ALL YOU NEED TO SELL CHEESE SUCCESSFULLY

CHEESE BUYER

2021

From the publishers of SPECIALITY FOOD

MAGAZINE

The True Taste of SWITZERLAND

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AOP

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PETER'S YARD

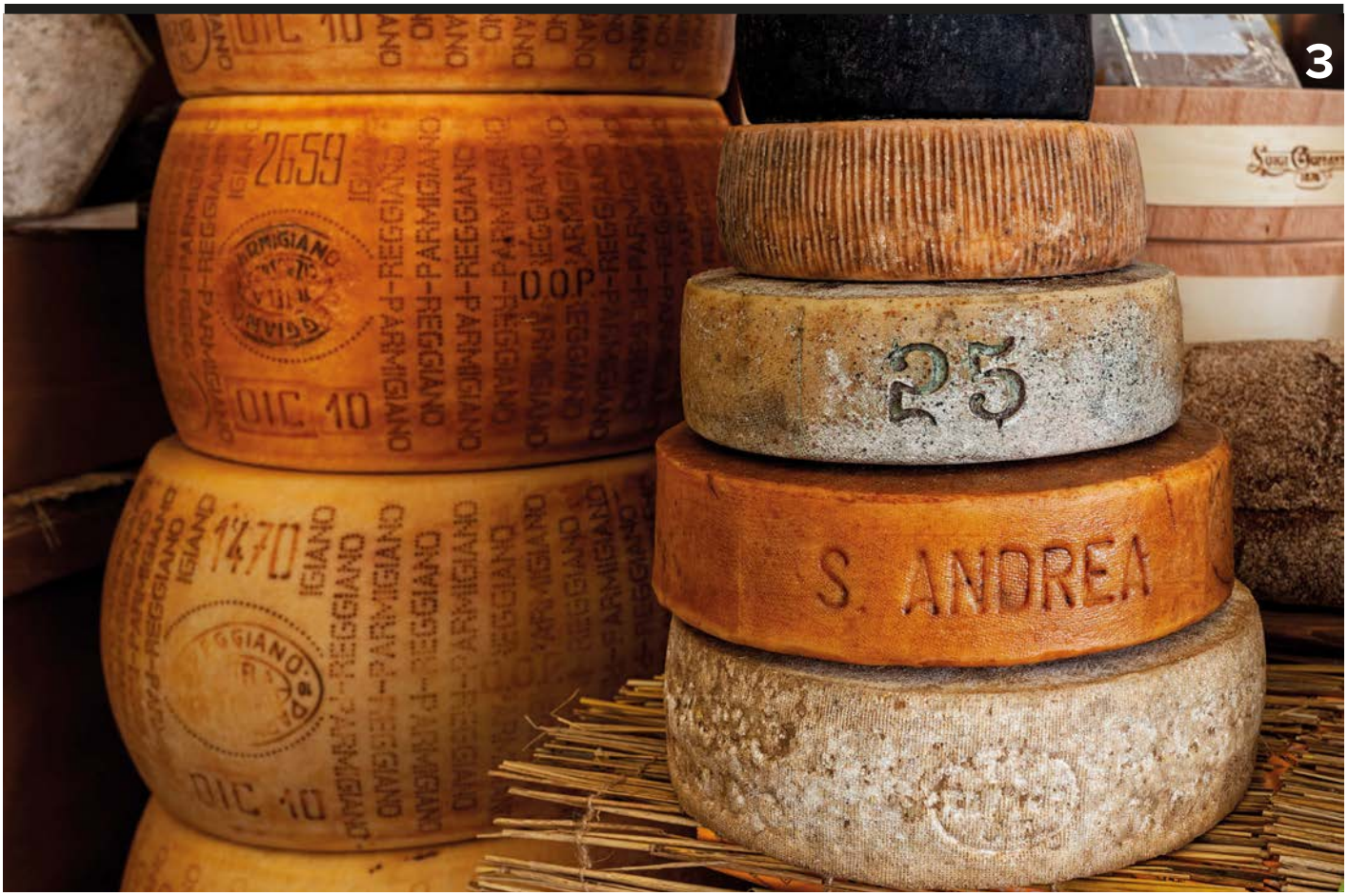


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WELCOME TO CHEESE BUYER



Welcome to the 2021 edition of *Cheese Buyer*, brought to you by the publishers of *Speciality Food*.

The past year has seen some challenges which need no introduction, yet will be felt for years and by generations to come, but it's also been a time of great innovation and transformation for the cheese industry. While some businesses have sadly been lost, others have triumphed, and perhaps the sector's greatest achievement has been the increased public love, appreciation and respect that has been garnered for cheesemakers and retailers.

The *Cheese Buyer* team has worked hard to represent the cheese industry as it currently stands in the UK and further afield in order to give you a helpful and comprehensive resource to reflect on as the coming year progresses.

In this issue of *Cheese Buyer*, we look at how we should approach the upcoming period in cheese retail; where the opportunities are to take advantage of, and how consumer demand has evolved. We explore the international opportunities that are out there, and speak to European retailers to corral their experience and opinion. We delve into the new online realms worth exploring for every forward-looking cheese retail business. Plus, within these pages you'll also find a discussion around why dairy products are worth a fresh look, and how *Cheese Buyer* readers can become ambassadors for the industry: a role which is more important now than ever.

On top of all of that, we profile some of the greatest cheesemakers across the UK and beyond to find out about new launches and celebrate heritage in equal measure. From British classics to European favourites and the businesses bringing them to you, there's plenty to get your teeth into.

I hope you find this an educational and inspiring read.

HOLLY SHACKLETON
| EDITOR

Editor
Holly Shackleton 01206 505981
holly.shackleton@aceville.co.uk

News & Content Editor
Courtney Goldsmith
courtney.goldsmith@aceville.co.uk

Group Editor
Charlotte Smith
charlotte.smith@aceville.co.uk

Group Advertising Manager
Sam Reubin 01206 505936
sam.reubin@aceville.co.uk

Advertising Manager
Jessica Brett 01206 505901
jessica.brett@aceville.co.uk

Art Director
Lee Whiteford
lee.whiteford@aceville.co.uk

Accounts
Sue Carr 01206 505903

Subscriptions
01293 312188
specialityfood@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk

Publisher
Helen Tudor 01206 505970

Published by
Aceville Publications, 21-23 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Road, Colchester, Essex, CO2 8JY

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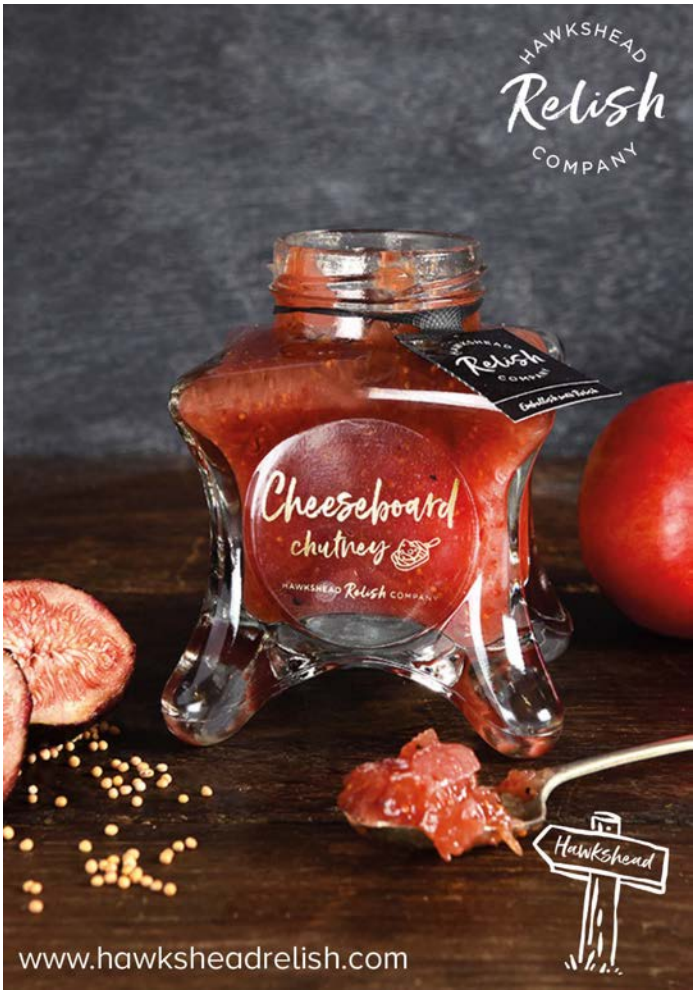


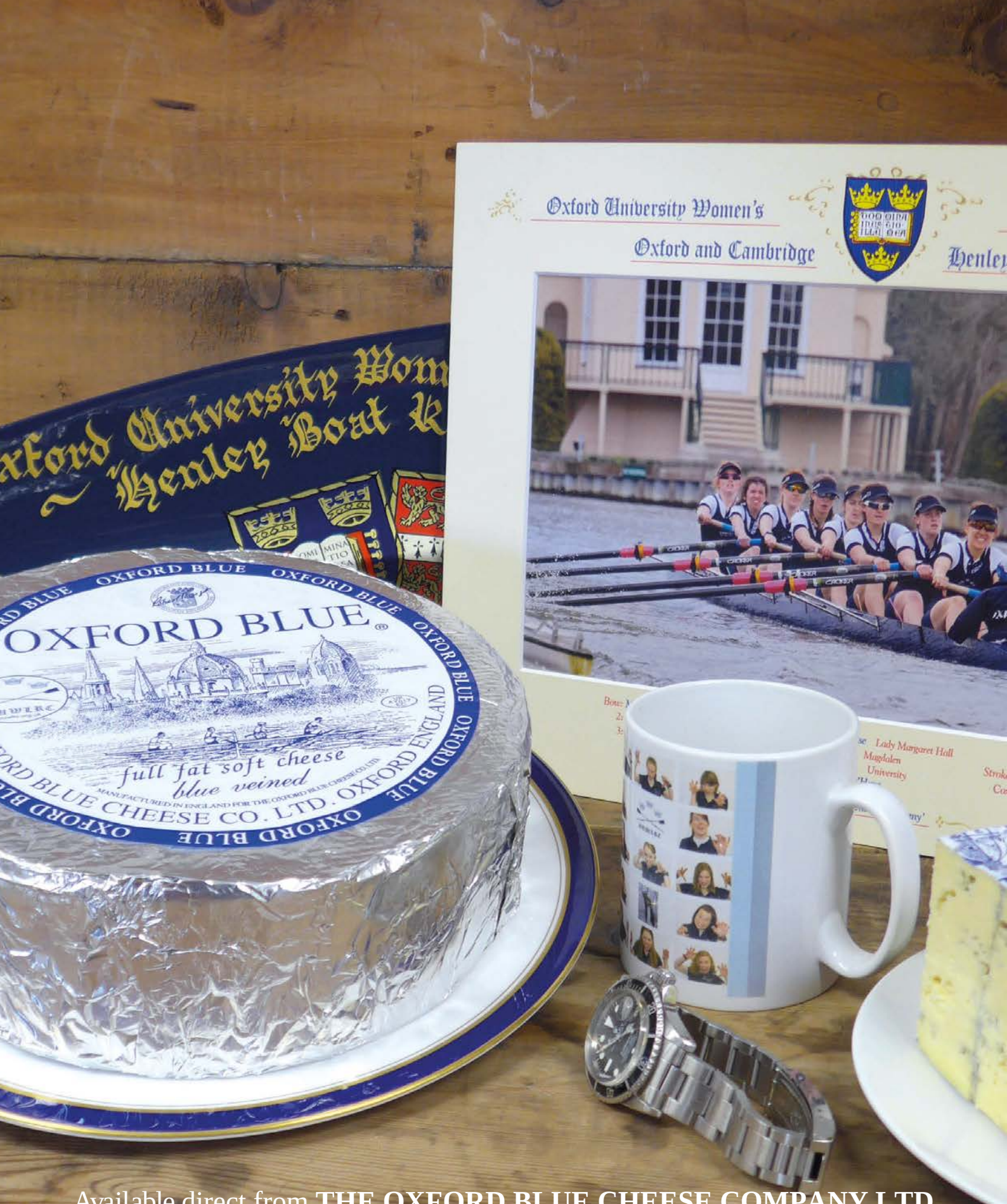












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AN INDUSTRY ICON

North Wales' Snowdonia Cheese Company represents the best of speciality cheeses at home and abroad

In 2001, Snowdonia Cheese Company began handcrafting Extra Mature Cheddar to be sold at British farmers' markets. Since then, it has gone from strength to strength. Inspired by the lush greenery of beautiful Snowdonia, this family business – run by the sons of third-generation dairy farmers – uses fresh and natural ingredients to produce a premium range of waxed cheeses and traditionally made chutneys of exceptional quality and flavour. The success of its signature Black Bomber Extra Mature Cheddar, its very first cheese, paved the way for accolades from around the world. To date, Snowdonia Cheese Company has collected multiple awards at The British Cheese Awards, Nantwich International Cheese Awards, The World Cheese Awards and Mondial du Fromage in France. "We're very proud that our products have been recognised by renowned industry experts," says John Newton-Jones, Snowdonia Cheese's managing director. "These awards reflect the care, expertise and natural ingredients that go into creating our handcrafted cheeses."

Enduring appeal

Snowdonia Cheese began to see significant growth and its products could soon be found on the shelves of premium retailers across the UK. But its ambitions didn't stop there. After six years of hard work, Snowdonia Cheese saw its international sales rocket too, growing more than six-fold. Today, the business sells to more than 25 countries worldwide, including Canada, Australia, the United States, France and Germany.

Honouring provenance

Snowdonia Cheese Company's natural, premium Cheddar and Red Leicester cheeses are celebrated for their depth of flavour and creamy texture – the result of its dedication to exceptional flavour and quality. Every step of the cheesemaking process is carefully considered by the small, devoted team at Snowdonia Cheese, from the sourcing of ingredients to the expert grading of the cheeses.

