demonstrate full traceability. Brands to look out for include Planet Paleo, Borough Broth Company and Daylesford Organic.

> "Protein, collagen, and gut health are the largest functional health requirements for food and drink consumers"
>
> JESSICA HIGGINS, FREJA



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PRODUCT NEWS

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Nostalgic new flavour from Fairfields Farm

Artisan crisp maker, Fairfields Farm, has added to its award-winning line-up with an exciting new flavour, in response to consumer demand.

The Prawn Cocktail variety taps into a growing desire from shoppers for nostalgic, traditional flavours. Suitable for vegans, and made using potatoes from the family farm in North Essex, the crisps are dusted with a carefully selected range of seasonings including tangy vinegar and sweet tomato for a piquant, but creamy and savoury finish.

Co-founder, Robert Strathern, has been rooting for the new addition for some time, and says he is thrilled to finally bring one of his favourite flavours to life. "Consumers are craving the flavours of yesteryear, so we decided that now was the ideal time to launch another much-loved classic," he explains. "Conforming to our promise of meat and dairy-free crisps, the recipe development team has really pulled it out of the bag. Prawn Cocktail is a personal favourite of mine and I've always had it in my head to launch this flavour, so I'm delighted that the idea has come to fruition."



Both 40g and 150g formats are available.
fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk



Corn snacking brand launches new flavour

Love Corn has added to its ever-growing, popular range of crunchy snacking corn with a new flavour – Sour Cream & Chive. Available in various sizes, the fibre-rich corn bites are low in sugar, gluten free and vegan.

Co-founder, Jamie McCloskey, says, "Not only are we famous for our crunch, but also for our fantastic flavours that we lovingly create. With the launch of Sour Cream & Chive we're turning up the volume on taste, providing the UK's best tasting sour cream flavour to date. With 50% less fat than crisps, this new flavour offers a better for you option, whilst still packing a punch!"
lovecorn.co.uk

Mr Organic expands range with sauces

Mr Organic, which started its journey on a tomato farm in Pontinia, Italy, has expanded its range, introducing four new tomato sauces, made in-house by chef Andrea, using the brand's own tomatoes, cooked within five hours of harvesting.

Smooth Basicilo and Smooth Bolognese join the Smooth Pasta Sauce line, while the Authentic Italian range has expanded to include Mushroom Ragu and Aubergine Ragu. The sauces contain no added sugar, relying on the natural sweetness of sun-ripened tomatoes. Brand manager, Stephanie Lee, says, "Our Healthier Choice Basilico and Bolognese are classic sauces that are popular with families. We wanted to expand our pasta sauce range to make deliciously smooth sauces that will be suitable for even the fussiest of eaters. Now is the perfect time to launch tomato pasta sauces since this is the time when people get into the spirit of tomato season." The sauces are available in a 350g glass jar format.
mr-organic.com





Brands team up for tasty new vodka launch

The Cornish Sea Salt Co has partnered with fellow Cornish brand, Southwestern Distillery (creator of Tarquin's Gin) to launch Connie Glaze Toffee Vodka. Smooth and balanced, every small batch of the vodka is slowly filtered through Cornish sand at the distillery, then blended with toffee and the highest quality sea salt crystals. And 1% of sales is being donated to clean local beaches.

"The joy of being a craft distillery is the opportunity to experiment, creating small batches of spirits that can push the boundaries of flavour innovation, and partner up with fellow local artisan producers to celebrate the best of Cornwall," says Tarquin Leadbetter of Southwestern Distillery.



Connie Glaze is named after the golden sandy beaches of Constantine Bay and the crisp clean blue water of the Atlantic Ocean - Connie, short for Constantine and Glaze, meaning 'blue' in Cornish.
tarquinsgin.com

Tracklements teams up with star chef

Tracklements has a brand new limited edition release, crafted in collaboration with chef and food writer Mark Hix. The restaurant standard Zingy Burger Sauce is all-natural and vegan, and works perfectly alongside barbecued meat, fish, cheese and vegetables, blending together tomatoes, mustard, turmeric, lemon, chillies and spices.

Guy Tullberg from Tracklements says, "It's been such an adventure working with the wonderful Mark Hix on this project. I have a feeling this brilliant sauce is going to star at lots of barbecues this summer, certainly at mine!"

Mark Hix adds, "I have been using Tracklements in my restaurants for many years, and they are my go-to choice for condiments at home. It was a pleasure to be asked to collaborate on this new limited edition sauce."

Zingy Burger Sauce is available now while stocks last.
tracklements.co.uk



Janda Food launches new Vegan Tartare Sauce

Chips are delicious, but paired with the right sauce, they really sing. Just in time for high summer, Janda Food has released a brand new match made in heaven for the takeaway favourite – Vegan Tartare Sauce. Tasting exactly like a conventional tartare, it's crafted without dairy or eggs, making it suitable for plant-based eaters, and those avoiding dairy and eggs in their diet. With a delicious tang and crunch from capers, the sauce is a new must-have for your ambient aisles, and comes in a recyclable glass jar, with a 99% recycled label.
jandafood.com



A UK first from Warrendale Wagyu

Warrendale Wagyu has launched the next phase of its journey, unleashing its first alcohol offering. WA-GYN is the only wagyu beef fat-washed gin on the market in the UK. With aromas of juniper, ruby grapefruit, lemongrass and pink peppercorn, the gin is washed with British Wagyu fat for 48 hours before being triple filtered for a luxurious mouthfeel.

Managing director, Tom Richardson, says, "We strive to be at the forefront of innovation, which is why we have launched the first fat-washed gin available in the UK. With the past year seeing great success for the business, it seemed right for us to expand our use of wagyu into new areas.

"Whilst it is uncommon for gin to be fat washed, we spotted a gap in the market and have carefully combined juniper with flavoursome fruits and herbs to create a drink that tastes fantastic. For those that enjoy gin, this needs to be added to your list as it will leave you impressed with the luxurious taste."
warrendale-wagyu.co.uk





New sweet sauces from Hawkshead Relish

Hawkshead Relish, best known for its savoury sauces, pickles, relishes and chutneys has recently released a decadent range of modern dessert sauces, designed to be the perfect partner for ice cream, pancakes, waffles, yoghurt and fresh fruit.

Each sauce is handmade using only natural ingredients, and is gluten and nut free. The range includes Raspberry Ripple Ice Cream Sauce, Sticky Toffee Waffle Sauce, and Lemon Drizzle Sauce.

Managing director, Jonathan Robb, says, "We've been asked by many customers for sweet sauces, so we set about creating a small range that would really work alongside our existing products."

The range is available to order now.
hawksheadrelish.com

Aagrah brings Indian restaurant experience to the table

Capitalising on the trend for recreating restaurant-quality dishes at home, Aagrah Foods has launched a new range, enabling customers to enjoy an authentic Indian restaurant experience in their own kitchen. Showcased in eye-catching packaging, the vast offering includes bite-sized poppadoms, chutney, tikka spice mixes, Acari, Kahari and Kashmiri Korma cooking sauces, traditional hand-pulled naans, and pilau rice mix.

Spokesperson, Shakil Hussain, says, "Our journey, fuelled by the passion of Mohammed Sabir and Mohammed Aslam has culminated in a range that encapsulates the quality of an award-winning Indian restaurant meal. Our commitment to tradition is unwavering; we employ the time-honoured tarka technique to unlock the vibrant flavours synonymous with the Indian subcontinent, offering a Kashmiri twist that's been a cornerstone of our heritage. Each product is a celebration of our roots."
aagrah.com





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THE SECRET TO A WELL-STOCKED STORE CUPBOARD

Pasta, rice and sauces are the bedrock of quick, easy, nutritious meals...and as *Speciality Food* discovers, consumers are looking for better quality, wholesome products across these categories

COMMENTATORS



BRUNO ZOCCOLA
VALENTINA DELI



SALLY ASSINDER
GAROFALO



GIANFRANCO PERRI
JUST GOURMET FOODS



SOPHIE ZIEGLER-JONES
SUMA



AL OVERTON
IBIS RICE

The store cupboard is the savvy, time-poor cook's best friend. A culinary treasure chest to lean into for bowls of comfort, and meals in a hurry when there's not a minute to spare.

Nudging up against the tins of beans, pulses and tomatoes, packets of stock, jars of spices and condiments there will almost always be pasta and rice. The reliable, filling backbones of thousands of dishes, from family-friendly oven bakes, to oozing, buttery risottos.

As with any food, quality makes a huge difference, and consumers are thinking more and more about where these essentials come from, and how they might benefit their health. They're also, retailers say, becoming more attuned to the environmental credentials of what goes into their basket.

What's trending right now?

As the cost of living continues to put a squeeze on households, creating restaurant quality dishes at home has almost become the norm, with eating out reserved for special occasions. Bruno Zuccola of Valentina Deli says this has been one of the most enduring trends in the pasta and rice categories since the pandemic. "People come into Valentina Deli and buy a quality artisan pasta and delicious organic sauce for under £10, which will easily feed a family of four, and almost certainly with leftovers too," he explains. "When you compare this to your average restaurant meal, where it costs a minimum of £12 for one average plate, of course people are moving special occasion meals into their own homes in order to save money."

To meet the needs of these shoppers, Bruno says retailers must look beyond the average, mass market pasta, rice and sauce varieties, offering something special, and authentic, to help customers put a slice of Italy on the table.

In pasta, the Valentina Deli team has noticed a shift in the popularity of certain shapes recently, with short varieties definitely leading the charge. "Rigatoni, penne and fusilli have particularly surged in popularity," Bruno adds, saying the move towards these varieties is occurring, he thinks, because of the versatility of these varieties. "These shapes offer excellent sauce-holding capabilities, while also being adaptable to a wide range of recipes, from traditional Italian dishes, to creative fusion cuisine. Additionally, short pastas tend to appeal to a broader audience, including families with children, who may find them more manageable to eat."

Sally Assinder of Garofalo, says spaghetti, penne and fusilli continue to appeal, but adds the brand is seeing increased demand for speciality pasta shapes, largely influenced by social media trends. "Fusilli lunghi stands out for its visual appearance," she says. "We are seeing the same with orzo, which is also popular among influencers."



Sales of wholewheat pasta are also on the up, Sally adds. "Although we have quite a variety of wholewheat pasta shapes, it is the traditional shapes showing the largest increase. There has been a lot of media coverage on gut health and the gut microbiome recently, with more specific and greater attention given to the benefits of wholegrains versus refined grains."

Once considered the 'poor relation' to classic pasta, Sally says wholewheat versions have come a long way, with significant advancements in production methods, which "allows for a finer grind of the wholewheat flour. This results in a smoother texture and reduced grittiness in the final product. Overall, these advancements have contributed to making modern wholewheat pasta more palatable and appealing to a wider audience."

> "There has been a lot of media coverage on gut health and the gut microbiome recently, with more specific and greater attention given to the benefits of wholegrains versus refined grains"
>
> **SALLY ASSINDER, GAROFALO**









Addison Gill of Seggiano says the brand is also seeing growth across its speciality pastas – particularly ancient grain and gluten free options. This has led to a programme of NPD, and the release of a new line of organic pastas, catering to the "interest in wholewheat, and grains like khorasan kamut and einkorn. These varieties provide a delicious and nutritious twist on classic pasta shapes like busiate, lumaconi and orzo."

When it comes to rice, Gianfranco Perri of Just Gourmet Foods says the attention customers are giving the specialist wholesaler's Gli Aironi Carnaroli Affumicato (smoked rice) is undeniable, and points to home cooks and chefs being a bit more experimental with Italian cuisine. "It elevates a risotto dish to new levels," he explains, adding that smoked rice works "wonderfully with seafood, and has the natural creaminess of a great Carnaroli."

Choosing the best

There is, undoubtedly, an almost limitless supply of pasta and rice available to retailers today…so why should you, when considering your stock list, push better quality products up the agenda?

Bruno says it's the job of independents to focus on delivering superior ingredients and traditional flavours, which differentiate them from supermarkets, where mass production and affordability drive listing decisions.

"At Valentina we ensure that most of our products offer various tiers within their categories, organising our ranges according to a 'good, better, best' system," he reveals. "Even our most basic, entry-level pasta, Rummo, surpasses the quality of what most supermarkets offer, crafted with bronze die extruded durum wheat. And then when we introduce customers to our 'best' pasta offerings, there's simply no comparison to what you find in a supermarket."

Independents should seek out small batch artisan made pastas, crafted with high-quality ingredients, Bruno adds. "Our offerings include fresh egg pasta, truffle-infused pasta, squid ink pasta and more. Not only do these excel in taste, but they also maintain their shape, even when slightly overcooked!"

This is a sentiment Gianfranco echoes, pointing to the higher protein content of artisan pasta, which not only holds its shape, but offers consumers (in an age of carb consciousness) better quality carbohydrates.

"Our recommendation to retailers is 'know your customer' and, of course, cater for different wallets, but don't dismiss selling a higher quality line, as people love to be able to upgrade for a special meal, or when they simply want to treat themselves to a new experience."

On the subject of rice, Gianfranco says Italian grains are of exceptional quality, and spending a bit more in this category will pay dividends in terms of both flavour and nutrition. "We source our rice from Gli Aironi which is an expert in rice production, taking huge care to ensure the nutritional integrity of its final product. Covering several different rice varieties (not simply the expected risotto rice options) the brand's products look great on shelf, and we find that retailers can offer a range which goes above the commodity nature of the category, better engaging customers with inspiration around cooking and flavour."

Gli Aironi, Gianfranco adds, has been developed over five generations of the same family, committed to sustainable agriculture and protecting the delicate wetland environment where they farm, including the population of grey herons which live there.

"They are a progressive business which is always seeking ways to minimise their impact and ensure that they are nurturing the health of the land that they call home."

This level of traceability is something consumers are searching for, says Addison. "By going beyond generic brands, you're catering to a growing customer base that values taste, transparency, and ethical sourcing." Traceability allows you to "build trust with your customers, and effectively manage your reputation, as you can confidently communicate the origin and quality of the ingredients."

A status symbol

Protected origin status can help boost the shelf appeal of any product, including pasta and rice, says Sally. In the UK we use PGI, while in Italy it's IGP (Indcazione Geografica Protetta) that binds foods to the region where they are produced.

The town of Gragnano, just south of Naples, is considered the birthplace of the pasta industry, thanks to its natural spring water sources used to produce the dough, and an idyllic climate, which lends itself perfectly to drying the finished product. Only pasta made within the municipality of Gragnano, following a strict set of rules, can claim Pasta Di Gragnano IGP status, which Sally says is a key indicator of exceptional quality.

To be designated, pasta must only be made with high quality durum wheat semolina (13% protein or above), and local spring water, be extruded through a bronze die, and be dried slowly, and packed within 24 hours to prevent further moisture loss.

Garofalo has been making pasta in Gragnano since 1789, and remains one of the most well-known producers of Pasta Di Gragnano IGP.

A new kind of customer

Wholewheat and alt pastas (made with different grains) are shifting into the mainstream. As Sally has already explained, gut health is topping the agenda for consumers, and many are swapping out their usual store cupboard essentials for products with bigger health claims.

Kelly Shaw of Windmill Organic, which recently released new protein-packed pastas made with pulses under the Profusion label, says, "Customers in the pasta category are increasingly seeking products that offer more than just basic carbohydrates. According to recent market research from Mintel, 56% of consumers express interest in pasta, rice, and noodles containing added healthy ingredients."

