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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the April issue of *Speciality Food*, where we're gearing up for a busy show season.

IFE set London's ExCeL alight yet again, and as always it was great to see the domestic and international fine food industries connect. The Farm Shop & Deli Show is next on the agenda, and you'll find an in-depth preview of what to expect within this issue. I was honoured to once again be on the judging panel for the retailer awards, and am excited for the moment the winners are announced at the show.

Also in this issue you'll find a host of valuable insider intel and inspiration, from the trending food and drink products to stock now – including Coronation-ready treats, frozen desserts and coffee, and much more besides – as well as deep dives into the value of seasonal events like Easter and picnics.

Plus, we explore the role location plays in the success of an indie retailer, and the joys of cheeses from the North from the people who know it best.

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Spring Budget 2023: The industry reacts

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt has announced the annual Spring Budget, but the independent retail sector was left feeling undervalued

Jeremy Hunt, the current chancellor, delivered a 'Budget for growth' on 15th March, which he insisted would provide support for people amid the cost-of-living crisis, bring down inflation and introduce a pathway for economic growth.

Key measures included an extended energy price cap, meaning average household bills will stay capped at around £2,500 a year, a freeze on the 5p fuel duty cut which has been extended to April 2024, and 30 hours of free childcare for parents of younger children.

The chancellor also announced a new investment zone scheme where eligible areas will get £80m of funding each to use for skills, infrastructure, tax reliefs, and business rates retention. However, independent retailers were left feeling somewhat let down by the announcement, as they weren't included as part of the plans for growth.

Little support for indies

While the budget announcement laid out some sensible measures such as extending the energy price cap and the 5p fuel duty cut, as Simon Jones, owner of Forest Deli, put it, "In real terms, there appears to be nothing of any value to small businesses from the budget."

This is something national chair of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Martin McTague, also felt as he argued, "The distinct lack of new support in core areas proves that small firms are overlooked and undervalued. Budgets are about tough choices, and with today's billions of pounds being allocated to big businesses and households, 5.5 million small businesses, and the 16 million people who work for them, will be wondering why the choice has been made to overlook them."

Emma Jones, founder of Enterprise Nation, was also left disappointed

at the lack of support for SMEs. She told *Speciality Food*, "This budget was touted as one for growth but there's not much that small food and drink businesses will have taken from it. What we would have expected to see were measures on how small businesses can be supported to boost digital adoption to increase efficiency and productivity, how Brexit freedoms could be used to help them sell their products to the world, and more support for the high street.

"This was a budget for the high-growth industries and returning workers. It makes the case for the government to see businesses as distinct; those with 0-10 employees who make up the majority of the economy, and the rest. Enterprise Nation remains firmly on the side of start-ups, micro and small business

owners who are looking at what a national budget can do for them," she added.

Lack of economic relief

With independent businesses still facing high costs across the board, the measures announced will have done little to offer relief.

Instead, "The budget ignored the impact of energy costs on businesses", according to Andrew Goodacre, CEO of British Independent Retail Association. "The support available to businesses will largely disappear from April, leaving them to deal with expensive contracts from high energy prices.

"This will be particularly difficult for food businesses that use refrigeration, cooking appliances etc., and who consequently have higher energy costs. Given the pressure on consumer spending, it is likely that these businesses may have to accept lower profit margins until the actual cost of energy is reduced," he added.

This is understandably concerning for SMEs, as Simon explained. "The great unknown is when and by how much electricity is going to come down in price, as this is having a huge impact on small producers and shops as the energy costs for many are now higher than rent. We all try and absorb what we can, but without any firm ideas on reductions,

it gets harder not to pass all the costs on. The small change in beer duty will have little if any impact as the costs of production and ingredients have already made brewing a very expensive business which we know from all our local breweries.

"I would have liked to see some firm details and actions on enforcing the Electricity Providers to lower prices as soon as possible which has a direct impact on every business rather than windfall taxes which don't actually help businesses or our customers."

This is a sentiment also felt by Mark Kacary, managing director of Norfolk Deli, who added, "Personally, I see very little to get particularly excited about. No major help for businesses in terms of energy, some help by not raising the energy threshold for households might give people a little more confidence to go out and spend, but I think for that to happen we'd be waiting a bit longer."

While the budget didn't offer the support the industry expected, according to Simon, "The key for all smaller businesses is to keep standards up – making shopping a pleasure not a chore and keeping value for money and service at the core." Focusing on the USP of independents is what will help to keep the high street alive, even despite the lack of economic support.

“The distinct lack of new support in core areas proves that small firms are overlooked and undervalued”

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*Source: IRI Value sales 52w to 23/2/2023



The taste of Oxford, with a kick

Baron Pouget's Original Oxford Sauce is a spicy table sauce created by Baron Robert Pouget de Saint Victor – the founder of the Oxford Fine Food Company – in his Oxford production kitchen in 2000 to celebrate the millennium.

The Oxford Fine Food Company was already well-known for its Oxford Blue Cheese when Pouget created the local delicacy, a result of a year spent perfecting a condiment to perfectly complement the cheese. Its ingredients are a combination of molasses, tamarind, anchovy, dates, garlic and bird's eye chillies. The final recipe came more or less by accident when the decimal point on the chilli content was misread at the time of conception. The result is a terrific sauce, appreciated as a cooking

ingredient or as an accompaniment to hot and cold dishes, which bears virtually no resemblance to the traditional derivative of Cumberland Sauce referred to as Oxford Sauce by Escoffier.

"I'm passionate about a really good sauce but couldn't find anything I really liked", says the effervescent entrepreneur. So he made his own and hired a renowned sauce consultant, Geoff Austin, to help him create a natural sauce with no colouring, additives or preservatives.

The sauce was sold to restaurants and delicatessen in and around Oxford and then taken up by Waitrose across Oxfordshire after one of its buyers discovered it.

The sauce is "a slightly sweet but also salty, strong sauce that would complement meat, fish, cheese and more, including a Bloody Mary. Thicker than Lea and Perrin's, but stronger than HP Sauce and tomato ketchup. "It is a brown sauce with a hell of a kick. Very special."

An expert in quality table sauces sent a flattering email to the team, reading: "As the former production manager of HP sauce I speak with some experience. Recently in the Oxford area and found this sauce in a deli. Fantastic. Well done, superb product. Don't know why in 12 years there I never found this as a comparison taste test YOU HAVE MY VOTE ON WHAT A POTENT BROWN SAUCE SHOULD TASTE LIKE!! Ken Jacques."

Farm shops and markets see increased demand in 2023

According to the Farm Retail Association, farm shops and markets are experiencing a spike in demand, partly due to the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables in some supermarkets.

Due to supermarkets rationing some fresh produce after bad weather in North Africa and Southern Europe hit crops, the Farm Retail Association (FRA) has reported a brighter outlook for customers of farm shops and farmers' markets.

Farm shops and farmers' markets, with their focus on locally produced produce, are still able to offer customers a full range of fruit and vegetables, thanks to their short supply chains.

Among the farmers' markets benefiting from increased footfall is Lavenham in Suffolk, which

has seen a 30% increase in visitor numbers since the start of the year. Fresh vegetables, supplied by Sunshine and Green, a four-acre farm in Cavendish, have seen a real increase in sales.

Emma Mosey, chairman of the Farm Retail Association and co-owner of Yolk Farm, commented, "The current issue really underlines the importance of being able to buy local produce. Our members sell vegetables that they either grow themselves or sourced from nearby

growers so when there are issues further afield, they can step into the breach. Not only does this reduce food miles but it also ensures support for the smaller businesses which play a vital role in food production in the UK.

"Farm retailers are also happy to pay producers fair prices, even in times of hardship. They always put both the customer and the producer at the heart of what they do, and because of this, their shelves and customer's baskets are full."

“ Our members sell vegetables that they either grow themselves or sourced from nearby growers so when there are issues further afield, they can step into the breach ”

Trending cuisine: East Asian

Flavours from the likes Japan, Korea and Vietnam have been rolling out at the speed of a bullet train.

Traditional flavours are making way for more unknown dishes from Japan, Korea and Vietnam to take centre stage in 2023. Think Gochujang, Bibimbap, Yakisoba and Bahn Mi.

These are the sort of grocery products and dishes that can give shoppers a taste of what they're missing as they enjoy fewer meals out. According to Upuli Ambawatta, brand manager for world food at distributor Empire Bespoke Foods, "We'll see more shoppers exploring Thai, Vietnamese and other less established cuisines which shoppers are keen to explore."

Indeed, Empire Bespoke Foods recently revamped their Nem Viet

brand to make its Vietnamese meals kits plant-based – thus appealing to a greater audience.

Korean food was the most popular cuisine on social media, according to a new report from adventure holiday travel firm The Bucket List Company. The company looked at levels of engagement on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Reddit, and Korean outperformed every competitor, including such global successes as Italian, Mexican, Japanese, and Indian.

Chefs like Maangchi on YouTube and @thekoreanvegan on TikTok have risen to internet stardom by making Korean dishes – and fine food retailers can cash in on Gen-Z and millennial shoppers by stocking quality ingredients to recreate their recipes at home.

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“2023 early days report”



**JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES**

In the course of history there have not been many works of art, ballads, poems or sculptures devoted to January and February – especially by speciality food retailers.

It is not easy to wax lyrical about an empty shelf, a wet weekend or a quiet till, or enthuse about staff members using up their holiday entitlement.

In particular, the prospect of January and February 2023 have seemingly struck terror into the general consciousness with news of recession, cost of living crises, war, strikes and distressing personal stories succeeding in subduing any sense of optimism.

One commentator recently referred to the atmosphere in the UK as being a feeling of a national paralysis.

So, as I write this article having completed eight weeks of this turbulent year, how is it actually going on the shop floor?

The post-Christmas landscape for speciality food is somewhat bleak and brutal so the fact that we were in January currently trading 12% up on last year would in normal times be seen as a result.

Yet as inflation in food has been recorded by Statista in January at 17% compared to 4% last year this puts matters into perspective.

Also, it can be argued that January 2022 was not a ‘normal’ month with Covid still around, nor was 2021 for that matter. Perhaps going back to the last ‘normal’ year of 2019 would be a better comparison.

This shows that we are 21% up in sales for the same month but as the cost of labour, energy,

packaging and almost everything else has also gone up significantly it is hard to derive any measure of comfort from this.

Rather than looking purely at sales referring to customer counts could be a better measure of performance.

In this regard we are 8% up compared to the number of customers we had in 2022. But in 2022 we still had Covid restrictions in place with social distancing and other constraints, so inevitably the 2023 figures should be higher.

Going back to 2019 again in terms of customers we have recorded that we are actually 220 customers down this year. At seven customers a day this is not as yet a crisis but not great news either, and shows that any growth suggested by the sales figures is nonexistent.

Moving on to February, has there been any change in fortune with days getting longer and the added bonus of Valentine’s Day to boost sales?

The problem with Valentine’s Day for us is that it does provide a welcome sales boost but usually occurs in half term week and is a two-edged sword. The day after, February 15th, is traditionally one of the slowest days of the year. The spark of romance in our sales has already gone out!

However, overall February has shown a healthier rise over last year at 22% up. I am not sure why to be honest. It could be the weather. It could be slightly better economic news. Also, customers are up by 13% on 2022 and even up by 1.5% on 2019.

It is too early to predict how the year will pan out, but there may just be the green shoots of recovery starting to emerge. Could the factor of the ‘speciality food niche’ be starting to kick in?

Anyhow, one important lesson from 50 years of retailing is to stop spending a lot of time trying to analyse sales patterns of the past (no matter how compelling) and start talking to customers in the present. That is where our future success lies.

“It is too early to predict how the year will pan out, but there may just be the green shoots of recovery starting to emerge. Could the factor of the ‘speciality food niche’ be starting to kick in? One important lesson from 50 years of retailing is to stop spending a lot of time trying to analyse sales patterns of the past (no matter how compelling) and start talking to customers in the present. That is where our future success lies”

Food and drink industry relieved by Northern Ireland Protocol agreement

Prime minister Rishi Sunak has agreed a deal with Northern Ireland to relax some Brexit rules and relieve some red tape for exporters.

The new deal aims to significantly reduce the number of checks, creating two lanes for goods arriving in Northern Ireland from mainland Britain. These are a green lane for goods that will remain in Northern Ireland, and a red lane for goods that may be sent to the EU.

Products going through the green lane would see checks and paperwork scrapped, while red lane goods would still be subject to checks. Bans on certain products like chilled sausages entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain would be removed, while Northern Ireland would also no longer have to follow certain EU rules, for example on VAT and alcohol duties.

GOOD NEWS FOR BRITISH PRODUCERS

The deal spells good news for producers and distributors in mainland Britain, as the proposed green lane will allow faster and less costly movement of goods to and from Northern Ireland.

In particular, this will benefit chilled and frozen exporters. Rupert Ashby, chief executive of the British Frozen Food Federation, explained, “For frozen food producers,

distributors and retailers which have faced difficulties since the Withdrawal Agreement, this marks the beginning of a positive new chapter.

“Frozen food has become an increasingly popular choice for consumers looking for high quality and affordable options in their weekly shop and I know that our members will seek to reach more of the Northern Ireland and EU markets through this renewed opportunity.”

Shane Brennan, CEO of the Cold Chain Federation, added, “There are important details that government will need to get right, such as paperwork requirements for the green lane and support for businesses in transitioning to the new systems, but today is a crucial and long-awaited milestone towards allowing the food industry to get on with the job at hand.”

MORE CLARIFICATION NEEDED

While the agreement is certainly a positive step forward after a tumultuous few years of Brexit chaos, exporters are still waiting for further clarification.

Rod Addy, director general at the Provision Trade Federation,

explained, “The requirement for special labelling for goods destined for Northern Ireland, designating them ‘not for EU’ will entail some disruption for food and drink producers.” He also warns that the trials and tribulations of Brexit are far from over as the current food shortages have evidenced, and the food industry should still be wary.

“We must also remember that while positive progress has been made over the past few days, Brexit is by no means done and hard work still lies ahead on the technical detail of EU-UK trade. Areas such as triangular trade, where EU products exported to the UK cannot in some cases be re-exported to the EU, and the target operating model for UK border controls remain big issues.”

Relief will come from more clarification on how exactly the new system will work, and exporters will be waiting to hear further news on this.

“We look forward to seeing the details of this agreement, and how it will provide a pragmatic and business-friendly solution that will ensure Northern Irish consumers can continue to enjoy the full choice of quality UK products, without facing higher prices,” Dominic Goudie, head of international trade at the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), concluded.

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“Be agile”



**STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE**

Focus on the core, protect cash, be agile... this has been our mantra as we navigate the choppy waters. To see weekly indicators highlighting solid transaction numbers and forecast-beating revenue in the early months of the year has been hugely satisfying, and more than that, has been seeing how the whole team has really upped the ‘productivity’ of our emotive SME.

Historically, I have often noticed amongst teams that any time the phrase ‘productivity’ is banded about it is immediately assumed that it is a simple binary standpoint – either you are productive or you are not! That if increased productivity becomes a voiced aim, then previously we can’t have been productive and so must have been lazy, not hardworking, unengaged... or any other number of pejorative terms and phrases that get slung around a shop floor!

Productivity has to be explained and bought into as a whole team objective, a mindset and system leading to the objective – ‘best community experience’, ‘greater EBIT’. We all have a deep love for Macknade and what it can do, but we need to continually assess whether we are approaching it in the best way, and even more so when the world is changing dynamically. What was productive yesterday may not be tomorrow – conversations around AI and Network abound! One for another day.