Snowdonia's extensive range includes British favourites – Black Bomber, Red Storm Vintage Red Leicester and Beechwood Smoked Mature Cheddar – as well as numerous other varieties that are bursting with flavour, such as Green Thunder Mature Cheddar with Roasted Garlic and Herbs and its most recent addition: Truffle Trove Extra Mature Cheddar with Black Summer Truffle.

Its classic-meets-modern ethos also extends to its five-strong chutney collection, which includes Fig & Apple; Balsamic Caramelised Onion; Pear, Date & Cognac; Spiced Tomato & Vodka and its latest creation, Rhubarb & Gin.

International ambassador

Today, Snowdonia Cheese continues to prioritise the finest, fresh ingredients in the crafting of its cheeses. Through constant innovation, it continues to create memorable flavour experiences for its customers in the UK and around the world.

The company takes great pride in representing the best of British cheese overseas. "Britain is an exceptional and well-trusted brand in itself – one that embraces constant change and demonstrates an ingenuity of invention," says John. "We're proud to continue this legacy by showcasing the finest British cheese internationally."

The North Wales-based speciality cheese producer shines a spotlight on Brand Britain by focusing on excellent product quality, marketing and innovation – a mission that it will continue to expand upon in the years to come.





TRUFFLE TROVE

Discover extra mature Cheddar enriched with delicate Black Summer truffle (Tuber aestivum Vitt.)

Exceptional flavour, expertly crafted

BEST BRITISH CHEESE BRAND
as voted by the Fine Food Digest Survey 2020-21

snowdoniacheese

MODERN CLASSICS

Family favourites meet modern innovation in Pimpernel Wharf's range of Continental cheeses and charcuterie

With today's consumer looking for the perfect blend of traditional favourites and innovative new flavours to explore, retailers have to strike the right balance when it comes to the products they source for their shelves. Thankfully, Pimpernel Wharf is on hand to offer its expertly curated selection of Continental cheeses, charcuterie products and olive oils.



"With an established history of importing Continental cheese, Pimpernel Wharf can be traced back to the 1960s," explains Daniel Stuart, managing director of Pimpernel Wharf. It's not for nothing that the business has maintained an impressive reputation across the food industry. "Our goal has always been to make cheese procurement hassle-free and great value, which is exactly what we do for our customers," says Daniel.

Today Pimpernel Wharf supplies a large portion of the food industry within the UK, including high profile restaurants, major supermarket chains and national retailers. "We're proud to offer these customers with a number of services, including unique and comprehensive cheese procurement service solutions, low prices provided by proven buying power, an experienced technical team and a reliable and efficient supply of fresh produce procured directly from the producers," he explains.



Pimpernel Wharf's long established and extensive supplier relationships have led to food retailers and foodservice operators across Britain offering tried and tested consumer favourites alongside innovative formats and flavours. "We have the core range of products such as Parmesan, Mozzarella, Grana Padano, Halloumi, parma ham and chorizo, but also have a great range of vegan lines and summer specials available," says Daniel, with the consumer appetite for exciting new options being satisfied by "our Continental Tapas/Rolito range, including chorizo with Cheddar, serrano ham and cream cheese, and Manchego and chorizo, with more flavours available." The business also supplies modern classics such as Halloumi fries and burgers, perfect for the upcoming barbecue season.

The future looks bright for Pimpernel Wharf, not least thanks to its personalised service of sourcing products on request for individual customers proving popular. The team looks forward to developing a new customer base across independent retail, foodservice and wholesalers, and with its array of Continental classics and modern innovations, it's onto a winner.

> "Our goal has always been to make cheese procurement hassle-free and great value, which is exactly what we do for our customers"



THE ART OF SOFT CHEESE

Now is the time to get behind British soft cheese, says Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses

Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses began its journey into soft cheesemaking more than 15 years ago. Renowned for its Farmhouse Lancashire and its soft, creamy blues, such as Blacksticks Blue, a soft white cheese was a much-wanted addition to the family, as its development would provide the finishing touch to the perfect British cheeseboard.

Button Mill, a small, soft cow's milk cheese, was born in 2014. Through careful parenting, it has evolved into a truly unique cheese. The soft, creamy centre is encased in a thin, chewy white rind, which is just as delicious as the savoury and squidgy middle.

These little cheeses have very specific environmental needs as they develop. They start their life in small artisan basins, and they like to be matured in close proximity to each other. This is why Butlers make them in batches of 600 at one time, to ensure they have plenty of siblings. From the time they are placed by hand into their own moulds, they take 12 days under the careful watch of Butlers' master cheesemakers to establish their distinct flavour.

A cheese for all

Butlers is often labelled as the largest of the small cheese producers, and bridging the gap between market stalls, delis and larger retailers is something the team takes great pride in. In Button Mill, Butlers have created a truly great British soft cheese that is always deliciously delicate and offers an indulgent taste that everyone will love.



> "In Button Mill, Butlers have created a truly great British soft cheese that is always deliciously delicate"

Much like winemaking, Britain is now mastering the art of soft cheesemaking, and by enlightening customers with a thoroughly positive experience with Button Mill, everyone can join the British soft cheese movement.



KEEPING IT LOCAL

Passion and unique heritage are behind the success of Fromagerie de Saint Flour's fine cheeses

Fromagerie de Saint Flour is proud to maintain a close connection with every step of the cheesemaking process from its base within the best of the cheese and dairy regions of Hautes-Terres d'Auvergne.

All of Fromagerie de Saint Flour's committed dairy farmers work in a united way as a cooperative, and have been bringing together their solid expertise for 50 years. Its farmers, cheesemakers and ripeners pay particular attention to each step of the manufacturing process to provide the best cheese as well as maintain the region's culinary and cultural roots.

To achieve unique flavours, PDO Fourme d'Ambert and Saint Flour are ripened in nearby old railway tunnels; just one way in which the Saint Flour dairy is championing the local heritage. The natural microflora in the tunnel provides the cheese with an authentic taste and brings out specific flavours to some of the business's veined cheese such as fourme d'Ambert and Saint Flour.

Saint Flour is the natural home of a number of spectacular French cheeses, including:



PDO BLEU D'AUVERGNE

The celebrated PDO cheese with its veined body and strong flavour. Around 1845, Antoine Rousell – the son of an Auvergne farmer and grandson of a Roquefort producer – had the idea of introducing a blue mould he had seen growing on rye bread into his curds. He then pierced his cheese with a knitting needle to allow the flora to flourish.

PDO FOURME D'AMBERT

In the 9th century, PDO Fourme d'Ambert was given the name, 'the big lady with the soft heart'. This will certainly have been due to her delicate taste as well as its soft, undulating texture. Fourme d'Ambert was mainly sold in the market in the village of Ambert, which is how the cheese got its name.



LE SAINT FLOUR

With a smooth creamy, melt-in-the-mouth consistent texture, out Saint Flour has an intense blue flavour with vegetal, mushroom taste that balances between bitterness and saltiness.

> "All of Fromagerie de Saint Flour's committed dairy farmers work in a united way as a cooperative, and have been bringing together their solid expertise for 50 years"



FORGING
A NEW PATH

Following the success of its retail range, Harvey & Brockless sees a future filled with innovation and opportunity



After many years of supplying the very best hotels and restaurants in London, Harvey & Brockless is branching out to the retail sector. The team launched a retail range in 2020, which found great success in small independents. The expansive fine food selection is a one-stop-shop for stockists, providing not only artisan cheeses, but also cured meats, Mediterranean deli and store cupboard essentials.

Able to respond to the demands of the latest trends, the Harvey & Brockless team is constantly updating its range with delicious new cheeses, charcuterie and sauces. Looking towards the future it will also continue innovating and adding to its range with products that are specially designed for independent delis and farm shops. Currently, new packaging formats for assembled cheeseboards are in development, which would perfectly suit the shelves of local retailers.

Sharing expertise

As well as providing a wide range of cheeses and accompaniments, Harvey & Brockless can offer retailers fundamental knowledge and training based on its relationships with the best artisan producers across the country. Making incredible artisan produce accessible to independent retail is Harvey & Brockless' main goal. The team understands that consumers today value knowing where their food comes from, so they will continue passing on the knowledge and stories behind the small producers they have close relationships with.

AN INNOVATIVE RANGE

Harvey & Brockless is constantly adapting and evolving its offering, which allows retailers to refresh their range frequently. Examples of recent innovations include Foie Royale, ethically sourced and made Foie Gras; Smoked Salmon in whole sides and retail-shelf-ready packs; along with a range of exclusive, restaurant-quality sauces such as rose petal Harissa under the Harvey & Brockless Kitchen brand. With so many options available in one space, retailers can consolidate their supply base, saving them precious time.





CHAMPIONING ORGANIC CHEESE

Godminster is making good on its mission to give back to its local community as well as the British countryside

"Nature repays those who treat her kindly." As Godminster's motto, this sentiment embodies the company's ethos about its organic cheese range and its farm, home to a herd of around 320 Friesians, Normandes and Short Horns – all organic dairy cows.

"As organic farmers, our careful stewardship of the Somerset countryside is an important part of giving back to nature," says Jessica Kimber-Holloway, commercial and operations director. "We've planted over 25,000 broadleaf trees at Godminster Farm in the past 21 years, as well as planting nearly 3km of new native hedgerows and creating two wetland areas."

Godminster was founded by Richard Hollingbery, who bought the farm in 1993. Since 2000, it has been certified organic by the Soil Association. The company's Green Godminster initiative this year is not only about producing great cheese, but also being a company that customers are proud to buy from. "From company-wide litter picking events in our home town of Bruton, Somerset, to cutting down on single-use plastic in our gifts and hampers – there's so much that we can do to ensure we are doing our bit to make this world a little greener," Jessica says.

Going green

A common assumption about organic farming is that it's all about pesticides and antibiotics. While that is part of the deal – Godminster's cows graze on grass that is never exposed to pesticides or chemical fertilisers – there is much more to it than that. "At the heart of Godminster Farm's organic ethos is sustainability, animal welfare and natural biodiversity."

Richard takes a holistic approach to the health of the Godminster Girls, as the herd of cows is affectionately known, using homeopathy to prevent disease – not antibiotics.

The cows are allowed to wander and forage, and after the summer grazing months end, they are fed a special feed of oats, barley, grasses and peas that are grown on Godminster Farm. But Godminster's work to boost the eco credentials of its farm go far beyond its herd and the organic milk they produce. "We have over 150 acres of permanent pasture and unused corners and margins provide extra hunting ground for barn owls. We've dug 14 ponds and created two wetlands in the past 21 years, resulting in an increase in wild fauna and flora around the part and more visiting birdlife every year," Jessica explains.

> "The cows at Godminster farm are raised organically and produce a deliciously creamy milk that is perfect for cheesemaking"



Taking this green approach to farming ensures that Godminster is constantly giving back to its local community and the wildlife that call the area home.

Strong credentials

What do these organic credentials bring to Godminster's range of cheeses? "The cows at Godminster farm are raised organically and produce a deliciously creamy milk that is perfect for cheesemaking," Jessica says. The farm's organic milk is cited as a major contributor to the distinctive tastes of its award-winning cheeses.

"We were recently voted the nation's favourite organic product by popular vote at the Soil Association's Best of the Organic Market awards. It's a real testimony to the past 21 years of hard work and our continued belief that organic cheese isn't just great for the customer, it's great for the environment too."

A GLOBAL SHOWCASE

Despite tricky conditions thanks to Brexit and Covid-19, the export market remains an important part of Godminster's business, and interest in its organic cheese continues to grow. "The Godminster logo is increasingly recognised on the Continent as a symbol of high-quality, high-welfare Cheddar, and the appetite for great British cheese is definitely strong," Jessica says. "Somerset is well known throughout the world as the heart of cheesemaking in the UK, and we continue to wave the flag for British exports by proudly displaying our Union flag on the front of our cheese range."





SOIL ASSOCIATION ORGANIC

WINNER 2019

BOOM BEST OF ORGANIC MARKET AWARDS

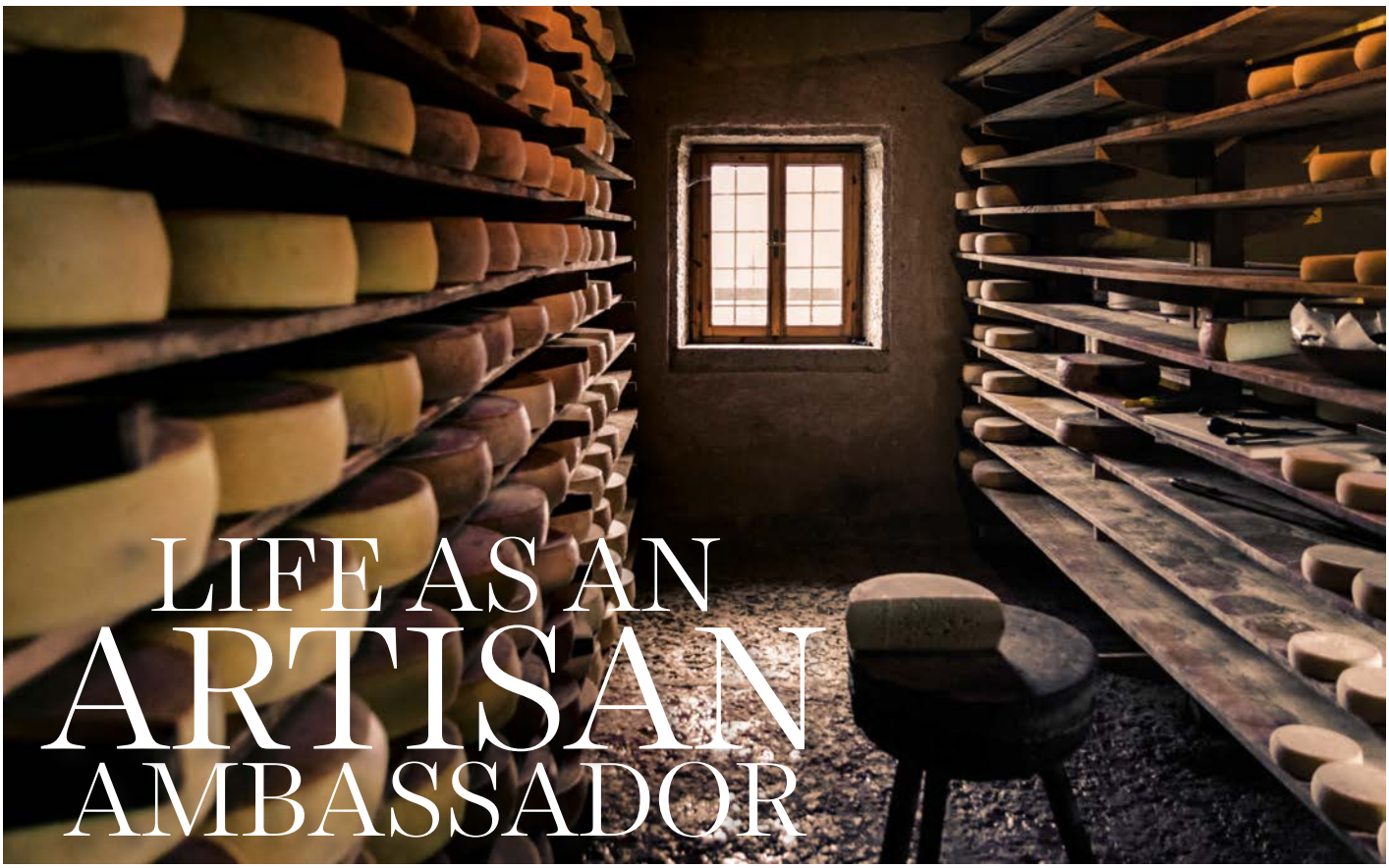
GODMINSTER®

Voted the Nation's Favourite Organic Product
At the Best of the Organic Market Awards, 2019-2021

Welcome to Godminster, the home of award-winning organic cheddar made in the heart of Somerset.