Convenience is a key factor too, Kelly adds, with interest in quick-cook or ready-to-eat pasta options on the up. "Additionally, there's a growing demand for pasta varieties that cater to specific dietary preferences or requirements, such as gluten free or plant based options. Overall, consumers want pasta products that align with their health goals without compromising on taste or convenience."

Windmill Organics' Profusion brand has been designed to harness the power of nature through functional foods packed with organic plant protein – using chickpeas, red lentils and peas.

Kelly says the decision to invest in this NPD has been driven by data showing 50% of consumers have a desire to be healthier since the pandemic, with 60% wanting to add more protein to their diet. The products appeal "not just to fitness enthusiasts, but also to a growing audience of middle-aged consumers,





those looking to manage their weight, and those eating a plant-based diet."

Suma has also recently increased its pasta line, offering an array of new organic, gluten-free oat pastas which mimic the texture of the wheat-based classic perfectly.

"We try to give people choice and options," says Suma's Sophie Ziegler-Jones. "We have our wheat pastas, many of which are made from heritage grains, and gluten free options. Our new oat pasta is one of the first to market, and we have some NPD going on in other types of legume-based pastas."

The demand for gluten free products endures, Sophie says, with food in this category being chosen not only by coeliacs and those with intolerances, but by consumers searching for ingredients that feel lighter, and more digestible.

"Our oat pasta is made with a combination of oat, corn and rice flours, so it's got quite a delicate taste, and a tender texture. It works really well in a pasta salad," she adds. "I think customers are looking for quality pasta, authentic pasta and for unusual ingredients – and this ticks all of those boxes."

Shapes include rigatoni, linguine and casarecce – made in Italy, using bronze die casts. They all cook quickly, making them ideal for time-pushed shoppers. "It can be quite easy to go over when cooking pasta," Sophie admits. "But our oat pastas are a bit more forgiving and hold their firmness well."

Beyond its texture and taste, Sophie says the brand hits the mark on sustainability as well. "The pasta comes in a cardboard box made from sustainably managed forests, and it lasts just as long as it would in plastic packaging.

"And our heritage wheat pasta is made with organic wheat grown by a Fairtrade co-operative of farmers, ground in their own mill, and mixed with local hillside spring water before being crafted on site, using 100% renewable energy.

"Being Fairtrade means a transparent and fair method is used to calculate the price the farmers get, which reduces the volatility in market price, and gives a guarantee the farmers harvest will be collected and paid for at an agreed rate."

Within the co-operative work is ongoing into growing and trialling ancient organic wheat varieties which will adapt to challenging climates, promoting sustainable agriculture, and better soil fertility.

Addison agrees that organic farming practices remain crucial to consumers. "Seggiano champions organic farming, using minimum-intervention agriculture and local cultivar preservation to nourish healthy ecosystems and a thriving food system," Addison says, adding that the commitment extends beyond certification, with a focus on traceable, high-quality ingredients. "We avoid industrial blends, favouring single-source ingredients that connect food to its terroir and guarantee origin."

MUST-STOCK SAUCES

- SPICY NDUJA
- BOLOGNESE
- AMATRICIANA
- PESTO (ESPECIALLY TRUFFLE-INFUSED)
- ARRABIATTA
- BASIL AND TOMATO
- PUTTANESCA
- NORMA

> "Our recommendation to retailers is 'know your customer' and, of course, cater for different wallets, but don't dismiss selling a higher quality line"
>
> GIANFRANCO PERRI, JUST GOURMET FOODS



Rice that sustains

Much has been written about the sustainability of rice, with bad practice in the industry pointed out by environmentalists. But a new breed of rice purveyor is coming up through the ranks. Sun Valley Rice in California works with farms within a 100-mile radius to bring nutritious, sustainably grown kernels (processed in its solar-powered mill) to market. Nice Rice launched to sell heritage basmati rice with fairer prices for farmers, and a lower carbon impact.

And IBIS rice is making moves to show how sustainable rice can be, giving better choice to retailers and consumers. Al Overton, the brand's UK advisor says UK consumers want to make better choices but "much of the time we are so far removed from where our food comes from, how it is produced, or who it is grown by, that it is impossible to know why better options are needed and the impact that they can have."

He takes rice as an example. "It is generally bought and sold more than 10 times between the customer who eats it and the farmer who grew it. Farmers who are often stuck in a hand-to-mouth cycle, with no ability to invest in their future, and no insurance against the impact that climate change or water shortages could have on the harvest."

IBIS Rice is proving different business models are possible, by short-cutting lengthy supply chain models, working with more than 2,000 farming families in Cambodia, living in the last remaining indigenous forest of South-East Asia.

"They grow one crop a year of organic rice in rhythm with the seasonal flooding of the land and, in exchange for their stewardship of the forest, are paid a 70% premium for their crop, given training on climate resilience, free seed, and pre-harvest financing if needed," Al says.

STOCK CHECK – 2024 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE



BIO ORTO PUTTANESCA TOMATO SAUCE

Bio Orto grows all of its own produce organically, and this exquisite sauce is an authentically delicious expression of its ripe tomatoes, olives and capers.

justgourmetfoods.co.uk



MR ORGANIC AUBERGINE RAGU

A sweetly savoury sauce made with all-organic ingredients, including Mr Organic's own ripe tomatoes. Wonderful in pasta or as a pizza topping.

mr-organic.com



IBIS RICE SEMI-MILLED LONG GRAIN RICE

Sustainably grown in Cambodia where farmers are given a better price for their crops, while caring for local nature. A versatile, delicious rice.

ibisrice.com



GAROFALO ORGANIC WHOLEWHEAT FUSILLI

A smooth, wholesome, delicious organic product, made in the birthplace of pasta by artisans.

pasta-garofalo.com



SAUCERER WILD MUSHROOM & TRUFFLE OIL PESTO

Elevate your pasta with this vegan-friendly sauce, packed with five different wild mushrooms and generous amounts of natural black truffle oil.

thesaucerer.co.uk



TRUE ORIGIN KILOMBERO LONG GRAIN BROWN RICE

A tasty rice grown sustainably in Malawi, with a fair price guaranteed for farmers. Nutritious and ideal for consumers tapping into the gut health trend.

trueorigin.org.uk



PROFUSION RED LENTIL FUSILLI

Protein packed, and powered by plants, this grain-free pasta delivers on flavour and function. Quick to cook. Just add your favourite sauce.

profusionorganic.co.uk



RISO GALLO CARNAROLI RISOTTO 1856 PORCINI

Prepared with a traditional recipe, mixing high quality dehydrated ingredients with the very best Carnaroli rice. Easy to prepare, and utterly delicious.

risogallo.co.uk



SUMA ORGANIC RIGATONI OAT PASTA

A gluten-free, light pasta, made using organic rice, corn and oats in the traditional way, with bronze dies.

suma-store.coop



SEGGIANO WHOLEWHEAT BUSIATI

Premium organic pasta with a low gluten index. Made from freshly milled ancient wholegrains to maximise fibre. Crafted by a family in Sicily.

seggiano.com

GRAINS FROM THE GOLDEN STATE

Sun Valley Rice is the specialist in sustainable, nutritious, Californian-grown rice

Nutritious, filling and affordable. Rice is a staple across the world, with at least 3.5 billion people estimated to include the grain in their diets every single day.

Often thought of as largely an Asian crop, conjuring images of paddy fields in exotic climes, the essential grain is equally happy growing in the lush landscapes of Northern California, taking root largely in the Sacramento Valley, where a combination of moisture-rich clay soils, hot days and cool nights mirror the conditions of Japan's rice fields (which, incidentally, sits on the same latitude).

It's here that, for five generations, the LaGrande family, founders of Sun Valley Rice Company, have pioneered innovative, sustainable rice production. Drawing on more than a century of experience and expertise, the team works closely with non-GMO family farms within a 100-mile radius of the mill, from Calusa to Yolo counties, yielding over 325 million pounds of premium rice each year.

Sun Valley Rice controls the entirety of the process, including farming, drying, milling and packing, ensuring the highest quality and care at every step.

Sustainability matters

As the second largest rice producing state in the USA, California has honed its rice growing practices over 100 years and is renowned for its commitment to high quality and sustainability. Measures include the use of water-efficient irrigation systems and water management practices like Alternate Wetting and Drying, as well as the implementation of conservation programmes to ensure the health of the soil and protection of native wildlife.

Based on the Rice Sustainability Report, USA rice growers have managed to achieve a 39% increase in land use efficiency, a 41% decrease in greenhouse gas emissions and a 52% reduction in water use over the past four decades, with targets to further improve these figures by 2030.

Sun Valley Rice has staunchly committed to eco practices, working diligently alongside its growers, within the milling process, and throughout distribution to be as environmentally friendly as possible. This includes the mill being powered by solar panels.

Rice is also an important crop for the food system, being an affordable and healthy staple and a basic ingredient for a variety of international cuisines, many of them popular in the UK.

Tasting the difference

When you choose Sun Valley's Californian-grown rice, not only can you feel good about your environmental and social impact choices, but you can be safe in the knowledge you've put flavour first.

Californian rice is known for its exceptional taste and quality, and Sun Valley Rice offers a range of grains suitable for multiple applications and cuisines, from short and medium grain white varieties, to brown and sprouted brown rice.

The most abundant variety in California – Medium Grain Calrose – is moist and tender, releasing more starch than long grain rice, for a creamy, perfectly chewy consistency.

The miller's Premium Medium Grain Rice has a slightly larger kernel size, with a distinctive white, creamy centre and sweeter taste that makes it incredibly popular for making sushi.

Short Grain Rice is the succulent, sticky sibling of the medium grain, most commonly used as a base for main Asian cuisines but also makes a great risotto or paella.table product, with a smaller, rounded kernel, mild, sweet, distinguished taste, and softer texture.

Glutinous Sweet Short Grain Calmochi makes an excellent base for sweet desserts such as sticky mango rice and mochi.

And the Gen-Ji-Mai premium Nutri Whole Grain brown rice is a superior product that's more water permeable, meaning it can be cooked more quickly than regular brown rice while retaining maximum nutrition.

This rice perfectly taps into general consumer desire to increase the amount of fibre and whole grain products in their diets without making any compromise on taste

Though all products in the Sun Valley Rice stable have strong health claims. They are gluten free, a good source of complex carbohydrates, low in fat and sodium, and free from cholesterol.

Californian rice is also naturally rich in vitamins and minerals including niacin, Vitamin D, calcium and iron, making it a nutritious and delicious choice.

The crop outlook is currently looking very stable for the next few years. With consistent supplies of high-quality Californian rice available at competitive prices, now is the time to consider buying from the Golden State. Sun Valley Rice has a full service team based in Guildford to make the supply of Californian rice easy with delivered prices , let the team do all the shipping and transportation for you.



> "When you choose Sun Valley's Californian-grown rice, not only can you feel good about your environmental and social impact choices, but you can be safe in the knowledge you've put flavour first"



USA Rice

SUN VALLEY RICE

TAKING THE BISCUIT

Whether a dunker for tea, or something savoury to add crunch to Cheddar, consumer desire for biscuits will never fade, say industry insiders

COMMENTATORS



STEVE MONK
GOOD GUYS BAKEHOUSE



DEBBIE HAMMONDS
FARMHOUSE BISCUITS



DAWN READE
ISLAND BISCUITS



MATTHEW CHILES
GOURMET PARTNERS



ALEX BRASSILL
JNCK BAKERY

Ah. The Great British biscuit. Nothing quite beats it. Particularly if it's presented in a dented, familial tin. The kind that's been passed through the generations, landing on the table in the afternoons, on the lap at Christmastime, and in the middle of the blanket with a flask of something warming during picnics.

There's a cosiness to the idea of a biscuit – whether sweet or savoury. One that makes most people come over all rose-tinted and nostalgic. And that, say makers and retailers, is what keeps shoppers coming back for more.

According to Mintel's 2023 report, volume sales of sweet biscuits were up 1.5% last year, despite cost-of-living pressures and the introduction of HFSS product location restrictions. Researchers pointed to their appeal as an affordable treat as being the predominant reason for the rise, with traditional flavours leading the way, alongside a desire for what it calls 'safe adventure'. "While new flavours sway only a fifth of buyers," Mintel says, "seasonal/limited edition biscuits prompt over half of buyers of sweet biscuits to purchase more overall." This "reaffirms limited edition variants as a valuable vehicle for brands to drive engagement."

Trends leading in sweet biscuits include personalisation, nostalgia and healthier options – particularly in light of ongoing research into (and mainstream chatter about) ultra-processed foods (UPFs).

On the less sweet side of the table, Mintel's 2023 Savoury Biscuits report reveals these products are most often eaten with cheese (60%) but that slowing sales (down against 2020 record levels) demonstrate a need for brands to invest in NPD and innovation that re-energises the market. Certainly, there's the opportunity to make a huge impact here as 69% of those who snack on savoury biscuits do so every day.

Opportunity knocks

Tudor Evans, senior category manager at Holleys Fine Foods agrees with the data, but says he's already seeing change within the savoury category with "brands constantly evolving their ranges and pushing the boundaries in terms of new taste combinations in oatcakes, crackers and wafers.

"Traditional brands like Nairn's have introduced a Marmite and Cheese Oatcake – a match that will always find favour with our customer base."

Steve Monk of Good Guys Bakehouse thinks more needs to be done to shake up the savoury biscuit aisle, saying he hasn't seen much real focus from market leaders in the category for many years.

"I can't think of any significant NPD launched recently," Steve explains. "Which is a shame, because savoury biscuits is a brilliant category, worth half a billion pounds." Steve believes the category has been neglected because it is "ageing", adding it's ripe for rejuvenation, which could inspire a whole new generation of shoppers. "We are one of the very very few brands that are over-indexing on younger, health-conscious shoppers," he adds.

Good Guys Bakehouse produces light, savoury wafer biscuits that pack a punch of flavour, at only five calories each. "Savoury biscuits seem to be wholesome, permissible and healthy, but savoury snack biscuits tend not to be healthy at all," Steve reflects. "They are usually high in fat and calories, so we thought 'let's make a product we can bring to market that offers something different'."

The brand bakes with natural ingredients "and we don't have to spray on oils and flavourings, so they are much lower in fat and calories. People want something lighter. They are putting rice cakes in their basket, and looking across to see if anything else is available. They want products for those 'light grazing moments' on the sofa."

A nod to the past

"Making moments and spending time together is what biscuits are about," says Debbie Hammonds, commercial director at Farmhouse Biscuits. Nostalgia is absolutely key for the brand. "People buy our products because they remind them of going to their grandma's house and having tea and a nice treat. We find nostalgic themed products do really well for us."



The bestseller by a country mile is Farmhouse Biscuits' Oat Flips – a recipe that goes back three generations within the Farmhouse family. "We're always talking about taking that inspiration from the past, but having modern creativity too," adds Debbie. "It's important to keep those classic flavours."

Farmhouse Biscuits conducts a lot of research with customers, who say biscuits are the sweet treat that resonates with them most. "Choosing a quality biscuit is that little extra indulgence," says Debbie. "We talk about it being that cherished gift, making memorable







moments, whether with old classics, or something new."

What sets a good biscuit apart is attention to detail throughout the process, she continues, adding that the brand's products are "labour intensive and artisan. Everything is hand weighed and hand packed. It means we can maintain quality all the way through."

Apart from Oat Flips, the team are currently seeing good uptake in flavours from Farmhouse Biscuits' English Garden range, such as Strawberry & Clotted Cream, and Honey & Oats.