In tricky times it is easy to slip into a top-down approach – laying out a way forward, but not giving everyone the opportunity for full buy in, that is to say the correct level of autonomy to genuinely feel that their daily ‘moves and shakes’ help set and drive the course of the whole

business. Meaningful roles.

So we are resetting, and a key part of that is to engage more fully with the next generation. This is age agnostic, recognising new entrants in over the past few years now ready to stretch their wings, as this is where the energy and drive for the next 10 years will come from for Macknade and our sector more broadly. Again, top down, unengaged leadership not only reduces productivity through lack of true engagement, it misses the opportunity to allow the next generation of operators to shine and break through.

The second part of that mantra now kicks in: maintain clear frameworks, trust good people and create the space to let them take off. It comes full circle – they will focus on the core, they will protect the cash, they will be agile (innovate), and so the cycle goes on and the business flourishes. As a simple example of rebooting, our crack finance team put together clear, updated, simple and visual cashflow KPIs that have allowed each department, across the business, instant visibility of performance.

This ‘gamification’ of the business has allowed everyone to see how they can impact on our activity and Macknade as a whole – clear metrics, which are then discussed and strategized around, have revitalised teams. The sense of being part of delivering the objective of high-level vision and mission, with financial bottom-line achievement, is now blossoming!

There is still much to do with really making sure all feel engaged, but the effort put in collectively to make sure all are able to see the team results, challenge when we miss and celebrate when we hit is heading us all in absolutely the right direction.

Of course, it is good business hygiene, it is what we should be doing, what productivity is based upon... but so often in the flog of SME ‘firefighting’ the integrity and enjoyment of the P&L gaming is not shared and cherished!

Focus on the core, protect the cash, be agile... not only essential but fun when it engages everyone.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STATS

1.6% 50%

The Soil Association Certification’s *Organic Market Report 2023* revealed that the UK’s organic market is now worth a record £3.1 billion, driven by 1.6% growth in sales in 2022, with shoppers spending almost £8.5 million on organic products every day in the UK. This demonstrates that there is still strong interest in sustainable shopping. In fact, the organic market has enjoyed its 11th year of growth despite the cost-of-living crisis, record inflation, heightened levels of uncertainty arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine together with its impact on world food markets and energy prices, and the on-going challenges caused by Brexit.

Figures released by the Centre for Retail Research have shown that almost 50 shops are closing a day, including larger stores as well as smaller businesses. Big retailers are usually the pull for consumers hitting the high street, and it is often once these shoppers are already in the area that they stumble across independents. In this way, their disappearance could negatively impact small businesses. As a spokesperson for the British Retail Consortium (BRC), explained, “Large retailers can play a crucial role as anchor stores in town and city centres, attracting customers to the high street and benefitting smaller shops and cafés.”

31.7% 10.1%

The food-to-go market increased by 31.7% in 2022 to £21.4bn, according to the *UK Food To Go Market Report 2023* by Lumina Intelligence. The picture is even brighter for 2023, with forecasts it will grow a further 4.1% to £22.2bn. In this highly competitive market, Lumina notes that grab-and-go, sandwich and bakery and coffee shop/café channels are driving growth in the food-to-go market. One opportunity is snack-to-go purchases, the report notes. Travelling and commuting snacking opportunities have increased by 4.3% year on year, as Coronavirus travel restrictions have lifted and the number of workers commuting to offices has increased.

Wild weather in March dealt a blow to high street retailers, with weekly footfall on high streets dropping by 10.1% according to MRI Springboard. Footfall was hit hardest in the North and Yorkshire, with a -8.8% drop compared to 2022. Diane Wehrle, insights director at MRI Springboard, commented, “All destination types were impacted, but inevitably – with their exposure to the elements – by far the worst affected were high streets, with a decline in footfall from the week before which was double that in shopping centres and four times as great as in retail parks.”

“Large retailers can play a crucial role as anchor stores in town and city centres, attracting customers to the high street and benefitting smaller shops and cafés”

NEWS IN BRIEF

CONSUMER ESSENTIALS AT RISK OF ENDANGERMENT

The Fairtrade Foundation has warned that everyday essentials including bananas, coffee and cocoa could be at risk of becoming ‘endangered’ due to climate change. Fairtrade Foundation CEO, Mike Gidney, commented, “Today, climate breakdown is making it harder and harder to grow food crops, making our food security ever more vulnerable. There is a risk that farmers will have to stop farming. That’s why it’s important that farmers and workers receive a fair price that will enable them to invest in transitioning to sustainable and climate resilient ways of production.”

UK FOOD AND DRINK EXPORTS BREAK RECORD

According to the Food and Drink Federation, there has been a huge resurgence in food and drink exports as most categories now exceed pre-pandemic levels, reaching a record £24.8 billion. Exports to Europe rose 22% to £13.7 billion – with fast-growing economies like Vietnam nearly doubling compared to this time last year. For the first time, exports to non-EU markets have broken through the £10 billion barrier, hitting £11.1 billion. Chocolate remains the UK’s top food export, worth £824 million, but it is likely that next year this could be overtaken by cheese, which achieved rapid growth in overseas sales throughout 2022.

UK TO JOIN WORLDWIDE COALITION ON FOOD WASTE

The UK is set to join the UN Food System Summit (UNFSS) Coalition on Food is Never Waste in a demonstration of commitment to drive action on the environment and tackle food insecurity on the global stage. By joining the international UNFSS coalition, which is committed to halving global food waste by 2030, the UK will team up with other world leaders, such as the USA, Italy and Australia, in tackling food waste at home and abroad. It will offer us the opportunity to share UK expertise and support other countries in their journey to reducing food waste and loss.

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Wednesday 29th March 2023 | 8:30 - 17:00

Barnham Broom, Norfolk

The East of England's new annual Food & Drink Conference. Join us for inspiring talks, informative workshops and unique networking opportunities!



Join the Food Innovation Cluster on Wednesday 29th March at Barnham Broom for the new annual Nourish: Food and Drink Innovation Conference.

The team are passionate about showcasing the local Norfolk and Suffolk food and drink manufacturing sector along with educating how businesses can innovate and grow.

There will be the opportunity to meet the buyers, learn about social food security, understand the Cluster, exhibit your products, hear from inspirational speakers and enjoy food and drink from local manufacturers.

The Conference is a celebration of food and drink innovation in the East of England and an opportunity for the food and drink business community to help shape the future of the Cluster in the future.

We are pleased to announce we have a group of excellent speakers and workshops confirmed, you will learn about the experiences of experts within the food and drink industry and be inspired to innovate, develop and grow your own food and drink manufacturing business.

For more information or to answer any questions get in touch with our Marketing and Events Coordinator, Charlotte Beach, c.beach@uea.ac.uk

Speakers:

- **Cassandra Stavrou, Founder of PROPER Snacks**
- **James Averdieck, Founder of Gü & Coconut Collaborative**
- **Hannah Springham, Founder of Farmyard Frozen**
- **Joseph Cordy, Head of Commercial at Paddy & Scott's**
- **Professor Andrew Fearne, Value Chain Management, UEA**

Workshops:

- **Alex Larter, UEA - Shaping the Cluster and its' membership to suit your needs**
- **Fergus Fitzgerald, Adnams - How to innovate and develop your food and drink products**
- **Gemma Crane, Mindset HR - How to get your first employee and create a positive work culture**
- **Professor Anne-Marie Minihane, UEA - Healthy nutrition and how to make your products healthier**

This Conference is a hybrid event, therefore, if you cannot travel down to Norfolk and make it on the day, you would be welcomed to join us virtually and celebrate from the comfort of your office or home.

Tickets for the in-person event located in Norfolk are going fast, so ensure you sign up via the QR code.

F•D FOOD INNOVATION CLUSTER



“Unlocking frozen opportunities”



MATT WHELAN
FIELD FARE

I'm a big Beatles fan. There's just something special and unique about their music. Take a song like Yesterday – covered so many times by a range of artists but no matter how they each tweak it or what new instruments they introduce to make it their own, the tune is always recognisable and reassuringly familiar.

So is the farm shop. Trusted, distinct and full of exciting twists and discoveries. In a time when the media is full of negativity and uncertainty, consumers take comfort in the warm, personal touch of the local farm shop. They delight in the unique, affordable treats and local products that they can discover on its shelves, whilst feeling reassured by its familiarity.

Shoppers have always counted on farm retail to represent quality and choice, which is key at a time

when trust in the supermarkets are at an all-time low. Many feel that they are supporting local businesses and producers when using farm retailers and a new generation of shopper is also finding sustainable shopping and 'clean' eating options more forthcoming at their local farm shop than in the supermarkets. In many ways, farm shops offer everything that supermarkets don't or can't. Theatre, community, individuality and delicious fresh, local, artisan or homemade products.

However, as people change the way they shop and in order to offer a viable alternative to supermarkets, farm shops need to constantly adapt along with their shoppers' needs. Committing to changes can be challenging though, especially at a time when the future looks a little uncertain. However, like that timeless, foot-tapping tune, it is simply a case of ensuring that your composition always has enough of the known components, as well

as plenty of newness and exciting discoveries.

One of the key essentials that the modern shopper deems important, is a quality frozen range. Whilst many farm shops offer frozen, there still is plenty of scope to develop the fine frozen foods offering within farm shops.

The convenience, good value and potential to help reduce food waste at home that frozen offers the shopper, alongside the cost saving opportunity and added discoverability that it brings to the retailer, means that fine frozen foods have never been so popular. Shoppers love browsing and filling their baskets with interesting new flavours and ideas. They view frozen as good value and with the naturally long self-life there's no need for them to worry about use by dates, availability or seasonality.

In turn, this leads to shoppers often being more open to trying new products or adding a little extra to their baskets. Even more so with a flexible concept such as Fieldfare's loose and individually portioned frozen foods. Shoppers can pick

and choose as much or as little they like. From simply sampling something new to personalised portions for everyone in the household, the unique concept offers theatre and excitement.

For the retailer, it may look like a big step to add fine frozen to their range but it need not be. We work closely with all our customers on an ongoing basis and we know from our numerous farm shop customers, who have created space for our freezers, that it is a fantastic and worthwhile way to service contemporary shoppers.

As energy saving, sustainability and budget management becomes more and more important to the consumer and retailer alike, yet the importance of quality remains paramount, fine frozen foods offer an excellent and profitable opportunity.

With exciting, discoverable products or flexible ranges such as Fieldfare's loose concept, fine frozen may just be the key to keeping the new generation of shopper coming back to farm retail again and again.

“ Shoppers love browsing and filling their baskets with interesting new flavours and ideas. They view frozen as good value and with the naturally long self-life there's no need to worry about use by dates, availability or seasonality ”

Food and drink industry lost jobs in Q4 of 2022

The food and drink industry lost 3,000 jobs in Q4, following a decline in employment of 7,000 jobs in the preceding quarter. This is a fall of 0.9% in the industry's labour force.

Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that over the last year, on average, 72% of food and drink manufacturers stated they had to absorb rising costs.

That compares with 56% of all companies across the UK and 53% of food retailers, suggesting that the industry has been disproportionately impacted by the rise in input costs during the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, compared to the average UK business. It also suggests manufacturers absorbed a lot of pain to support households and did not share the full extent of rising costs.

According to a report from the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), “In the short-term, the outlook for the UK economy and industry remains gloomy, as inflation continues to bite. With vacancy rates in the food and drink sector double the national average, there needs to be a more flexible approach to tackle skills shortages that prevail at every level.”

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Five female founders to watch in 2023

The food and drink sector is well-placed to foster diversity and inclusion. Ingredients, ideas and people from around the world have long enriched our food culture, while women have so often been the originators, manufacturers and distributors of food in communities of every size. Yet sexism and inequality plague this industry as it does others, with commercial boardrooms, factory floors, fields and offices rarely reflecting the pervasiveness of women in domestic food settings.

Speciality Food features five female founders proving that women can succeed in business and enrich this sector with a flood of colour and diversity.

Emma Jones, founder of Enterprise Nation, is passionate about helping small business owners succeed



WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A FEMALE FOUNDER?

There are more women than ever before starting and running businesses today, which is great news. But according to the latest Rose Review, there are still far more barriers facing women who want to start in business, like childcare costs, investment opportunities or the lack of visible role models, compared to men. As a woman, you often need to demonstrate competence to a much higher level than a male founder when it comes to accessing finance via the current routes such as Venture Capital or angel investment.

WHAT DRIVES YOU TO SUCCEED?

There is still a lot of work to be done to simplify business support for all SMEs. It's our guiding mission. It's why I started Enterprise Nation from a spare room in Manchester and why I've been there at every step of the way as it has evolved to be the fastest growing business support platform in the UK today.

My dream is for every new business founder to be armed with information about where they can get advice, mentoring, support and funding for their business from the first moment they register their business with Companies House or as a sole trader at HMRC. Making sure the Government cheerleads the small business community is also what drives me. Making sure the Government knows what small firms do, how they do it and what would make the most difference to communities and the economy is our driving purpose.

Lola Pedro, founder of Pedros Africa, is determined to prove that women can succeed in business



WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A FEMALE FOUNDER?

Bittersweet. Generally being a woman in this industry presents many challenges that I could've never initially anticipated. I spend a lot of time proving the legitimacy of what I do to so-called 'professionals' (men)

who are already operating with a bias, despite not really knowing that much about the specificities of the sector themselves. In saying that, successfully pulling off what is known to be a man's job in this sector has created many fans of the brand, primarily women, who understand the difficulties of pursuing such an endeavour in this market.

WHAT DRIVES YOU TO SUCCEED?

Representation matters! In my sector more specifically, spirits, you'd be hard-pressed to find many women of colour as brand owners. Therefore, I am driven by the fact that what I'm doing might catalyse others in my community to pursue their own goals irrespective of the fact that they too might be a minority within their industry.

Dominie Fearn, founder of The Wild Hare, believes the beauty of the food and drink industry is its diversity



WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A FEMALE FOUNDER?

The pros of being a female founder in the food and drink industry are that you become dialled into a really open and like-minded community — with the opportunity to interact with many female buyers and directors across the food chain. I have experienced very little gender bias in the industry and it's very empowering working alongside so many successful females. The cons of being a female business founder are that, typically, we are the ones looking after families too. Being a business owner is the busiest I have ever been in my career, so it really is a balancing act.

WHAT DRIVES YOU TO SUCCEED?

Food and drink is all about creativity and passion for what you love — and that cannot be limited to one group of individuals. The industry needs diversity, especially as we all shop for international cuisine as a matter of habit — because we love it! In addition, we need to ensure more women are thriving as founders in the industry, as it allows for greater versatility and creativity.

It is the best industry out there in my opinion, and there is always something new on the horizon. I have worked with some incredible people across my career, and I like watching how big, well-funded businesses do it — as well as small start-ups, because

at the end of the day, we are all welcome in this space.

Malika Datta, co-founder of Grechka, is passionate about changing the world around her for the better

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A FEMALE FOUNDER?

A significant advantage of being a female founder in the food and drink industry today is the rapidly growing community/network of women who empower each other through various impactful events and support groups. I'm excited to be part of this thriving community of foodpreneurs. I'm especially inspired by other female founders as I see how we are changing boardrooms in real-time, particularly by women juggling business, kids, and relationships. It's tough!

Unfortunately, gender bias still exists, as female founders face

extra challenges when it comes to raising investment, as traditionally investors are more hesitant to invest in women-owned businesses, and the statistics are appalling. Only 3% of all investment goes to women, and the percentage is even lower when it comes to BAME female businesses. However, it's great to see more and more initiatives aimed at providing equal access to funding for women.

WHAT DRIVES YOU TO SUCCEED?