"Nature repays those who treat her kindly" is Godminster's motto and it's from nature's finest ingredients that we take all of our inspiration. Here at Godminster we like to think that all the love and care we put into our farm is repaid in kind, making award-winning cheese & gifts for everyone to enjoy.

To find our more about the award-winning Godminster range, call the team on 01749 813733 or email sales@godminster.com



LIFE AS AN ARTISAN AMBASSADOR

Cheese Buyer speaks to cheesemongers who have made it their mission to champion cheesemakers to find out how and why they do it

An appeal to save Britain's cheesemakers during the pandemic saw support pour in for artisan and speciality makers. For the nation's cheesemongers, championing small producers was nothing new, but Covid-19 acted as a galvanising force for the industry to work together to ensure that no cheese or cheesemaker was left behind.

"British cheesemaking has been hard hit by the restrictions on the hospitality industry over the last year. It has been more important than ever to champion the amazing cheeses made across the country, to share our passion and encourage people to enjoy them at home," says Slate Cheese's Clare Jackson.

La Fromagerie owner Patricia Michelson believes it has been important to show that "we will not be phased by a pandemic. But given the challenges it raised, it made us even more aware of championing the work on the farm and in the dairy," she says. "To be even closer connected to the cheesemaker who, at times, felt isolated and afraid that sales would plummet, it was important for us to keep the relationships steady and the cheese made as before."

For retailers across the UK who represent Britain and Europe's specialist cheesemakers, a sense of pride and passion shines through. "At Slate we are passionate about artisan cheeses – in particular, the incredible variety of flavours, textures, aromas and traditions to be discovered and enjoyed," says Clare. "Those who make these cheeses are the genius at the heart of our business. Without their skill, commitment and dedication our fridges would be bare and our offering much less delicious." *Cheese Buyer* discovers how artisan ambassadors are celebrating farmhouse cheesemakers in their shops and virtually.

Spreading the word

Not all consumers that walk into a specialist cheesemonger will have an understanding of the processes behind farmhouse cheesemaking and what makes it so different from the products available at a supermarket. It is up to retailers to translate these stories. "Artisan cheese is a premium product, and it is important that we share details of its history and production story to champion this price point," explains Clare.

"By the time cheese is with us at Slate, so much time and care has gone into every step of the cheesemaking process. From

SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE

CLARE JACKSON, SLATE CHEESE



Each month our Cheesemonger's Special Selection is a celebration of three carefully chosen cheeses showcasing new discoveries, recent award-winners, particular geographies, cheese styles or simply those which are tasting great at the moment. This trio is accompanied by extended tasting notes that include considerable detail of the high-quality ingredients, traditional methods and skill involved in creating the artisan cheeses.

We hope it will not be too long until we can return to our pre-Covid ways of visiting cheese makers and hosting them in-store for 'meet the maker' events. These are invaluable learning experiences for us to get an authentic behind-the-scenes view of the farms where these cheeses are made, and the families who make them, often for generations. We can share this first-hand information amongst the Slate team and with our customers both during conversations in-store and via the journal on our website, where there is an enviable back catalogue of blue hairnet photos to be found!

> As cheesemongers, we need to know the maker's story. We need to make that connection with the producer to keep a direct link from farm to customer to plate

the production of milk with high standards of animal welfare and regenerative agricultural practices, to the hand crafting of cheese and its maturation," she says. Over the past year, efforts to share the stories of cheesemakers have moved online. "Tasting notes accompany all the cheeses we sell via our website. Blogs, video cheese chats and posts on social media are also important ways to reach the cheese loving community out there."

Caring for cheeses

In bricks and mortar shops, it is also critical that farmhouse cheeses are presented in their best light. "It is important that we continue to give it due care and attention once in our fridges," Clare continues. "Cheese care techniques such as scraping and glass-wrapping cut surfaces are vital to keep artisan cheeses in prime condition so that customers can enjoy it as the cheesemakers intended."

Upskilling staff

Knowledge is everything for a cheesemonger, so ensuring your team is brimming with passion as well as a well-rounded understanding of your products is key. "It is not only good for the customer to know the answers to their questions, but it is good for the cheesemonger to understand more about the product they are selling," explains Patricia. "All your cheesemonger staff should look to gain more knowledge, whether they do it themselves through the internet or joining the Profession Fromager – if you want to know more about European cheeses,

A VIRTUAL SMORGASBORD

PATRICIA MICHELSON, LA FROMAGERIE



Celebrating cheesemakers is all about seasons and the reasons to be enjoying cheese throughout the year. We have ways of displaying cheese in groups for creative cheeseboards, and we have developed a very active cheese tutorial online, taking tastings all around the UK and Europe on journeys that incorporate history, geography, land and people.

There are many stories surrounding cheese, and the virtual tutorials have definitely given us a storyboard of ideas and ways to develop people's knowledge and curiosity. We have invited cheesemakers into the virtual tutorials and included British as well as French and Spanish experts in cheesemaking to be part of the events. We have widened the net of connections which has been really fantastic, not only for us to meet up but also for the attendees to hear about their work too.

Social media has been hugely important over the last year, and you can do a daily post of simple things like opening a Cheddar, or tasting the first of the new season goat's cheeses. We are lucky we have a chef and kitchen so we make daily dishes and savoury take out using cheese, as well as our cheesecake which is slowly baked and tastes wonderful.





> It has been more important than ever to champion the amazing cheeses made across the country, to share our passion and encourage people to enjoy them at home

they have plenty of information, and it's also in English.

"For more knowledge on British cheese there is the Specialist Cheesemakers Association, and I would heartily acknowledge the work the Academy of Cheese is doing," Patricia adds. "Our senior cheesemonger Max Melvin is a tutor, and his courses take in all the points that the Academy outline, but he also brings in so much of what we do in La Fromagerie, too. As well as his knowledge of the science behind the cheese; so for the amateur cheese-sleuth or someone working or wanting to work in cheese, I would say spend your money on the courses. They are worth it."

Visiting cheesemakers

While Covid-19 put a temporary hold on travelling to visit local cheesemakers, getting to know the makers behind the cheeses you sell will continue to be an essential role of the artisan ambassador. "I'm hugely looking forward to going out and visiting makers," says Chris Hallam of Chorlton Cheesemongers. "It's what stops us just being a 'shop' and allows us to become an essential part of the pleasure of cheese – bringing amazing cheeses to customers and letting them know we've been on those farms or in those dairies and seen it and, sometimes, helped make it."

Chris advises cheese retailers to speak to the makers themselves to create a personal relationship, which will in turn help establish relationships with customers. "I think for us as a shop to be in touch with the cheese – who made it and how it is made – is fundamental to our business and our ethos of connecting with food and its origins," he says.

"Knowing a cheesemaker has had personal connection with the land, the herd, the milk and the final product demonstrates a passion for their cheese and a commitment to producing the very best. Small makers can be involved in the whole process, and that gives me confidence," Chris continues. "Likewise, as cheesemongers, we need to know the maker's story. We need to make that connection with the producer to keep a direct link from farm to customer to plate. This means we love to visit farms and makers, meet them, chat with them, pass on comments and receive advice from the makers themselves."

Slate's Clare agrees that connecting with local cheesemakers can have a positive impact on producers as well as sales. "Over the last year, much has been made of the shift in focus to local food producers. Customers visiting our Suffolk shops are extremely interested in trying local products, including East Anglian cheese. These cheeses are often not well known outside the region, so it is key for us to share our enthusiasm and knowledge," Clare says. "Developing an ongoing dialogue with those making cheese nearby is a vital part of this process as it enables us to share vibrant details about production of the cheeses and information about seasonal variations."

Being an artisan ambassador means sharing the knowledge, care and passion behind every cheese in your shop, and translating the hard work of cheesemakers into the joy of discovery of your customers.

> Artisan cheese is a premium product, and it is important that we share details of its history and production story to champion this price point

6 WAYS CHORLTON CHEESEMONGERS CELEBRATES CHEESEMAKERS



CHRIS HALLAM, CHORLTON CHEESEMONGERS

1 We have the names of the makers on our signage, and when talking about a cheese we tell customers who it is made by.

2 We will share stories we've been told or learnt from makers with customers, and we're always ready to explain the cheesemaking process (which we've learnt from experience, as we aim to send all our staff at least once on a day's making).

3 We're always tasting the cheeses and are keen to talk about the variables involved with artisan making, and we personalise our experience of the cheese or the maker wherever we can.

4 We're very clear with customers about why we may not stock certain cheeses (ie, they don't fit our criteria of artisan) and are proud of that.

5 We love having feedback about the changing taste and appearance of the cheese and will pass that on. We talk about cheeses never being 'set', that they can change, and that is what is exciting about them.

6 We have printed up tasting cards for our customers so they can make their own notes as they work their way through our cheeses.

INTRODUCING BELTON'S RED FOX FAMILY

Belton Farm's popular Red Fox is now available in three distinctive variants, all sure to maintain the modern classic's best-seller crown

Made using carefully selected starter cultures and a unique recipe developed over many years, Belton Farm's Red Fox family offers a decidedly different proposition to the British cheese market – welcoming new customers to the world of territorials.

An aged Red Leicester with a cunningly unexpected crunch, the classic Red Fox boasts a complex blend of sweet, savoury and nutty flavours. It stands out on the cheese counter thanks to its eye-catching russet colour and charms customers old and new as a result of its watchful maturation, leaving the palate with a lingering flavour and desire for more.

Newly-launched Smoked Red Fox shares Red Fox's rugged mouth-feel with a satisfying crunch, and offers something new for the discerning palate. Hand-selected Red Fox cheese is cold smoked over oak chips for 10 hours to produce Smoked Red Fox, which offers an authentic, delicate smoky flavour that pairs perfectly with its well-balanced sweet, savoury and nutty notes.

Meanwhile, White Fox – an aged White Leicester – offers cheese lovers something a little different within the British cheese portfolio. Its slow maturation provides a depth of flavour that is hard to beat and a versatility that is second to none, as well as a satisfying crunch.

Red Fox has been a staple of the cheeseboard for quite some time, and its impressive consumer awareness and engagement has been further driven with its very own TV advert which promotes Belton Farm's 'There's More To Cheese Than Cheddar' campaign. This message encourages customers to discover something new by experimenting with Red Fox in their recipes to ignite their taste buds. Alison Taylor, marketing manager at Belton Farm says, "Red Fox has been hugely successful, we have seen the brand go from strength to strength. The new naturally Smoked Red Fox delivers a new dimension to an already iconic cheese; a great addition to our portfolio of award-winning Great British Cheese."





> "The new naturally Smoked Red Fox delivers a new dimension to an already iconic cheese; a great addition to our portfolio of award-winning Great British Cheese"



CHEESE OF KINGS

Generations of cheesemakers have made Renard Gillard's Brie de Meaux worthy of royalty



The Renard Gillard dairy was created in 1886 in Biencourt sur Orge in the Meuse region. For the past 135 years this dairy, which was family-owned until 2000, has been proudly perpetuating traditions by making an exceptional Brie de Meaux.



The master cheesemakers at Renard-Gillard use their unique know-how, passed on from generation to generation, to produce cheeses of high quality worthy of the motto "Brie, king of all cheeses, and cheese of the kings".

Brie de Meaux finds its roots in medieval times, more precisely in an abbey in Rueil en Brie. It has pleased people through the ages and is now still displayed proudly on our tables, centuries later.

Originally produced West of Paris, Brie de Meaux-makers extended their milk collection area to East of Paris as well. The PDO territory goes from Seine-et-Marne all the way to the Meuse region, across seven departments.

"Brie de Meaux finds its roots in medieval times, more precisely in an abbey in Rueil en Brie. It has pleased people through the ages and is now still displayed proudly on our tables, centuries later"

Brie de Meaux goes through several steps of making and ripening, most of which are manual, which is crucial to make the best cheese possible. Ripened for a minimum of 28 days and handmade using a special Brie ladle, this cheese boasts a fruity taste with hints of hazelnuts.

Exclusively made of raw cows milk, Brie de Meaux is a soft cheese with a delicate white rind. It should be soft and smooth but never runny! It is often said that Brie de Meaux is best enjoyed at dessert, which is why it is consumed at the end of a meal due to its creamy and unctuous consistency.



HALLOUMI: THE CYPRIOT CLASSIC





INSTAGRAM @AMYSHEPPARDFOOD



Introducing YAMAS!, a best-selling cheese range which celebrates the best of Greek and Cypriot dairy



Halloumi cheese sales are set to grow further this summer, with BBQs, alfresco eating and garden gatherings being at the heart of all our social occasions due to COVID restrictions.