New Christmas products are now open for orders, available (as is the entirety of the Farmhouse Biscuits collection) in a range of formats including luxury gifting tins, and at multiple price points to make the Great British biscuit tradition as accessible as it can be, to as many people as possible.

Tudor agrees that traditional biscuits are worth investing in, saying sweet biscuits is a key category for its largest customer groups. "Farmhouse Biscuits and Walkers Shortbread continue to do well," he says, adding that Holleys' exclusive brands, including Bakewell and Browne, and Oui Love it! have grown in popularity too.

Natural and sustainable

Organic products are going from strength to strength, with sales driven not only by the sustainability and ethics involved, but the fact that organic food and drink is regulated, and rarely (if ever) ultra processed.



Dawn Reade of Island Biscuits has seen an increase in sales, especially for the brand's Lemon Melts, but with the Orange Melts coming in a close second as citrussy flavours make an impact.

What makes a great biscuit in Dawn's eyes, though is that it's "got to have chocolate on it".

A chocolate biscuit, Dawns says "is one of life's great pleasures. It's something delightful you can immediately give to guests with a nice cup of tea or coffee, without spending a morning baking!"

Customers love that Island Bakery products are organic, sustainable, and as close to home made as possible. "Being organic rules out artificial flavours and colourings, and ties in with people who are looking for more natural products," Dawn suggests. "They can taste the difference. The real lemon oil from the peel, real stem ginger in the ginger biscuits, real pieces of apple in the Apple Crumbles. Obviously they are all-butter recipes too. You can really taste the butter."

Dawn says the world of gluten-free biscuits has also opened the team's eyes, following the launch of the Sweet FA brand, dreamt up by one of their longest serving employees, Fiona Aitali.

"She joined us 30 years ago. Fiona is an amazingly good baker, and had been unwell for a while," Dawn explains. "Eventually she was diagnosed as a coeliac. It was a real shock for her because she loves baking. When she wasn't at work, she was baking for friends and family." Fiona was "gutted", wondering if she would ever be able to set foot in the bakery again, but approached Dawn, to see if she'd be up for her developing a gluten-free range. "She had the idea of calling it Sweet FA based on her initials," Dawn laughs, adding, "and it sounds a bit cheeky too!"

Many, many recipes and formulations were trialled, with a key mandate that the finished products shouldn't be sandy or gritty – something Dawn hates. "So often these biscuits will taste nice, but you're left with a sandy texture, usually because of rice flour."

The Sweet FA range had to be "biscuits even people who aren't coeliac or gluten intolerant could enjoy...not second best!"

Made with tapioca and gluten-free oats, and dairy and palm oil free as well as organic, Sweet FA products have made steady progress in the three years since launching, demonstrating, says Dawn, a real desire for exceptional products that 'taste like the real thing' in this category.

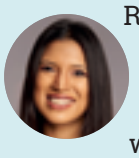
Matthew Chiles of Gourmet Partners, which supplies Olina's products into the UK fine food arena, says gluten free is a category to watch in sweet and savoury biscuits, with "staggering growth" reported via analysts, despite only one in 100 people in Britain having coeliac disease, according to Mordor Intelligence.

"We are seeing a huge spike in sales of our Simply Seed range – a nutritious combination of linseeds, sunflower kernels, pumpkin seeds and black and white sesame seeds," says Matthew, adding that there "seems to be an overlap, as consumers without underlying health issues, or with keto diets, are just enjoying the idea of snacks that taste great and are made from healthier ingredients."

Gourmet Partners' own data confirms its Simply Seed Pumpkin Flatbreads are now outselling all other products, including the core range and popular Seeded Toasts and Wafer Crackers.

> "People buy our products because they remind them of going to their grandma's house and having tea and a nice treat. We find nostalgic themed products do really well for us"
>
> **DEBBIE HAMMONDS, FARMHOUSE BISCUITS**

BAKING AT HOME



Reshmi Bennett of Anges de Sucre says pistachio is the flavour that's popping in 2024, but adds a trend that shouldn't be ignored is home baking – especially when it comes to cookies.

The bakery sells its hero cookie recipe online, with dozens of downloads purchased every week. She puts this down to a real interest in experimenting in the home kitchen, and a response to the cost-of-living crisis. "My cookies are New York style. If you were to buy them out and about, each one would generally set you back £4 to £5 in a shop. You can make a batch of 12 at home for around £12."

Biscuit baking kits or 'bake at home' doughs are "seriously worth investing in", Reshmi says.



STOCK CHECK 2024 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE



PUMPKIN & SUNFLOWER SEED SOURDOUGH CRACKERS
PETER'S YARD

Snappy, wholesome sourdough crackers flecked with seeds. Marvellous with all types of cheese, or alongside dips and pates.

petersyard.com



WHITE FUDGE FROSTY
ORKNEY BAKERY

The bakery's shortbread biscuit base, smothered in its smooth caramel, with a fudgy white chocolate topping.

orkneybakery.co.uk



WHOLEMEAL & EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL CRACKERS
SNOWDONIA CHEESE CO

Designed to complement the entire Snowdonia Cheese Co range (and other cheeses of course). Delicious, and with a satisfying snap.

snowdoniacheese.co.uk



CHERRY & ALMOND BISCUITS
CARTWRIGHT & BUTLER

New to the range. Luxury biscuits designed to deliver the taste of a Bakewell, with almond, and chewy nuggets of cherry. Presented in a perfectly pink gift tin.

cartwrightandbutler.co.uk



CHEDDAR WAFERS
GOOD GUYS BAKEHOUSE

Shaking up the savoury biscuit aisle, these light, crisp and moreish wafers are infused with real Cheddar, and contain just five calories each.

goodguysbakehouse.co.uk



CHILLI, GINGER & CUMIN
CRADOC'S CRACKERS
CRADOC'S SAVOURY BISCUITS

Delightfully warming crackers in eye-catching packaging. Made with only the best ingredients, including flour from a Welsh co-operative.

cradocssavourybiscuits.co.uk



OAT FLIPS
FARMHOUSE BISCUITS

The brand's bestsellers. Moreish, crumbly, open-textured biscuits that taste of home. Available in plain, milk and dark chocolate varieties.

farmhouse-biscuits.co.uk



HARISSA WITH CHILLI AND CUMIN
ISLAND BAKERY

The bakery's organic Isle of Mull Cheddar shortbreads, infused with gently tongue-tingling harissa, chilli and cumin. Melt-in-the-mouth.

islandbakery.scot



MATURE CHEDDAR CRACKERS
TREGROES

A new way to enjoy the brand's signature waffles. Savoury, filled with real Cheddar cheese, and with a toothsome crunch. Delicious alone or with your favourite toppings.

tregroeswaffles.co.uk



BALSAMIC VINEGAR & CARAMELISED ONION SEEDED SNACKERS
OLINA'S

Deliciously piquant and savoury gluten-free snacks with a satisfying crunch. Crammed with nutritious seeds.

gourmetpartners.co.uk

Olina's Seeded Snackers are making waves too. "Even consumers who would not normally seek out seed-based products are delighted by the taste of our Roasted Beetroot, or Caramelised Onion and Balsamic Vinegar, bite-sized snack products. In fact, as a business it's been difficult to keep up with demand for these. But that's a good problem to have!"

Naturally, seeded crackers, which are loaded with fibre and nutrients, appeal to the gut-health set too.

Alongside gluten free, another area of potential growth in biscuits is lower sugar, or sugar free. Alex Brassill, founder of JNCK Bakery, says although the sweet biscuit category is growing year-on-year, it's still behind on other sectors from a health innovation perspective, and he believes it's remained "relatively stagnant" despite desire from consumers to reduce their sugar intake.

There's plenty of room, Alex says, for sweet biscuit makers to capitalise on the demand for reduced sugar options, whether that's reformulating recipes, creating new, lower sugar recipes, or even considering formats for portion control.

As a child, Alex loved the gooey cookies at school but, even then, recognised they were unhealthy, filling the paper bags they arrived in with grease. "I always wanted to replicate those cookies in taste, without all the bad stuff – hence the launch of JNCK Bakery."

Alex's products have been rated HFSS compliant, containing 90% less sugar and 50% less saturated fat than the average competitor.

"What's more, we've added good stuff. Three times more protein, and five times more fibre than other cookies. We've used ingredients such as pea protein for satiation, prebiotic fibre for gut health, and a bespoke, low sugar, protein chocolate."



Alex says now is the time for retailers to sit up and take notice of the amount of sugar on their shelves. "Recent government legislation means that high losses are predicted in HFSS categories, with biscuit snacks predicted to be the second worst hit," he adds. "As more awareness of health continues amongst consumers, retailers and foodservice outlets will have to adapt to selling, and listing and marketing will need to shift to follow rules around what can and can't be promoted."

Alex says retailers should be prioritising healthier biscuits "in the way they already do in other sectors", adding he hopes they are increasingly seen not as a 'niche' offering or a 'compromise', but as "food items that have been created to be indulgent, while still being good for you".

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Printed and personalised biscuits are taking off in a big way, says Katrin Hoffman of DTM, which has seen hot demand for its Eddie Edible Ink Printer. The printer (the only one certified for use in a food environment) is being snapped up not just by hobbyists, but by cake and biscuit decorators, cafes, hotels and franchises.

"They're seeing high demand for bespoke and personalised products for corporate events and private occasions such as anniversaries, weddings and christenings," Katrin explains. "What we realised is, personalisation can help brands make a strong connection with their customers. If there's something that has your name on it, it builds that connection."



Hello Summer



Embark on a Flavourful Journey with Our New 2024 Tropical Floral Range

Discover our brand-new Tropical Floral Range. Each tin is not only a celebration of flavours but also a visual masterpiece, inspired by the lush landscapes of tropical paradises.

Immerse yourself with our three delicious award winning flavours:
Lemon & White Chocolate, Caramel Fudge and Stem Ginger

All wrapped in a colourful, brightly designed embossed tropical tin. The perfect treat for someone special or of course, just for you.

For further enquiries, email sales@farmhouse-biscuits.co.uk or call 01282 613520

www.farmhouse-biscuits.co.uk

CENTRE



Give your customers a delicious taste of Northern Ireland in store

1 HINCH DISTILLERY
IRISH GIN

Hinch Distillery is renowned for its Ninth Wave Irish Gin, meticulously crafted with premium ingredients. It features vibrant citrus top notes, a hint of spice in the middle, and earthy base notes, all enhanced by the precise inclusion of orris and angelica roots. This combination creates a captivating and distinct flavour profile, making it a stand out offering in the world of spirits.
hinchdistillery.com

2 MOOCHA KOMBUCHA
KOMBUCHA RANGE

An award-winning and healthy drink made in Northern Ireland, crafted from organic tea using only the highest quality ingredients. Moocha Kombucha is packed with probiotics and antioxidants which promote good digestive health and wellbeing. Flavours include Mixed Berries, Elderflower & Lemon, Peach & Turmeric, Apple & Blackberry and Cola, all containing over 3 billion live cultures!
moochadrink.com

3 GOLDEN POPCORN
POPCORN

Bring the cinema experience home with Golden Popcorn. Available in sharing and impulse packs, in Sweet, Salty and Sweet & Salty flavours, Northern Ireland's premium popcorn brand has been delighting customers for more than two decades. Founded by a cinema owner, the range is free from gluten, lactose, GMO ingredients and MSG. It's the perfect choice to make those snacking moments 'pop'.
goldenpopcorn.com

SHOWCASE

Invest Northern Ireland



4 FREE'IST
NO-ADDED-SUGAR CHOCOLATE

Free'ist believes better ingredients and better sourcing make for better chocolate.
With no added sugar, palm oil or artificial flavourings, and made using ethically sourced cacao beans from Columbian farmers, the brand says great taste and 'better-for-you' belong together! It's proud to deliver a delicious range of no-added-sugar chocolate that never compromises on flavour.
myfreeist.com

5 MILLAR MOO
MILKSHAKES

Millar Moo is fast becoming a family favourite in the flavoured milk drinks market. It's been around since 2015, but recently has been enjoying major success in the UK. Available in glass bottles and aluminium cans in four flavours - Strawberry, Chocolate, Banana and the hugely popular Cookies & Cream - Millar Moo prides itself on being fat free, gluten free and in fully recyclable packaging.
clarkemillar.com/millar-moo

6 LONG MEADOW CIDER
CIDER RANGE

Long Meadow Cider, situated in the heart of the Orchard county of Armagh, Northern Ireland, has been harvesting fruits from its own family orchards for almost 60 years, ensuring a handpicked selection for all its products. Whether it's the refreshing award-winning craft ciders or natural artisan apple juice range, Long Meadow Cider has the quintessential summer drinks to please every tastebud.
longmeadowcider.com

7 NOISY SNACKS
HEALTHIER SNACKS

Who said healthier snacking had to be boring? Noisy Snacks' Chip Shop Curry Coated Chickpeas and Beef Brisket Broad Beans are pulse-based, healthier snacks that are bursting with adventurous flavours, with an added crunch. They are a source of protein, 100% vegan, low in calories and high in fibre to keep you fuller for longer.
noisysnacks.com



MEET OUR RISING STARS OF 2024

A celebration of 25 of the fine food and drink industry's most exceptional founders

The time has come...to reveal our 25 Rising Stars of 2024. This project is a collaboration between *Speciality Food Magazine* and Speciality & Fine Food Fair, to celebrate the event's landmark 25th anniversary.

In May, we reached out to the artisan food and drink industry, asking those working within it to nominate the founders and leaders who they thought stood out from the crowd.

Innovators who've carved out their own paths, defining a niche in their sector. Visionaries, who have driven change. And those who are working in a way that's kinder to people and the planet.

We recieved nominations for hundreds of candidates – all of them worthy, and with their own merit – but the 25 revealed across the following five pages are the ones whose stories really jumped out at our judging panel. Founders who have followed their hearts, done something different, and deliver great-tasting food and drink to the table.

They will all be honoured during this September's Speciality & Fine Food Fair at London Olympia.

"We're thrilled to finally be able to publish and share the names of our 25 Rising Stars," says Charlotte Smith-Jarvis of *Speciality Food Magazine*. "Whittling the entries down to just over two dozen was a mammoth task for our judges, because there were some incredible nominees. The process highlighted several things. Firstly, that the world of artisan food and drink never stands still. Something new, bold and exceptional is always around the corner. The creativity in this industry knows no bounds.

"Secondly, there's an enormous amount of passion, and incredible amount of work that goes into the sector.

"And, thirdly, ingenuity is everywhere. Some amazing businesses and ideas were generated during the pandemic. Businesses that have gone on not just to survive, but to thrive, injecting excitement and renewed vigour into multiple categories.

"We hope you'll join us at Speciality & Fine Food Fair this September to congratulate these brilliant food lovers and entrepreneurs."

"It's amazing to think that Speciality & Fine Food Fair is celebrating its 25th birthday this year," says Nicola Woods, event manager at Montgomery Group. "The world of fine food and drink has changed so drastically in that time, with the explosion of innovative and delicious products mirroring the growing consumer appetite for new and diverse food and drink.

"Over the past quarter century, Speciality & Fine Food Fair has been a platform for passionate entrepreneurs to get their start, network with the industry and grow their brand, and we're so excited to be celebrating 25 Rising Stars this year in partnership with *Speciality Food Magazine*.

"We'll be recognising these inspiring foodie founders at the fair, and to further celebrate our 25th anniversary we'll be introducing new features, tasting stations, networking opportunities and chances to hear about the latest industry trends.