I'm genuinely keen to make a significant social impact, i.e., to help improve the quality and longevity of people's lives worldwide with sustainable solutions in mind, as well as providing more equal access to healthier food choices. Grechka isn't just about the tangible product, but also the community we have built and plan to grow further via the well-being concept of the brand. Seeing how much we positively impact the community around us is a big motivation for me.

Shemin Macgregor, founder of Shemin's, uses her lived experience as a woman to improve her business

WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING A FEMALE FOUNDER?



I have found that being a female in the food and drink industry is a very welcoming place to be! I have

had a great journey. I have taken my experience as a mum to make products that are easy to use, quick and full of flavour. Whether you're coming home from work or feeding hungry children, I wanted people to feel like creating healthy and delicious food wasn't a luxury. Starting as a jar of paste I'd send my kids off to university with, I developed a product I'm proud to see on shelves of farm shops and independent retailers nationwide

Starting as a female founder in a new industry did make me feel nervous at the beginning, but the relationships I've created in the industry and the support have given me confidence. Seeing the community behind me has pushed me to create new things and expand and diversify my offering.

WHAT DRIVES YOU TO SUCCEED?

Passion! Passion to give people the means to create taste-bud-tingling Asian food at home, without getting a takeaway! Passion to show people that you don't need additives, sugar, or preservatives in your products to make them delicious! Passion to prove that making something delicious doesn't need skill, and doesn't need to take hours, you can achieve that in just 20 minutes! Second to passion has to be my customers. My customers and the community around the brand give me so much joy, you can't beat the feeling of reading a 5-star review or being awarded over 40 Great Taste Award stars.

“ Food and drink is all about creativity and passion for what you love, and cannot be limited to one group of people ”

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SCAN ME!

MEET THE PRODUCER

Introducing Biladi: a business founded by childhood friends on a mission to share the joy of Lebanese food with the world

From the best-selling cookbooks of Yotam Ottolenghi and Sabrina Ghayour to their ever-popular appearances on the small screen – not to mention the popularity of ingredients such as pomegranate, zaatar and sumac in delis, restaurants and discerning foodies’ cupboards up and down the UK – it’s certainly fair to say that Middle Eastern food is having a moment. While a number of producers are launching products to cash in on the demand, it’s rare to find one which has such authentic roots as Biladi: an exciting new player in the British fine food market.

The name of the brand, meaning ‘from the land’, was founded by two childhood friends – Khodor Fawaz and Abbas Zein – hailing from a small, picturesque village in the South of Lebanon, who have dedicated their professional lives to celebrating the diversity, quality and flavours of their country’s cuisine.

An authentic taste of Lebanon

The range perfectly satisfies the adventurous appetites of today’s food lovers, incorporating Tahini – made using traditionally stone-ground 100% Alqadarif sesame seeds – in classic and blended varieties including Chocolate Tahini, Carob Tahini and Grape Tahini; plus the aromatic herb seasoning Za’atar, a blend of thyme, sumac and toasted sesame seeds in olive oil, with the Spicy variation also containing paprika.

The pair are confident that the brand will resonate. “There is a gap in the market for authentic Lebanese products, which consumers have eaten and know about from the many Lebanese and Middle Eastern restaurants in the UK,” begins Khodor. We are all familiar with the increasing popularity and variety of nut butters, but the Lebanese twist has been missing from the sector – until now. “The Biladi range of Lebanese products fills this gap



by offering customers a new ‘seed’ butter to the assortment made from a tahini base. Our flavoured Tahinis are a great alternative to other spreads such as peanut butter or sweet spreads like Nutella,” he says.

This versatile product range was the result of dedicated work from Khodor and Abbas, as well as a team based in Lebanon, with a focus on using traditional methods and the very best quality ingredients. “We teamed up with food industry experts to create our range with simple ingredients – just as eaten across the villages and cities in Lebanon – and there was a lot of trial and error in our quest to get everything perfect,” Khodor explains. “Creating our products involved several separate

steps and was made all the more challenging by our commitment to not adding emulsifiers. The team worked on the products tirelessly to create not just a fantastic taste, but also an incredible shelf life, using just simple ingredients. The result is a brand new, ready-to-go products accessible to everyone.”

This dedication to quality and staying true to traditional Lebanese cuisine will be music to the ears of fine food shoppers. Not only is the unique range made in Lebanon using excellent quality, 100% natural ingredients – no additives, artificial flavourings, added sugar or emulsifiers are used – but every item is suitable for vegans, as well as being a convenient way for consumers to

create their favourite Lebanese and Middle Eastern dishes at home.

Versatile and delicious

Ready and waiting to cater to these shoppers, the Biladi website is full of recipe ideas for adventurous foodies to indulge in. Khodor’s suggestions? “Biladi Tahini is perfect for delicious and healthy houmous, baba ghanouj, or scrumptious salad dressings. It can be used as a dipping sauce for grilled/fried aubergine, cauliflower and other vegetables, or mixed with lemon and poured on grilled/fried fish or lamb.”

There are plenty of healthy and

decadent ideas for the sweet-toothed among us to enjoy, thanks to the flavoured tahinis in the range. “These are fantastic on pancakes or when baking. Use in brownies, spread on toast, pancakes, and muffins, or drizzle on Greek yogurt and fruits,” suggests Khodor.

Meanwhile, Biladi’s Za’atar & Olive Oil is a deliciously versatile workhorse. “Try drizzling it on warm flatbread, adding to sandwiches and salad dressings, or on roast vegetables, poultry and fish. Or, you can mix it with scrambled eggs or use in an omelet for a mouth-watering herby flavour.”

A boon for health

In news that is sure to be popular with the growing number of health-conscious consumers, there are a number of natural health credentials to be found within the Biladi range. For example, tahini is high in fibre and acts as an antioxidant, lowering inflammation in the body. Their Za’atar contains high levels of polyphenol antioxidants from the olive oil and vitamins from the thyme, sumac and sesame seeds, while its Carob Tahini is considered a super food; full of fibre and high in calcium and iron, carob is a rich source of vitamins and minerals.

Award-winning flavour

Despite being new to the British market, Biladi is already reaping rewards – literally. “We entered four products into the 2022 Great Taste Awards and they all won gold stars. We were extremely proud to have won 3 Gold Stars for 2 of our Flavoured Tahinis (Grape and Carob) with our Chocolate Tahini winning 2 stars and our Spicy Za’atar Sauce winning 1 star. Not a bad start and introduction to the UK speciality food market.”

“The range perfectly satisfies food lovers’ growing adventurous appetites”

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CHOCOLATE TAHINI

A naturally low-fat sweet spread made of tahini and cocoa, blended with roasted sesame seeds, grape molasses, and coconut oil. A delightful, silky and luxurious spread for hot toast!

GRAPE TAHINI

A naturally sweet spread made of creamy tahini blended with fragrant grape molasses.

TAHINI

The smoothest stone-ground Tahini, made with top quality roasted sesame from Al Qadarif in Sudan. Perfect for delicious houmous, baba ghanouj, salad dressings, or just as a dip on its own.

CAROB TAHINI

This mouth-watering Lebanese sweet spread has just 2 ingredients. It blends superfood carob with creamy sesame. High on calcium, iron and of course, flavour!

Classic & Spicy ZA'ATAR

Aromatic thyme mixed with roasted sesame seeds, zesty sumac, and virgin olive oil. With an added kick of paprika for the spicy jar. A superb marinade, dip or spread.

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African cooking is our latest obsession, with West African cuisine, the dishes of Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal, especially fashionable. Google Trends data showed searches for Nigerian foods alone were up 250% between 2021 and 2022.

Intrigued by flavours experienced at street markets and restaurants such as Ikoyi, keen cooks are inspired to have a go at home. To help, there's *Africana* by Lerato Umah-Shaylor, voted by *Delicious* magazine one of its cookbooks of 2022.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO OUR FARM SHOP OR DELI?

Modern foodies want world flavours. If you can use African spice combinations to showcase British seasonal farm produce, you're onto a winner. You'll inspire your chefs, delight regulars and refresh your café menu. Vegan and veggie customers particularly will welcome variety; there are only so many butternut squash risottos they can face.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE AFRICAN TREND?

The Black Lives Matter (#BLM) movement put African cooking under the spotlight. Publishers moved away from African cookbooks by Europeans, preferring, for authenticity, cookery writers of African descent. Chefs and restaurateurs such as Zoe Adjonyoh, author of *Zoe's Ghana Kitchen*, and Aji Akakomi of Akoko in London's Fitzrovia, fed appetites for food adventure, with their spicy, peanut-heavy, meat- and plant-based dishes. Did you know peanut butter now outsells jam?

WHAT IS JOLLOF RICE?

West Africa's iconic dish. It is spicy and vibrantly red from tomato paste,



WEST AFRICAN CUISINE

Add wowza to your menus with plantain chips, jollof rice and chicken peanut soup says Sally-Jayne Wright

curry powder, paprika, carrots, red peppers, red palm oil and onions. Every family has a recipe. So contested are the ingredients and origins that West Africans refer to the Jollof Wars.

ISN'T THERE ALSO A FAMOUS GROUNDNUT (PEANUT) STEW?

There are soups and stews galore which is great news because soups are our most popular plant-based meal. There's societal pressure to eat less meat and many flexitarians choose world cuisines on their meat-free occasions (Kantar). A peanut stew or soup works for omnivores and vegans alike if you use separate stocks.

WHY ARE WEST AFRICAN-INSPIRED RECIPES SO SUITABLE FOR FREE-FROM CUSTOMERS?

Many dishes are naturally gluten-, dairy- and meat-free. Yes, you'll find meat, poultry and fish but also recipes

based on legumes, seeds and beans. Think colourful palaver stews made with melon seeds for protein; black-eyed bean cakes with chilli sauce; red cabbage and coconut salads. Typical ingredients include ginger, peanuts, tomato paste, plantains, fish, Scotch bonnet peppers and red palm oil.

HMM, NOT SURE ABOUT PALM OIL

Unrefined, red oil is used widely across Africa and gives a distinctive aroma, flavour and red colour. Yes, it is palm oil and saturated, but don't confuse it with the bleached, odourless derivative ubiquitous in processed foods. Red palm oil contains Vitamin A and tends to be used for scratch cooking alongside fresh ingredients.

WITH SO MANY BRITISH AFRICANS, WHAT'S STOPPED US EXPLORING THIS SORT OF FOOD MORE?

Hospitality's fear of peanut allergies plus home cooks' fear of Scotch bonnet peppers and unfamiliar veg. We need hand-holding in the form of cook-in sauces, seasoning mixes, meal kits, ready meals and cooking pastes.

IS ANYONE MAKING WEST AFRICAN READY MEALS?

Based in Birmingham, Oyetty Meals have over 20 authentically Nigerian frozen dishes, including Smokey Jollof Rice, for delivery nationwide.

WHAT ABOUT AN AFRICAN 'PESTO'?

At September's Speciality & Fine Food Fair, we were very impressed with the fresh zingy flavour of Shirley's Jollof paste one jar solution. Making the real thing can be very time-consuming says CEO Shirley Boateng. It will please the 39% of world cuisine

eaters interested in products that work for both meat and meat-free dishes (according to Empire Bespoke Foods).

AND WHAT ABOUT SNACKS?

Ocado appear to be trialling Chika's plantain chips. London-born founder, Chika Russell, is of Nigerian descent and sends 2% of her profits to help educate girls in Nigeria. Her range includes roasted peanuts, sweet potato thins and plantain chips.

HOW DO YOU MAKE PLANTAIN CHIPS? I'VE HEARD PLANTAIN IS GLUTEN-FREE AND FULL OF FIBRE.

Use the greenest fruits and slice finely with a mandolin, fry and salt. For a sweeter treat, use yellow-black plantains. Peel and steam, or slit the skins before baking or microwaving.

HOW ELSE CAN WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE TREND?

What about: gift bundles of Zoe Alakija's *Afro Vegan* cookbook with jars of Shirley's Jollof paste; instead of butternut squash risotto, try suya roasted cauliflower with spiced peanut puree or Red-Red (bean stew). Call your dishes African fusion or West African-style. Tie in with local African festivals and tell followers.

WILL THE TREND LAST?

Zoe Adjonyoh declares on her website, "I want to see Jollof as readily accessible as curry at supermarkets." If the success of humus, shakshouka and tagine is anything to go by, Zoe will get her way. We can buy West African ingredients but we need more kitchen confidence. Food entrepreneurs, look this way.

“ The West African foodservice scene is blossoming and there is an opportunity for partnerships between the rising restaurants/chefs and brands or private labels to bring these flavours to the masses ”

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LAND OF PLENTY

Speciality Food uncovers what makes Northern Ireland a hotbed of food and drink innovation

With its lush landscapes, rural communities and a unique blend of tradition and innovation, Northern Ireland is fast becoming one of the most exciting destinations for food lovers. The country has long had it all – from meat and dairy from its famously rich pastures to seafood from its dramatic coast – and a new generation of culinary adventurers are making waves, too.

A rich landscape

For generations, Northern Ireland's natural environment has worked in partnership with passionate producers to create some of the world's very best food and drink, and this collaboration is still very much alive today. "Northern Ireland still has a real agriculture-based economy; very few of us are more than a generation away from farming stock so there is a real understanding of food and where it comes from," explains Bryan Boggs, general manager at award-winning Clandeboye Estate Yoghurts. "We also have amazing raw materials, the best dairy, beef, vegetables and fish. I suppose a lot of rain gives very good grass and growing conditions."

"In this country we have some of the finest meat, dairy and arable farmers in the world. This allows food business to produce world class products that really stand out," agrees Alistair Crown, founder of multi award-winning farm-to-fork charcuterie producer Comdale Farm. The country's food professionals

work together just as productively. "There is quite a bit of collaboration between food businesses here. Northern Ireland is a relatively small place and we all know each other. There is a lot of know-how and expertise out there and we work well together," says Bryan. With so much knowledge and experience on the scene, it's no wonder that Northern Ireland is a hotbed for exciting new talent – with new businesses launching all the time, there's a raft of invaluable first-hand experience ready and waiting to be tapped into.

Keeping standards high is paramount to the continuation of this success. "We need to keep standards high, worry about quality not quantity and our reputation will keep growing," Bryan continues. "In our business we talk about working up to a standard and not down to a price and I think that is key!" Alistair agrees. "Good food business is built on the fundamental principles of quality and that Northern Ireland is renowned for top quality. We as people are very resilient and will never settle for mediocrity."

Taste of tradition

Traditions are also of great value to many of the producers of Northern Ireland, and Crawford's Rock – headed up by Michelle Wilson – is a prime example. The small family-run business sustainably harvests a range of seaweeds at a stretch of shoreline called Nicholson's Strand, which runs from Derryogue

in Kilkeel. "Our forefathers as Trustees of the shore had kelp rights historically," she begins. "They used these for agricultural purposes but they also harvested seaweeds after the first frosts. There is an old Irish phrase 'pràtaí, pàiste, feamainn' meaning potatoes, children, seaweed. This was the order of care for households in pre-famine times, and as company director I look back on these times with great reflection and know that during those hardships coastal communities survived because of the easy catch (crab, mussels, limpets and seaweed) whereas urban communities perished."

Now a multi-award-winning company, Crawford's Rock – like many other artisan businesses across Northern Ireland – believe in growing sustainably. This involves only taking what they need, educating others on the importance of the health benefits seaweed provides, and working with community and voluntary sector groups across the country. Education plays a key role in many other food and drink brands, too. Comdale Farm is another such business which provides a valuable experience for the travelling foodie. "We now provide classes and courses for people to learn the basics of butchery and charcuterie and also

offer tours of the farm and our production facility," explains Alistair. "I know many other producers also provide this service."