"Since COVID has come into our lives and restrictions to travel have been impacting us all, we have seen behaviour of the nostalgic consumer, inspired to create holiday cuisine at home to bring back memories of comfort and indulgence," says Rhian Kinman, senior marketing manager at Futura Foods.

Halloumi is a Cypriot cheese made from a blend of Cypriot cow, sheep and goat's milk in Cyprus. It is known for its high melting point which gives the cheese a springy texture and caramelised surface when heated, while the blend of milk gives the cheese a depth of flavour, making Halloumi cheese a perfect vegetarian alternative to meat and a must-have for any BBQ.

A trending cheese

Cultural fusion flavour pairings are on trend at present and Mediterranean fusion recipes are filling the food blogs and Instagram food inspiration, with a resurgence of cooking from scratch and experimenting in the kitchen invigorated by lockdown restrictions. Halloumi cheese has been on trend and in double digit YOY growth in the UK market for the last four years (Kantar World Panel January 2020). It has found its way onto many pub and restaurant menus, both centre of plate and as an accompaniment, with Halloumi fries being the star of the show in the last three years.

"The speciality cheese ingredients category is the biggest winner over the last 12 months, up by 30.5% in value (Nielsen – SPECIALITY CHEESE– Latest 52 weeks – we 10 April 2021), Halloumi is a key driver of this growth and retail sales are estimated to be £80M in 2021," explains Will Wake, commercial director at Futura Foods.

With the popularity of Halloumi set to soar in the summer months and beyond, stocking YAMAS! is sure to be a smart retail move. **futura-foods.com**



HALLOUMI'S AUTHENTICITY

Halloumi has a trademark level of protection in the UK and Europe, protecting the authenticity of the unique tri-milk Cypriot cheese. It means that the name Halloumi can only be used for Cypriot cheese made from Cypriot milk in Cyprus, throughout the UK and Europe. At the end of March 2021, a Halloumi PDO application was approved by the European Commission to be registered in Europe - this will support Halloumi further in the forefront of being authentic.

What does this mean for the UK?

As part of the Brexit agreement, the UK PDO registration scheme upheld all existing PDO before Britain left the European Union. Moving forward all UK PDO applications will need to be separately registered under the UK PDO registration scheme, actioned in the UK. In the meantime the existing trademark will protect the name, recipe and provenance.

> "Since COVID has come into our lives and restrictions to travel have been impacting us all, we have seen behaviour of the nostalgic consumer, inspired to create holiday cuisine at home to bring back memories of comfort and indulgence"

@specialityfood

A TASTE OF HISTORY

Renowned Swiss cheese specialist Walo von Mühlenen shares his passion for the stories hidden in each bite of cheese

Flower meadow cheese from pure untreated raw milk is a product imbued with centuries of tradition and heritage. While each cheese shares this history, it also tells its own story through subtle differences in smell and taste.

"When tasting cheeses, I immediately see green alpine flower meadows, with beautiful fat cows in front of me," says Walo von Mühlenen. "I can guess what the weather was like and even the mood of the cheesemaker. You can smell the open fire and sometimes the sausage hanging in the corner. These stories that the cheese tells fascinate me, and I want to pass them on."



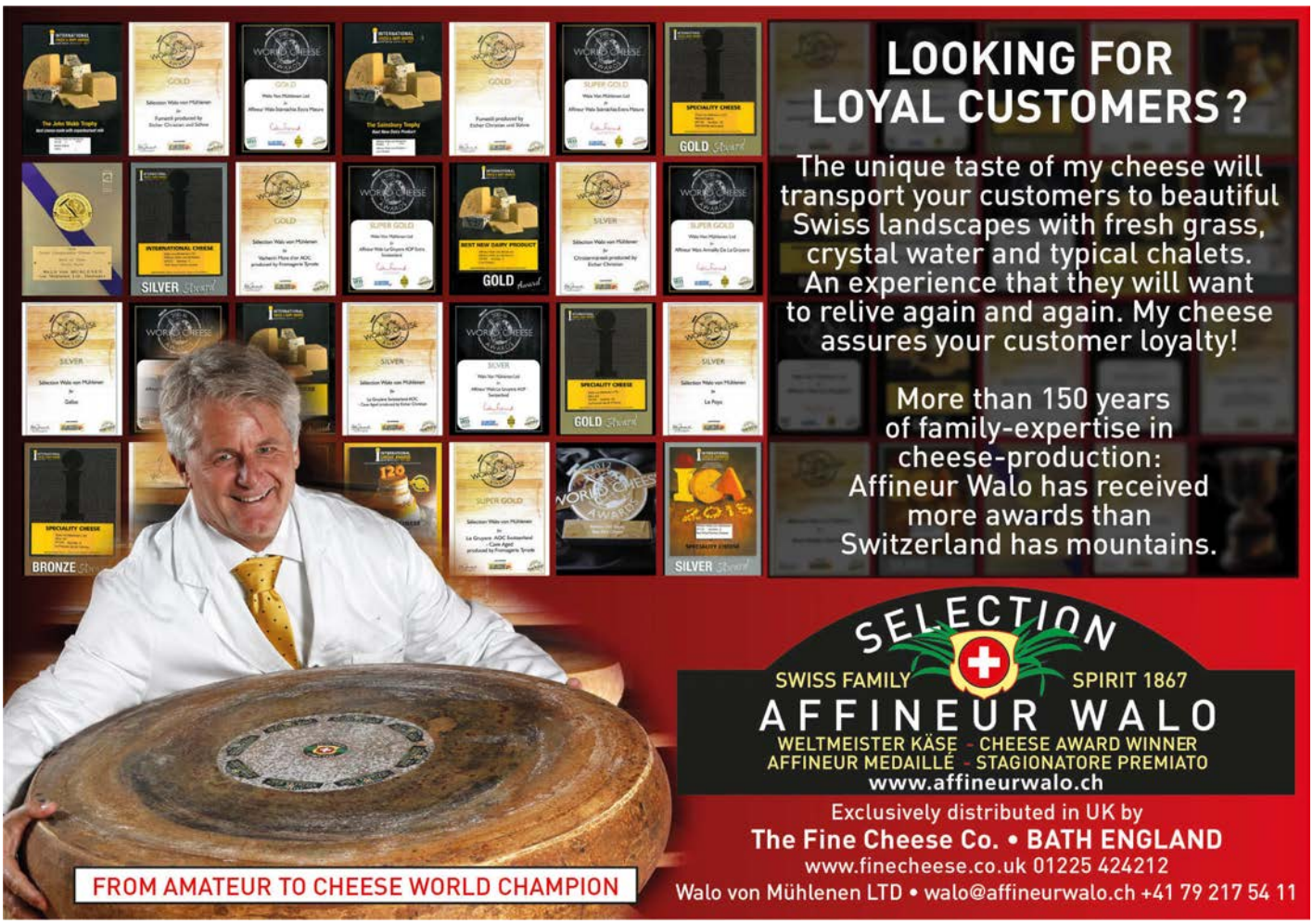
A selection worth exploring

Affineur Walo is the fifth generation to run his family business, and more than 150 years of cheese production have led to a specialised range containing traditional AOP products like Emmentaler Switzerland AOP and Le Gruyère AOP, as well as its own creations. "I have built up a selection of unique cheeses, and I also make sure that they are adequately presented, and that the sales staff know their stories," Walo says. Working with trusted UK distribution partner The Fine Cheese Co in Bath, he ensures that the stories of Swiss cheese travel far and wide across Britain.



> "If you want to differentiate yourself, you need to offer a unique range with a captivating story"

Consumers are seeking opportunities to explore new cheeses, Walo says – and successful retailers will take advantage of this. "You can compare it to cars," he concludes. "One does not really need a Porsche; a Dacia will do the job, too. But if you want to differentiate yourself, you need to offer a unique range with a captivating story. And Swiss cheese is ideal for this."



CONTINENTAL SHIFT

Do you sell your cheeses like a European? Relations with the Continent are rocky, but there may be lessons to learn...

When it comes to relations between Great Britain and Europe, 'it's complicated' just about covers things right now. Our nearest neighbours loom large in our food culture, sharing fabulous techniques, precious skills, and some friendly competition over who can really claim to make and sell the world's finest cheeses. What with Brexit and vaccine nationalism, and worrying friction around trade, relations with our Continental cousins have become strained, and yet there are lessons to learn from some of the oldest and finest cheese-producing regions of the world.

Enabling honest conversations

One measure that may put Europe's best cheese sellers ahead might be longevity. Britain's population of speciality cheese sellers have experienced dramatic plot arcs in the last few decades. With the post-war drive for productivity killing off small herds and the heritage recipes made with their superior milk, the scene was set for supermarkets to champion block Cheddar to a public who valued convenience and cost over quality. We have lived through a renaissance in micro dairies, artisanal cheese production and excellent cheese counters but are arguably still rebuilding consumers' skill at shopping small, while France's fine foods have enjoyed long decades of investment and are only now feeling the cold wind of homogenisation.

"I do think Europeans are better at talking," says cheesemaker Stacey Hedges, a well-travelled Aussie whose soft-rinded Tunworth and Winslade cheeses are made in rural Hampshire and sold into European markets by Neal's Yard Dairy. "The consumers there are more used to going into a shop and speaking to the specialist behind the counter. Brits need to overcome their timidity."

It's a fair point. National stereotypes aside, there's an unmistakable ebullience on display at fromageries, Käsereis, fabrica de quesos and formaggi of Europe. "Of course the Continent has so many countries that have different ways of selling," suggests Stacey. "But I think when the British look to Europe in terms of selling cheese they really look to France, where specialist cheese shops are on the decline. In the last few years we've seen some really fantastic independent cheese shops open in the UK, and they're really going great guns, but there is that timidity in the British public that we don't see in Europe."

Stacey's own favourite experience of French cheese is a market in the Loire where the owner of a small herd of goats sold her own cheese direct to the public. "People on the Continent are much more confident in asking questions and having a chat. Here, we've lost that because we're so used to going to supermarkets where you can do your whole shop without talking to someone. Supermarkets have had such a monopoly here for such a long time. It's about making that customer feel comfortable. Not feel stupid if they ask a stupid question. It's a two-way exchange. If the person behind the counter is at all patronising or snooty it's not going to make the customer feel too good, so I think it is about education on both sides."



WILLISTORE, AMSTERDAM

Reimagining 'speciality'

In the UK, the divide between farmhouse cheeses and commodity-

3 OF THE BEST...

QUATREHOME, PARIS
This Parisian fromagerie-come-affiner launched in its first incarnation in 1935; Marie Quatrehomme receiving France's highest honorary decoration for dedication to the ancient skills of cheese handling. Today the family has five outlets where France's famed cheeses get a house spin: Camembert marinated in calvados; Fourme d'Ambert pimped with figs and nuts; smoked Burgundy goats cheese spiked with Japanese whisky, and much more.
quatrehomme.fr

PAPPIKÄSE, BERLIN
The cultural melting pot of Berlin is reflected in this ever-changing selection of Alpine cheeses. The passion for the finest Swiss, Austrian and Italian cheeses shines through the shop's socials, which bang the drum for the Continent's most innovative and exciting cheese makers.
peppikaese.de

GIOLITO FORMAGGI, PIEDMONT
This small shop in Italy's gastronomic heartland is celebrated not for its size or heritage (though the family started selling local cheeses in 1920) but its range of local small batch cheeses, including rare exclusives from the region. The character of cheesemonger Fiorenzo Giolito lives large online, where chuffed customers document their buys.
giolitocheese.it

type blocks of territorial recipes has generally been pretty stark, giving the selections in our delis, farm shops and cheesemongers a clear differentiation from supermarket ranges. For Alessandro Keder, an Italian who moved to the UK 10 years ago to run Italian deli delivery business L'Incontro with his sister Roberta, this divide is problematic. "The main thing in England is that the finest cheese is quite hard to find," he suggests. "In Italy you don't need any special knowledge to find specialist cheeses; in England it's harder. Unless you're quite fond and know a bit about it, it'd be harder to find something good. In Italy we have a very, very strong focus on quality. Everything you find has to be a certain quality. Of course in England there is quality but it's a range. You have to hit on the right cheese, the right producers... whereas in Italy it would be pretty sure buying anything really."

It's reasonable to conclude that the exclusivity of our best cheeses, their niche appeal, is a USP, but the danger of appearing elitist – and limiting one's audience to specific economic groups – is real. "In Italy our culture is based around food, not class," says Alessandro. "An artisanal shop is run by the cheesemakers and they welcome anyone. They're proud of the products and they want to show them off; they don't care who you are. They would be so happy to take the time to show people around, explain how things are made. I went to a couple of factories for Parmesan in Emilio Romana and the people were so friendly. The passion they showed us; you could see in their eyes they were just happy for us to be there. That's important. If I'm no expert and go in a shop not knowing anything, if I feel unwelcome there I'm not going to buy, am I?" Perhaps in a country where quality is a given and the buying public from all walks of life have a closer relationship with the production of excellent cheeses, there's less of the formality that intends to evoke quality but can be experienced as the theatre of class. "In Italy we don't treat food like products but more of a passion. It has a value to us that's nothing to do with the financial value. The passion the producers have in their products – you can feel it. Maybe because there often aren't as many steps between producer and final consumer."



> "In Italy we don't treat food like products but more of a passion. It has a value to us that's nothing to do with the financial value"

Serving up surprises

At his Amsterdam store Willistore, cheesemonger Brad Vanstone benefits from the natural curiosity customers have around his range, which is entirely dairy-free. "We're very lucky because the people coming into our store ask great questions," says Brad. "We don't have to feed them the information because they bring brilliant points. We will proactively do things like taste cheeses, invite feedback and so on, but a lot happens organically. With cheese, taste is so important. Meat or milk is an ingredient, but with cheese it can be the centrepiece of a meal and people get protective over the quality. It's a hedonistic product, I think, so the bar is

THE VIEW FROM PARIS

Nathalie Quatrehomme, cheesemonger at family business Quatrehomme Fromager in Paris, share her perspective


NATHALIE QUATREHOMME

FRENCH SHOPPERS HAVE A REPUTATION FOR PAYING HIGH PRICES; DO YOU HAVE A ROLE IN ENCOURAGING THAT?