This year's event will also see the launch of our 25th anniversary documentary, looking back at some of the highlights of the fair with our ambassadors and partners. We can't wait to welcome you and take a look ahead to the next 25 years of speciality food and drink. See you in September!"

> "Whittling the entries down to just over two dozen was a mammoth task for our judges, because there were some incredible nominees....The creativity in this industry knows no bounds"



Will Fugard

GUSTO ORGANIC



After a career in the creative industries Will co-founded Gusto Organic with a desire to improve the UK soft drinks offer – delivering a range of soft drinks crafted for an adult palate, which he felt were missing in the chillers of bars and shops.

The brand's organic and Fairtrade colas are a significant part of the business, crafted using organic essential oils, extract of cola nut, Sicilian lemon juice, Fairtrade Madagascan vanilla and agave. And it launched the world's first organic cherry cola, with 8% organic cherry juice.

With Yuzu Lemonade, Sicilian Blood Orange, and a Fiery Ginger with Jalepeno in its stable, Gusto Organic has brought its premium and ethical lens to popular flavours, supplying fine hotels, restaurants and grocers across Europe, the Middle East and Singapore, with notable launches this June including Jones the Grocer at Heathrow Terminal 2, and The Mandarin Oriental in London.

drinkgusto.com



Angus Cowen and Charlotte Dawe

SEA SISTERS

When Angus and Charlotte founded Sea Sisters in 2021, they became the first people to manufacture canned fish in England since the 1940s.

Angus was chef at some of London's best-loved neighbourhood restaurants (including Trullo) before stepping out of the kitchen and the late nights of hospitality during the pandemic.

And Charlotte is passionate about people food and storytelling. She loves how food brings people together, nourishes, and can be responsible for lifelong memories. She has worked with a diverse range of communities, which has been influential in the building of the Sea Sisters brand. Having a young family spurred Charlotte on to build her own family business. She wholeheartedly believes in diversity and inclusion, celebrating women in the fishing industry, as well as interpreting Sea Sisters' social media content into BSL.

The couple knew from the very beginning Sea Sisters was about supporting the British fishing industry, clear provenance, and innovative ideas with maximum flavour.

Since launching, Sea Sisters has won many accolades, including Great Taste stars, and Reserve Supreme Champion for its Cuttlefish in Ink at the Taste of the West awards.

seasisters.co.uk

Nick Egan

CORNWALL PASTA CO



Nick started his journey in professional kitchens aged 13, where food became his life. His relationship with food and where it comes from has always shaped the direction for Cornwall Pasta Co, which Nick founded to (in his own way) deliver real change to part of the food system.

When it launched in 2020, Cornwall Pasta Co was the first organic British pasta company, championing ingredients sourced from his home county of Cornwall.

Nick believes if you start with the absolute best ingredients, you always produce better food.

The pasta is extruded using traditional bronze dies for a coarse surface. Alongside its organic wheat base, this makes for a distinctive taste he says you won't find anywhere else. Cornwall Pasta Co products are plastic free, fully compostable, and have been certified by the Soil Association.

cornwallpasta.com

Shadia Al Hili

CUZENA

With no food industry experience, but an unwavering desire to introduce an unknown product to the British market, Shadia founded Cuzena to bring the magic of the Middle East to the British fine artisan food scene.

Cuzena (meaning 'kitchen' in Moroccan) launched in 2018 with her Ful Madamous fava bean dips, which led to listings with Selfridges, Whole Foods and various independent retailers.

Despite the challenge of introducing new products, and building a brand, Shadia has grown Cuzena into an ambitious team of five, with the business continuing to lead with absolute innovation in bespoke packaging with authentic flavours, from chips and dips, to stir-in suaces, and tofu snack pots, all designed for cross-category appeal.

Cuzena's products are now available on train lines and ferries, and Shadia's sights are firmly set on airlines, and growing the foodservice range. Her vision remains ever clear, in bringing the joy of Middle Eastern food into the mainstream.

She proudly supports Yemaid, which provides life-saving medical supplies, food and water to the people of Yemen, giving back to the heritage and roots where many of her recipes originate.

cuzena.com



Tom Palmer

YEP KITCHEN

After spending a decade living in the heart of China, eating his way across the country, Tom returned to the UK with a vision to bring the bold, fiery flavours of Chinese cuisine to British consumers, and to ignite excitement in a category that has remained largely unchanged for years.

Tom set out to create condiments that truly represent the essence of China. By sourcing key ingredients directly from the regions where they grow, following traditional processes, and collaborating with Chinese artists to produce the artwork the represents the brand's vision, he has been able to achieve just that. This dedication to authenticity led Tom establish Yep Kitchen's own manufacturing site in London, ensuring the brand retains full control over production as it scales up. The current range features three umami-packed chilli oils and one fiery ferment, with more exciting products on the horizon.

He is thrilled to be representing a cuisine he holds so dearly. Sharing the authentic flavours of China with the UK, Tom says, has been a dream come true.

yepkitchen.com



RISING STARS

Fan Yang
OTHER FOODS

A health-conscious foodie and mushroom fanatic, Fan Yang has turned her favourite childhood ingredient into a phenomenal product that encourages people to 'dare to snack differently'. Fan is on a mission to end unhealthy and boring snacking with real, wholesome fungi and plants.

Officially launched into eight Whole Foods Market stores in 2019, the Other Foods snack range (including a variety of mushroom and artichoke crisps) is now available in more than 800 stores in the UK and exported to 10 countries. As the first company to offer 'mushrooms on-the-go' in the UK and Europe, Fan is proud to be able to bring a snack that is minimally processed, great in taste, packed with nutrients, and completely vegan and gluten free, to the market.

Other Foods has six lines, with a focus on specialty mushrooms and now additionally supplies Holland & Barrett, Ocado, Planet Organic, Selfridges and many independents across the UK and around the world.

otherfoodsuk.com





Ryan Moore and Chris Farnworth
BLENDSMITHS

Growing up, Ryan's parents loved walking, and his bargaining chip to join them was a visit to a local cafe – a scene which would later become a passion and obsession!

Following many years working in a global brand supply chain, he grew agitated in his quest to pursue something more aligned to his interests, and was given the opportunity to work alongside the renowned team at Square Mile Coffee Roasters.

Unfortunately, after a few years in the coffee industry, Ryan developed Overactive Bladder Syndrome (OAB), significantly reducing his caffeine tolerance. At this point, he researched alternatives he could enjoy daily, finding himself underwhelmed. And so Blendsmiths was born, alongside lifelong friend Chris, who was seeking a new challenge. The duo share an unwavering passion for the pursuit of all things quality-focused, and are on a mission to 'change the world of drinks' with their vegan superfood, matcha and hot chocolate blends.

blendsmiths.com

Kier Kemp and Jennifer Dreier
CONDIMANIAC



Condimaniac was an accident. It all started back in 2018 after a few beers at a barbecue - like most good ideas tend to. Kier and Jen had been drunkenly discussing whether Kier should take his obsession with condiments to the next level by posting reviews online. Usually, these things end there. This story doesn't.

Kier was looking for a palate cleanser after years of being a professional musician, so for fun he did just that: adorning the reviews with beautiful images and outrageously in-depth flavour examinations. Those reviews struck a chord with other Condimaniacs around the world, and before long the two were being sent hundreds of products to review. From hot sauce to kimchi, they tried it all, and developed a great idea about what was out there, and also what wasn't out there. By 2019 they'd incorporated a company with the aim of filling the gaps left behind by more traditional retail, aiming to serve people just like them - the condiment-obsessed. Since then, Condimaniac has gone on to win numerous awards, featured in a plethora of national press, and been selected by Gordon Ramsay for his TV show Future Food Stars. Most importantly though, they've created a club of like-minded condiment enthusiasts.

condimaniac.com



Andrew Jones and Hannah Springham
FARMYARD FROZEN

Farmyard Frozen is the brainchild of the culinary creatives behind Michelin-listed Farmyard in Norwich. It was founded during the pandemic as a way for chef-patron Andrew Jones and managing director (and partner) Hannah Springham, to continue to bring restaurant quality dishes to their customers, for them to enjoy in their own homes.

Hannah, a founder of award-winning TV production company, Knickerbockerglory, brings her bold, infectious spirit to the brand, while Andrew (who has previously cooked in the kitchens of Claude Bosi and Richard Corrigan) works with his team to celebrate the flavours of Norfolk in a frozen, easy-to-cook format. Every dish is handcrafted by restaurant chefs, with no added nasties, across a range that includes starters, main courses, sides and desserts, winning multiple Great Taste awards in 2023, in addition to the Innovation Award from the British Frozen Food Federation, for the Farmyard Chocolate Bar.

As well as delivering nationwide, the couple are proud to supply multiple artisan food retailers, and provide luxury Farmyard Frozen desserts to private jet owners.

farmyardfrozen.com

Rhian Caffull
VEG LIFE

Plant-based food pioneer, Rhian, founded Veg Life during the pandemic, with an aim to position delicious, sustainable, artisanal products that challenge perceptions in the fine food space.

Her standout creation, the Scotchee, puts a vegan twist on a picnic and snacking classic, offering the same appearance, texture and taste as its traditional counterpart, with fewer calories and less fat.

Committed to the UN's sustainable development goals, Rhian's business not only provides delicious food, but puts the environment first every step of the way. All retail products are served in home compostable packaging, and she is determined to help reduce food waste, using crumbs created by bread slicing at local bakery (which would otherwise be thrown away), and turning any broken 'eggs' into sandwich fillings.

Rhian's background as an expedition leader further underscores Veg Life's dedication to impactful projects, ensuring it helps community endeavours (such as the Community Fridge in Malvern) through its artisanal offerings.

veglifeeats.com





Edward van der Lande

MORE TODDLER MEALS

More Toddler Meals (MTM) was founded while Edward was deployed to Somalia with the British Army in 2022, leaving behind his working wife and toddler son. He realised there was a gap in the market for genuinely convenient and nutritious meals aimed at growing tots, and the more he researched, the more he realised there was also a big problem in the UK with early years nutrition. Around 15% of children starting primary school, he discovered, were obese, 55% of children aged four and under had two or fewer portions of vegetables per day, and 24% of UK parents to children of this age and under felt guilty about their child's daily diet.

Edward's mission with MTM was to craft meals with toddler development in mind, to encourage healthy eating from the earliest of years, exciting young imaginations through great taste and colourful packaging. Uniquely, MTM meals are freeze-dried once cooked. They are lightweight and can be taken anywhere. They just need hot water added to prepare them in minutes, making them fantastic for busy parents who need to quickly feed their child when on the go, on holiday, or before a hunger-induced tantrum erupts.

moretoddlermeals.co.uk



Matt and Kit Newell

HIVE MIND

Brothers Matt and Kit launched HIve Mind in 2018 after Matt's hobby of beekeeping was overproducing honey. They decided there was no better use for the product than to turn it into mead.

Matt and Kit's goal is to revolutionise the mead world, and produce meads unlike anyone has ever tasted before. They began with lighter style, sparkling drinks using additions such as Citra hops, designing their products in line with the craft beer world, to tempt in beer and cider drinkers – and winning a Great Taste award for their first commercial batch. Five years on, the brothers now make a range of six sparkling meads in 330ml cans, six styles of traditional mead, melomels (fruit meads), braggots (honey beers) and a honey rum.

One of their proudest moments was winning a Great Taste Golden Fork for Wales in 2023 for their flagship traditional mead, which can now be found in Michelin Star restaurants.

The pair say they love to push the boundaries of what can be done with honey, being careful to showcase its provenance and fantastic flavours.

hivemindmead.com

Monique Farquharson

THE MATCHA YAAD

Monique is the visionary behind this brand, which beautifully marries the vibrant flavours of Jamaica with the elegant tradition of Japanese matcha. Monique's journey began in Jamaica, where she was introduced to matcha at university as an alternative to coffee. After discovering the drink's health benefits, a passion was ignited which led her to Japan. She spent nearly two years immersing herself in the art of matcha and Japanese tea ceremonies under the guidance of her sensei, affiliated with Urasenke - a renowned institution dedicated to the art of tea.

This immersive experience not only deepened her appreciation for matcha, but also sparked the idea of creating a unique fusion of Jamaican and Japanese cultures through innovative beverages. She then ventured to the UK and established The Matcha Yaad, offering products that celebrate authenticity, creativity, and wellness. The Matcha Yaad's flagship product, the Ginger Refresher, is a testament to Monique's innovative spirit. This beverage combines the antioxidant-rich properties of Japanese matcha with the bold, spicy notes of Jamaican flavours, creating a unique and invigorating drink.

thematchayaad.com



Marietta Hickman

CHEEKY NIBBLE

Tourette Syndrome and autism sufferer Marietta founded Cheeky Nibble in 2021. Having found that exercise and baking helped manage her mental health, she brought her two passions together to create the business, which is on a mission to spread joy through truly delicious snacks and cereals which are free from allergens, yet full of flavour.



Cheeky Nibble specialises in vegan, top 14 allergen-free granola, inspired by classic British desserts and drinks, including Cherry Bakewell, Victoria Sponge, Banoffee Pie and Vanilla Latte.

They are all made in a BRCAA bakery, which is a dedicated peanut and tree nut free environment, and formed into clusters which make an indulgent breakfast or snack – the first hybrid granola product in the UK.

The packaging is recyclable, with boxes printed with carbon balancing, allowing customers to make a delicious and ethical choice.

cheekynibble.com

Bella Acland

SOUL KITCHEN



Bella founded Soul Kitchen while at university, where the keen foodie found herself frustrated at the lack of nutrition and flavour of cup noodles and instant soups.

By blending high quality, nutrient rich vegetable powders, superfoods, herbs and spices in her kitchen at home, Bella quickly realised that more people needed to try her recipes. Soul Kitchen soups are the perfect convenient solution without any compromise on quality or flavour. The brand is on a mission to disrupt the instant soup category with its delicious, 100% plant-powered products which are packed with real veggies and only natural flavours. They're the only vegan, gluten-free and palm oil-free instant soups currently available on the UK market. Having been selected as one the most promising healthy challenger brands for Mission Ventures Good Food Program, Bella's business has gone from strength to strength following a full rebrand and innovative NPD.

wearesoulkitchen.com

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Kirsty Miller and Alex Higham
EXHALE

After 20 years together, 15 years of those working in the corporate world, Alex and Kirsty quit their hectic London jobs to launch Exhale in 2020.

Their first hires were Kirsty's brother, Tom and his girlfriend, Laura (still with them in customer services) followed by their neighbour, Kaspar (now heading up operations).

The brand grew quickly as people followed the crazy journey of this start-up, with up to 250kg of coffee passing across their kitchen table each week. Four years later, with nearly 20,000 subscribers, roasting over 10 tonnes of coffee a month, Kirsty and Al still have huge ambitions to promote health, sustainability and fairness in the coffee supply chain. Together, they combine their passions and skills to bring the healthiest coffee imaginable, sourced responsibly (Exhale is a B-Corp and Soil Association accredited), with a true love of the craft.

Exhale coffee is some of the purest available in the UK, being lab tested nine times to ensure it's free of moulds and pesticides, and optimised for antioxidants.

exhalecoffee.com

Ella McKay
FATSO

Ella is the co-creator of super chunky, disruptor dark chocolate brand, FATSO. Self-proclaimed as food obsessed, she scrapped the big corp life and leant into her entrepreneurial instincts to take on the saturated world of chocolate, with a truly unserious and uncompromising brand.