A bright future

The future looks bright for food and drink in Northern Ireland – indeed, its reputation is spreading across the world thanks to a developing culture of food tourism. "We get emails from people all over the world saying they had our yoghurt for breakfast in the hotels they stayed in in Belfast, and asking there is any way they can get it where they are," says Bryan.

"Food and food tourism as well as the economy is growing globally, and we can create a positive future while preserving our past," continues Michelle. The customer focus has changed with an emphasis on local, seasonal and sustainable – this helps us preserve our heritage more than profit-driven companies. Our passion as artisan food producers creates a great platform for our future and that of our province."

"The only way is up for Northern Ireland Food right now," concludes Alistair. "We are getting better, more innovative and exciting every year. As food producers we are well supported by Invest NI and Food NI. This gives us confidence to push on, create new products and explore new markets across the world. Food tourism is going to be massive in Northern Ireland. It is a growing sector and one that we have seen constant growth in. It is fantastic to see Northern Ireland now being recognised for new innovative food and drink products, and there will be plenty more to come."

“ Our passion as artisan food producers creates a great platform for our future and that of our province ”



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crawfordsrockseaweed.co.uk

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Cambrook satisfies sweet and savoury palates with two new launches



Caramelised nut specialist Cambrook has launched two new flavours into its range of recyclable 65g packets.

Ideal for grab-and-go snacking and suitable to display on a clip strip, the two new flavours in the recyclable stand-up packaging will satisfy both savoury and sweet palates.

The new Garlic & Chilli Mixed Nuts with Corn are a savoury

combination of cashews, almonds and peanuts tumbled in olive oil, chilli, sea salt and a pinch of garlic, mixed with crunchy giant corn.

Mixed Nuts with Chocolate Cranberries are a blend of baked salted cashews, almonds and peanuts mixed with dark chocolate coated cranberries.

Deborah Bradfield, sales and marketing manager at Cambrook Foods, said, "For us it's all about the taste experience, to combine dark chocolate coated cranberries with our award-winning baked and salted nut mix is totally a food lover's dream! And if you are rather fond of chilli and garlic together (which I am!) then when you add the crunch of the corn it makes it unputdownable! We are very proud of our new flavour creations and we are so excited to launch them in our new recyclable 65g packets."

cambrookfoods.co.uk

Hunter & Gather launches squeezezy bottle format

Hunter & Gather, producer of unsweetened condiments, has relaunched its existing range in 100% recyclable squeezezy bottle formats and added a spicy new addition to its offering.

The new launch – Unsweetened Sriracha Hot Sauce – is made from 100% natural ingredients including red pepper, apple cider vinegar, garlic, cayenne pepper, pink Himalayan salt and konjac root – with no added sweeteners or sugar.

Amy Moring, co-founder of Hunter & Gather, said, "With increased consumer drive for health and value, we've worked hard to create a flavour packed, great tasting range of sauces with exemplary health credentials (100% natural ingredients, no added sugar or sweeteners, 72% less sugar than the leading brand) but in a 100% recyclable squeezezy bottle that means less waste and more value for shoppers. Whilst other brands might claim 'no added sugar', the reality is that most contain added natural sugar in the form of fruit syrups or dates that coat the palate. Our squeezezy sauces really do stand up to scrutiny as they are handmade in the UK in small batches, using quality ingredients, absolutely no added sugar or sweeteners, and with zero compromise on taste."

hunterandgatherfoods.com



New Coronation-ready design from Belvoir

Belvoir Farm, creator of archetypal British cordials and soft drinks, has rebranded its Elderflower Cordial and Sparkling Elderflower bottles in celebration of the upcoming coronation of King Charles III.

Available in stores from April 1st 2023, the new look combines crowns and special edition banners in an attractive move for the British business.

Belvoir's Elderflower Cordial has been made since 1984 and is based on a family recipe made at home for over 50 years, using hand-picked elderflowers for a delicate floral taste.

Harry Clark, shopper marketing manager at Belvoir, said, "This is a monumental moment in British History, and being a proud British brand, we would like to celebrate this with a bespoke celebratory design. Belvoir Farm have created a bespoke design linking to British Heritage and our new King on our best-selling Elderflower product."

belvoirfarm.co.uk



New low/no beer options to hit shelves

Brewer of low and no-alcohol beers, Nirvana Brewery, have added two inventive new options to their lineup: Heavenly, an orange and thyme sour beer; and Hell-ish, a classic lager brewed with roasted jalapenos.

Available in 330ml cans, the duo complement the brewery's existing range of beers which includes pale ales, IPAs and stouts.

Becky Taylor-Kean, founder of Nirvana Brewery, said, "Being dedicated to low and no-alcohol beers, we've learnt so much since we launched way back in 2016. That's placed us in a great position to spearhead the craft beer angle to the category – one that can ensure independents don't miss out on its continued growth. Having a core range of seven, plus innovations like these brews, also means we can cover all of the flavour profiles for retailers and customers alike."

nirvanabrewery.com



Luscombe releases new royal Bubbly

Royal Warrant-holder Luscombe has created a new addition to its Bubbly range in celebration of the upcoming coronation of King Charles III.

The new launch, Rose & Cherry Bubbly, is available in 27cl glass bottles and joins the award-winning Strawberry Bubbly, Damascene Rose Bubbly and Elderflower Bubbly.

All items in the range, including the latest addition, are made from the finest organic ingredients and Dartmoor spring water.

Gabriel David, owner and founder of Luscombe, said, "Inspired by the rose featured in the Coronation emblem, our limited edition Rose & Cherry Bubbly has been crafted with Royal celebrations in mind. A gently sparkling bubbly, it balances the sweet-tartness of cherries beautifully with the floral notes of the rose, and is naturally sweetened with muscat grape juice and finished with Sicilian lemons and soft Dartmoor spring water. Like all the drinks in our range it contains no artificial additives, sweeteners or concentrates."

luscombe.co.uk



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Booja-Booja relaunches vegan ice cream range

Vegan chocolate makers Booja-Booja have revamped its dairy-free ice cream range, with four new flavours and three recipe updates.

The existing flavours which have been updated are Vanilla, Chocolate Salted Caramel and Caramel Pecan Praline, while the four new flavours being launched are Cookie Dough, Mango & Raspberry, Deeply Chocolate and Chocolate Fudge Brownie.

The brand has been creating ice cream for 16 years, and the range has won 48 awards in that time, yet the team believed that the range could be stronger and was worthy of refreshing.

Matt Gilding, managing director of Booja-Booja, said, "This is a premium free-from ice cream range that ticks all the boxes and that everyone can enjoy. There's a wide range of flavours, it's got great free-from credentials and a minimal, clean ingredients list. But most importantly, it tastes better than ever. Familiar flavours have been transformed and the new varieties are incredible. This is a whole new product, inside and out; creamier, cleaner, more sophisticated and quite simply, breathtakingly delicious. It's as good, if not actually better, than most luxury dairy ice creams. The only thing we haven't changed is the price."

boojabooja.com



New Hi-Oleic peanut butters from Biona

Europe's first organic hi-oleic peanut butters are being brought to the UK market by Biona.

By making the new nut butters using hi-oleic organic peanuts from Argentina – which contain 30% more healthy fats than alternative peanuts and are naturally sweeter and richer in taste – Biona is progressing its mission to convert more conventional farmland into organic alternatives.

The two new variants, available in May 2023, are Dark Roast Hi-Oleic Peanut Butter and Super Crunch Hi-Oleic Peanut Butter. Both are sold in 250g jars.

The new products contain no palm oil and are suitable for vegans.

Kelly Stalker, marketing manager at Windmill Organics, said, "Our team has been working on the 'peanut project' for five years. The peanuts come from Argentina, where we have set up a project to grow organic peanuts. Peanuts can be grown in many places in the world, but we have deliberately chosen Argentina because of the unique soil and the many years of experience of the local population, continuing our mission to convert more farmland into organic."

biona.co.uk

Celebratory new sauce from Stokes

Stokes Sauces, the Suffolk-based producer of condiments, sauces and preserves, has launched a spicy new addition to the range in honour of the coronation of King Charles III.

The original Coronation Sauce was created in 1953 by student Angela Wood in celebration of the Queen's Coronation Banquet.

In honour of the coronation of our new monarch, King Charles III, the team at Stokes have proudly put their own spin on the modern classic sauce to suit twenty-first century palates.

Extra creamy and featuring sweetness from apricots and sultanas, plus fragrance and flavour from Stokes' own blend of curry sauces, the new sauce is a delicious way to honour this uniquely British occasion.

Rick Sheepshanks, founder and MD of Stokes Sauces, said, "I couldn't be more proud to be British just now. We have this incredible occasion to celebrate as our King is crowned, and to have mustered the team here to come up with and deliver such a wonderful tribute, well, it literally brings tears to my eyes, as well as a broad smile to my face."

stokessauces.co.uk



"Change before you have to"



LAWRENCE BARNETT
WONDERLAND DESIGN

One of our clients recently asked whether it was time for a packaging design refresh.

Much had changed in the category in question and their design hadn't been updated for a number of years. So, my instinct was to say 'yes', but I wasn't entirely sure about the exact reasons why it should be updated.

Some say that pack changes should be every three to four years to keep it up to date. Or whenever the brand team feels a bit of pack 'fatigue' – regardless of whether consumers might feel the same!

So, what might prompt a pack design change? There are actually a few more rational indicators:

NEEDS MUST

The most common reason is when there is a change to product ingredients or legislation that means the pack must be changed. This provides an opportunity to evolve the design but you should also be clear about why the design is being changed and what it will seek to achieve.

COMPETITORS UPPING THEIR GAME

Updated packaging from existing competitors and perhaps new brands coming into the category can have an impact. Such changes may make your brand look dated. They may be doing a better job at communicating key benefits or be using new pack structures that make their products more appealing. If so, then it's time to think about how to respond.

BRAND EVOLUTION

Your brand may have evolved and changed. And maybe your packaging design or its format

hasn't kept up. Take an objective look at what your brand offers and consider whether your pack is still a good reflection of how you want consumers to see you. If it doesn't quite work then it's certainly time to look at what changes need to be made.

PRODUCT EXTENSIONS

New product ranges or even extensions can make you realise the shortcomings of your current pack. New products that are added will challenge the way your existing products look. It's always better to look at the range as a whole rather than develop new product packaging that takes on a slightly different design, meaning ranges can look disconnected and inconsistent.

MADE YOU LOOK

Tired packaging designs can lose their appeal to existing consumers and fail to attract new ones. If you sense that this is a problem then a refresh, which may possibly include a new sustainable pack format, can reinvigorate the brand among both existing and new consumers.

CHANGING TRENDS

Lifestyles, food and drink and environmental trends have changed over the past few years. And they keep changing. Perhaps these have had a particular impact on your category. If so, your brand may need to adapt and play more to the changing landscape, so a pack design refresh may be what's needed to exploit new opportunities.

There are some brands that routinely make changes to their pack graphics. Much less so, pack formats. Many bigger brands, in particular, make incremental changes little and often simply to keep the brand fresh. For smaller brands, this is neither practical nor necessary. So, all the more reason for brands to keep reviewing their category and consumer behaviours as well as their own brand and product positioning to make objective judgments as to when a refresh may be in the offing.

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FLOURISH



EDWARD BERRY
THE FLYING FORK



MARK KACARY
THE NORFOLK DELI



LOU MACDONALD
NEW MACDONALD'S FARM SHOP



HOW TO SELL EASTER

Samantha Priestley explores the secrets of successful seasonal selling in 2023

Te may still be in a cost-of-living crisis, but as Christmas proved, in tough times people continue to spend on food and drink. It seems most of us put more importance on eating together than on lavish gifts and frivolous spending. Eating together, as a family, is important to us, and Easter looks set to mirror Christmas in this way. It's something Samantha Riddington, food hall manager at Flourish, has certainly noticed, and she knows that shining a light on this can be beneficial to her business, and for customers.

"We're definitely seeing people spending on fine food still, despite a rise in energy costs and other economic stressors. As this is a time when people come together, we always love to put a focus on fresh produce used for Easter Sunday family roasts. We like to put emphasis on colourful locally grown veg and the amazing quality of our locally farmed meat, which always comes from free-range farms with high welfare standards."

Edward Berry, owner of The Flying Fork, takes a pragmatic view of volume of sales versus prices, but sees reasons to be optimistic going forward.

"It's not a new observation that when times are tough, it's often the 'affordable' treats that do well. In terms of food, that translates to less eating out and possibly enjoying something special at home. It's hard to get a true picture of trends, as whilst many retailers reported bumper sales over the festive period it may have been largely the result of higher prices rather than volumes. I always like to look at alcohol as a measure, and talking to wine merchants, sales are buoyant."

One thing we can be pretty sure of is, this Easter will be more than just chocolate eggs. Yes, we all love chocolate eggs, but family meals and being together will trump everything.

So, how can fine food indies make the most of this?

"Our main focus in the lead up to Easter will be on fresh produce for amazing family meals at home," says Samantha. "With events like these it's all about coming together with your loved ones and the joy of sharing a meal."

The trend of eating at home rather than going out may have started during lockdown, but it's certainly flourished even more in more recent times. Edward sees a way indies can tap into the 'entertain at home' trend.

"Many people who shop in indies are keen cooks. When it comes to entertaining at home, sound suggestions packaged in meal deal offers or cross promotions work really well."

Counting the cost

But not everyone sees this as a time to be quite so optimistic. For some, the tough times experienced by customers are all too close to home and there's less room for manoeuvre when it comes to planning for Easter. For Mark Kacary, managing director at The Norfolk Deli, Easter will be a small affair.

"If anything, we have vastly reduced what we are doing for Easter. We would prefer to sell out rather

than be overstocked. We are located in a very conservative, aging part of the country. As a business we rely more on holidaymakers and online sales than we do on local business. Our nod to Easter will include a small selection of chocolate eggs, simnel cake and little else."

For Lou Macdonald, owner at New Macdonald's Farm Shop, it's about understanding the hardships customers are facing and offering alternatives that are affordable and still Easter specific.

"We will source cheaper food options for sure this year as many families and individuals are on tight financial budgets. We will include 'specials' and 'budget' offers like our 'wonky' eggs – imperfect shells but perfectly good contents. It's a bit like wonky veg!"

Edward Berry agrees, and thinks sometimes sticking to what you know will work for each holiday season, is the best road to take.

"I tend to advise not attempting to be too adventurous at Christmas, and the same applies to Easter. It may sound boring, but it's only once a year, and the tried and trusted tend to be the most popular. However, as retailers it's how we present, merchandise, entertain and sell that matter most."

"Like Valentine's or Christmas, Easter is a great opportunity to connect with your regulars and draw in new customers with special promotions, a fresh, exciting Easter range, and fun for the whole family. It's a moment to advertise Easter promotions and opening hours on your website and social media pages well in advance of Easter. You could also instruct staff to mention your Easter specials and deals to customers a month ahead."

For Samantha Riddington, Easter equals spring and the two can be sold together and are interchangeable.

"Spring for us is a time to celebrate colourful veggies, fresh free-range eggs and joints of meat, alongside fresh daffodils and tulips and of course lots of chocolate. We always like to have some special products for occasions, so you'll find cute chick and bunny cakes, cookies, hot cross buns and local bakery products. A fun experience for our customers adds to the experience of Easter."

Keep it local

With so many people choosing a family Easter at home this year,

The opportunity of Easter

Like any holiday or seasonal date in the calendar, Easter shouldn't be seen as one dimensional. While businesses are busy selling Easter they can also be selling so much more. Edward sees Easter as an opportunity to sell the business as a whole and this starts with making customers aware of your business. By selling Easter you're selling your business.