Yes of course. Our customers are willing to pay for more expensive cheese if they know the animals are treated well and housed outside, the seasons are respected, the cheese is well made... it's our job to explain how the cheeses we sell meet this. The French are used to having a budget for cheese, though interestingly you can have really good cheeses that are cheap or expensive. There's a point at which explaining doesn't help with prices, though. English cheeses have big transport costs, so our Shropshire and Stilton is really expensive. Even for us, a nice cheese shop in a nice neighbourhood of Paris where people have money, we can't sell cheese at just any price.

DO YOU THINK AFFINAGE IS TAKEN MORE SERIOUSLY IN FRANCE THAN IN THE UK?

It depends; it's not easy to have a proper cellar in Paris – we don't have a lot of space – not all shops mature cheese. I think many of our cheese sellers know its importance, though. We're not cheesemakers, but we can make cheese better. That's our job. Maturing it is the way to put our stamp on a cheese and add value.

What I think is easier in France is we have a lot of young cheeses. In the UK you have a lot of already old Cheddar, and many of your other cheeses have the same hard paste. What makes it easier for us is that we have more small, wet-paste cheeses. We also like to mature with alcohol but on small pieces; what we get from the UK are big pieces that are really hard, so not easy to mature.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SENSE OF WHAT BRITISH CHEESE SELLERS COULD LEARN FROM FRANCE?

Your shops are lovely; the outfitting of the cellars is good, the displays are really beautiful... I think what you miss is the variety of cheeses so that's more of a point for cheesemakers. You have a lot that are pretty much the same paste. It's changing – there are goats cheese and some sheep, but your culture is mostly around hard paste cow's cheeses. I think we benefit a lot from a real variety over here.

high. Sampling has been really tricky for the last year, so that's a struggle but our retail strategy long term is more sampling."

The experience of bringing plant cheeses into the world's oldest centres of dairy cheese is a valuable lesson in piquing interest among shoppers who may feel they've seen it all before. Cheese retail in Amsterdam is increasingly dominated by tourist traps piled high with vac-packed Gouda or Edam, so cutting through takes real skill. "That's a recent tourist phenomenon," sighs Brad. "Amsterdam has been absolutely hammered by cheese stores that have a load of Gouda that tourists will take away with them. But step outside Amsterdam, and across the country there are 1,000 specialist cheese stores. Gouda is 55% of all cheese sold in the Netherlands, and is a huge part of the Dutch diet, but you do see a lot more outside of Amsterdam. There are so many more markets here where people get the weekly shop."

Brad's also finding that messaging around sustainability is landing with consumers. "Our new products will have the emissions on each product," he points out. "It shows the consumer and also the industry: this is where we are at the moment. Yes, we want to improve but it's a starting point. For us that's really about shouldering our environmental responsibilities." It's also an important way to engage with younger shoppers keen to use their disposable income in a way that upholds their ethics. With passions around climate change rising globally, offering conscious consumers a solution to their concerns around food sourcing is a trend that's here to stay.

> "It's easy to look at Europe with rose-tinted spectacles. Particularly France where we like to imagine people still shop every day at the bakery, cheesemonger, butchers and so on... but there is a willingness to pay for quality"

Reducing polarities

"In the UK you have discounters or high-end sellers," says Brad. "In Holland everyone's price sensitive so we don't have that disparity. People expect to pay less for their foods; that definitely applies to markets. Germany even more so; Holland is kind of between France and Germany. People are tight on food budgets." It's the same story is Denmark, where quality is tallied with a close focus on value. Interestingly multinational co-operative Arla has played an important role in seeding native cheeses to compete with Italian and French imports, quietly working with cutting-edge chefs driving the new Nordic cuisine over the last two decades to create exciting new wave of homegrown artisanal cheeses that now populate indie retail cheese counters. "It's a big brother, or big sister approach," says Ulrik V Hansen, an outgoing senior sales manager for Arla based in Denmark. "As the loudest voice in the industry we were able to open doors for small dairies to create a nice environment for special cheeses to be developed in Denmark. It's been about creating a melting pot."

The project, Arla Unika, has pushed quality up the agenda for Danish shoppers – an outcome any retailer would be pleased to embrace. Reports that the food culture of 'old Europe' is being eroded by the march of supermarkets is troubling, but as long as the ancient cheesemakers and sellers of the Continent continue, there's good reason to look forward to research trips around cobbled markets and marble-countered malls when travel restrictions lift. "It's easy to look at Europe with rose-tinted spectacles," conclude Stacey. "Particularly France where we like to imagine people still shop every day at the bakery, cheesemonger, butchers and so on...but there is a willingness to pay for quality." Long may it continue.





CONTINENTAL CLASSIC

The much-loved Le Gruyère AOP has been a favourite with cheese aficionados for generations. Here's why

Centuries of expertise go into the production of every wheel of Le Gruyère AOP, the internationally-renowned cheese made in Switzerland's western cantons. In the region's family-run dairies, generations work together to maintain the level of quality that lovers of the cheese across the world have come to expect.

A heritage cheese

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

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

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

HOW TO SERVE

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

DID YOU KNOW?

Le Gruyère AOP and the town and region of Gruyères are named after a crane, orgrue in French, which purportedly landed on the shoulder of the warlord who founded the civilization. You can see depictions of it on the statues, flags, and doorways of every area village, and on several wheels of the cheese.



AGED TO PERFECTION

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

- Le Gruyère AOP Classic (aged six-nine months) is nutty, sweet and refined – delicious melted and popular with fans of mild cheeses
- Le Gruyère AOP Réserve (aged 10 months and up) is aromatic and full of flavour – its complex, mature flavours make it a popular choice for a cheeseboard
- Le Gruyère AOP can also be purchased aged 18 and 24 months – both options showcase a well-balanced but powerful taste

HOW TO CUT LE GRUYÈRE AOP



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

IT'S TEA TIME.
WITH EXTRA FLAVOUR.



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PROUD TO SUPPORT THE BEST

In its role bringing the best of British and European cheese to independent retailers, Rowcliffe's Clemency Hall range offers a vital service to the industry

In an ever-changing world, it's becoming increasingly vital to connect with businesses which not only supply the very best products for independent retailers to stock, but maintain quality and an unrivalled service whatever the circumstances. Rowcliffe is one such business.

Britain's leading importer and distributor of quality cheese and fine food since 1967, the Rowcliffe team has supported British cheesemakers and imported the finest cheeses from across Europe with aplomb. "We are thankful and proud to represent many of Britain and Europe's talented farmers and artisans as they bring forward cheeses with true provenance, hand-crafted skills and stories that our business is proud to keep alive," says Sunit Mehta, managing director at Rowcliffe.

As supporters of these producers, it's important that all retailers, regardless of store size, can tell the unique stories of these artisanal makers. Rowcliffe's Clemency Hall range makes it easy for *Speciality Food* readers to bring the best of British and European cheese to their customers; Rowcliffe hand-cuts the fine cheeses in its range to deli-friendly sizes and carefully packages it in the attractive Clemency Hall livery – updated in 2020 – which celebrates the quality of the cheese within. The pre-wrapped cheeses allow for longer periods of freshness for the cheeses, and each cheese is dated with its exact shelf life for ease of use for the end customer. Not only that, but in the event of a last-minute need Rowcliffe is ready to step up: "At Rowcliffe we offer next-day delivery where at all possible," says Sunit, "so your customers can enjoy Clemency Hall cheeses tomorrow." Rowcliffe's area sales managers are available to offer range consultation and support.

International network

Despite the twin challenges of Covid-19 and Brexit, Paul Heasman, inventory manager at Rowcliffe, explains that their ability to offer a wide range of internationally-sourced cheeses has gone unchallenged – meaning that retailers can maintain their range of fine European and British cheese unhindered. "It also has not changed our appetite to offer a broad range of EU sourced products," Paul explains.

> "Clemency Hall is exclusive to Rowcliffe and is focused on quality and heritage. Full of character, it is made by artisan producers for you, the independent retailer"

Rowcliffe takes its responsibility as the connection between producer and retailer very seriously – especially in the current climate. "This is crucial as it allows us to keep both parties appraised of current and future market conditions," says Paul. "Retailers keep us informed of shifts in customer demands which can be driven by a multitude of factors and can differ between customer outlet types." Working with a varied selection of makers means that the Rowcliffe team often offers a valuable service to producers, too. "We deal with a lot of small and EU producers who do not always have the tools to be close to the UK market." As some makers rely on Rowcliffe to be an invaluable connection between their work and the international marketplace, suppliers in the UK and EU are Rowcliffe's "eyes and ears in the domestic market," explains Paul. "They identify new opportunities and innovation to keep the range and offer fresh."

When working with fine quality products from across a number of borders, the relationships Rowcliffe has with its suppliers are vital; "Clemency Hall shows that we cohesively promote and champion cheeses from around the EU and UK with equal importance," Paul says.



WHAT'S IN THE RANGE?

Clemency Hall brings together some of the finest cheeses available in the UK and Europe. British cheeses included in the range include Clemency Hall-branded vintage waxed Cheddars and options infused with flavours such as herbs and black truffles, Keen's and Westcombe Cheddars, Lincolnshire Poacher, Rosary Goat Plain Buttons, Shropshire Blue and Colston Bassett's Blue Stilton.

Representing Europe in the Clemency Hall selection are: Brie de Meaux Rouzaire AOP, Comté, Gorgonzola Dolce DOP, Taleggio DOP, Parmigiano Reggiano DOP (aged for 24 months), Le Cret Gruyère AOP, Beemster Reserve Gouda PDO, Manchego and Feta DOP.

Rowcliffe's Clemency Hall range also boasts olives, antipasto and marinated semi-dried cherry tomatoes, all ideal partners for fine cheese.

Clemency Hall

Expertly Hand Crafted Cheese



Bring quality, value and exclusive cheeses to your counter, all while keeping it independent.

Rowcliffe's very own Clemency Hall artisan range is precision cut for you and carefully packaged into deli-friendly sizes.

Contact us to receive our brand new product list.

Call us on 01892 838999 or email sales@rowcliffe.co.uk

www.rowcliffe.co.uk



Premium Swiss Cheese from our Kaltbach Caves

EXPERTISE: Aged in our 22-million year old sandstone cave in Switzerland's Alpine valley where cavemasters have been refining cheese for more than 60 years.
NATURAL CLIMATE: The mineral–rich air in the caves provides the perfect conditions to produce cheese unlike any other.
TRUSTED BRAND: The Kaltbach brand gives consumers a trusted and recognisable family of cheeses to explore.

For more information on our range of Kaltbach cheeses and stockists, go to **www.emmi-kaltbach.com/gbr** or email **info.uk@emmi.com**



HOW TO BE A NEXT-GENERATION CHEESEMONGER

Cheese Buyer looks at how today's tech-savvy cheese retailers are blending bricks and mortar excellence with online sales channels

Covid-19 was a spark that ignited huge changes for the retail sector. Almost overnight, footfall dropped due to lockdown orders, limits on shop capacity forced customers to queue up and quickly grab what they needed and go, and a fear of catching the virus kept many consumers home, instead turning to online shopping.

Amid these sweeping changes in shopper behaviour, cheesemongers that pivoted quickly towards e-commerce, social media and virtual events found success, as a next-generation form of cheesemongering emerged. But this sudden growth of online sales channels doesn't mean bricks and mortar is over. "In my view, it's a multi-strand approach – not just selling cheese over a counter in a shop," explains Stephen Fleming of George & Joseph. "We see ourselves as facilitating people getting together over cheese, so that involves selling online to a wider audience than our shop can service, as well as offering events and educational courses to inform and entertain."

Balancing the online and physical aspects of cheesemongering is a skill that modern cheese retailers will need to master, and one that will open up opportunities for those that succeed.

E-commerce boom

Over the pandemic, Kevin Sheridan of Sheridans Cheesemongers was pleased to see his physical outlets across Ireland continuing to perform well. In-person shopping still fulfills vital services for consumers, he says. "For many people, it is one of the few opportunities for outside human connection. In addition with restaurants being closed, they are looking for new ideas and have more time and willingness to cook at home and experiment with new foods."

> "We see ourselves as facilitating people getting together over cheese, so that involves selling online to a wider audience than our shop can service"

While bricks and mortar cheesemongering is by no means going away anytime soon, there are more opportunities than ever before in online business. "We experienced a big shift to online last year," says Stephen. George & Joseph's website has gone from accounting for about 5% of revenue to 45% over the last 12 months. "Previously, our website was mainly selling monthly cheese subscription boxes and tickets for our tasting events. We moved quickly to get our most popular products onto our website so customers could buy online during lockdown."

Kevin also saw an uplift in e-commerce sales, even as in-store demand remained strong. "We have been extremely busy with our online business, and we haven't found that it is competing with our traditional stores, but is another choice and layer to our service," he explains. "It suits some customers more than others and has helped us reach areas outside our normal physical presence."

While Kevin believes that some will move away from e-commerce as lockdown lifts, the door for digital sales will remain open. "Now that they have experienced the quality and the convenience of the service, they will keep it as an option."

Digital presence

As well as promoting online cheese sales, next-generation cheesemongers have found success in expanding their digital presence. For some, this took the form of increased activity on Facebook or more posts on Instagram as social media became a vital tool to stay in contact with customers. The Cheese Shop Nottingham owners Rob and Webb Freckingham found that videos posted to

4 TIPS FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Patricia Michelson of La Fromagerie offers her expert advice:

1. **CHOOSE A SUBJECT THAT YOU KNOW ABOUT.** Think of four or five cheeses that go well together. Pick cheeses that can be talked through in a progression of flavor and texture and have nice stories.
2. **PLAN THE UNBOXING.** In your head, go through how you want the customer to open that box. Make sure your cheese is nicely wrapped, and include tasting notes, as well as notes on how to look after your cheese.
3. **SET HOUSEKEEPING RULES.** When you dial in, introduce yourself and a few little housekeeping tips, like 'turn off your microphone when I'm talking, and when you want to ask a question, either put your hand up or put a message in the box'.
4. **RUN A PRACTICE SESSION.** Stopping and starting and umming and ahhing does not go well in tutorials. You've got to know your subject and your cheese inside out. Detailed preparation, good notes, and then you're off!