After graduating with a business and marketing degree, Ella bounced into a marketing role with a blue chip employer. Working across leading oral care brands, she quickly learned that a successful marketer can make anything sexy (even dentures). A hop over to a major telco company where her focus was in e-commerce/online marketing, was followed by a jump over the pond to Vancouver where she landed herself in the work-hard-play-hard world of advertising. After three years hiking mountains, skiing and sunbathing in the same weekend, eating a lot of kale-based smoothies, and meeting 'the one', she and her partner returned to London, taking a role at a leading brand strategy and design agency. A great breadth of roles, and yet she couldn't shake the entrepreneurial itch. So, when Ella and her partners-in-chocolate started to ask the question: "why is dark chocolate so boring, and why does milk chocolate have all the fun?", she couldn't resist urge to solve the problem.

Three years on, and 18 months since launching FATSO, driven by values and integrity, Ella and her team of chocoholics are well on their way to show the world that dark chocolate can have just as much fun as milk, without compromising on taste, quality, ethics or size.

sofatso.com



Natalie Wood
SOUL FRUIT

Coming from a mixed background, with a Singaporean mum and English dad, Natalie has always been exposed to a wide variety of foods. But, having a strong sweet tooth, there was a time when she couldn't be found without a pack of sweeties in her handbag.

In 2018 she decided to make changes in her life, quitting her corporate marketing job in Hong Kong to train as a Yoga teacher in Bali and learn more about nutrition. This made her realise how much she needed to cut out artificial sugary snacks.

Living in Asia, Natalie found she had access to lots of delicious tropical fruits, which made her wonder, with so many amazing fruits in the world, why don't we have more varieties of dried fruit snacks? They are nature's candy, after all.

She's particularly addicted to a chew, while her husband is a crisp cruncher. That's why Soul Fruit dries its fruit in two unique ways, ensuring its snacks don't just taste great, but they also have the most satisfying textures too. Natalie is on a journey to make snacking simple again with Soul Fruit, using the whole fruit, and nothing but the fruit.

soulfruit.co.uk





Dan Shearman
THE WILDERKITCHEN

Dan is the eco-chef founder of The WilderKitchen, home of Wilderbee Hot Honey – the chilli-infused honey condiment creating a real buzz in the UK.

Dan introduced the UK to the hot honey trend after discovering the sweet and spicy condiment in a New York pizza restaurant. On returning to London, he created a version for his food truck menu using the highest quality, ethically-produced honey infused with sustainably grown chillies. After years of selling in unbranded pots from the hatch of his truck, he ventured into retailers and restaurants, and is now stocked in Marks & Spencer, Co-op, Whole Foods and Harrods, as well as restaurant menus across the UK - even making the cocktail menu at Tom Kerridge's Michelin starred Hand & Flowers. Focused on disrupting the honey category with a fusion of sustainability and spice, The WilderKitchen offers a bee-friendly, organic wildflower honey farmed in the most natural way possible, with respect for our planet's pollinators, along with chillies that support farmers in Rwanda by paying above living wage, providing free education to employees' children, and planting crops that promote carbon sequestration - counterbalancing their carbon footprint.

wilderkitchenfood.com

Karen Robinson
THREE ROBINS



Driven by her son's lactose intolerance and a lack of healthy, low-sugar snacks and drinks for children, Karen identified a market gap for a family-oriented oat milk brand.

Launched in May 2022, Three Robins' original and chocolate oat milks are barista-standard, low in sugar, and fully fortified, designed for the whole family to enjoy from breakfast to bedtime. Last year saw Three Robins win five product awards, including a prestigious Great Taste Award, and Karen was a finalist in the Women's Enterprise Scotland awards, securing vital growth funding through Scottish Edge.

Three Robins products are now available in Selfridges as well as more than 80 independent shops and cafes across the UK. The team is gearing up for a big summer with the recent launch of the brand's innovative Little Smoothies range for kids, which offer a healthier on-the-go option for nursery and primary school aged children designed to revolutionise the snacking category.

Committed to quality and healthy options for kids, Karen is driving positive change in the food and drink industry. Before Three Robins, she had a successful career in international development. Karen holds a PhD in international relations, and spent 15 years working to support women's rights in conflict-affected countries on behalf of organisations including the United Nations and the UK government.

threerobins.co.uk

Laura Barton

GRANOLA BUTTER UK



Granola Butter has been a huge success in the US - which sparked Laura's initial product idea. A lot of trends from the US find their way over to the UK, so she saw this as a huge opportunity, saying she loved the fact granola butter could be made with predominantly British ingredients to minimise food miles and celebrate British farming.

Laura spent 18 months developing the recipe - tweaking different ingredients to strike the perfect balance of health and indulgence.

Granola Butter has the texture of peanut butter, but is made from granola instead of nuts. It's a sweet spread, but contains 70% less sugar than comparable products in the market. The Granola Butter Co's granola is toasted to perfection, then blended to deliver tasting notes of caramelised biscuits. It's high fibre and naturally free from nuts, gluten and dairy.

Laura says her customers love the product because it has an accessible flavour that is versatile and adds excitement to meals and snacks throughout the day. She's continued to innovate with flavours such as Hot Cross Bun, Cookie Dough and Strawberries & Cream - bringing joy to what she felt was a stagnant category.

granolabutter.co.uk

Alexa Fernandez

CHILI MAVEN

Alexa founded Chili Maven in December 2021 with a desire to bring a real taste of Mexico to the UK. After much experimentation with flavour combinations, she launched the UK's first salsa macha. While salsa macha is a staple in Mexico, it's a brand new concept to most Brits, best described as a chilli condiment, but so much more than that in its layers of flavour. What sets Alexa's products apart is her pursuit of the proper taste of Mexico. Chili Maven only uses Mexican chillies in its products. They're grown in Mexico, picked in Mexico, prepared in Mexico, and blended with artisan Mexican techniques. Why is that so important? At the heart of Chili Maven is Alexa's passion to infuse cultures. Having grown up in the border town of El Paso, Texas, she's used to the rich diversity of interacting cultures. What better way to share culture than through delicious food? Alexa pours her joy of food and (most of all) flavour into all of Chili Maven products.

chilimaven.com



Eva Thorne

THE GARDEN OF EVA

Eva Thorne is a native New Yorker, born of an American Southerner mother who loved to cook and preserve. Her mum used the Grand Diplome Cooking Course to teach Eva the basics. Making jams, conserves, and pickles almost year-round was a regular feature of life in the Thorne household.

Passion for food and travel combined to create The Garden of Eva, which brings the pickles, relishes and jams of the American South to the UK and beyond. The company's upcycled Pickled Watermelon Rind is the recipient of two Great Taste stars. It's brilliant with cheese and grilled meats, while the brine goes well in cocktails. Honest Burgers used The Garden of Eva's American Southern relish – Chow Chow – on a New Orleans-style fried chicken sandwich, which was a monthly special. And Whole Foods Market UK named The Garden of Eva's Chili-Watermelon Jam as a 2024 Food and Drink Trend for complex heat.

Eva is currently exploring a farm-to-jar model and leveraging AI to tackle bigger challenges in the food system.

gardenofeva.co.uk





Seji Hong

BOMBOM

Seji's journey begins with her Wimbledon supper club. Launched in 2019, it led to collaborations and pop-ups with East London restaurants. Soon after, in 2022, she brought independent Korean sauce company BOMBOM to market.

BOMBOM's sauce recipes are inspired by the dishes most loved by Seji's guests. She has taken those flavours, and developed them into easy-to-use jars that appeal to everyone, from meat lovers to vegans, allowing them to enjoy authentic Korean food at home.

Since launching, BOMBOM has gained listings at Whole Foods Market, Ocado, Selfridges and Sous Chef, and scooped up two Great Taste Awards.

Her best-loved (and first) product is BOMBOM's Gochujang - a spicy, sweet, umami, fermented sauce with an elevated, premium flavour and real versatility, lending itself as a dip, marinade or even a salad dressing.

bombom-market.com



James Santillo and Tara Smyth

SUNDAY CHARCUTERIE

Founded in 2021, Sunday Charcuterie was born from a desire to create artisanal charcuterie with a focus on provenance and authenticity of flavour. Excellent salami requires an excellent pig, so James and Tara's dedication begins with sourcing the highest welfare, free-range pork from East Anglian farms and smallholders. Embracing a sustainable nose-to-tail philosophy, James meticulously seam-butchers each pig, creating exceptional small-batch salami and air-dried hams. The range has now also expanded to include delectable fresh terrines and pâtés.

The couple's commitment to craftsmanship has garnered widespread acclaim, including five prestigious Great Taste Awards to date. With over 120 stockists across England, including renowned retailers like Fortnum & Mason and Daylesford Organic, Sunday Charcuterie is redefining standards for British charcuterie.

sundaycharcuterie.co.uk

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CHEESE FOR CELEBRATIONS

Many couples are eschewing the traditional three tiered wedding cake, instead choosing to mark their occasion with cheese...but how to get started?







Gone are the days of plain and simple wedding cakes. Cheese wedding cakes are growing in popularity, and they're a boon to savvy cheesemongers and delis who are keen to show off their creative flair and expansive cheese range.

For the uninitiated, a cheese wedding cake is a stack of cheeses that resemble the tiers of a traditional wedding cake, often decorated with edible accompaniments.

Daniel Williams (the fifth generation of the family-run Godfrey C. Williams & Son in Sandbach, Cheshire) has won Best Cheese Celebration Cake at the International Cheese & Dairy Awards for the past five years in a row, and has prepared hundreds of bespoke cheese wedding cakes for customers, so suffice it to say he is full of ideas for his peers.

"British cheesemongers are lucky to have so many great cheeses available to us, so it shouldn't be too hard to find cheeses that look and taste great," he says. With so many options, he advises choosing a theme such as cheeses local to a region, or cheeses that match a similar tonal colour scheme.

"Lynher Dairy's Wild Garlic Yarg makes a bright, colourful statement, while White Lake Dairy's English Pecorino has a stunning textural look," he says.

Worried about two cheeses impacting each other's flavour or appearance? Daniel uses cake boards to separate cheeses like Stilton and Wensleydale.

Getting the balance right

For cheesemongers advising customers how to make their own cheese wedding cakes, it's important to ensure they understand the sizes and weights of cheeses, and this information isn't always easily available to the public, Ian Wellens of The Cheese Shed tells *Speciality Food*.

His shop has created a unique cheese builder tool to help customers design their own cheese wedding cakes while factoring in the many variables. "You're trying to do a lot of things: get the right quantity of cheese for your numbers, achieve a good shape (I aim for a nicely graduated pyramid), and have a good range of contrasting cheeses. Sometimes this may be complicated by some 'must have' cheeses, or 'must NOT have'!"

It's important to keep an open mind. "I would avoid going into cake creation with a really fixed idea about what the cake must include. You may need to be flexible in order to end up with something that really works. You may adore Cheese A but find that its size is a problem, and perhaps the similar Cheese B is a better choice. One more thing: remember it's not just you who's going to be eating the cheese. You may hate goats' cheese but in your 100 guests there will be some who love it!"

From his point of view, the only cheeses that are really difficult to incorporate are ones with a curved top or bottom. "People always worry about putting weight on Bries, though in practice this is fine as long as the Brie is not too ripe," he says. "It needs to be soft enough to be nice but not anywhere near the runny stage. A well-chosen brie can easily have 6-7kg of cheese on top of it."

Making a statement

Once the cheeses are chosen, decorations will really make your display sing.

"Biscuits, fruit, chutney, flowers, and foliage are all great additions to cheese wedding cakes," Daniel says – and they're a surefire way to stand out, as he says these touches are often overlooked by cheese wedding cake providers.

"My favourites to incorporate are Miller's Cranberry & Raisin Toasts, Tiptree Blackberry Jam, and Cottage Delight Caramelised Red Onion Chutney. They add fruity hints which compliment most cheeses well."

Ian agrees that a selection of crackers, biscuits and chutneys is a must. "We would also tend to include a set membrillo-style preserve: you can slice these to have with cheese. Either quince (like membrillo) or another flavour such as pear, fig or damson," he says.

Portioning is a big consideration to be factored in at the creation stage, according to Daniel. "We recommend 80-100g of cheese per person, then tweak that depending on factors like other food available. A six-tier, 12kg cake may look stunning, but it will often be too much cheese for a wedding with 50 guests," he warns.

And don't forget to consider how the cheese wedding cake will be served on the big day. "Make sure that there's a plan for the cutting, portioning and disposal of anything left at the end," Daniel says.

While it's easy to lose sight of serving amidst the excitement of choosing cheeses and accompaniments, it's important to agree this with the couple upfront. "Make sure that all parties know who is responsible for this, be it your business, the venue, the caterers or the couple themselves," Daniel says.

When it comes to cheese wedding cakes, you can get creative with added extras.

"Upselling goes beyond cheese biscuits and chutney," Daniel says. "Consider offering bespoke knives, personalised wooden boards, and other souvenirs from the day that can be kept long after the cheese has all gone!"

> "I would avoid going into cake creation with a really fixed idea about what the cake must include"

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MEET THE CHEESEMAKER

Organic Herd is going against the status quo in dairy with its range of sustainable, disruptive and fun products

Cheese is a fascinating product. From sweet, mild and creamy, to distinctly bold, no two are the same, regardless of how or where they are made. Their deliciousness lies in the fact they are naturally individual. And it's this uniqueness and individuality that's celebrated by Organic Herd, which is 'disrupting' the dairy industry with branding that 'pops', and products that deliver on sustainability...and taste.

Drawn in by the vibrant on-pack colours and typography, once consumers have an Organic Herd product in their hands, closer inspection will reveal they are holding something produced in tandem with nature and with respect for the environment. Products that use milk sourced from a co-operative of 120 British organic dairy farmers who believe that how they farm really matters and are therefore committed to making dairy more sustainable through choosing farming practices that make a positive difference to the environment, animal welfare, and the quality of the milk and dairy products they produce.

These credentials resonate with a new wave of speciality shopper, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, who are filling their baskets more consciously, reaching for healthier, unprocessed foods, and enjoying making purchases outside the realms of the supermarket, within farm shops, delis, food halls and garden centres.

A herd apart

Organic Herd is the trading name of Omsco (the Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative) which was founded in 1994. "It started as an organic co-operative, conceptualised around a farmer's table between five founder members," says CEO Martyn Anthony. "They started to pool together organic farms from around the UK to service a growth in demand for organic dairy."

"Around 18 months ago we felt







the organic message was becoming lost," Martyn explains. "We sat down as a board to discuss how best to re-energise our messaging, highlight everything that's great about organic dairy and resonate with existing and new consumers who care about what they eat. As such, we made the decision to rebrand, working with our creative agency, Quantock, to create a range of distinctive, delicious and, yes in many ways, disruptive organic dairy products that really champion the values that we and our farmers believe in."

Martyn adds the purpose of rebranding as Organic Herd was "to get the organic message out, and to engage consumers with something a bit more fun that broke the normal industry narrative."

"We wanted to be different, to turn dairy upside down," agrees Organic Herd's director of membership and communication, Sara Ogborne. "Our three pillars are 'Proudly Sustainable', 'Naturally Delicious', and 'Always Organic'. Organic Herd is founded on the values of our farmers, and how we farm as a co-operative. That's at the heart of everything we do. And on top of that, from a customer point of view, we're focused on creating products that we believe consumers actually want, because they connect with the values they are looking for in a young, fun way they can really buy into. These are products that make an impact."