“ Tell a story rather than simply displaying your products, for instance take elements of an Easter egg hunt and create ‘hidden’ items as part of the display ”

it makes sense to showcase local products and a local approach. Buying local is more important than ever for customers this year and it's something indie food retailers are especially good at. Mark Kacary knows the importance of the local angle, particularly in the face of big supermarkets.

“A business like ours is 100% traditional deli. We are within 10 minutes' walk of a Sainsbury's and a Tesco and a short drive from Aldi. Supermarkets have massive marketing departments and gargantuan marketing budgets to create an image of the perfect stay at home family meal at budget prices. We cannot compete with that. Our angle is to provide products supermarkets simply cannot stock and sell. Our focus is on cheeses made by small artisan producers, on local produce made within a 30-mile radius of our shop which offers the customer something different and which simply cannot be offered in a supermarket. It's all about local for us.”

It's something Samantha Riddington knows works, and a close relationship with local suppliers allows her to shape her Easter preparations and displays accordingly.

“We have some extra fun baked goods coming in from our local bakery, Hobbs House, like chocolate brioche, sourdough and hot cross buns, as well as Easter Pippins doughnuts and themed patisserie cakes.”

For Mark it's the centre of the business, a wider choice all locally sourced makes his deli stand out. And as customers look for fine foods for a family Easter, the local approach can bring big wins.

“Our cheese boards have a theme and as much as possible everything

we do is local. So there will be local cheese boards with local chutneys, local charcuterie and local wines, beers and spirits. What we offer which many cheese shops do not offer is the width and breadth of a fully stocked deli.”

Sustainability sells

Shopping locally goes hand in hand with sustainability, another issue that's close to shoppers' hearts more than ever this year. With feast foods like joints of beef and lamb regulars on Easter Sunday dinner tables, the notion of being a sustainable business needs to be apparent and seen more as a reality. Lou Macdonald knows this is ethically important to her business as well as to her customers.

“We will only stock ethical, high welfare, local, organic, regenerative produce. Lower impact on the environment, local grown. We support local businesses, which supports the local community and economy. Our ethos is to support those businesses that sustain good practices, and not those big cooperations who sustain the unethical practices.”

Samantha Riddington agrees, it's not only about what customers want, it's about creating and maintaining an ethical business.

“Sustainability is a huge part of our business and it seems to play a large part in our customers' buying habits. Many of our products come with the B-Corp logo, and we use point of sale signage, e-newsletters and table talkers to tell our customers all about our values. Our partner and main supplier Cotswold Fayre was the first fine food wholesaler to be carbon neutral, and is a proud B Corp too.”

For Edward Berry it's about making that connection between being an ethical business and the

sustainability customers are looking for. Communicating this effectively is important.

“Those that shop in the independent sector are probably already closer to the notion of sustainability, be it food miles, seasonality, packaging or sourcing. This can be communicated subtly, or with well displayed message such as distances, sourcing stories etc.”

The Easter message

Getting your message across to customers is always important and significant dates and holidays can give businesses a helping hand with this. The sight of eggs on your counter signals it's almost Easter and gets customers prepared, and the displays you create at this time of year solidify your wider message.

“Displays are incredibly important to us to create that initial wow factor that makes customers want to return,” Samantha Riddington says. “We use an impactful display right at the front of the food hall as a focal point which shows all new products we have in, with smaller stands around the store to give a good flowing shopping experience.”

For Edward Berry it's a chance to be creative and to create campaigns around a recognisable holiday.

“Tell a story rather than simply displaying your products, for instance take elements of an Easter egg hunt and create ‘hidden’ items as part of the display. Devote an area of the store for Easter products. If you are using Easter as the reason for a large campaign, gather all the related products into one area of the store so customers don't have to work too hard to make decisions. Choose merchandise which points towards family. Overall, Easter is a family holiday typified by presents, mostly chocolate admittedly, for children, large gatherings over meals and journeys to visit family.”

It's family that really floats when it comes to Easter, this year especially. Selling Easter in 2023 is more about selling a day of close bonds and togetherness than chocolate eggs, though we can never underplay the importance! The place in between the two is a sweet spot to really excel in.

“ We use an impactful display right at the front of the food hall as a focal point which shows all new products we have in, with smaller stands around the store to give a good flowing shopping experience ”



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THE REAL DEAL

John Bensalhia explores the seven wonders of the special offer world, and how farm shops and delis can make the most of them throughout the year

Who doesn't love a bargain? If there's a guaranteed way of bringing in new customers and retaining existing ones, it's the special offer.

Farm shops and delicatessens have taken this to heart with a broad cross-section of special offers. In the current economy, with news reports of families and individuals struggling with rising costs, financial challenges and food shortages, special offers are especially welcome.

Special offers keep the farm shop or deli one step ahead of the competition, providing that extra personal touch with tailored loyalty schemes, package deals and gifts.

The Cornish Food Box Company uses special offers for a variety of marketing purposes including attracting new customers for its grocery subscription service, launching new products and pushing sales around particular events or times of the year. "As an online-only

food delivery company we have to cut through the noise on social media and digital advertising, and a really good offer is important to encourage wavering customers to get onboard and give us a go!" says Lucy Jones, owner. "The aim being that once they have tried The Cornish Food Box Company food and service they'll love it so much that they come back again and purchase at the full price."

"One of our main attractions is our exquisite, high quality Wexford Valley Tomahawk Steak, which has been reduced from £40 to £23.50 – they literally fly out the door!" says Mandeep Singh, marketing manager, Tom Hixson of Smithfield. "Another popular item is Black Label Argentine Beef Ribeye Steak, which has been reduced from £65 to £29.95."

But coming up with these kinds of offer is an art in itself. What kinds of special offer appeal the most? How often should special initiatives

be promoted, and what are the best ways of doing so? Here then, are some answers. Welcome to the seven wonders of the special offer world that can help make a real deal...

Stay loyal

Ongoing special offers are key to returning customers. If repeat visitors continue to come back for more, rewarding their loyalty through cards and schemes is a smart move. Many farm shops and delicatessens have introduced their own loyalty schemes in which customers can gain a number of special perks. Money off products. Exclusive access to promotions. Plus, bonus points for future discounts. The spend to bonus point ratio can vary, but it's not uncommon for some delis and farm shops to offer very healthy deals. Norfolk Deli customers can get five points for every £1 spent if they have signed up to their 'Perks' loyalty scheme.

A welcome bonus for customers is when farm shops and delis allow customers to gain points through other means other than purchases. Sometimes, customers can qualify for loyalty schemes through recommendations to others or even acknowledgements on social media, as Lydia Tomkinson, marketing manager at Eversfield Organic, outlines. "Our loyalty scheme, Eversfield Organic Rewards, lets customers save up points from different activities, such as shopping with us, referring a friend, or following us on social media, which can then be redeemed as money off vouchers."

Free gift giveaways! Strawberry Fields Farm Shop uses this technique on a regular basis, sometimes with a topically seasonal angle. February, for example, saw the giveaway of free dough balls and a free pancake kit for every £20 spent in its farm shop. "Generally we find it much better to give customers something extra for free rather than discounting our products," says Lucy Jones. "Where we use direct discounting is primarily in launching new products or new bundled boxes. For new product launches, typically the supplier will be offering a special wholesale price which we pass on to our

"There are, of course, challenges with getting the right offer at the right time to the right people," says Lucy Jones. "The food and drink industry is typically fairly low margin so when setting out our special offers we have to be aware of the overall costs we will incur. Encouraging repeat orders through our Cornish food box subscription service is the best way of managing this. One of our latest special offers gave new customers a free organic fruit box when they signed up to have regular veg box deliveries from us."

The gift that keeps on giving

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customers to encourage them to try something new."

The Cornish Food Box Company works very closely with several holiday cottage companies in the South West to provide welcome gifts and grocery deliveries for their guests. "Through them, we offer discount codes for them to promote grocery deliveries direct to holiday cottages. For the holiday cottage agencies, it is a fantastic way to promote high quality local food deliveries to their guests which results in great reviews and we get introduced to new customers outside of our local area."

Soaring in popularity is the gift card. Not only do gift cards help save money on everyday visits to the shops, they also make for excellent presents. Among those offering gift cards and vouchers are Allington Farm Shop (card values range from £15 to £25), Ben's Farm Shop (£10 to £50) and Becketts Farm (£5 to £100).

Special deliveries

In the wake of Covid-19, home delivery of goods is still a popular choice, especially for those who may be too old, disabled or ill to go to the shop. On the other side of the coin, today's time-hungry society can mean that others are simply too busy to go shopping, with home delivery providing a more convenient alternative for those whose time is eaten up by work or family commitments.

"We offer 5% off our entire online range of organic groceries when customers subscribe to a recurring order with us," says Lydia Tomkinson. "Which not only helps with savings across their whole shop, but also means they can have all their organic groceries delivered to their door at a convenient frequency, perfect for those with busier lifestyles."

Jurassic Coast Farm Shop runs its own subscription service that allows its customers complete online control over their purchasing. Customers can choose whether to buy their shopping from Jurassic Coast on either a weekly, fortnightly or weekly basis. The process allows complete flexibility in that customers can



“Ongoing special offers are key to returning customers. If repeat visitors continue to come back for more, rewarding their loyalty through cards and schemes is a smart move”



media. For example, which social media outlet is the most suitable? Instagram is a good visual showcase for a special offer. A photograph of the special offer product(s) gives potential customers a clear idea of what they can expect. Twitter users also benefit from photography: the word count limit makes for a short, snappy impact. Twitter also allows for retweets, which can help to spread the word across a wider audience. Facebook remains a popular method of promotion, offering greater flexibility in its word count.

Another consideration is the frequency of promotion. Lydia explains that Eversfield Organic tends to promote its special offers at least once a month. "However, we promote our reward scheme and subscribe and save 5% discount for recurring orders wherever we can, alongside the other benefits of having an account and receiving a regular order from us."

More seasons

Specific changes of season and annual events are great opportunities for special offer deals. Every year brings extra interest in buying food for occasions such as Christmas, Easter, and Valentine's Day.

"We regularly provide special offers

featured around special events," says Lucy Jones. "An example of this is our annual Cornish Food Box Christmas Dinner Offer. Every year, we give customers who order their Christmas dinner from us in October a special early bird discount."

With that in mind, many farm shops continue to tie in special offers and deals with annual days and events like these. Valentine's Day 2023 alone brought a slew of various special offers including deals on ribeye steaks at Taylors Farm Shop (two for £11.99), a steak and wine deal at Westlands Farm Shop; and a takeaway picnic afternoon tea at Strawberry Fields Farm Shop, Lifton (including the likes of sandwiches, cakes, plus perennial South West favourite, scones with home-made strawberry jam and clotted cream).

The customer is always bright

Everyone loves a special offer, and invariably, customer feedback on special offers will be uniformly positive. In fact, some businesses are offering a prize for customers who leave feedback: Wally's Delicatessen & Kaffeehaus promises that one lucky entrant who offers views via an online feedback form will win a £5 e-gift voucher in a monthly prize draw.

But while customers love a special offer, smaller companies have to be careful how they use them in a competitive industry. "We simply can't afford to give special offers to both new and existing customers but equally we don't like to feel that our loyal customer base miss out," explains Lucy Jones. "In order to combat this we give a standard 5% discount to our customers who subscribe to regular deliveries from us. This way, our regular customers always get a great deal and we can use special offers to attract new customers."

"Our customers tend to love our special offers," concludes Lydia Tomkinson. "Already being a huge fan of Eversfield Organic and the organic produce we sell, it's an added bonus being able to get something that you love for a discounted amount."

Lydia adds that special offers prove to be popular as Eversfield often sees an uplift in sales for that particular product once it has been discounted. "Often, customers come back to repeat their purchase, or first-time customers use the special offer as a way to try out Eversfield Organic and subsequently become repeat customers due to the quality and superb taste of our products."

change the frequency of delivery or, if they wish, make a cancellation.

Promote the promotion

Reaching out to customers about current and future special offers is one of the most important aspects of promotion. Farm shops have their own different methods of informing customers about special deals. "We promote our special offers through a mixture of email and SMS marketing to our customers," says Lydia Tomkinson. "As well as via our social media accounts."

"Special offers are promoted through our weekly mailing list (on Mondays and Wednesdays), Instagram and Facebook," says

Mandeep Singh. "Every week, we have special offers on our produce. Depending on stock, we have offers on a range of high-quality meat sourced from all over the world. Whether that's Spanish Iberico pork, Japanese Wagyu steaks or New Zealand grass fed lamb from the Alpine meadows."

The rise in social media affords farm shops and delis an ideal opportunity to promote special offers. Whether it's through Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, reaching out to customers via social media platforms is a no-brainer. It's instant, fast and best of all, free!

There are a number of considerations with respect to social

“ In the current economy with news reports of families and individuals struggling with rising costs, financial challenges and food shortages, special offers are especially welcome ”

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PUTTING PICNICKING FRONT AND CENTRE

Samantha Priestley explores the summertime staple well worth celebrating properly



COMMENTATORS



SARAH SHAW
THE CORNISH HEN



SIMON WARNE
THE EAST STREET DELI



CATRIN MACDONNELL
PAPADELI

National Picnic Week might not be till 18th June, but if the pandemic taught us anything it's that there's no right or wrong time for a picnic. It's one of the more joyful lockdown habits that we've taken forward with us long after social distancing ended. And we're getting more and more creative with our picnics. For fine food retailers this is an area of growth and something that goes hand in glove with the business. But preparation ahead of the picnic season is still important.

Sarah Shaw, owner of The Cornish Hen, takes a fresh look at picnics every year. "Every season we have a good look at all our suppliers to see if there is anything new to offer our customers. Whether that's a more affordable packaging option or a more eco-friendly way of supplying the picnics, or simply something that is a bit different to the usual."

Simon Warne, owner at East Street Deli, agrees, but approaches picnic season with some subtle changes rather than anything too adventurous. "We will be tweaking our range of products to cater for the summer picnic season. Picnic cheese boxes were a winner last year and we anticipate much the same this season. Hummus was a

popular line we introduced last year and so we'll be looking to increase the varieties of it this summer. Tins of Perello Gordal olives are always a winner, whatever the season, and this year we'll be pushing these products as much as possible."

For Catrin MacDonnell, owner at Papadeli, it's all about offering easy to eat things that can pack well and travel well. "Lots of creative veggie dishes, tarts, empanadas etc in the counter made every day work really well for picnics. Picnics also bring together these areas of the business that are already there."

It's something that puts fine food

retailers in a prime position. The items that are stocked all year are already picnic foods, just waiting for the season to roll around. But there are some items that are brought in especially for picnic season.

Setting the scene

At Papadeli, Catrin knows that picnics can be used as celebrations, as well as a simple way to get out for the day, and it's important to dress a special picnic and give customers the opportunity to splash out.

"We do picnics for weddings and these can be super simple affairs in a field with paper plates and

wooden cutlery as well as smarter ones with hired picnic baskets and trestle tables, proper glasses etc. If it's a picnic for a special day or event people like to go all out! We insist on being as sustainable as possible with reusable or recyclable packaging and customers really appreciate this."

Sarah Shaw picks up on this point. She's seen a drive towards eco-friendly tableware coming from the customer. "The main change is that people are far more eco aware every year which we fully support. We are careful with the packaging so there are less likely to be any leaks or spills. We offer eco plates and wooden cutlery for the picnics. The wooden cutlery is usually taken up but people seem to be as happy eating their picnic food in the eco tubs it comes packaged in and seem less likely to want to use the eco plates."