HOW TO SUCCEED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA



Svetlana Kukharchuk of The Cheese Lady shares her three top tips for beginners:

JUST GET STARTED.
"I'm a very private person when it comes to my social media, but I understood quite early on when I started this business that I needed to be on social media. The more I've gone on, the easier it's got."

TRUST YOURSELF.
"At first, I outsourced social media to another agency, but I felt like it wasn't working for me. Even though they were a professional marketing agency, I thought, 'maybe I'll do better myself because at least I know my product'."

KEEP LEARNING.
"I try to learn from wherever I can. If there are any courses or free webinars, I take advantage of those to learn more."

social media were a simple way to spread the word about the artisan cheeses in their shop.

"It's very difficult to explain a taste on a website," Webb explains. Over the cheese counter, drumming up sales is straightforward when customers can taste a sample of the cheese on offer, but online he found words weren't doing their cheeses justice. To get a step closer to the in-store experience, they use video to show cheeses off and talk about tasting notes and pairings.

Elsewhere, others sought to build customer loyalty online through tools such as newsletters. George Mewes, who runs George Mewes Cheese, found newsletters to be the perfect way to communicate with and educate customers. The shop's weekly newsletter has more than a thousand subscribers, and includes information about the latest cheeses, as well as offers and other announcements. "It's been very, very positive for us," George says. He finds newsletters to be a valuable way to share his passion for farmhouse cheeses. "People love to hear and read about the products. We do everything possible to get our message out there about the products that we sell."

Virtual events

Another string in the bow of a next-generation cheesemonger is the ability to adopt new technologies and use them to their advantage, such as with virtual tastings. "We started doing cheese tastings over Zoom, which began as a replacement for our usual monthly in-store event. But we have also found a demand for private and corporate tastings on Zoom," Stephen says. "One great advantage is that we can have guest speakers in the Zoom events that would have been much harder to do with our real-world events."

"We are also very busy with virtual tastings and events," adds Kevin. "This has been a great way to reach into people's homes and to provide a night out where there are no restaurant evenings possible."

Virtual tastings filled the void for consumers' craving social events, and not having to rely on proximity meant that cheesemongers could welcome participants from further afield than for typical in-person events.

For newcomers to virtual tastings, Andy Swinscoe of The Courtyard Diary says the key is keeping things simple. "People are just after a fun experience." He suggests running themed events in order to generate repeat bookings. "Use a specific topic that you can drill down on, whether that be French cheeses or Italian cheeses, to vary your tastings a bit more." If a tasting is particularly popular and sells out, Andy will run an identical tasting a week or two later to make the most of his material.



KEVIN AND SEAMUS SHERIDAN, SHERIDANS CHEESEMONGERS

Finding balance

For the next-generation cheesemonger, finding a balance between physical and digital is the key to success. When Stephen first introduced a greater online offering, he admits that this was a challenge. "At first we had to reduce our shop hours to give us time to get all the online orders together, but after a few weeks we had streamlined the process to allow us to open fully at the same time." He suggests that cheesemongers who are hesitant about making the move to online start small. "We put out 20 best selling cheeses online first, then added others over time."

Technology can be used to produce reports that detail exactly what is needed each day to fulfil orders. "When we started using route planning software we halved our delivery times," Stephen continues. And remember that nothing is ever set in stone, he says. "Keep reviewing and improving your processes so things keep getting more efficient over time."

Fundamental changes have occurred in consumer behaviour over the last year which have opened up new doors for cheesemongers. Every shop will find success with a different mix of online and in-store selling, but the key to being a next-generation cheesemonger is being open to new technologies and finding what works best for your shop.

TASTE THE TERROIR

Dedication to great cheese has led Maison Monts & Terroirs to the top of their game

Monts & Terroirs is a company working on a human scale with firm cooperative values.

Since 1945, Monts & Terroirs has forged special links with producers in Franche-Comté who share its commitment to quality cheeses, while respecting tradition, people and the environment.

The business is made up of dedicated men and women who are able to convey their expertise and passion at every step of the chain, and stands for:

Respecting traditions, the regional diversity of its land, and animal wellbeing are values it has held since 1945.



What's in the range?

There's a selection of classic French cheeses within the range, including Comté, Morbier, Raclette, Emmental and Gruyère – all made of 100% raw milk, which preserves the richness of flavour these cheeses are known for, as well as the unique aroma of the regions in which they are created.

The PDO Comte sold by Monts & Terroirs is characterised by a surprising level of richness, thanks to the dedication of its makers. Each wheel is unique and develops a different aromatic profile to the next, meaning that the cheesemakers pay special attention to each and every wheel in their care.



Each wheel is ripened using the traditional hot ripening process for at least six to 18 months, following the expertise of Monts & Terroirs' master cheesemakers, and as the ripening process progresses, the rind becomes darker, the cheeses' springy texture becomes firmer, and its light and floral aroma develops to be increasingly powerful, fruity and smoky with spicy notes.

> "The PDO Comté sold by Monts & Terroirs is characterised by a surprising level of richness, thanks to the dedication of its makers"







ONE FOR ALL

Through its most challenging months, Shepherds Purse continued to find ways to support its team, customers and suppliers

For North-Yorkshire-based artisan cheesemaker Shepherds Purse, 2021 brings an end to the cheese industry's Covid-19 crisis and a starting point for recovery. Like all cheese producers, the pandemic has been a challenging time – according to Caroline Bell, MD, it's been the most difficult period in the company's history since its founding in the late 1980s.

Neither industry-specific crises, such as the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001, nor wider economic downturns have produced such a shock to the system. "The challenges came from the radical shift in the market as a result of the lockdown," Caroline explains. "Rapid change is always disorientating, and for it to happen in such an emotionally charged environment with so much fear inherent in the situation made it even more so."

As a small, family-run business with a team of 35, Covid has been felt on all fronts. "From supporting our team and their individual and family needs, to doing our best to support our suppliers and customers," says Caroline, "it's really been challenging. But we've risen above it, and I'm proud of how our team has pulled together and supported each other and our wider work family over the past 12 months."

Lending a hand

How did the team at Shepherds Purse react during those difficult months? "It called for empathy, communication and calm," Caroline says. "Staying grounded and reducing the situation to the things we did have control over and trying to handle those things well." And there were plenty of areas where Shepherds Purse excelled. The team worked to reroute products and stayed in close communication with customers and suppliers throughout the pandemic, and they also spoke to as many people as possible across the industry to find out who needed help and what they could do.

This supportive mindset saw Shepherds Purse launch Fettle, a Mediterranean salad-style cheese that was created to help the struggling sheep milk industry. Caroline says events like the launch of Fettle were "extremely important to morale".

"They gave us, as a team, energy, as we felt we were able to create something that would help our suppliers survive and manage the risk that we were taking in doing so. The support from our customers was nothing short of exceptional – it gave us a huge boost," she adds. Best of all, Fettle was a success from the perspective of Shepherds Purse's sheep milk producers, as a lifeline to help them continue selling milk through the pandemic.

Delivering excellence

For the remainder of the year, Shepherds Purse will continue to work closely with customers and suppliers through the cheese sector's recovery and towards a brighter future. "It's still going to be challenging as the country opens back up and we aim to deliver the same level of excellence we maintained throughout the crisis, but we are working closely with our customers and our suppliers to manage the supply to areas of the market that are reopening," Caroline says. After having learned to cope with change and uncertainty over the past year, Shepherds Purse is well positioned to build on these months of hard work to achieve its ambitions.



> "I'm proud of how our team has pulled together and supported each other and our wider work family over the past 12 months"

DIGITAL PIVOT



"This period has accelerated technological and digital trends," Caroline says. "They have been amplified by the crisis. There is great promise in this change, however we must all scrutinise the details to ensure that the changes being delivered match with delivering a future that we want our children and our children's children to flourish in."

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TASTE THE DIFFERENCE

While dairy products may be staples, there's a lot more to them than supermarket shelves would suggest. Opt for the best for a top-selling USP

While independent fine food retailers are designed to be a cornucopia of speciality food and drink, from the exotic to the downright innovative, there's something to be said for stocking the basics – but doing them really, really well. Lockdown proved that shoppers will come flocking to indie stores if they sell the produce they want to buy, be that indulgent but affordable treats or daily necessities, and dairy produce such as yoghurt, milk and butter offer the perfect opportunity to tick all boxes in one fell swoop.

New formats

Kent-based food hall Macknade has not only invested in great quality dairy but has explored the opportunities provided by zero-waste formats, too – and it's reaping the rewards. The retailer has taken on a refillable service for Otties yoghurt, a local-to-them family business. "This yoghurt is absolutely beautiful and comes from a local family-run business based in Kent's Elham Valley," explains Stefano Cuomo, managing director of Macknade. It's not only the quality of the product that's going down well; the move to environmentally friendly retail formats is proving popular with customers. "Like us, Otties is pushing the boundaries to reduce its environmental impact on the world," explains Stefano. "It's really important for us to support the growth and reach of local businesses and this is just one example of the relationships we cultivate. Not only are we confident that we are offering a premium yoghurt product to our customers, it is also helping us to meet our own goals of reducing the packaging and waste produced by the business. Not to mention that it tastes incredible."

Cater for discerning customers

Dairy produce is a food type in which it's relatively easy to tell the difference between high-quality and low-level options, so by giving fine food customers an alternative to the cheap milk, yoghurt and butter readily available in supermarket chillers you can be confident that it will be lapped up. "There's a vast difference between low-quality, mass market dairy and independent, smaller producers," begins Shaun Young, founder and director of The Estate Dairy. Founded in 2016, The Estate Dairy offers a range of artisan dairy products in the heart of North Somerset's Chew Valley. Their milk, cream, cultured butter and Greek yoghurt are all sourced from small family farms which operate on free-range farming systems – a badge fine food shoppers are not only familiar



STEFANO CUOMO, MACKNADE

> "There's a vast difference between low-quality mass market dairy and independent, smaller producers"



with, but prepared to spend more for. "It's highly important that consumers have more access to artisan lines across all food sectors," he says, a prospect as old as the hills for delis, farm shops and food halls, but often forgotten when it comes to basic dairy products.

As with every sector in the food industry, quality dairy comes with its markers worth looking out for so retailers and shoppers alike can sort the cheap from the gold top products. "A key thing would be traceability, being able to go to the farm from where the milk is sourced is hugely important," explains Shaun. Consumers appreciate the effort independent retailers go to in explaining the story behind the food they're buying, what makes it different and why it's worth spending more for quality, and dairy is no different. "Produce with unique and differentiating processing methods are the ones to look out for, and milk that's unhomogenised would be a good example of this," says Shaun. When it comes to justifying the unavoidable price hike of high-quality dairy products over low-cost options, education at retail level is key. "Quality comes at a significantly higher cost," Shaun says. "The quality of raw materials and how they are sourced and produced are important factors to consider," and thankfully the deli shopper is primed to learn more. If staff manpower doesn't allow for in-person explanation at the display or point of sale, try some static displays. Blackboards explaining the provenance and story of the items displayed next to them could go down well, and avoid any 'how much?!' moments.

RETAILER INSIGHT

Daylesford Farm has long sold quality dairy products to discerning customers. Here, Peter Kindle, head cheesemonger and manager of the creamery at the business's farm, explains more.

How important is it that discerning consumers have access to good quality dairy produce?
There are several ways to approach this as, when a consumer chooses to buy good quality organic dairy, it doesn't just benefit their health, it benefits the planet. Intensively farmed milk might be cheaper to purchase but it is to the detriment of the animal's health and longevity. Good quality dairy should be produced sustainably, protecting the welfare of the animals. As for the consumer's health, choosing organic means they can be sure that the product won't be associated with antibiotics or any heavy chemicals linked to mass farming that may pass from grass, to cow, to milk.

What should independent fine food retailers be looking out for when stocking quality milk, butter etc?
Look for organic and look to avoid products of high-intensity farming, which focuses on economics rather than ethics. Moreover, avoid homogenisation. The technology for homogenised milk became widespread to make it more marketable to consumers. Unfortunately, the process also effects the milk's proteins and when you mess with the protein, you mess with digestibility.

Some customers may question the higher price of quality products, comparing costs to supermarket products. How can retailers explain the difference in 'value'?
The cost monetarily might be low but environmentally, the cost is enormous. There are big moral consequences by buying things as cheap as we can. Reducing production costs invariably brings a need for artificial chemicals and fertilisers which continue to degrade the environment and it's not sustainable.

What's the ratio of 'classic' to 'innovative' products? How did you land on this balance?
Our range covers milks, butter, yoghurts and cheeses, many of which are award winning. Our cheeses are made using traditional methods and we have some classics like the Single and Double Gloucesters, plus our own creations like the Adlestrop, Penyston and Baywell. We started producing kefir several years ago, which has been hugely popular. There are three flavours: Organic Milk Kefir, Organic Blueberry & Açaí Kefir and Organic Ginger, Turmeric & Honey Kefir. As a sustainable farm, we like to close the loop and avoid any wastage which is how we came to sell our Buttermilk. It is made from the liquid left behind after churning the cream for butter and creates a creamy, tangy, low-fat, high protein and versatile ingredient.



PETER KINDLE, DAYLESFORD FARM

> "When a consumer chooses to buy good quality organic dairy, it doesn't just benefit their health, it benefits the planet"



A BRIGHT FUTURE

South Caernarfon Creamery is looking ahead with an exciting expansion to house its array of delicious cheeses

An award-winning farmer-owned North Wales cheesemaker has embarked on a £14.4 million investment programme as it plans a massive increase in production at its Pwllheli headquarters.

South Caernarfon Creameries was founded in 1938 with an initial 63 producer-members and has now grown to be Wales's premier dairy co-operative. The UK's biggest farmers dairy co-operative with over 130 members, aims to increase annual output to 22,000 tons of cheese by 2024, up from their current 16,000 tons.

Work has started on the expansion which will create 30 new jobs by 2024 taking the workforce up to 160.

Under construction are new facilities for milk reception, additional cheese production and packing lines and a new whey processing facility as well as improvements to the plant's environmental and energy performance.