Last year. over the course of five months Organic Herd delivered 14 new dairy products into the fine food sector, including premium mild, mature and extra mature Cheddars in grab and go and cutting formats, expertly made by its partner Wyke Farms, which is internationally renowned for its innovation in sustainability. Further Port Salut style cheeses, including flavoured varieties such as chilli, are crafted by partner High Weald Dairy. Brue Valley is making exceptional butters (from unsalted to truffle-infused) for the brand. Chocolate bars and hot chocolate drinking flakes make it into the mix too.With NPD ongoing, this herd is not standing still.

How we farm matters

As a legally defined method of production with a strict set of criteria to adhere to, organic sets the gold standard for farming, and has always (rightfully) been seen as a sign of quality.

Organic Herd's mission is to unpack what organic means (for people and the planet) in an accessible way. To breathe new life into the organic category. "Organic delivers against so many consumer concerns; free range, grass fed, herbicide free, and planet positive to name a few. But as an industry, we forgot to tell consumers, how we farm, and why it matters."

"I think, over time, people have lost the reason why organic is really good for them," Sara says. "We needed to give them a reason to engage with it again. Certainly, our view is that people are looking for value, but they are definitely still looking for values, and what we've tried to do with Organic Herd is reposition organic, but also ensure consumers are able to understand those values and feel good about buying organic without preaching to them."

If you look at the design of the products, and tone of voice "it's not holier than thou. It's vibrant, and positive. It's food and drink that puts a smile on people's faces."

While retailers and producers are being pressed to be more sustainable than ever before, Martyn says nutrition also resonates with consumers, with a recent study by analysts at Nielsen showing that, although respondents are thinking about the environmental impact of what they eat, they're put healthfulness and nutrient-dense food and drink first.

"Consumers want to buy products that are nutritious," Martyn adds. "If you look at organic, it's naturally high in nutrients. And Organic Herd is the largest co-operative to have a milk pool that's truly antibiotic free. On animal welfare, better nutrition, and better sustainability, it ticks all the boxes."

How to stock

Organic Herd has deliberately chosen to work within the speciality sector, with Martyn saying it's the "right thing to do" to not only put the brand's products in front of its core demographic, but also to support retailers by enabling them to shake up their deli counters with something a bit different. Organic Herd is available via Rowcliffe, Longmans, CLF, Cress Co and Suma, with sampling packs available. You'll also be able to meet the team and try the range at this September's Speciality & Fine Food fair in London.



CHEESE UNCUT

New retail perspectives from industry experts

'We are what we eat'



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

How did we arrive to today with such a plethora of cheese? From block Cheddars to farmhouse PDO Cheddar, to highly processed questionable slices that only contain 51% cheese, and so-called American slices, which contain no cheese whatsoever.

In my opinion it's a sorry situation that we find ourselves in - eating slices of oil. Especially as they are pretending to be something they're not. How about the manufacturers sell these products for what they are? Slices of stabilised oil with colour and flavour added. Would you buy that? Not me!

One of the most questionable ingredients used in these slices, in my opinion, is an ingredient called natamycin. This is an antifungal used to treat conjunctivitis, and when used in food can apparently disturb your gut microflora. I will let you draw your own opinions on the matter of American slices for your burgers and sandwiches. I, on the other hand, will decline such highly processed garbage.

Cheese indeed is one of the world's original processed foods, with cooked meat coming in first, having been prepared some 1.5 million years ago.

Cheese has been part of our diets at home and internationally for thousands of years. It was a 'found food' along with goats, wheat, and legumes in the Fertile Crescent, also known as the Levant. How was it found? Well, there is a lot of speculation, but I believe it would have been discovered along with the domestication of goats. Spilt milk with a lumpy creamy texture. This would have occurred after the spontaneous acidification from the natural cultures turned it into a cottage cheese style consistency. Inquisitive as humans are, it would have been tasted and the rest, as they say, is history.

This new foodstuff formed part of the staple diet. In leaner times, the preservation of milk into cheese fed populations during the winter, with the harder cheeses prevailing as they would keep for a longer time. The use of rennet would have been discovered as a coagulant to easily split the curds from the whey, and produce a solid faster. Salt has been used for millennia as a preservative of many foods, including cheese. Our first recorded British cheese is Cheshire, which features in the Doomsday book of 1086.

We are learning that "we are what we eat, what they eat" can have serious consequences. What I mean is if you spray a field with synthetic fertiliser to grow feed for your livestock, which go on to make cheese or are reared for meat, you will ingest those fertilisers. The same applies to arable production. Natural fertiliser has been used for thousands of years and in my opinion should be the only way we farm. Nutrient-rich soil can only be naturally rich in nutrients without messing with the flora and fauna. We need to work with nature and not try to change it.

Ill-gotten gains are exactly that, ill. Our world populations are suffering with diseases and many allergies that we are now beginning to realise are a direct result of diet.

"We are what we eat, what they ate, what they sprayed" is so true. Eating cheese shouldn't be about the profit, but about celebrating and being thankful for the great cheese being made by dairy farmers and producers who are connected to the soil, and those great people that only champion real cheese and brilliant produce.

Scottish maker launches Alpine-style cheese

Strathearn Cheese Co brings a new product to market this month, six years after the release of its last addition, Wee Comrie.

Known for soft, creamy, washed rind or young, delicate cow's milk cheeses such as Lady Mary and Strathearn, typically aged for a maximum of four weeks, Braggon (aged for three to four months) is a depart into a whole new world of cheese for the Scottish maker.

Co-founder Pierre Leger says they've been working on Braggon since last September. "Because of the type of cheese we make, November and December are extremely busy for us," he explains. "We can almost never make enough so we thought, 'why don't we make a cheese we can mature longer and make earlier in the year when we're not so under pressure?'."

Pierre says they were looking for something that would mature in a few months, in an almost Gouda style. "Something I could press overnight. It's a semi-hard cheese with a natural rind. We make the cheese, turn it out, salt it, and mature it, turning it regularly. That's it."

He describes the flavour as akin to a young Vacherin or Tete de Moine. "It's sweet and savoury. On the cheese tasting wheel you might say the sweetness is like cooked cream and condensed milk. That's what you get to start with. And the savoury is a little meaty, almost like Parma ham."

The team are very happy with the results, and have been selling out at farmers' markets and via local delis. "It's been flying out the door," Pierre says. "So we've had to increase production and we've decided to make it regularly. From June we will have a regular stock and be able to supply further afield."

Braggon is available in 1.3kg rounds for retail.



New group for cheesemakers

A cheesemonger passionate about preserving the art and heritage of British farmhouse cheeses has launched a new networking and skills sharing group.

Andy Swinscoe of The Courtyard Dairy, says he feels it's a pressing issue for cheesemakers to come together to share knowledge and experience, and learn from one another. It's the only way, he believes, ancient recipes for products such as Wensleydale, Lancashire and Cheshire cheese can survive.

The inaugural sessions of the Northern Dairy Cheese School (open to everyone) take place from 16th to 18th September, 2024, with a focus on Wensleydale, exploring how it's crafted, and how small changes and nuances can affect the outcome of the finished product.

There are a couple of drivers behind the project, which will foster events each autumn and spring. "First, in France, Switzerland and Italy there's a lot of technical support for cheesemakers," says Andy. "In Britain we just don't have that anymore. We're looking at how we can build that knowledge up around farmhouse and artisan cheeses, and the best way is to start discussions, get interested cheesemakers together, and to experiment.

A second reason behind the school is the recent loss of Cotherstone from the cheese landscape. "It was a traditional cheese from the Dales, and when we lost them from the industry, we lost all that knowledge and expertise," Andy continues. "We've spent a lot of effort and time trying to put farmhouse Wensleydale on the map and we need to continue that so in 40, 60 or 100 years' time there's something there for people to work from. We thought it would be a great idea to use Wensleydale as a starting point.

"Anyone interested in cheese can come along. The objective is to learn more, make bonds and create a really strong industry. Hopefully it will evolve, and we'll take it to other areas and parts of the country. It's really exciting."

Contact Andy at The Courtyard Dairy for more details or to book a spot.



Look out for autumn release from Wye Creamery

A new cheesemaking business says its first release should be available later this year. Bryn Edwards of Wye Creamery is in the process of testing batches at his parents' dairy farm in Hereford, using milk from their mixed breed Jersey and Friesian, pasture-fed cows. "It's really nice milk," he says. "Because they feed on pasture it's got an amazing flavour. We're trying to utilise the grass and avoid feeding concentrates, just leveraging the grasslands around us."

It's the first time in the family's 30 years at the farm that milk has been used to diversify, and Bryn has spent a great deal of time setting up the facilities, buying cheese vats, and experimenting with his recipes, with a view to have products to sell from November onwards.

"It's going to be a thermophilic cheese, based off a L'Etivaz from Switzerland. That's made using summer milk from Alpine pastures to really encapsulate the flavour from the grassland. The richness of summer milk makes it quite nutty and smooth. That's the kind of cheese we're aiming for here."

Once the final product is ready and a name decided, Bryn says the dairy will up its social media presence and begin liaising with retailers and wholesalers. Watch this space.

Range expansion for Golden Hooves



Golden Hooves has announced the launch of two new cheeses, with Red Leicester and Smoked Cheddar now available for retail in 200g pre-packs or 2.5kg blocks. The additions follow the successful release of Golden Hooves Mature Cheddar and Vintage Cheddar in 2023.

Part of the British farmer-owned dairy co-operative, First Milk, Golden Hooves' cheeses are made with 100% regeneratively farmed milk, with the Smoked Cheddar smoked traditionally over oak sawdust for eight to 12 hours.

Director, Leona McDonald, says, "We've been blown away by the reception we've had for our Cheddars over the past 12 months, so are excited to be unveiling two new deliciously regenerative cheeses. Made using fully traceable regeneratively farmed milk, our Red Leicester and Smoked Cheddar are two British classics that dare people to think differently about where their food comes from and the impact it's having on the environment. Can cheese save planet Earth? Well, we know we have some super cheese at Golden Hooves and dairy needs to play its part!"

Belton Farm adds vintage cheese to Fox family



Belton Farm, maker of one of the UK's best-loved Red Leicester cheeses (Red Fox), has added a brand new product to the Fox family. Silver Fox is billed by the farm as a superior vintage Cheddar that "promises a sensory journey like no other". Handcrafted, and slowly matured for 18 months, the cheese has a robust character and intensity, with sweet and savoury notes complemented by the crunch of salt crystals and a creamy finish.

"Our master cheesemakers take pride in utilising locally sourced milk from free-range, grass-fed cows to create the modern British Silver Fox Cheddar," says Justin Beckett, managing director of Belton Farm. "Each cheese undergoes rigorous grading and inspection before being elegantly packaged, ensuring that every slice delivers an unforgettable taste experience."

Silver Fox made its debut at the British Cheese Awards, where it clinched a gold, and following its domestic launch has garnered significant interest from international markets, with listings secured from the US, to South Africa.

New home for Paxton & Whitfield

One of the UK's oldest and most recognised cheesemongers has relocated. Paxton & Whitfield recently announced the move of its iconic Bath shop to a new position at 20 Green Street – a larger space enabling the team to showcase the retailer's diverse range of cheeses and accompaniments, featuring a huge cheese counter with a window into the cold room, for a fully immersive shopping experience.

Managing director James Rutter says he is thrilled by the move which "will allow us to better serve our customers in Bath and the surrounding areas and provide them with an enhanced sensory shopping experience. We are proud of the heritage we've laid in Bath, and we are delighted to offer a modern environment paired with our centuries of cheese expertise."



COMMENTATORS



MEL WYTHE
SECRETTS OF MILFORD



VICTORIA DUNTHORNE
VICTORIA'S CHEESE



MARK KACARY
THE NORFOLK DELI



THE COOLEST CHEESES FOR SUMMER

As nature dials up the heat, what consumers want from their cheeseboard can change, as *Speciality Food* finds out

When it comes to al fresco dining (be it lounging in the back garden, a picnic in the park, or a lingering afternoon at the beach) cheese is the most perfect, portable meal solution.

Boules of Burrata with their sumptuous, luscious creamy hearts are the warm weather cheese of the moment. As Google searches for Burrata were up 900% last year, this is one trend you should be taking seriously, giving your customers oodles of inspiration at the counter, with plenty of ideas up your sleeves for the service of this Italian classic. Perhaps with a drizzle of fine olive oil, spoonfuls of pesto, or even cherry jam from the ambient aisle. Maybe draped with a few slices of your finest Parma ham. Or point customers in the direction of your fresh groceries section for sun-warmed peaches or strawberries, which are beautiful alongside Burrata after a tumble in aged Balsamico di Modena.

It's a sure-fire winner. But what else should you be considering as you command the counter this summer?

Lighten up

Mel Wythe, farm shop manager at Secretts of Milford, says at this time of year she tends to seek out softer, lighter cheeses for customers. "Some of our new additions are Miss Thymed (which has a light and herby citrus flavour with a nutty background), Cornish Crumbly (a creamy cheese with a lovely zingy flavour that pairs well with fruit and sweet chutneys), and Cornish Yarg."

Products with a "citrus tang" always do well at the farm shop, Mel explains, adding that sales also climb for the classics such as Somerset Brie, or squidgy French Brie de Meaux. "The soft ripened triple cream Delice De Bourgogne is popular moving into summer," Mel adds. "But we find our lighter Cheddars continue to do well too, like Twanger cheese. It's robust in flavour, but not too strong like some of the vintage ones."

To bring a point of difference to the cheeseboard, Mel says they like to highlight seasonal fruits and chutneys for contrast, while also stocking a broad range of salamis, either whole to cut on the go, or pre-sliced for ease. They "really help elevate a cheeseboard, with additions like peppercorns and fennel bringing pops of flavour". She also advises pointing customers towards greenery, such as fresh herbs or salads to garnish their boards, as well as nuts, olives and honey.

Victoria Dunthorne of Victoria's Cheese also advises a lighter touch. "For cheese retailers, the summer brings opportunities for selling cheese for outdoor grazing, parties and picnics," she says. This means classic winter staples for "eating with a robust red in front of the log burner" have given way to cheeses that lend themselves to salad-based meals. "I think we naturally eat more 'alternative' milk cheeses in summer, like crumbled goats' cheese on a beetroot and walnut salad. So our offerings need to reflect this. Goats and ewes are generally lactating in the summer months, so their cheeses are at their best."

Retailers must be careful, however, Victoria says, when stocking these kinds of cheeses. "Some fresher cheeses, like Burrata and young goats' cheeses, for example, have a very limited shelf life, so we need to be clever in not overstocking so we don't fall victim to high wastage costs. I use different suppliers, so have different delivery days, which means we can have smaller, but more frequent deliveries." This, Victoria explains, ensures she has enough stock at any time, while mitigating against waste.

As for pairings? Victoria likes to steer her customers away from richer chutneys and towards other accompaniments in summer. "One of my favourite, lighter cheeses for summer is Wissington," she says. "It's a local ewe's milk cheese made by Becky Enefer just down the road from me here in Norfolk. It is a hard cheese with a fresh lactic flavour that I love to serve with pickled pear."

Like Mel, Victoria is also a fan of Delice de Bourgogne for summer, advising eating it with ripe English strawberries. And "a lighter washed cheese that lends itself to summer is Gubbeen. It's one of my current obsessions, served with some pickled watermelon rinds."