For Simon Warne this is still part of the planning process, but with good sales of re-usable containers last year, East Street Deli is looking to expand on this sustainable picnic trend. "We haven't sold any tableware that is specific for picnics in previous years but we are currently looking into lines such as eco-friendly cutlery sets, tea towels and even picnic blankets. We do



have an environmentally conscious and plastic-free section where we sell lines such as stainless steel food containers, and we definitely benefited from an uplift in sales of these lines in 2022."

The low down

One area that Simon has seen a definite bloom in is the low alcohol and no alcohol drinks sector. "This has been a growth area for us. We offer a relatively large range of non-alcoholic beers and spirits and are looking at new soft drinks to be introduced to our shelves by Easter. We will be showcasing the health benefits from our ranges over the coming weeks and months through our social media feed and in-store tastings. Whilst many people shop with us for that 'little treat' we realise that there is a growing need for healthier foods and we'll be

continuing to grow this throughout the summer season."

Sarah Shaw agrees, and has also noticed a growing desire amongst customers for low sugar products and healthier options in general. "This is definitely a growth area for us. An area that seems to be more and more popular for us is our takeaway salads. Because this is so popular it means we can make a larger variety of them which is great for customer choice. I do think this trend will continue especially when looking at picnic hampers. Obviously our traybakes and cakes are the foods that we use the sugar for and because we make them ourselves we can help with the best option for our customers, as we all know exactly how much sugar has gone into which cake!"

It seems to depend on the type of product, as to how much attention

customers are paying to sugar levels. Sarah finds some products will always sell better than others, no matter what the sugar levels are. "We look to offer a choice on the soft drinks, varying from very healthy to high sugar and then leave it to the customer to decide. I would say the high sugar currently outsells the healthy. The kombucha is much more expensive though, I'm not sure how great an impact that has on the choice."

Money talks

Expense is a big deal right now, and for the foreseeable future. Though some items will always demand a higher price point, the cost-of-living crisis can create another big win for picnic foods, as it's a cheaper alternative to restaurants. Simon Warne finds that customers don't mind spending a little more on

picnic foods if it's still less than they'd spend on dining out.

"We are seeing a continuing trend of people eating in rather than eating out and in doing so are willing to splash out a bit more. We see picnics being a great opportunity for delis like ours to cater to families and friends who are looking to get together and eat and drink without it breaking the bank. More than ever, our customers are looking for value for money. If we can offer quality products with the great service we pride ourselves on then we believe they'll be happy to return time and again."

For Sarah Shaw it's often the special items that customers go for when it comes to picnics, and price isn't an issue if they feel they are getting value for money. "Customers are definitely willing to splash out on a hamper. A hamper usually means a special occasion or doing something that you want to put a bit more effort into, hence being happy to spend a little more! In the current climate our customers definitely want value for money. They work hard to earn it and really want to see that they are spending it on something worthwhile. Value for money as opposed to cheap is where we will be looking to serve our customers best."

On the whole, a picnic is still cheaper than eating out, and being able to offer a cheaper alternative puts fine food retailers in a sweet position. "I think people see a picnic as a well-priced day out," Sarah says. "Much cheaper than a restaurant and the food quality can be the same. Picnics are great because you can go all out with all the trimmings and Champagne or keep it realistic and fit your budget."

It's all about portability

Unsurprisingly, what most people are looking for in a picnic is good food and drink that can be carried easily. Hampers are always a good option, as everything is already in one place, as Sarah Shaw knows. "Our hampers vary in size, shape and form, from the traditional wicker hamper to a cardboard wicker effect hamper to a Cornish Hen Bag, cloth or paper. There are a few other options besides, but these seem to be the most popular."

For Simon Warne, hampers are a year-round offering, and when it

comes to picnic season he's looking at other ways to make the products portable. "We have introduced a slightly more suitable range of boxes that can be filled with all of our picnic lines."

Sarah agrees, and knows that getting the packaging right is vital, and not always easy. "The area that offers the most challenges is the packaging. We continue to look at eco boxes that are both functional and attractive. There is no point spending hours on food prep when the carrier leaves something to be desired. This is quite hard because packaging that looks good costs more. It's a juggling act for sure."

But there is one picnic item that's done the job for them. "Canned cocktails have been an absolute winner for us," says Simon. "They were the ultimate stocking filler last Christmas and we expect the summer picnic season to see them continue to grow in popularity. Canned wines were a little bit more of a struggle, possibly because of our location."

For Sarah it's an evolving area of the business, but one there's no denying is a grower. "Canned wines are certainly an on-trend product. We have tried quite a few and been amazed and delighted by some and horrified by others. It is a new line that we hope our customers will really enjoy this year. We are cautious with this though as even the entry level has a high price point." Indeed, research by Statista shows that sales of pre-mixed alcoholic drinks are expected to have doubled between 2021 and 2025.

There's no doubt that picnics have changed, and will continue to change. A picnic is no longer a few sandwiches and some crisps, as Catrin Macdonnell knows. "Sandwiches are pretty popular, but I think there is a general move away from these and more creative picnic ideas such as veggie rolls and mini salmon en croute will rise in popularity. I think people are more into trying new cheeses too instead of the traditional Cheddar/Brie types."

It's the ability for fine food retailers to roll with these changes and keep offering customers exactly what they want that makes them so well placed to put picnics at the centre of their business.

“ Every season we have a good look at all our suppliers to see if there is anything new to offer our customers. Whether that's a more affordable packaging option or a more eco-friendly way of supplying the picnics, or simply something that

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“ If it's a picnic for a special day or event people like to go all out! ”





Spice up your store cupboard offering this year with these must-stock products

1 LEE KUM KEE SWEET SOY SAUCE

Lee Kum Kee Sweet Soy Sauce has a unique consistency and warm, deep colour. The sauce is specially brewed from premium soybeans and wheat flour, and its treacly texture, palatable flavour and rich colour means it is perfect as a seasoning for clay pot rice and stir-fries. It also works fantastically as a dipping sauce for dim sum, rice rolls or dumplings.

uk.lkk.com

2 BALLANCOURT PÂTÉS

Ballancourt Fine Foods specialises in a wide range of quality French foods. All products can be provided with bespoke labelling at no extra charge and have the added benefit of long shelf life. The extensive range of ambient pâtés, terrines and rillettes is second to none with a variety of jar sizes to suit all needs.

ballancourt.co.uk

3 TRUEFOODS STOCKS

Intense yet subtle, these premium beef and chicken stocks use 100% British slow-roasted beef and chicken bones to provide a deep and meaty flavour. Free from artificial colours, flavours and preservatives and made with specially selected ingredients, with no added salt (all naturally occurring), they make a great base for gravies, soups, sauces, jus and basting.

truefoodsltd.com



3



7

6

4 BANHOEK CHILLI OIL

A kitchen essential for the spice connoisseur, Banhoek Chilli Oil is a handcrafted, premium grade, artisan chilli oil made from just two ingredients, the highest quality rapeseed oil and dried Thai Birdseye chillies. 100% natural, with no preservatives, and GMO-free, it is a delicious golden-hued oil which delivers just the right level of spice and something special to a variety of dishes.

banhoekchillioil.co.uk

5 GLEBE FARM CEREALS

Glebe Farm, owned and run by brother and sister Phil and Rebecca Rayner in Cambridgeshire, has relaunched their PureOaty cereals range. Its British oats are Red Tractor quality assured from seed to table and 100% gluten-free. Glebe Farm's new PureOaty gluten-free cereals range includes porridge oats, organic porridge oats, and granola. The perfect way to start your morning.

glebefarmfoods.co.uk

6 ZANAΕ GREEK DISHES

Giant Butter Beans in Tomato Sauce, called 'Gigantes' in Greek, is a popular and nutritious speciality from the sunny Mediterranean region. This version is made according to a traditional recipe for authentic flavour. Also in the range is Dolmades – Vine Leaves stuffed with Rice. The dish is produced with carefully selected tender vine leaves collected in springtime and high-quality rice.

zanae.gr/en

7 BIONA ORGANIC GRISSINI

Made with organic Italian wheat flour and extra virgin olive oil, Biona Organic's newest grissini products are perfect for any meal or snack. These grissini come in two nutritious flavours, quinoa and sesame, and are a delicious source of protein and fibre. These natural and organic breadsticks pair perfectly with both sweet and savoury dips – and are a flavourful addition to the award-winning organic range.

biona.co.uk



“CHANGE STARTS HERE”

The Natural Food Show is back at ExCeL London on 16th-17th April 2023

Sustainability is on the menu at the Natural Food Show, part of Natural & Organic Products Europe. The pioneering trade show for natural, organic and sustainable products returns to ExCeL London on 16th-17th April. Connecting thousands of new and long-established brands with retailers, buyers, wholesalers and distributors across Europe, representatives from Whole Foods Market UK, Holland & Barrett, Waitrose, Sainsburys, Infinity Foods, Boots, Tesco, and more will be there.

Now with consumers thinking more about their health (and the planet) than ever before, the focus this year is reiterating the importance of high-quality wholefoods and the impact our food systems have on the environment.

Carol Dunning, event director at Diversified Communications, organiser of the event, comments, “The Natural Food Show is more than just a trade show, it’s a movement, a community. The show is made up of an inspiring industry that work hard to put high-quality food on shelves (and on people’s plates). And with a cost-of-living crisis to contend with, it’s even more important for brands to establish the value of their products to customers, and for retailers to help drive this demand with an all-important visit to the show. Change starts here!”

From home-grown to international

From artisanal delicacies to free-from confectionery, plant-based cheeses to organic functional foods – every trend is covered. A few brands to see include Raw Living, Suma Wholefoods, NKD Living, Oliana’s Bakehouse, Origin Kitchen, The Authentic Bread Company, SmarterNaturally, The Eco Barn, Dove’s Farm Foods, Biogroupe, NKD Living, Nutland, Brand Organic, and many more.

The show will also feature a NEW ‘Launchpad Zone’ dedicated to innovative SMEs and start-ups who have just launched to market. Expect fresh concepts and cutting-edge products from brands including Sip & Smile, Opi Futta, Lil Packaging, Biladi Foods, Nuccy, Plantea Group, Root2Ginger, Uhhmami Aps and Notorious Nooch.

Anya Zervudachi, sales manager of the Natural Food Show says, “It’s one of my favorite areas of the show for 2023, some really cool innovative brands, I am as excited for them to meet buyers as I’m sure buyers will be to meet them!”

Another major draw for retailers to discover is having a wide selection of international brands on offer. And this year the Natural Food Show have confirmed Pavilions from the US, Canada, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Thailand. Plus, an international

Hosted Buyers Programme helping to expose brands to a wider market.

Independent Day – Sunday 16th April

This year, Natural & Organic Products Europe has announced a new initiative to help reward and celebrate the work that independent health stores do for communities around the country. Sunday 16th April (the first day of the show) will be known as ‘Independent Day’.

As well as special show offers, discounted travel, hundreds of unique brands, and entry into the Independent Retailer of the Year award, the Sunday is packed full of inspirational sessions. From understanding consumer habits to implementing in-store branding, these talks promise to arm independent retailers with an effective sales growth strategy for 2023.

Len Glenville, joint-chair, Health Stores UK, says, “We are delighted to hear about Independent Day initiative being launched this year at Natural & Organic Products Europe. NOPEX has put together a fantastic package of benefits to ensure that independent health food retailers can really maximise the business benefits of their visit and enjoy catching up with friends and colleagues at the evening drinks and awards event. The help with

travel costs being offered to Health Stores UK members is very warmly welcomed, especially at this time. NOPEX is always great place to discover new products, get exclusive deals and learn from the retail and industry experts. We’re all looking forward to it!”

Jim Manson, editor and founder, *Natural Newsdesk* says “I’ve attended every NOPEX for the last 20 years, and there’s something I’ve noticed about retailers who are the most regular and consistent attendees. In short, it’s the strongest performing, most successful independent stores who you can rely on to show up every single year. Are the two things related? I’ll leave that for others to consider. But let’s just say that, each year, some of the busiest

people in the trade make a business calculation that attending the show is time well spent, for themselves and their teams. Of course, it’s more than just about discovering new products and getting exclusive deals – it’s about participating, getting involved in our industry. And I think that’s incredibly important. So, my advice to independent retailers everywhere is this: Take part. Get yourself and your team along to ExCeL – you’ll be doing your business – and the whole industry – a big favour.”

For more information and to apply, please visit naturalproducts.co.uk/independentday.

Food for thought

The Natural Products Theatre will host a range of topics around trends





● How does your health store compare to others around the UK? – Rosie Greenaway, Editor, Natural Products News & Dominic Roberjot, Publisher, Natural Products News

● Did you know you can save the world? How to let customers know they can make a difference (Panel: Better Food, Planet Organic, Hodmedods, moderated by Al Overton)

● 10 trends to watch in 2023 – Mary Allen, president & founder, Natural Brand Works

● The organic market 50 years on: Where we've been and where we're going – Alex Cullen, commercial & marketing director, Soil Association Certification

● Health trend spotlight: "Shroom me up!" – the rise of the functional mushrooms (Panel: KÁÁPÁ Biotech, London Nootropics, Good Mushroom Nutrition, moderated by Shona Wilkinson)

● How to create the go-to destination for health & wellbeing – Karen Green, Food Mentor, Buyer-ology

lives' and the role manufacturers and retailers have in helping consumers live a more sustainable lifestyle.

Soil Association's senior trade relations manager, Lee Holdstock, will moderate an exciting discussion titled 'The cost and true cost of sustainable food'. In this session Steven Sidhu, business lead of Growing Good Technology, and Alex Smith, founder of Alara Wholefoods, will consider what may be driving costs in a food system that doesn't externalise its issues. Hear from organic brands about how they have made trading up to sustainable easier and keep sustainable accessible.

Other notable sessions include:

● What does the public really think of indie health food stores? – Cheryl Thallon, founder & MD, Viridian Nutrition and Co-Owner Sheaf Street Health Store

opportunities and challenges in the industry – with a firm focus on sustainability and how to work as an industry to tackle the climate crisis. This includes an important session with Craig Sam, Author and Executive Chairman of Carbon Gold Ltd. He will discuss the positive implications of how carbon taxes will make non-organic food more expensive and organic food cheaper, while bringing reduced greenhouse gas levels, more biodiversity, cleaner air and water.

As well as this, Mike Watkins, head of retailer and business and insight for NielsenIQ, will talk about 'The changing climate of Sustainability' including 'How consumers think about sustainability in their everyday

For the full seminar programme and timings, please visit naturalproducts.co.uk/seminars-main.

Pitch to the buyers

The ever popular and dynamic Pitch to the Buyer session with Holland & Barrett is back. Don't miss five buyers from Holland & Barrett choose between six hand-selected exhibitors from every category – food, beverage, VHMS and beauty – who will pitch their products live on stage.

Plus, for the first time, Whole Foods Market UK will facilitate private pitching sessions on the show floor, which will take place as carefully curated 'speed-dating style' meetings over the two days.

Jade Hoai, executive leader – operations, Whole Foods Market, says, "As Whole Foods Market continues to lead the way in bringing innovative trends to the high street and unique food, drink and health and beauty developments from across the globe, we are delighted to be attending Natural & Organic Products Europe in April."

She continues, "The event is a chance to focus our priorities on

quality, local and sustainability in all new product initiatives, which is at the centre of our business to make sure we are nourishing people and the planet. We look forward to attending the event to network and stay current with the latest trends and research in the industry."

Natural & Organic Innovation Awards

The Innovation Showcase is the place to discover and celebrate the movers and shakers of the sector. The showcase will display the latest products launched in the last 12 months that have been shortlisted for a Natural & Organic Innovation Award. Here, visiting buyers can vote for their favourite products to win across seven categories, including Best Food Product, Best Organic Food Product, Best Snack Product, Best Special Diet Product, Best Vegan Food Product, Best Drink Product, and Best Organic Drink Product.