Nick Beadman, SCC commercial manager, said, "This represents continuing growth by the company which will only further increase production of our existing portfolio of cheeses, including our award-winning half-fat and lighter cheeses."

"Our advanced packing site delivers cheese in all the forms that are required by major supermarkets, whether block, grated or sliced.

"We are already making these different products but this latest investment will give us even greater capacity and what is so important to us is the quality which earned us 80 awards at cheese shows in the UK and Europe in 2019.

"Our aim is to keep on delivering that quality while increasing our production by 6,000 tons and this investment here enables us to do that."

Award-winning cheeses

That quality is at the heart of what they do as over the years SCC's products, led by its popular Dragon Cheese brand, have won a host of awards at the UK's most prestigious food and agricultural shows and have represented Wales inter-nationally at the Salon du Fromage in Paris.

They have also done that increasingly sustainably with a Welsh Green Dragon award after continued improvement in its campaign to reduce its carbon footprint including buying new, more energy efficient lorries for its milk tanker fleet.



The planned growth won't compromise quality but it is projected to increase its demand for Welsh milk for their plant at Chwilog, near Pwllheli, as turnover ramps up from its current level of £60 million a year to over £85 million.

SCC, set up over 80 years ago, has remained on the same site where the latest investment follows on from £11.5 million spent in 2016 on a new state-of-the-art production and packing plant.

That's where their extensive range of cheeses is matured, cut and packaged for the UK, where they supply all the major supermarkets, and the international market as well as village and corner shops across Wales.

Alan Wyn-Jones, managing director said, "This will make us even more resilient, efficient and sustainable in what is a ferociously competitive industry.

"We have grown strongly with our sales doubling in the last five years from £30m to £60m and had reached the current production capacity of the plant.

"We are not interested in growing for growing's sake. Our plan is all about making us even more competitive and profitable and so more resilient and sustainable for the future.

"As a dairy farmer cooperative that directly leads to more competitive and stable returns for our farmer members from across North and Mid Wales, thus enhancing the competitiveness of the Welsh dairy sector and farm viability."

> "Our aim is to keep on delivering that quality while increasing our production by 6,000 tons and this [expansion] enables us to do that"

WHAT'S IN THE RANGE?



SCC produce an impressive range of cheese with their Welsh Cheddar varying from a creamy Mild variety through to Mature and rich Vintage versions. Their Welsh Slate Cavern-Aged Cheddar is matured underground in the famous Llechwedd Slate Caverns while they also produce American-style Monterey Jack and traditional Caerphilly.

Dragon

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dragonwales.co.uk

CHEESEBOARD HEROES

Great cheese deserves excellent accompaniments, so we have gathered some of the very best chutneys, biscuits and preserves to make your cheeseboard selection sing

As much as we all love a delicious cheeseboard, with a variety of hard, soft and gooey options to tempt customers' tastebuds, no cheese retailer is complete without a delicious array of products to level-up their offering. From chutneys and pickles to biscuits and preserves, there's a whole host of products out there to choose from, and sometimes it can be difficult to choose which options would work best for your customer base. To help you decide, the *Cheese Buyer* team has collated some of its absolute favourites; read on to find out what products will give your cheeseboards a tasty boost.

HAWKSHEAD RELISH



Westmorland Chutney is Hawkshead Relish's original Chutney and is still one of their best-sellers 20 years later. It is a traditional dark, rich chutney packed with dates, prunes, apricots and ginger, making it the perfect farmhouse chutney. From cheeseboards to a hearty stew, Westmorland Chutney is certainly an all rounder. The Hawkshead Relish range of over 100 preserves are handmade in the English Lake District in traditional open pans. All products are made with natural ingredients and are gluten-free, nut-free and suitable for vegetarians.

hawksheadrelish.com

TRACKLEMENTS



The quintessential fruit cheese – gorgeously jammy and rich with a sharp tang, Tracklements' Quince Fruit Cheese is the perfect partner for Manchego and sheep's cheeses. The quinces used to make this fruit cheese are sourced from a farm in Somerset where the quince trees are nestled within an apple orchard. Like all items from Tracklements, this Quince Fruit Cheese has been produced to high environmental standards; its ingredients have been responsibly sourced, its packaging is eco-friendly, and its production has been powered by 100% sustainable energy.

tracklements.co.uk

DRIVERS PICKLES



Drivers Pickle's fabulous Cheese Lovers Pickle Gift Box makes the perfect year-round gift for the foodie in your life, and is so attractive you don't need to wrap it! This gift box contains three of their best selling accompaniments to any type of cheese, including: Traditional Farmhouse Pickle, chopped and mixed vegetables in a traditional sweet brown pickle sauce; Real Ale Chutney, apple pulp, onions and mixed fruits combined with a real ale chutney; and Mini Onions in Honey & Balsamic Vinegar, mini silver skin onions pickled in honey and balsamic vinegar.

pickle-lovers.co.uk

STAG BAKERIES



Featuring a choice assortment of their favourite savoury biscuits, the Stag Bakeries Cheeseboard Selection Box is ideal for gifting, sharing, or livening up any cheeseboard. This selection box offers a variety of flavours and textures, and the mini cocktail size of the biscuits makes them ideal carriers for a wide variety of cheeses. It contains four varieties of water biscuits – Original, Parmesan and Garlic, Chilli, and Rosemary – along with traditional Scottish oatcakes and wholemeal biscuits, ensuring that there is something for every menu and occasion.

stagbakeries.co.uk

PETER'S YARD



Peter's Yard combine Swedish tradition with British craft to create their hand-baked sourdough crackers. Each batch begins with their 45-year-old sourdough starter, which is fermented for 16 hours for a unique, subtle flavour. Their baking tradition is inspired by 16th century Sweden when crispbread was baked at harvest time and preserved on a pole over fires to keep crisp during the long, dark winter months. Made in their craft bakery in London, every product in their range is crafted without shortcuts or artificial ingredients for award-winning flavour and crunch.

petersyard.com

STOKES SAUCES



A scrumptiously sticky pickle, this is made with Stokes' own unique blend of vegetables in a sweet and spicy sauce made with molasses and black treacle. Not only is it delicious, but it's dairy-free and gluten-free, as well as being suitable for vegans and vegetarians. Plus, like everything in the Stokes range, Sticky Pickle is made at The Old Stables in Rendlesham, Suffolk by passionate and experienced staff using slow cooking methods and only the best ingredients which have been sourced responsibly.

stokessauces.co.uk

ISLAND BAKERY



Island Bakery's oatcakes are the perfect platform for a chunk of cheese. Made from whole oats, oatmeal and extra virgin olive oil, they're nourishing and versatile with a uniquely rugged texture. Slowly baked with care in unique wood fired ovens, there are three varieties to choose from: Original Organic Oatcakes; Black Pepper Organic Oatcakes and Three Seed Organic Oatcakes. They're ideal for environmentally-conscious consumers, too, as Island Bakery uses organic ingredients and utilises local sources of renewable energy to produce its range.

islandbakery.scot



THE DUTCH CHEESE EXPERIENCE

Treur Kaas, a specialist in maturing premium cheeses, is continuing to build on its award-winning range

From the farmer all the way to the consumer, there are many important steps along the cheesemaking process. Treur Kaas, a family business founded in 1955, deals with perhaps the most critical turning point in this journey: maturing and caring for the cheese.

Dutch cheeses are Treur Kaas' speciality, and over the decades the business has evolved, first under the guidance of founder Evert Treur, and later by second-generation Daan and René Treur. The family built its own warehouse and soon became experts in sourcing and ageing premium Dutch Gouda cheeses, which it supplies to wholesalers, retailers and speciality shops around the world.

Setting the standard

Working with artisanal cheesemakers and farmers, Treur Kaas has curated a range of fine cheeses, spanning organic and herbed varieties, as well as cheeses made of cow's, goat's and sheep's milk. One of Treur Kaas' best-known cheeses is Bon Repas, an authentic Emmental made from thermised milk and prepared at the Van Erk family farm in Berkenwoude, The Netherlands.

Bon Repas matures for eight weeks in Treur Kaas' warehouse. The cheese is filled with characteristic holes, or eyes, that are created by propionic acid bacteria, which is added during the preparation stage. Through the maturation process, the bacteria create large holes in the cheese, which grows into an oval shape. The end result is a unique farmhouse cheese with a particularly soft and creamy character and sweet, mild flavour.

The latest cheese to join the Treur Kaas family is Mèkkertaler, an organic Emmental goat's cheese. The desire to add such a cheese has long been growing in the business, and Mèkkertaler is indeed a success story. It joins Treur Kaas' existing Mèkkerstee range, which all use milk from the De Mèkkerstee farm in Ouddorp. The farm cares for a herd of around 600 goats which are free to roam and provide three litres of fresh goat's milk every day.

The goat's cheese line includes a variety of ages and herbal variants, such as those enhanced with fenugreek, honey clover, Italian herbs and more. Treur Kaas' goat's cheese line has also recently been restyled, so in addition to a delicious taste, the cheeses will also look beautiful on the shelf.

> "Each of Treur Kaas' cheeses is made by specially selected farmers, and every one has a unique story behind it"

A varied range

In addition to these two unique Emmental-style cheeses, Treur Kaas has created a product range full of variety, including farmhouse cheeses matured for varying lengths of time and traditional herbed cheese. These include fresh, summer varieties as well as firmer cheeses for colder days. They range from the spicy – with options like Villa Szechuan, which is made with Chinese Szechuan peppers – to the fragrant – like Villa Ortica, which includes nettle, chives, parsley, onion and garlic – and the smokey, such as Villa Fumé.

Each of these cheeses is made by specially selected farmers, and every one has a unique story behind it, which is just as important as its quality and taste. At Treur Kaas, each of these elements is given careful attention and consideration over the maturing period, resulting in a high-quality range with something for everyone to enjoy.

NEW EXPORT LINE

A brand new line of export cheeses is in the works from Treur Kaas. The range will feature farmer's cheese, herbed cheese, Gouda cheese, goat's cheese and more, and all styled in a singular look. It will be shown for the first time at the 2021 International Cheese and Dairy Awards.





MÈKKERTALER

Thanks to pure craftmanship, this delicious goat cheese with beautiful round eyes has been created with a special recipe. A goat cheese with a perfectly balanced taste, characteristic and with a light sweetness, combined with the mild taste of our goat cheese.

Treur Kaas - www.treurkaas.nl/en
Contact: willem-janoudehinken@treurkaas.nl

TREUR KAAS
The Dutch Cheese Experience

HOW TO FUTURE-PROOF YOUR BUSINESS

Ellen Manning discovers that versatility is the key to success for forward-thinking cheese retailers

The past 12 months have been a rollercoaster ride for the cheese industry, with the coronavirus pandemic affecting everyone from cheesemakers to retailers across the board. The industry has weathered the storm in many ways, adapting, pivoting and hanging on for dear life to survive in the most difficult of circumstances. In some ways, it hasn't just survived, but thrived. According to figures from Kantar, cheese sales in the UK soared last year, with a 15 percent increase in volume and 17 percent in value. Cheese outperformed the overall uplift in food and drink sales and according to the figures, 1.2 billion more cheese occasions were enjoyed in-home – up 20 percent on 2019. If 2020 taught us anything, it's that our love of cheese is going nowhere, even when forced to buy online rather than from a deli or enjoyed at a restaurant or pub. But with customers discovering different ways to get their fix, where does that leave cheese retailers? While the Covid crisis may have shown that the British cheese industry can survive the toughest of situations, it also showed consumers that they don't necessarily need to shop in person. While delis, farm shops and retailers are no doubt overjoyed about being able to finally reopen their doors to eager punters, another key coronavirus lesson is that you never quite know what's around the corner, and resting on one's laurels just isn't an option.

For Stephen Fleming, owner of award-winning George & Joseph in Leeds, the key to future-proofing your cheese retail business is to never rely on just one avenue. "Somebody said to me you're never going to make a living from cheese just by selling cheese over the counter in a shop, and I've always remembered that," he said. While a shift to online selling has proven helpful in the past year, other revenue streams include live sales, events and education and learning. "I think future-proofing is very much about not being dependent on one source of income and saying, 'what can we do around cheese that's different?' We've always done events and while they have been more virtual-based we're hoping to get back to them, and we're also working on a fourth strand which is about learning stuff and teaching people."

CHEESE SALES IN THE **UK** SOARED LAST YEAR, WITH A **15 PERCENT** INCREASE IN VOLUME AND **17 PERCENT** IN VALUE

SOURCE: KANTAR

Maximising the cheese experience

While many customers – and businesses – embraced the online side of things out of necessity, Stephen agrees that cheese is often



about experience, whether it's learning about it being made, tasting it, serving it up to guests at the end of dinner, or as part of events. While many of those events will have to be outdoors this summer, when it comes to cheese he's optimistic that there's an appetite for people to get out and enjoy the experiences they've missed. "My personal feeling is that people want to get back out and do something different," he says, and that means he's willing to try to cater for that. With that in mind, he's already looking at restarting some of their previously successful collaborations with other local businesses such as a local wine bar and finding ways to hold them, even if in a slightly different format, this year. "I see collaborations as a great opportunity. It's a great way for us to widen our audience – even if it's with a business that you think would have a similar audience, you always find there's people who know them but don't know us and vice versa. It's great for both of us."

Whether through events or just walking into a shop and buying your cheese in person, Andy Swinscoe from The Courtyard Dairy agrees that offering a great experience for the customers who walk through your door is the secret to success


RUSSELL ALLEN, AUBREY ALLEN

when it comes to cheese retailers. "When people come to you that experience is really key. What is better than coming to your shop and how can you make that experience absolutely perfect. Anyone can write a paragraph on cheese for a website – or copy someone else's paragraph – but to talk about it as a person and have that human connection is something that can't be matched online. Yet it's also something that's frequently not done well in farm shops or delis. They don't have that link, they literally just serve the product. It has to be more than that."