When you eat lighter you drink lighter, Victoria adds. "So if we're cheese grazing in the garden, we'll be drinking English pink fizz, or a light, fruity beer."

Maximising local appeal

If you live in a holiday hot spot, now is the time to hone in on those local cheese champions at the counter – perhaps even more so than you do year-round. Tourists generally love to head home from their break with a taste of the region they've visited neatly packed in the car, and cheesemongers should capitalise on this.

Mark Kacary of The Norfolk Deli says in his experience peckish holidaymakers will ask for products they are familiar with at the start, but you should use their enquiries as an opportunity to offer them something they might not have tried before.

"Small local cheesemakers need cheese retailers to help push and promote their products to keep them economically sustainable," Mark adds. "We always find that cheeses like Baron Bigod go well, but so does Mrs Temple's Walsingham, or Wells Alpine, or Ferndale's Norfolk Dapple. For a taste of summer you can't go far wrong with St Jude or, looking a little further afield, Feltham Farm's La Fresca Margarita Salted, drizzled with smoked chilli oil or peanut rayu at summer barbecues."

Have truckles, will travel

Wrapped carefully and kept cool, all cheese is a good travelling companion. But truckles make life even easier.

Heather Lewis of Clawson, which recently launched a series of fine, characterful wax truckle cheeses, based on the dairy's Cheddar, Red Leicester and Wensleydale, says the appeal of these products is that they "come in their own packaging. All you have to do is pop them on a board, in a basket or on a table and they are protected. They're nice and easy to carry. And I think, because of our branding, our new products are a bit of a talking point too.

Heather also advises retailers to remind shoppers of the portability and appeal of wax truckles for the summer outdoor theatre and concert season, where they make an easy supper popped into a cool bag or hamper with some crackers, a bit of charcuterie and a bottle of bubbly.

Clawson's Castaway wax truckle, infused with fruity mango and ginger, she says is delightful for summer spreads, as is Truffle Seeker, with its pops of real truffle and sweet honey. While Gunpowder's naturally smoked flavour lends itself as a tasty topper for burgers.

Outside of the truckle range, Heather says summer is a key time to remind shoppers that blue cheese really isn't just for Christmas. "Stilton and Shropshire Blue add zing to salads and can really elevate them." And then there's creamy, mild Wensleydale which "is nice in a salad, but can also be blended into a cheesecake!"

> "I think we naturally eat more 'alternative' milk cheeses in summer, like crumbled goats' cheese on a beetroot salad. So our offerings need to reflect this"
>
> VICTORIA DUNTHORNE, VICTORIA'S CHEESE

SUMMER CHEESE PAIRING MUST-HAVES

HONEY
Truffle honey is booming, working across the board with practically anything from Gouda and Gruyere, to goats' and blues. Also look out for more interesting honey. BeeHype, for example, has a whole nut infused honey that tops off baked cheeses nicely, and chilli honey that is brilliant with Halloumi or Feta.

FRESH STONE FRUITS
Peaches, apricots and plums are excellent with summer cheeses – particularly if lightly charred.

FROZEN GRAPES
Advise customers to garnish their warm day grazing boards with frozen grapes (or even berries). Fragrant muscat grapes are divine with many types of cheese.

CHILLED SPARKLING RED WINE
Matched with a blue or washed rind cheese, this Australian barbecue essential is the pairing your customers need to know.

HERITAGE CIDER
Incredibly versatile, lower in ABV than wine, and bursting with complexity. There are some amazing ciders on the market today to put with the summer cheeseboard. Keeved varieties work especially well. And Oliver's is a name to look out for.

CHILLI JAM
Shoppers are loving anything with a bit of fire at the moment, so capitalise on those chilli jams right now.

STRAWBERRIES
A surprisingly good bedfellow with those mousse-like, melt-in-the-mouth cheeses, such as young goats' or simple mould ripened varieties.

LEADING INDUSTRY NAMES HEADING FOR

2024 GREAT YORKSHIRE SHOW

Expect a packed programme in the Cheese & Dairy section at one of UK's biggest agricultural events

More than 140,000 people will descend on the Great Yorkshire Show this summer. The four-day event (one of the largest and most respected in the UK), takes place from 9th to 12th July, bringing a celebration of agriculture, food, farming and the countryside to the showground on the outskirts of Harrogate.

From cattle and showjumping competitions, to state-of-the-art farming equipment, fashion, food and sheep shearing, there is something for everyone at the show, which celebrates its 165th anniversary in 2024.

Of particular interest for the fine food sector is the Cheese & Dairy Show, where a cast of stellar cheese experts has been lined up, covering everything from what it takes to judge Britain's best cheese and dairy entries, to perfect pairings.

This section is highly regarded in the industry, having been set up initially in 2002 to help boost dairy businesses in the aftermath of the foot and mouth disease outbreak. The quality and calibre of judges coming from all across the UK is exceptional this year – from producers and industry experts, to commercial buyers.

Judging of cheese and dairy classes begins on Tuesday, 9th July, with international cheese judge, Nigel Barden hosting. Nigel has more than three decades of foodie knowledge and experience under his belt, with a career spanning BBC radio and TV, appearing at live consumer events and food festivals, judging awards, and working as a restaurant critic and compere.



Cheese expert Sam Wilkin, producer of The Cellarman podcast and The Westcombe Project, hosts the Cheese & Dairy Show on Wednesday. Sam is a judge at the World Cheese Awards and has made multiple appearances on BBC Radio 4's The Food Programme, and Food FM's A Slice of Cheese.

Wednesday is presentation day, with prizes awarded for all categories, plus two memorial trophies given to mark the massive contribution made to the show by David Hartley of Wensleydale Creamery (who passed away in 2020), and Shepherds Purse founder Judy Bell MBE. Judy was chief steward for many years before her death in 2022, and the position has been proudly filled by her daughter Caroline since then. Caroline is delighted to be able to follow in her mother's footsteps, particularly this year, marking the 35th anniversary of Shepherds Purse, which launched at the Great Yorkshire Show in 1989.

She says, "I've been involved with the Great Yorkshire Show Cheese & Dairy Show for many years, and 2024 will be my third year as chief steward. The success of the show is firmly rooted in the incredible team of stewards and judges who all work so hard to improve it each year, with the full support of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society team too. It's been vital to have such a prestigious show in Yorkshire that showcases not just the best of Yorkshire cheese and dairy (which of course is dependent upon quality dairy farming) but also the best of cheese and dairy from across the country and the continent, all on the Yorkshire stage."



On Wednesday the People's Choice classes will take place in the afternoon, with the first 50 members of the audience to volunteer invited to sample two types of cheese and an ice cream entry to pick the winners (who will be announced on Thursday).

On Thursday meet The Cheese Explorer, Emma Young. Emma is a cheese consultant and author from London. Her debut book, The Cheese Wheel, was released in 2023 and she has been an international cheese judge for the past 12 years. Emma is a garde et jure for the International Guilde des Fromagers, and teaches cheese courses for MonS Formation, The Guild of Fine Food, and the Academy of Cheese.

This is the day that the renowned Cheese Auction takes place, with this year's proceeds going to RABI, which provides expert mental health, wellbeing, financial and practical support to those in the industry. Last year's auction raised more than £5,000 for Herriot Hospice Homecare.

Finally, on Friday, Homage2Fromage's Nick Copland hosts a day of events, activities and interviews, plus a cheese quiz with some tasty prizes. Nick and his friend Vickie Rogerson started Homage2Fromage 12 years ago and have fronted hundreds of events in dozens of locations, celebrating cheese in all its forms.

The Cheese & Dairy Show is being supported this year by Wensleydale Creamery. Sandra Bell from the creamery says, "As a proud Yorkshire dairy business, Wensleydale Creamery are delighted to be supporting the Cheese & Dairy Show again this year at the Great Yorkshire Show. It's a fantastic showcase of produce from across the UK and beyond, and it's great to see this area of the show continue to go from strength to strength."

Charles Mills, show director, adds, "Showcasing the best cheese and dairy products from the UK and beyond is one of the best ways to demonstrate the importance of farming to how and what we choose to eat. Visitors will be able to see some of the best dairy animals in the showing rings and then be amazed at the wealth of the range of the end products."

GREAT YORKSHIRE SHOW

WHERE: 9th-12th July, 2024
WHEN: Great Yorkshire Showground, Railway Road, Harrogate
greatyorkshireshow.co.uk


CAPTION





CAPTION





INTERNATIONAL CHEESE & DAIRY EXPO **2024**

The time has come for this year's edition of the iconic event which is passionate about celebrating the best of the world's cheese and dairy

Cheese and dairy professionals from around the world are preparing to flock to Bingley Hall, Staffordshire County Showground for the latest installment of the International Cheese & Dairy Awards, an integral part of Love Cheese Live – one of the UK's largest consumer cheese and food events – and a must-attend occasion for the industry.

Taking place on 27th June 2024, the event will see over 5,500 cheeses from across the globe be judged by hundreds of cheese experts for a chance to win one of the cheese world's most prestigious awards. The Best In Class award itself boasts a 125-year history, and alongside the other titles brings producers worldwide recognition as well as a boost in consumer sales.

An update for 2024

As many within the cheese industry will know, the directors and committee of The International Cheese Awards decided to take on the awards from the Nantwich Show in 2020 during the outbreak of Covid-19. In order to retain the event's must-visit position on the calendars of cheese fans and professionals, the team worked with the help of industry volunteers to protect its heritage. The continuation of this iconic event is testament to the level of support received from sponsors, exhibitors and competition entrants.

Established over 127 years ago, a new era beckons for the event. Now named The International Cheese & Dairy Expo and partnered with Dairy Industries International/Expo, the aim is for this to be the largest cheese and dairy show in Europe – grand plans the cheese and dairy industries are welcoming with open arms.



This year's event is set to be the best yet, with international entries increasing by 30% and cheese being sent from as far away as Australia, America and Canada. Plus, the retail element of the awards has seen impressive growth for 2024, with most UK retailers planning to attend and a significant increase in entries into the Retailer Awards.

Love Cheese Live: a hub for cheese-loving consumers

The ICDAs are held within the home of Love Cheese Live, which draws cheese enthusiasts from far and wide. Taking place 28th-29th June, it will showcase cooking inspiration, shopping and sampling opportunities, and at its centre will be demonstrations from an impressive line-up of chefs and experts.

This year that includes James Martin, with Strictly Come Dancing Star AJ Pritchard wowing attendees with his dancing prowess in the Collier Ballroom on-site.







NEED TO KNOW

- Official registration courtesy of IFF is being introduced for the 2024 event – you can register via buytickets.at/internationalcheesedairyexpo/1073765
- The Keynote Speaker stage. Sponsored by A B Dairy, the stage will host sessions from leading industry names throughout the day on 28th June.
- Winners of the Supreme Champion and Retailer categories will be announced at 4pm on 27th June at the main keynote stage by show director Chris Chisnall and judging director Dai Williams.

> “In protecting the heritage of the show, it remains as relevant today as it has always been in providing a day on the calendar to not only celebrate great achievements but focus on the cheese and dairy industry under one rooft”

NEED TO KNOW

WHERE: Staffordshire County Showground **WHEN:** 27th-29th June 2024
WEB: internationalcheeseawards. co.uk



A note from Ian Luxton, chairman of the International Cheese & Dairy Awards

“The International Cheese and Dairy Expo, incorporating The International Cheese and Dairy Awards, is an event run by industry representatives to protect the unique history of the awards and importantly support the cheese and dairy industry to establish quality credentials and showcase products to potential customers.

“It serves to encourage competition, facilitate professional networking, benchmark existing products internationally, showcase innovative products and promote both UK and wider global commerce.

“In protecting the heritage of the show, it remains as relevant today as it has always been in providing a day on the calendar to not only celebrate great achievements but focus on the cheese and dairy industry under one roof.

“By actively encouraging a collaborative approach with the Society of Dairy Technology and Dairy Industries International teams, we can present a holistic event which remains relevant to the entire industry, and of course, a wonderful occasion for old industry friends and ex-colleagues to meet once a year!”



THE CHANGING FACE OF PACKAGING

Soaring interest in sustainability, and technological innovations, are driving the industry into an exciting new era



COMMENTATORS



LAURYN HALL
SPRINGFIELD SOLUTIONS



EVE REID
WBC

Remember the days when packaging was purely functional? A vehicle to get products from A to B. A protective vessel to shield food and drink from bugs, bacteria and nasties.

Those days are gone.

Yes, of course, packaging continues to serve all of the purposes above, but it has also become more versatile, increasingly eco-friendly and, dare we say it...fun!

Whether you're a retailer, or a brand selling artisan ready meals, biscuits, crisps or perhaps cheese, the way you package and label your products matters increasingly to consumers.

It is a window into your world, informing the very first (and most important) impression they make of you. Getting it right, then, really does matter.

And 'getting it right' in 2024 means paying attention to key trends, the biggest being sustainability and interactivity.

What is interactive packaging?

Want to make an impact? To build a relationship with new and existing customers? To drive social engagement? Or, maybe, to inject a bit of excitement into your category? It could be time to consider whether interactive packaging might work for you.

This device is being used more and more across multiple sectors, and for myriad reasons, anecdotally to huge success. Use a QR code on pack for consumers to scan in store. It could take them to the fields where the cows who produce milk for your cheese are grazing, or to a recipe landing page, where a celebrity chef can be seen whipping up a quick supper using your ingredients.

Augmented reality (AR) makes products come alive on the shelf. And you can even link to playlists on your packaging, bringing a creative, musical touch to your brand.

Barilla, for example, joined forces with Spotify to market branded playlists on the platform – each one acting as a timer for one of its pastas. An 11-minute set for fusilli, and a nine-minute one for spaghetti, for example.

ASDA introduced sandwich boxes for its lunch deals which folded out into plates (complete with plate image inside) to encourage more mindful eating. Brands are building puzzles and board games inside their food and drink gifting packaging. And some clever cafes have worked with design experts to manufacture interactive takeaway coffee cups which change colour or pattern as they cool, indicating the perfect drinking temperature.

Interactive packaging gives food and drink businesses the capability to inform, excite and educate their customers, gather data, and constantly update and improve their offering on the back of engagement. It's the (packaged) gift that keeps on giving.

In addition to QR and AR, both of which work via smartphones, Lauryn Hall, marketing manager at packaging specialist Springfield Solutions (an All4Labels Global Packaging Group company) says NFC (near field communication) is also taking root.

"NFC chips embedded in packaging can be tapped with a smartphone to open a webpage or app," Lauryn explains. "As well as the security advantages of this technology, it can help food and drink businesses to engage with their customers by creating unique, memorable experiences.

"In today's competitive landscape, customer interaction is crucial for fostering brand loyalty and driving sales."

Lauryn points to storytelling, gamification, and relaying sustainability information and product use as the most prominent examples of interacitivty in the marketplace at the moment.

These touchpoints for consumers represent "a significant advancement", she adds. "By leveraging digital technologies, companies can create richer, more informative moments, improving transparency, and gaining valuable consumer insights."

Springfield Solutions, which is helping businesses to navigate interactive options, thinks that as the technology becomes more accessible, and more recognised, its adoption will shift firmly into the mainstream "offering numerous benefits to both them, and their customers", Lauryn adds.

Being bold

Using interactivity to leverage your business is an exciting step to take. But, says WBC's in-house designer, Noah White, being bold in the design of your packaging and labelling, and ringing the changes to become more dynamic, can also have the desired effect on your bottom line.