NEED TO KNOW

WHERE: ExCeL, London
WHEN: 16th-17th April 2023
WEB: naturalproducts.co.uk

“ The Natural Food Show is more than just a trade show, it's a movement, a community. The show is made up of an inspiring industry that work hard to put high-quality food on shelves (and on people's plates) ”

CAROL DUNNING, DIVERSIFIED COMMUNICATIONS



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www.naturalproducts.co.uk/independentday



naturalproducts.co.uk
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FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW 2023

The most comprehensive snapshot of the food, hospitality and retail sectors returns to Birmingham's NEC 24th-26th April

Farm Shop & Deli Show returns to the NEC, Birmingham this April (24th-26th), as part of the UK Food & Drink Shows. Bringing together the very best of the hospitality, manufacturing and grocery, speciality and convenience retail sectors, the shows are set to showcase the very latest products, big thinking, key insights and latest trends through the lens of the developing cost-of-living crisis.

The must-attend event unites Farm Shop & Deli Show, National Convenience Show, Food & Drink Expo and Foodex Manufacturing Solutions (incorporating Ingredients), under one roof, giving food and drink professionals 2023's most

comprehensive snapshot of the latest developments across multiple industries. **Register for a free pass at: farm-shop-deli-show-2023.reg.buzz/.**

The three-day event is well known for its ability to bring together the great and the good from the industry's diverse sectors with innovative exhibitors, hot-topic seminars and business-changing awards central to the shows' unparalleled line-up.

Visitors to Farm Shop & Deli Show, the UK's premier trade event for the specialist retail sector, will leave with heightened awareness of the sector's newest and most unique products as well as its innovation and sustainability capabilities.

WHO'S EXHIBITING?

A jam-packed show floor of over 350 exhibitors will be showcasing the latest products and services on show in the specialist retail sector.

Expect big name exhibitors such as Cawston Press (Stand T331), Pip & Nut (Stand T362), Cook (Stand S310), Silent Pool Distillery (Stand M289) and Godminster (Stand Q279) to be showcasing their wares.

Also exhibiting are:

ECOBAGS (STAND P281)

Suppliers of fully bespoke branded reusable bags EcoBags is celebrating 20 years of supplying fully bespoke branded reusable bags to quality independent businesses. Bags of any size, shape and colour made from Jute, JUCO, Cotton, Canvas and even Recycled Plastic Bottles, they are the proven UK experts when it comes to branded reusable bags.

LOVE CORN (STAND U348)

A crunchy corn snack that comes in a variety of great flavours, has a light

crunch and is made from simple ingredients. Low sugar, gluten-free and plant-based, they're perfect for on-the-go, in a lunchbox, paired with a refreshing beverage or sprinkled on a salad – LOVE CORN is the fan favourite amongst busy adults, always-hungry teens and picky little eaters! Available in a variety of sizes and perfect for all snacking occasions!

LUDLOW FARM SHOP (STAND G319)

Set in 8,000 acres of Shropshire countryside, Ludlow Farm Shop was established in 2007 with the aim of offering the best fresh, local, seasonal and handmade food. One of the specialist areas within the farm shop is the preserves and sauces department. If you're looking for an award-winning, traditionally made preserve, sauce or chutney, Ludlow's range is the perfect blend of classic and innovative and can provide personalised plans for all needs.

“ We're here for the National Butcher's Awards and to find new innovations. Something really different. We'll be leaving with two new concepts to consider – a worthwhile trip! It's good to be back with the industry, it's all about socialising and networking, and it's great to be able to do that again ”

FERGAL MCKAY, MANAGER, MCKAY FAMILY BUTCHERS

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THE FRUIT PIG COMPANY (STAND S350)

Producers of rare fresh blood black puddings, white pudding, haggis and specialist bacons, this produce is available nationally in over 250 farm shops, delis and butcheries including the prestigious Fortnum & Mason and Gloucester Services. The rare black puddings grace the plates in many eateries from small cafés to Michelin-starred, TV chefs. Fruit Pig is also SALSA certified.

TOUCAN MOBILE SALES & ANALYTICS (STAND U319)

Toucan removes the pains and challenges facing many sales operations in product-based businesses by harnessing the power of data and providing powerful insights at the click of a button to help managers monitor and measure performance across the company, their team, products, product groups, territories and customers. Field and internal sales teams are equipped with the information to service their customers better, manage their territories more effectively and help increase customers spend with upsell and cross-sell opportunities, increasing margins as a result.

TWEEDMILL TEXTILES LTD (STAND Q280)

A family run business, Tweedmill has been creating beautiful throws, picnic rugs, home accessories & more for some of the world's best loved brands since 1971. Weavers create soft tweeds, tartans and blankets and designers, pattern cutters and machinists take the material to create products that are built to last. From recycling yarn, to weaving tweed, all products are produced using exceptional craftsmanship.

HAMPTON COURT GIN (STAND H338)

A multi-award-winning, small-batch, hand-crafted spirits company,

“ This is our first ever trade show, it's been such a great way to connect with farm shops and delis. They're so busy that typically it's hard to get in front of them but the show has been a great way to meet them and also catch up with existing customers, face to face ”

JULIE GREEN, DIRECTOR, GUN DOG GIN

Hampton Court Gin is inspired by the buzzing contemporary culture of Hampton Court, and 500 years of its history, including the lives and wives of the infamous court of Henry VIII. With spirits which blend aromatic botanicals with advanced modern distillation techniques and rich, historical storytelling, the brand produces two multi award-winning craft gins, and, brand new for 2023, a craft spiced rum.

BURREN BALSAMICS (STAND P330)

Formed in 2014 in Northern Ireland, Burren Balsamics is an artisan producer of 100% natural infused Balsamic and White Balsamic Vinegar, valuable assets to any store cupboard whether in a restaurant or home.

THE CHESHIRE CHEESE COMPANY (STAND P289)

The award-winning Cheshire Cheese Company has a unique

range of contemporary waxed cheese truckles, cutting wheels and chutneys. Including flagship products such as Black Bob, Extra Mature Cheddar and Caramelised Onion & Rioja cheddar, the full range is Vegetarian Society approved.

RUSSELL & ATWELL (STAND M339)

The Russell & Atwell vision is to create ridiculously good chocolates for everyone. Available in 90g pouches and 160g jars, their fresh chocolates contain sustainably



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sourced cocoa, organic cream and butter, British wildflower honey and a pinch of Dorset Sea Salt and absolutely no palm oil or preservatives.

LITTLE BIG FLAVOUR KITS (STAND S279)

Little Big Flavour Kits offers meal kits designed to help people cook Sri Lankan food. Set on the silk route, the food has absorbed a variety of cultures, resulting in a unique fusion of flavours. Taking the guesswork out of the cooking process by including spices, coconut milk and recipe card, the kits make it easy to cook authentic dishes. The range includes flavourful plant-

based options, perfect for people choosing a vegan or vegetarian diet for health, environmental, or ethical reasons and uses compostable and recyclable packaging.

CRUMBS BREWING (STAND G311)

Crumbs takes loaves that would otherwise go unsold from artisan bakeries and turn them into a range of delicious beers. With their latest beer they have even partnered with a naan bread manufacturer to rescue 'wonky' naans and brew the world's first Naan Laager. Because each beer is brewed using a different type of leftover loaf, the style of the beer reflects the character of the



delicious bread that makes it. It may be waste but it's still an important, high quality, ingredient in the brewing process. Crumbs fight food waste and make tasty, unique beers at the same time. It's delicious beer, bread differently.

TREGOTHNAN & R-CHI (STAND H329)

In 1999, Tregothnan planted the UK's first ever tea plantations in the unique sub-tropical microclimate of the River Fal in Cornwall. The collection of 11 hand-crafted, home-grown teas and infusions span black, green and herbal varieties. Tregothnan loose teas, tea bags and pyramids are 100% plastic-free and fully compostable. R-Chi Iced Tea is unique, sustainably grown and distinctly British. Sourcing the finest ingredients to deliver a pure, unrefined, incredible taste, packed with natural antioxidants. Using British grown tea and British Manuka to craft a refreshing and healthy soft drink.

STAG BAKERIES LTD (STAND P301)

Based on the Isle of Lewis, Stag Bakeries is a family-run bakery with a heritage dating back to 1885. Stag specialises in producing premium bakery snack products such as savoury biscuits, cheese straws, traditional Scottish shortbread, and speciality fruit cakes. Each product is made using the finest ingredients and nothing is rushed. The company's newest range of products are the Hebridean Baker biscuits, six



flavours of Oaties and Shortbread launched in 2022.

DALLAWAYS CHERRY JUICE (STAND K330)

A Kent-based farming family produce this pure English Cherry Juice made from lower grade cherries that were traditionally left for waste. The repurposing of these cherries to create a delicious and nutritious juice has increased dramatically over the last 5 years as demand has increased. The brand is currently working on an innovate UK project in conjunction with the University of Kent to confirm the pre-biotic and anti-aging properties of cherry juice and the active anthocyanin compounds within cherry juice. Dallaways Cherry Juice is the only English produced cherry juice, ready to supply the UK market nationwide.

For the full list of exhibitors and products on show, visit farmshopanddelishow.co.uk

WHAT'S ON STAGE?

Meanwhile, on The Grocer Live stage, Will Shu, founder and CEO of Deliveroo, will lead a raft of speakers sharing insight, expertise, best practice and predictions for 2023 and beyond.

The show's dedicated speaker programme offers visitors a comprehensive look at the thriving UK food and drink industry, covering a diverse and highly relevant range of subjects.

Set against the three-day show's essential themes of people, sustainability, trends, health and technology, with individual sessions



“ This is one of the biggest shows in the UK to come to. I wasn't sure how busy it'd be after the pandemic but it's really busy. I attended one of the seminars yesterday on latest product trends and it had a really interesting panel. Day 2 and it's proving a really great show. Well worthwhile coming ”

ALISON KAYE, DIRECTOR, EVA BOLD

“ We’ve done all the shows there are to do this year and by far and away Farm Shop & Deli Show is the best. We’ve met and opened up dialogue with buyers from big national retailers, and it’s because of this, and the support of the WRBM team, that we have already committed to the 2023 shows, where we plan to take more space and bring more of our brands ”

PETER MITCHELL, MD, THE FARMERS SON

conversation with *Grocer* editor, Adam Leyland, in *Diversifying Deliveroo: From dark kitchens to bricks and mortar* as the pair discuss the innovative delivery pioneer’s success story and what the future holds for the sector.

Also forming part of the programme’s schedule will be:

ETHICAL BUSINESS – B CORP IS THE FUTURE

Certified B Corporations are leaders in the global movement for an inclusive, equitable, and regenerative economy. Cotswold Fayre are committed to using its business as a force for good – doing what’s right to build better business for everyone and for the planet. Join this session to understand more about B Corp, its importance, the responsibility that we all have and how it can impact your business (*Dragon’s Pantry, 12:00pm, Monday 24th April*).

THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS: HOW HAS UK FOOD AND DRINK ADAPTED AND WHAT IS THE OUTLOOK?

Rising energy bills, staffing shortages and record inflation are three of the challenges the UK food and drink industry continues to face. In this session, we are joined by leading trade organisations to analyse the support available to businesses (*The Grocer Live Stage, 1:20pm, Monday 24th April*).

SUGAR-SMART: WHO’S RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO MAKE BETTER CHOICES ON FOOD?

Our industry is under pressure to reformulate products with less sugar. Join Action on Sugar who debate whose responsibility it is to make better choices on food – the government, consumers or manufacturers? Action on Sugar also give an update on the sugar

Find out what’s on at the other shows here:

<https://www.farmshopanddelishow.co.uk/uk-food-drink-shows>

promising to drill down further on various aspects of each, visitors can expect to hear from some of the industry’s best-known names including Kate Nicholls OBE, chief executive at UKHospitality, Tom Athron, CEO at Fortnum & Mason and Karen Betts, chief executive Officer at Food & Drink Federation to name a few.

Scheduled to be on The Grocer Live stage on Monday 24th April, 11.35am, Will Shu will be in

SHOW SPOTLIGHTS

BALLANCOURT

Ballancourt Fine Foods is a family run company that specialises in quality traditional French products. The business’s main strength apart from their high-quality products is the bespoke own labels they can produce, completely free of charge, with no case sizes and small minimum orders. Ballancourt’s extensive range of pates, terrines and rillettes is second to none with a variety of jar sizes to suit all needs. The range doesn’t end there, they also offer a fantastic range of mustards, soups, vinegars and classic gourmet cooked meals all of which provide a perfect addition to any hamper. The entire range benefits from long shelf life and ambient storage. The perfect store cupboard staple, delicious served with a warm crusty baguette and a glass of your favourite red wine.



ballancourt.co.uk

Stand K33

GLEBE FARM

Glebe Farm is delighted to be attending the Farm Shop & Deli Show 2023 as an Awards Supporter. It’s the only farm in the UK growing and processing gluten-free oats into plant-based oat drinks, flours, and cereals. Owned and run by brother and sister Phil and Rebecca Rayner, based in Cambridgeshire, Glebe Farm steams and mills the oats on its working farm and state-of-the-art gluten-free mill and plant milk facility. Its oats are ‘Red Tractor quality assured’ from seed to table, award-winning, and certified gluten-free. The farm uses its own renewable energy sources to achieve class-leading 0.29kg CO2/Litre of PureOaty. All their oats are sourced locally either on the farm or within 40 miles, and then milled on-site, so they know exactly where every oat has come from. Glebe Farm has won awards including a gold star for PureOaty ‘Barista’ by Great Taste Awards in 2019.



glebefarmfoods.co.uk

Stand F240

WORLD OF SWEETS

Discover award-winning and global confectionery brands that are different from the rest. World of Sweets pride themselves on innovative confectionery to delight and excite shoppers and are considered experts in novelty confectionery. Featuring an exclusive brand portfolio which includes Anthon Berg, Pez, Warheads, Nerds, Red Vines, Sour Punch Tootsie, Vimto, Sweet Bandit, Crazy Candy Factory and Bonds of London. Their latest brand partner is Danish confectioner Anthon Berg. Renowned as a world-famous liquor filled chocolate brand founded in 1884 and better known for their unique bottle-shaped chocolate. Endorsed by some of the most internationally recognised spirit brands such as Cointreau, Drambuie, Remy Martin, Southern Comfort and many more. World of Sweets are the UK’s largest confectionery distributor.



worldofsweets.co.uk

Stand 452

ICERTECH



Icertech specialise in providing temperature-controlled packaging systems for shipping chilled products, with a focus on quality and service. With over 30 years of experience in the packaging industry, whether you’re new to the industry or well established they have a packaging solution to suit your needs. Icertech’s product range includes coolants which are manufactured on their site in North Wales, and a range of high-quality insulated boxes. With these packaging solutions you can confidently send your chilled goods in perfect condition.

icertech.co.uk

Stand K229

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reduction programme and discuss the advertising and promotion restrictions that are in place (1.30pm, Monday 24th April, Education Hub).

LOW2NO IN RETAIL: THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Low2No alcohol category continues to grow, with supermarkets dedicating more and more space to the category. In terms of growth in retail, what's

next for the category? How can manufacturers further grow within the major supermarkets and what opportunities are there in smaller format retail? (The Grocer Live Stage, 3.45pm, Monday 24th April).

DRAGONS' PANTRY

Ready to witness the ultimate retail test? Watch and learn as brave entrepreneurs meet our fearsomely-experienced industry 'dragons' to make their 15-minute pitch.