Invest in your team

For Andy, that connection is achieved by investing in your staff – something that he thinks is vital when it comes to futureproofing your business. "It sounds simple but too many people employ staff but don't actually invest in them. You need to concentrate on training your staff – train them on the detail of cheese, the detail of ordering and actually give them responsibility." It may be difficult to let go of the reins, but by allowing your staff to stand on their own feet and take responsibility, you're actually safeguarding your business, he says. "If your business is going to grow you need it to be less reliant on you. The easiest way to future-proof your business is to make your staff less reliant on you. It's incredibly difficult, especially if you built that business from day one, to let go of certain parts of it but it's important. It's actually more of a risk to be in a situation where only you know how to do certain things." For Andy, allowing staff to grow means you build a team that is not only diverse in terms of people's skills, but is also well-rounded and complete. Similarly, and in a similar way to Stephen's love of collaboration, it's important as a retailer to support local cheese makers and work with them, building relationships over time."

All about product

Experience is important, as are events and all the other avenues when it comes to selling cheese. But ask any cheese retailer and they will agree that one thing matters above everything else. The product itself. For Russell Allen, managing director at Aubrey Allen, which stocks an impressive selection of artisan cheeses at its cheese shop in Leamington Spa as well as




STEPHEN FLEMING, GEORGE & JOSEPH

offering cheese boxes delivered to your door, ensuring success means offering something that people can't get anywhere else – which includes the product itself as well as the experience when it comes to buying it. "I have been doing this since 2001 and obviously things are very different now, but in many ways the same things apply. In the early days people would come in and say, 'do you have any Edam?', or maybe Cambozola, or 'do you have any mild Cheddar?'. It's not necessarily about being exclusive but it's about understanding that it doesn't serve you to try to stock things that are supermarket staples if you're serious about being a specialist. It's all about product." If the focus of independent cheese retailers is the product – and not always cheese that we can get our hands on easily elsewhere – some may point a concerned finger at suggestions that cheese sales in the UK to the EU have plummeted, while imports of European cheese have also dropped. However, those with a more optimistic view may choose to focus on suggestions that such problems have seen a growth in interest in British cheese, with consumers keen to support their local producers. Either way, perhaps education is key – something Russell said is important when it comes to staff and customers. "Educate your clients about what they are buying, make sure that you have staff who know and understand what they are selling," is his advice. That element of education means whether it's British territorials that a retailer is selling or something a bit more specialist, by making sure customers not only taste them but are told the story behind them by staff who are in the know, they are more likely to keep people coming back for more.

One trick up Russell's sleeve is offering "one-offs" that you can create some excitement around. "You might get, for example, a three-year-old Comté. You get it, you promote it, maybe do a video, put it on your social media and offer it on a Saturday as a special. Focus the whole of your energy on that one product for, say a week. That works really well. You can get your team behind it, you can talk to clients only about that cheese, you create an impressive display around it to give that real wow factor. Then make sure that every client who comes in has a taste of it. It's all about the tasting, it's all about giving them the product. Then they'll come in another time and say, 'have you got any of that cheese that you sold before?' You won't, but they will have confidence in you to try whatever else you have." Andy has a similar suggestion – focus on a different element each month to create excitement and engagement. "Don't just open the shop, close the shop, and sell the cheese. Focus your attention each month on a different thing. It might be a specific cheese, it might be seasonal, or it might be something like what makes the perfect Ploughmans. It can be anything, but it means you can change the display, do all sorts. People seem to be prepared to do things like that for Christmas with things like Stilton, but I think you should do it every month, all year round."

> "The easiest way to future-proof your business is to make your staff less reliant on you. It's incredibly difficult, especially if you built that business from day one, to let go of certain parts of it but it's important"


ANDY SWINSCOE, COURTYARD DAIRY

Consider the small details

The work doesn't stop there. For Russell it's about all the small things that help customers offer their own experience to friends, family and guests when showing off the cheese they're sharing with them. That means labelling things well, with all the details of the cheese to not only tantalise them into buying it, but also giving them the right "bragging value" when it comes to introducing that perfect Pecorino or terrific Tunworth to their guests with all the information they need. Then there's the way everything is displayed in your shop – right down to understanding the psychology around what makes people actually take the plunge and make a purchase. "Even in quiet times, make sure your counter is full," he advises. "In quiet times like January people know they're going to be quiet so they don't fill the counter, then they sell less. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Psychologically people buy off full counters, so even if it's using bigger cheeses or arranging things differently, make it look full. Keep stocking your range and hold your nerve. Even in quiet times there are people who want to buy, and if you're not careful you alienate them when you need them most."

Add all their advice together and it's clear that the consensus on future-proofing a cheese retail business revolves around a lot of hard work. The pivot to online may have saved many cheesemakers and cheese retailers – and undoubtedly will play a part in their survival in the future, but selling cheese is clearly inextricably linked to the personal experience that so many top retailers offer. From building up relationships with cheesemakers to collaborating with other businesses, stocking the right products at the right time and in the right way, as well as pursuing different avenues when it comes to offering that all-important experience to customers, there's no such thing as sitting back and relaxing – especially not when it comes to your in-person offering. "That's part of the future-proofing experience," says Stephen. "Not just sitting and saying, 'we've had a great year selling online, what's next?', but instead coming up with new ideas, thinking about how to do it." For him, the government's lockdown roadmap wasn't just a handy set of dates to put in the diary, but the basis for a marketing plan to move his retail business forward and come up with new ideas and plans for the future.

Future-proofing any business isn't easy – or guaranteed. But given cheese retailers are still going strong despite everything 2020 and 2021 have thrown at them, you could argue they've got cause for confidence. After all, if they can survive that, perhaps they can survive anything.

A THOROUGHLY MODERN BLUE

Inspired by the runaway success of Oxford Blue, Baron Robert Pouget has created a Continental-inspired twist on a classic



In the spring of 1995, when Baron Robert Pouget first produced Oxford Blue, the choice of English blue cheeses was limited to Blue Stilton and half a dozen others – all semi-hard and from long-established makers. There were certainly no semi-soft English blues rivalling the popular Continental blues such as Cambozzola, Dolcelatte and Fourme d'Ambert. Since then a plethora of new blues have emerged from counties throughout Britain, and the latest blue to launch into the UK fine retail market is Oxford Dolce: a rich and creamy blue boasting a sweetness akin to the Italian icon, Gorgonzola Dolce.

Oxford Blue: where it all began

When the now multi award-winning Oxford Blue was first produced the intention was to supply Oxford's colleges and restaurants, but it was soon picked up by London retailers such as Fortnum's and wholesalers such as H&B. Waitrose soon followed and within 12 months of a very low key launch, sales had reached three tons a month.

Robert explains, "We were very surprised with how quickly it took off because it was one of the first English semi-soft blues which attempted to compete with the European blues. Oxford Blue has quite a sharp flavour and when it matures it gets creamier, more salty and pungent."

So how is Oxford Blue fairing after 27 years in production? "Remarkably well," says Robert, "and even though sales to the catering trade and the airlines took a sharp dip during the period of lockdown, sales to the independent sector have shown a marked increase."

A new cheese for discerning cheese lovers

The English blue cheese market is now enhanced by a new blue from the same stables. "For some time we've been working on developing a new blue cheese to sell alongside our Oxford Blue," says Robert. "Oxford Blue has a very English flavour in the style of a soft Stilton, but I wanted something sweeter, more akin to Gorgonzola. We worked on creating our new cheese and when we thought we had it about right we called it Oxford Dolce, and started selling it last year."



Not only does The Oxford Cheese Company's newly extended range offer flavours to suit every taste, it supplies shoppers and retailers alike with a modern format, too. "With both Oxford Blue and Oxford Dolce available as 150g pre-packs," continues Robert, "we've hit a completely new market and increased sales accordingly."

When it comes to wine pairing it always comes down to personal choice. "Personally," says Robert, "I would always choose a full bodied red, such as a good Burgundy or red Rioja. I'm a man whose long experience has taught me that with cheese you can't beat a good red! An exception would be the Oxford Isis, where a chilled glass of Alsace does the trick."



> "Personally, I would always choose a full bodied red, such as a good Burgundy or red Rioja, to partner with Oxford Blue and Oxford Dolce. I'm a man whose long experience has taught me that with cheese you can't beat a good red!"

AN ACCLAIMED RETAILER



Not only is The Oxford Cheese Company the home of such iconic British consumables as Oxford Blue, the award-winning Isis and now Oxford Dolce, but it is a must-visit retail destination, too. Located in Oxford's famous Covered Market, it has been trading since 1983 and has earned a reputation as one of Britain's premier specialist cheese sellers.

Separate from the wholesale and production arms of the business, which are located a few miles outside of Oxford, the retail site nonetheless forms an integral part of The Oxford Cheese Company's service.



A TASTE OF THINGS TO COME

With the launch of its innovative new product, Barber's offers retailers a glimpse into the UK's food future

Since 1883, Barber's has been a family-run cheesemaking and dairy farming business in the Somerset village of Ditcheat. While its roots are based in traditional cheesemaking processes, this year it brings a brand new innovation to the field: Cheese Pops, a vegetarian-friendly and zero-carb cheese snack made using Barber's renowned Cheddar.



"The focus of the business is the production of premium quality rindless block Cheddar using traditional natural mixed 'pint' starter cultures as well as other British hard territorial cheeses," explains Charlie Barber, commercial director at Barber's.

The Barber's range of speciality cheese was impressively expanded with the acquisition of Dorset-based Ford Farm cheesemakers in 2010; the portfolio now includes Block Cheddar, Cave Aged Traditional Cheddar Truckles, Red Leicester, Double Gloucester, Wensleydale, smoked Cheddar, goats cheese, and savoury and fruit additive cheese blends.

> "The future is all about keeping the cows, our farmers, all our teams of people in the business and our customers on the path to be the best... Maybe some other flavours of cheese pops as well!"



Introducing Cheese Pops

New to the Barber's offering are Cheese Pops, a creation of an eponymous Dutch business who had been producing popped cheese using Gouda and Emmental and had wanted to add a Cheddar variant to the range. "They found that Barber's Cheddar consistently made by far the tastiest Cheddar cheese pops of all the different Cheddar recipes they tried," explains Charlie. The Barber's-branded Cheese Pops are indeed tasty; simultaneously light, moreish and intensely cheesy, they provide all the richness of a great Cheddar on the go.

What made heritage cheesemaker Barber's move into the snacking arena? "Simply tasting how delicious the product was," explains Charlie. "We thought we should use our brand to create a premium snack that provides people with another great option alongside nuts, crisps and scratching to enjoy with a drink." A delicious accompaniment to a beverage either at home or at the pub, Cheese Pops offer a modern snacking experience for consumers of all ages.

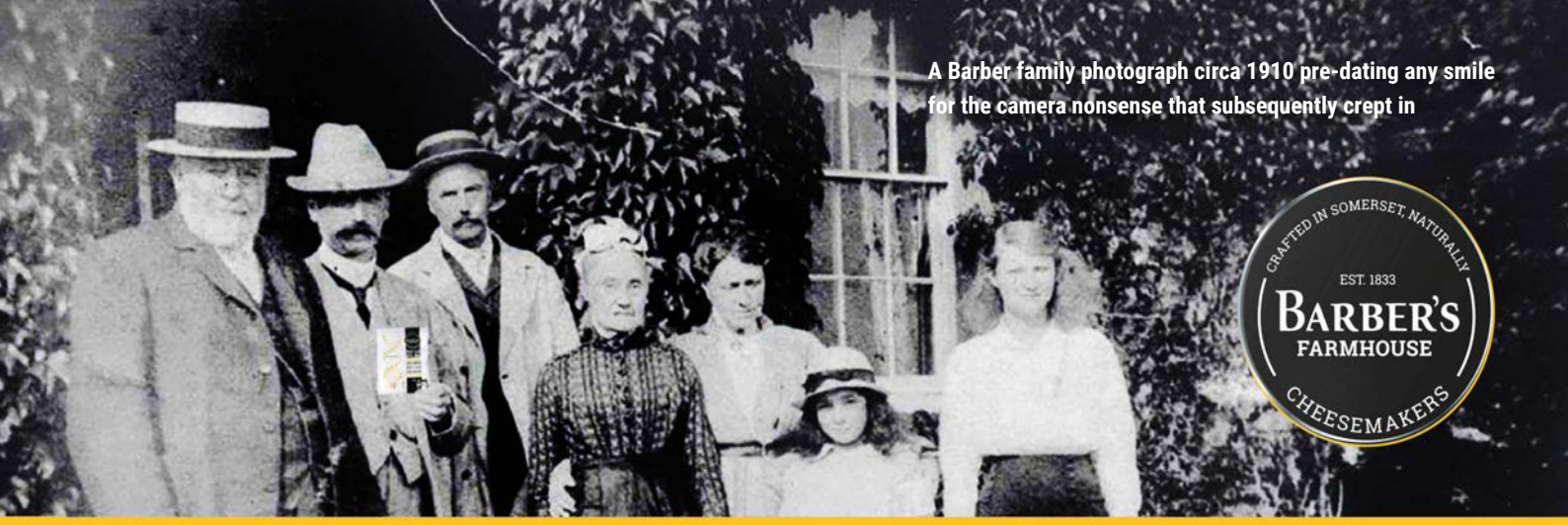
Health-aware snackers are well-catered for with this new launch, too. "There is the added bonus that they are carbohydrate-free and high in protein so can support people on low carb diet regimes," says Charlie. "The product delivers real flavour and authenticity, so we feel it should appeal to people facing the challenge of restricting what they eat and satisfying their taste buds."

What's next?

The future of Barber's will be music to the ears of cheese-loving independents. "We have a mission to be the very best dairy farmers, milk buyers and producers of British cheese that we can be," Charlie says, "so the future is all about keeping the cows, our farmers, all our teams of people in the business and our customers on that path... Maybe some other flavours of cheese pops as well!"

HOW TO SERVE

Thanks to their punchy Cheddar flavour, crunchy texture and versatile size, Cheese Pops can be enjoyed in a variety of ways. Charlie advises serving them, "sprinkled on top of salads (caesar is a good one), or crushed and sprinkled on top of oven-baked dishes." As well as being delicious served crouton-style with meals, Cheese Pops are ideal for health-conscious snackers and are perfectly suited to accompanying a beverage – try alongside a hoppy IPA or refreshing white wine.



A Barber family photograph circa 1910 pre-dating any smile for the camera nonsense that subsequently crept in

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