"We know that in order to stand out, you've got to do something different," Noah explains. "In a market oversaturated with competitors promising on price but often falling short on quality, we always strive to compete in both aspects."

The detail is in the retail, he adds, saying that minimalism has dominated speciality food packaging design for years and it's time to "embrace maximalism", using strong colours, typography and imagery.

"There has been a steady increase in brands using brighter, bolder visuals and colours in their bespoke packaging in the past year. Many of our incoming design briefs are highlighting a desire to stand out and 'pop'. Humorous, engaging and tongue-in-cheek informality seems to be on the rise."

It's crucial, Noah adds, to stay relevant. "It's interesting to see how many previously outdated/traditional brands have made strenuous efforts to pull their socks up. In order to stay on the scene, it's evident that innovation is a must."

Meeting demands and driving products that might have once been considered unconventional or risky in the market, taking a leap, can be the start of setting a trend, Noah reflects. "At WBC we know that in order to





stand out you've got to do something different."

Products that sustain

In our recent *Green Issue*, it was clear that sustainability matters across the entire chain, from the production of ingredients, through manufacturing, packaging and delivery.

The analysts at FMCG Gurus say shoppers are "aware of the environmental implications associated with food and beverage packaging" in particular and this "heightened consciousness" has resulted in more individuals actively engaging in recycling.

Their data shows 82% of global consumers consistently recycle soft drink packaging, while 78% recycle food packaging most or all of the time.

FMCG Gurus' Kate Kehoe says the only drawbacks to their endeavours are limited access to recyclable items, limited awareness, and their lifestyle. Kate adds their concerns put emphasis on the significance of designing packaging that has a minimal impact, integrating sustainable practices throughout its life cycle.

The Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) recently pushed back by the UK government to 2027, is hoped to further drive change in packaging within the drinks sector, with the deadline moved to enable manufacturers whose products are out of scope, to make a difference.

The consumer, Kate says, has to be factored in here too, as, she adds, they have limited time to consider how and what they will be recycling.

They "prioritise sustainable packaging claims they are familiar and confident with, and that's something both producers and retailers must consider".

Further data from FMCG Gurus reveals 82% of global consumers consider it important for packaging to be recyclable at least once.

The team at Future Market Insights agrees, saying the industry is seeing a surge of research and development in packaging, aimed at finding new sustainable materials and solutions.

It estimates the sustainable packaging market value to be $285.3 billion in 2024, with an expected CAGR of 5.8% over the next 10 years. Germany, it says, is leading the way, followed by the UK, where there's a higher consumption of eco-packaging materials – especially paper and paperboard, which are estimated to account for 38.2% of global packaging sales in 2024.

"The forecasted steady rise in market value, coupled with the surge in adoption of sustainable materials underscores a promising trajectory for the sector," a spokesperson says. With continuous R&D efforts and growing awareness, "the coming years are likely to witness a notable shift towards bio-plastic, paper-based packaging, and reusable solutions."

Amongst these solutions is the new Hydropol product from Aquapak, which was used by The British Crisp Co with Evopak to produce a new paper crisp packet, unveiled in March. Hydropol is a polymer which performs like plastic but, with its solubility, allows for 100% paper fibre recovery through recycling mills. It can be composted, is compatible with anaerobic digestion, and is non-toxic and marine safe.

The product was developed following a study by the business which showed 62% of those asked wanted to see increased investment in new packaging materials. Chief technology officer, Dr John Williams, says the study shows the "FMCG sector is highly cognisant of the need to move away from conventional plastics to more environmentally friendly materials which offer better end-of-life outcomes."

He adds it's important there's "an acceleration in the use of materials which are available at scale, offer the required functionality, run down existing conversion lines, and have a viable end-of-life solution to the consumer".

Eve Reid, commercial director at WBC, says it's the job of packaging manufacturers to keep up to date with the latest materials available, creating products that not only attract attention for customers, but reflect those business' core beliefs too. "Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of misleading marketing tactics and facetious claims," she explains. "Eco doesn't always mean eco. Fat free doesn't always mean calorie free or nutritious." In order to survive and thrive, brands are being forced, she says, to think, be honest, be transparent, and make the right decisions, so their customers can make informed decisions.

"Everything new coming into the market has sustainability ingrained into its core design, and everyone along the line will be looking to see if these product standards are aligned with their sustainability efforts," Eve continues.

"Therefore brands are having to take accountability, make actionable change, and be incredibly transparent with what they are offering – from what's in the packaging, to the food and drink contents inside. Consumers in the 18 to 24 age bracket are 59% more likely to pay up to 10% more for eco-friendly types of packaging according to Fess Group's research."

WBC has recently launched its new Food-to-Go range, made using a by-product of the sugar industry. The sugarcane pulp takeaway containers are one of the most sustainable solutions on the market for eliminating single-use plastic. "After use they can be rinsed and popped into the compost bin at home, making them the perfect alternative to plastic containers," Eve says

HOW CAN RETAILERS BE MORE PACKAGING SAVVY?

- Join the circular revolution. Work with wholesalers who are minimising excess packaging during delivery, and accepting returns on packaging.
- When stocking look carefully at packaging of products you are buying, bearing in mind consumers are being more mindful of sustainability. Look for recycled plastic, ready meals in cardboard and compostable trays, and snacks sold in paper or compostable packaging.
- If you are shipping out products, be more mindful of your processes. There are multiple packaging companies offering cold chain solutions, and packaging that is better for the environment, including recyclable paper-based void fill, cushioning and wrapping.
- If you are a farm shop on a working farm, could you reuse cardboard packing on site? Shredded cardboard makes a good mulch, or can be used for animal bedding. Is there anywhere locally you could donate shredded cardboard?







FINAL CALL

There's no denying it: we've had a soggy start to the year. According to the NFU, the UK has experienced its wettest 18 months since 1836. The constant bouts of rain have not only hampered farmers and growers, but also retailers. Dismal weather continued to keep many fair-weather shoppers at home for what the British Retail Consortium called a "dull, wet April".

But there is hope on the horizon. Not only did May bring two bank holidays to boost sales volumes and some brilliant, long days filled with sunshine (we can only hope more of these are on the cards), but inflation is also easing and shopper confidence is growing steadily, according to IGD.

Although disappointing challenges have emerged for those who import a fantastic, diverse array of foods from the European Union, support for British farmers, growers and retailers is running high. At the government's latest Farm to Fork Summit, a package of support was announced to build the UK's food security by investing in fruit and vegetable growers, which is welcome news for farm shops and delis who stock home-grown produce. While more needs to be done in the short-term to provide support for struggling farmers, including taking more action around nature-friendly farming and promoting healthy eating, we're confident that small farmers and independent retailers will take up the mantle to lead the 'buy British' charge in their local communities.

In fact, trust in farmers and retailers remains the highest in the industry, according to a survey of thousands of consumers across Europe. EIT Food's Consumer Observatory published its Trust Report, which found trust in farmers and retailers were the first and second highest in the sector, respectively, beating restaurants and caterers, food manufacturers and authorities. Although these numbers have all dipped slightly from the previous year, we also know from previous research that consumers put more trust in smaller organisations, individual people and local businesses more, which stands independent fine food shops in good stead.

This summer, we'd urge you to continue building on these strong relationships with your customers with in-store events, tastings and advice from your team of experts. How will you go above and beyond for your local community this month and make summer 2024 one 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 courtney.goldsmith@artichokehq.com

5 MINUTES WITH

TIM DUNLOP, EUROPEAN COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR, BIGGAR AND LEITH



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I'd be photographing and writing about classic cars. Outside of my day job I spend my weekends at race circuits and motoring events as I am a true petrol head.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
Aside from a paper round while at school, my first job was as a cashier and shelf stacker for the now defunct Wilkinsons chain of hardware stores. After this, I moved into sales roles and into the food and drink sector.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Seeing mutual success for all involved in the project I am working on. Knowing that by networking, communicating and focusing with everyone pulling in the right direction, real success can be achieved which is rewarding for all concerned. I'm lucky that at Biggar and Leith, we have a passionate global team, strong brands and contemporary products that shoppers love so it's inspiring to see all our efforts come together.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR JOB?
Building solid sustainable and realistic plans with distributors. It's so satisfying to set out a plan and see the listings and volumes come through across multiple sectors as a brand grows. A great example of this is being part of the growth Shanky's Whip Irish Whiskey Liqueur, which is experiencing an explosion of popularity and being stocked on store shelves and back bars across the country.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
I'm not sure anyone really enjoys admin. There is a lot of it in most jobs, and sometimes it can be a real motivation killer.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
Seaside fish and chips. Say what you like, but there is simply nothing better than a fresh piece of battered haddock served with chips and mushy peas. Oh, and to make it perfect it has to be served with a cup of tea.
Ideally overlooking the coast in a quaint fishing harbour, preferably in North Yorkshire.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
I suppose technically not eaten, but having tried Anty Gin (a gin from Cambridge Distillery made with wood ants as one of the botanicals) I would class that as one of the weirdest things to have passed my lips.

YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Any John Rebus novel by Ian Rankin. His books are the only ones I can pick up.
Within a paragraph be transported to a rain-soaked street in Scotland for another case for Rebus to solve.



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TRIED & TESTED

BBQ LENTIL CRISPS
OLLY'S



New launch for the pretzel brand which unveiled two flavours of lentil crisp at this year's Farm Shop & Deli Show. The light as air snacks are high in protein and fibre, vegan, less than 91 calories per portion, come in recyclable packaging, and are HFSS and CQUIN compliant. Above anything else, they are simply scrummy. We're big fans of meaty flavoured crisps (very on trend) at *Speciality Food*, and these remind us of those famous snacks beginning with F and rhyming with dazzle. They're incredibly savoury, with an umami, almost smoked bacon flavour. We just couldn't keep our hands off them!
ollys-ollys.com

CHEEKY WEE KISS
ANGEL'S DARE

We've tried a lot of cocktails in cans this year, but so far this is our favourite. With a base of dry gin, the award-winning tipple absolutely brims with juicy flavour, combining rhubarb, ginger, strawberry and cranberry. Served over ice, with a few strawberries to garnish, it's a mouthwatering drop that tastes like the essence of summer. We also enjoyed the Scottish brand's Secret Orchard drink, matching gin with peach, apple, elderflower and mint. And the eyecatching design certainly stands out on the shelf.
angelsdarecocktails.co.uk



PINEAPPLE FRUIT SNACKS
THE DORMEN

We tried the full range of fruity snacks from The Dormen and found them all delicious, from the Strawberry & Banana, to Strawberry, and Mango, Passionfruit & Cashew varieties. But Pineapple was one of our favourites, especially as, being nut free (though not suitable for allergy sufferers) the packets are ideal for popping into kids' lunch boxes. Formed into a little button shapes, almost like sweeties, they are a fantastic innovation in the fruit snack sector, made with 100% fruit and no added sugar or sulphites. In fact, the only inclusion is snappy pops of crisped rice for texture. The gluten-free snacks taste of the essence of pineapple, with a zesty, almost sherbetty sweet twang. We loved them.
thedormenfoodcompany.com



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Duncan Tinkler, chef patron at Bangers and Balls, Whitstable



When we started Bangers and Balls in the summer of 2017 we had just moved to Whitstable, Kent, right in the heart of the Garden of England. It was madness to me not to make the most of the local bounty.

I learned to cook growing up visiting my uncle, deep in the Suffolk countryside. We would pass the happy pigs, the orchards and farms, to the butchers, greengrocers and farmers. We knew everyone who worked there. We knew where the meat had come from and who had grown the vegetables. We knew that that the food, whatever we did with it, was going to taste amazing.

Cooking wasn't really something that was planned out in advance. More often it was reactionary. What was good in the butcher that morning? What veg where available? What could we make from them? It was exciting.

It was this excitement that I wanted to bring to Bangers and Balls as chef. I was very lucky to be introduced to two young farmers, Jack from Jack's Veg and Laura from The Wonky Parsnip. Along with Jim's Family Butcher in Whitstable and the Goods Shed in Canterbury with its superb fishmonger and nose to tail butcher, I was set.

The thing about buying local, I soon discovered, is that it means going seasonal too. I found this out after working with Jack and Laura to create a menu of weird and wonderful veg that you just couldn't buy in supermarkets; from electric daisies that make your tongue dance to bright purple basil for the most powerful pesto. As the leaves started to change and the nights drew in, suddenly I found I couldn't order the same things anymore.

Gone were the fabulous summer squashes, soft fruits and tomatoes. Suddenly I had to be reactionary. I had to reinvent the menu with crown prince pumpkins, apples and pears and if I still wanted tomatoes I needed to get preserving.

This was exciting. I was learning something new. Soon I discovered that along with seasonality and preserving went foraging, and suddenly a whole new world of food had opened up to me. I could create dishes that people hadn't had before. Flavours and textures that were totally new, like wild garlic and elderflower. It was exhilarating. So much so that I went on to write three bestselling books on the subject.

To me, buying locally means being part of an extended community of growers and farmers, shop keepers, chefs and foodies. It means embracing the changing seasons and getting excited about variety. It means caring about where our food comes from, how it is produced, how far it has come to your plate.

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo

10 TRENDS IN ITALIAN FOOD YOU NEED TO KNOW

Italian cuisine is still coming out on top as the most eaten international cuisine in the UK...but what are consumers looking for?



From a quick plate of pasta grabbed after a busy day, to antipasti shared with friends over a glass of wine at the weekend, or Friday pizza night – Italian food is ingrained into British food culture. Here are just a few must-stock items shoppers can't get enough of.

• **Regional olive oil** – Any Italian will tell you there's olive oil...and then there's olive oil! British shoppers want to know more about the farm, village or town where their olive oil was grown, as a sign of quality, particularly in speciality food stores.

• **Authentic pasta** – Made with heritage wheat, cast in bronze, and with a defined region of origin. Shoppers are getting picky about their pasta.

• **Pizza** – More people than ever before are making pizza from scratch at home. And they want access to authentic ingredients to help them recreate the pizzeria experience – from Italian flour, to sweet Italian tomatoes. .

• **Pesto** – Alongside pasta, a quick meal solution. Stirred into a sauce, a pasta salad, potatoes or smoothed over crusty bread, pesto is a real favourite.

• **Burrata** – An oozy, cream-filled joy of a thing. Burrata has taken off massively in the UK in the last two years. With a drizzle of oil and twist of pepper, and some good bread to mop it up, it's become a winner for easy dinner parties at home.

• **Nduja** – Another new staple being popped in baskets. Jars of nduja are nice to have, but also think about stocking it on the chilled counter with your charcuterie.

• **Truffle** – A whisper of truffle brings a bosky, earthy, unforgettable taste to almost any dish. Make it accessible by stocking products at a variety of price points, from relatively inexpensive truffle dusts, through to truffle oils and pastes.

• **Aperitivo** – Sales of classic aperitivo drinks such as Aperol spritz, bitter sprits, and Negronis are on the up. Stock up on interesting spirits and antipasti options, from bruschetta toppings to olives, roasted peppers, artichokes and, of course, the finest cured meats.

• **Dolce** – Customers are reaching for cantuccini, amaretti and baci to go alongside their morning coffee.

• **Wellbeing -** Shoppers are thinking more frequently about the functionality and health benefits of what they eat, and are paying more attention to grains, pulses and tinned fish, which form a huge part of the Mediterranean diet. Offer tastings and recipe inspiration to help them make the most of these store cupboard essentials.



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