Success could bring a new listing and coverage in *The Grocer*, while everyone gets invaluable insights into what works in-store (The Grocer Live Stage, 10.00am, Tuesday 25th and 2.30pm, Wednesday 26th April).

TECHNICAL ADVANTAGE: ALL YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT SALSA AND BRC

The importance of food safety has never waned, but it has arguably never been more in the spotlight than it is today – particularly since the introduction of Natasha's Law in 2021. In this session, Katie Young discusses everything food safety, particularly focusing on SALSA and BRC and what you need to be aware of (Dragon's Pantry, 10.30am, Tuesday 25th April).

PLANT-BASED POTENTIAL: THE RAPID RISE OF ALTERNATIVE FOODS AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

As consumers are becoming more aware of the impact of what they consume has on the environment and their health, the popularity of the plant-based category has accelerated. In this session, sponsored by Lincoln International, Alex Masters is joined by a panel of plant-based experts to discuss the acceleration of the plant-based food category and the challenges and opportunities on the horizon (The Grocer Live Stage, 12.00pm, Tuesday 25th April).

FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW UNVEILS ITS 2023 FARM SHOP & DELI RETAILERS OF THE YEAR!

It's time to recognise the speciality retailers leading the sector in customer service, innovation, community involvement as well as initiatives aimed at retaining, rewarding and empowering staff at our 2023 Awards. Plus, Nigel Barden will catch up with a few of our previous winners, talking about the future of the industry and how they

“ It's our first time here and we're looking for new confectionery - we've found so many! We're quite excited about it! Really worthwhile coming and being back out and about with people. Much better than Zoom! ”

DANIELLE HADDON, OWNER, DANIELLE HADDON LTD

are adapting to the challenges that the sector faces (The Grocer Live Stage, 3.15pm, Tuesday 25th April).

DOES SUSTAINABILITY COME AT A COST?

Net-Zero, Carbon Neutral – these are all claims or industry buzzwords used to highlight to consumers positive actions in the fight against climate change. In reality, what do they symbolise? In this session, Paul Hargreaves, CEO at Cotswold Fayre, is joined by a panel of experts to analyse the importance of sustainability to consumers and the role of the supply chain to drive change. (Education Hub, Tuesday 25th April, 12.30pm).

TRAVEL RETAIL: WOULD YOU LIKE TO SUPPLY YOUR PRODUCTS ONTO PLANES, TRAINS AND CRUISES?

Have you ever considered the travel sector as a route to market and don't know where to start? Quite often underestimated, this channel is the perfect route to consistent high volumes, advanced engagement and great brand exposure. Learn more from the industry expert, Heerum Fleary, on why planes, trains and cruises should be on your radar for 2023 and beyond! (Dragon's Pantry, 1.45pm, Wednesday 26th April).

The breadth of expertise that will be accessible at Farm Shop & Deli Show this year is staggering. Many of the industry's leading lights and brightest talents will be sharing invaluable knowledge on how to

make it in our ever-turbulent world, discussing everything from the future of low2no and how we can rethink food waste, to the HFSS policy change and how best to nurture talent.

Whether you're just launching a foodie start-up, want to take your store to the next level, or looking for answers in new technology, there's a session for everyone at the UK Food & Drink Shows in April.

See the full line-up of sessions and speakers here: farmshopanddelishow.co.uk/sessions-2023#/seminars/



NEED TO KNOW

WHAT: Farm Shop & Deli Show
WHERE: NEC, Birmingham
WHEN: 24th-26th April 2023
WEB: farmshopanddelishow.co.uk

COMPETITIONS & AWARDS

Supported and judged by leading farm shop & deli retailers, top wholesaler buyers and owners and industry experts, the Farm Shop & Deli Product Awards is an initiative that recognises and rewards the best in specialist food and drink products.

Judged across 11 categories (Beverages, Chilled & Frozen Desserts, Chilled Deli, Condiments & Sauces, Fermented & Smoked Foods, Meat, Non-Food, Plant-Based, Preserves, Savoury Biscuits & Snacks and Sweet Bakery & Confectionery) by our expert panels of judges, the Product Awards is a showcase of the most exciting products and the brands behind them in the market today. Find out who's worthy of a bronze, silver or gold accolade on stage at the show in April.

FARM SHOP & DELI RETAILER AWARDS

A highly respected prize within the industry which plays an important role in supporting the UK's independent specialist retail market, the Farm Shop & Deli Retailer Awards celebrates the very best in the sector across nine regions and 10 categories. For 2023, the Awards are zeroing in on specialist

retailers, particularly those who are playing an important role in supporting and developing their team. In a sector where staffing is a common issue, initiatives that have been implemented to retain, reward and empower staff will be celebrated. Retailers from up and down the country will be assessed by a panel of esteemed judges to find winners from each region, with the live announcement a must-see event at the UK Food & Drink Shows.

BRITISH BAKER: BRITAIN'S BEST LOAF 2023

Celebrating artisan bakers across Britain and beyond, Britain's Best Loaf will culminate in a live judging event and awards presentation on stage at the show on Tuesday 25th April. With dozens of entries already shortlisted across seven categories including, Wholegrain, Flavoured Sourdough and Innovation, it's a platform to witness the very best in baking in 2023.

“ Farm Shop & Deli Show is a must-visit event for anyone looking to invest, improve or advance their speciality venture in 2023 and beyond. With over 350 exhibitors expected and a fantastic programme of speakers lined up to address the industry's biggest questions, it's sure to be one of the most worthwhile days out in your diary ”

ANDREW REED, MANAGING DIRECTOR – WINE & EXHIBITIONS, WILLIAM REED

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SALES ENQUIRIES



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New retail perspectives from industry experts

The CheeseGeek to expand into speciality wholesale

Online cheese retailer the CheeseGeek is set to expand into wholesale and is looking for partnerships with speciality retailers and restaurants. The London-based company plans to develop co-branded ranges and menus.

Commenting on the expansion, founder Edward Howard, said, "We want customers to see our logo on menus across the country and know the values it stands for. We strongly



believe there is a better way to engage customers with cheese that aligns with 21st century

consumer expectations, and this shouldn't be restricted to customers at home."

In addition to supplying a wide range of artisan cheeses, the company will support wholesale customers with in-person training, co-hosted events, access to exclusive products, and marketing and digital expertise. "We are looking to work with businesses that have a passion for great produce, provenance and telling the story of their producers.

"It's about facilitating engagement with the customer about the cheese, rather than just having it put on the table. Every single interaction with cheese is an opportunity to get someone hooked into our amazing industry and product," he added.

Dairy industry calls on young people to help reduce emissions

According to recent research, 32% of 18-24-year-olds in the UK want a job that plays a part in tackling climate change, but major dairy co-op Arla found that young people are unaware that a role in the dairy industry could provide this.

Paul Savage, director of UK agriculture at the co-op, said there was 'clearly a knowledge gap' within young Brits. "Sustainability is also about ensuring a sustainable workforce for the future and that is why we need our younger generation to step up and consider a future in dairy to help drive the changes we've already identified.

"Our research shows that over two-thirds of 18-24-year-olds think it's important that farmers use renewable energy technologies.

"But nearly half of those surveyed were unaware that solar panels and wind turbines can already be found on many farms and often have the capacity to generate enough energy to export to power homes in the local area."

Arla said that the next generation of farmers were needed to help deliver future changes.

NEWS IN BRIEF

THE OLD CHEESE ROOM RECALLS THREE CHEESES DUE TO LISTERIA

Three types of artisanal soft cheeses produced by artisan cheesemakers The Old Cheese Room have been urgently recalled over health fears. It is feared they may be contaminated with listeria, a bacteria that poses a particular threat to the elderly, pregnant women and babies. The recall affects the Baronet, Baby Baronet and Mini Baronet varieties of the Wiltshire brand's cheeses. Listeria most commonly infects chilled, ready-to-eat foods such as pre-packed sandwiches, pate and soft cheeses. In rare cases, it leads to listeriosis, which can cause a temperature, vomiting and aches and pains.

NON-LE GRUYÈRE AOP CHEESES CAN NOW BE LABELLED AS 'GRUYERE'

The name 'Gruyere' can now be used to label cheeses from outside of the region in which the AOP cheese is made, a US appeals court has ruled. It agreed that 'Gruyere' can legally be used to describe cheese regardless of where it was made, despite protests from two groups representing cheese producers

from Switzerland and France. The court said the French and Swiss groups "cannot overcome what the record makes clear: cheese consumers in the United States understand 'Gruyere' to refer to a type of cheese, which renders the term generic". The groups said they would continue to "pursue vigorously" their efforts to protect the name.

CHISWICK CHEESE MARKET 'GIVES BACK' WITH ANNUAL CHEESEMAKERS GRANT

The Academy of Cheese has teamed up with Chiswick Cheese Market to launch a new initiative to encourage aspiring cheesemakers into the industry and help new cheesemakers get their products to market. New UK cheesemakers who are at start-up stage or have been trading for less than 18 months can apply for the grant. Worth £1,000, the grant will be awarded annually to four cheesemakers in the form of Academy of Cheese certifications and cheesemaking guidance. Lucy Cufflin of Chiswick Cheese Market commented, "We are hopeful the Chiswick Cheese Market Cheesemakers Grant will result in a number of new British cheesemakers making even more delicious cheese for us to showcase here."

Inspirational Cheese Retailers: Lewis & Cooper



Founded over a hundred years ago, in the quintessential North Yorkshire market town of Northallerton, Lewis & Cooper has developed into a world-renowned gourmet food shop, recognised far and wide for its local delicacies and fine foods. Over the decades, the shop has even garnered a reputation as the 'Fortnum & Mason of the North'.

Today, 123 years on from its founding, the shop continues to operate at the same site where George Lewis and Binks Cooper first put their stake in the ground. While Lewis & Cooper's operations are vast – ranging from a food hall to a tearoom – and its reputation has been built on the premium quality of its hampers, the in-store delicatessen, which is home to a 300-strong cheese offering, is central to its success.

Delicatessen manager Julie Oxley-Hoyle says championing each and every cheesemaker behind these artisan products is a key part of her role. "Being a cheesemonger is a challenge. It is very much evolving as tastes and the industry change," Julie says. "I think it is a great privilege



to sell these cheeses, which are so lovingly made." As well as stocking traditional favourites in its core range, Lewis & Cooper adds guest cheeses into its huge offering as they become available and the team discovers them. This ever-changing array provides excitement for customers and staff alike. "I love the seasonal cheeses as it's something to look forward to!" Julie says.

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Rowcliffe to sponsor artisan cheese award at ICDA 2023

British importer and distributor of premium cheese, Rowcliffe, has announced their sponsorship of the Supreme Artisan Trophy at the International Cheese & Dairy Awards (ICDA) 2023 for the second year in a row.

Senior purchasing manager Paul Heasman has previously represented Rowcliffe on the judging panel, and this year the leading premium cheese distributor will have four judges on the panel.

Lisa Kerr, head of marketing at Rowcliffe, commented, "We are delighted to be sponsoring the Supreme Artisan Trophy again this year. At Rowcliffe, we pride ourselves on championing and supporting small and artisan producers and this trophy is one of the leading awards and acknowledgements for the industry."

Sunit Mehta, managing director of Rowcliffe, added, "The ICDA is an important landmark in the cheese and dairy industry, and we are pleased to not only be supporting the awards through sponsorship but to also have been invited to be on the judging panel for this year's cheese awards."

"Having been actively involved in the awards for many years with multiple previous winners we are delighted to remain a valued partner in the awards in 2023."



Torpenhow Farmhouse Dairy launches coronation cheese

Family farm Torpenhow Farmhouse Dairy is located in the Northern Fells in Cumbria, and produces several cheeses utilising the milk from their organic, pasture-fed herd of 150 Jersey-Friesians. Created especially for the artisan market, their limited-edition cheese The Monarch is launching in mid-April as a tribute to the upcoming coronation of Charles III. A four-kilo size cheese, it has a soft-set structure and is slightly crumbly with a distinctly mild but defined blue taste.

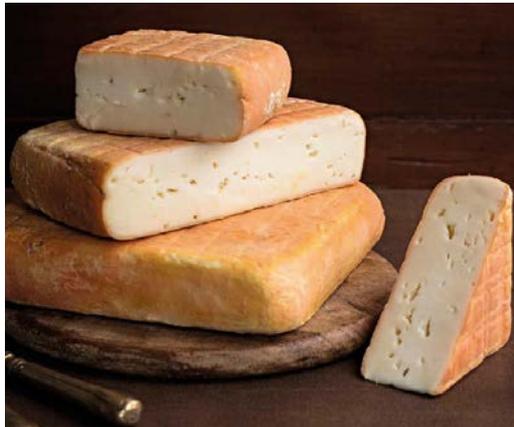
CHEESE FACT FILE...

ST JAMES

● **Country of origin:** Cumbria, UK

● **Milk:** Unpasteurised ewes

● **Description:** This cheese is seasonal with milking from early spring to late autumn, and comes in squares which are typically around 2kg each. For a period of three to four weeks, the cheeses are individually washed and turned in brine three times a week. This allows them to form a striking orange-yellow rind that contributes to the taste. The flavours are deep and complex, rich, savoury and sweet at the same time.



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JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

The global cheese market is growing, with more people turning to cheese for nutrition and convenience. The health benefits of cheese are being realised, such as its good protein, minerals, calcium and use as a keto-friendly food.

In 2023, it appears that UK consumers are especially interested in sustainable and ethically produced cheeses.

Decisions in food buying are being steered by the alarming rate of global warming. Our choices for food are becoming fine-tuned and switched on to "what's better for the environment is better for us". With 60% of the UK population now choosing to buy sustainably, they also agree to pay more for the privilege. In my opinion it is clear that positive change is on the horizon.

Take cheesemakers Patrick and Rebecca Holden who make Hafod Cheese. We have to wise up to their philosophy when it comes to maintaining circular economies by investing time in good regenerative land management and proper animal husbandry. Patrick is the CEO of the Sustainable Food Trust.

This month's column aims to focus your attention on buying wisely. For too long the wool has been pulled over our eyes when it comes to good food choices. With a booklet of various subsidies to choose from, Defra seems to have lost the plot. Indeed farmers will benefit from planting trees and hedgerows, but will they be able to afford to make the changes needed to become fully agroecological?

So what is this all about? Simply put, it is without doubt that arable, dairy and meat produce born on regenerative land contains all the right stuff for a healthy diet. "Regenerative Agriculture describes farming

and grazing practices that, among other benefits, reverse climate change by rebuilding soil organic matter and restoring degraded soil biodiversity – resulting in both carbon drawdown and improving the water cycle," according to Regeneration International.

As a procurer of charcuterie, cheese, wine and bread we are ever so conscious of the foods that we sell at No2. Mankind has destroyed so many eco systems and diminished the rich pastures to lifeless soils through the decline in soil condition caused by its improper use or poor management, usually for agricultural, industrial or urban purposes. It is a serious environmental problem. Soils are a fundamental natural resource, and are the basis for all terrestrial life. Avoiding soil degradation is crucial to our wellbeing.

This is why my mission in 2023 is to focus on farmers and winemakers that are consciously following agroecological methods to help enrich and keep our soil healthy and, what's more, full of life. Last year I attended the Science of Artisan Cheese Conference. This was such an inspirational time for me and I am now convinced that we can all play a part in positive agricultural change.

What better story is there when you can put your hand on your heart and explain truly why something tastes so good and different? Take Hafod or Stonebeck cheese for example. I have travelled far and wide and met many cheese farmers. These are only a few that truly get it and are prepared to make the sacrifices needed to achieve a circular economy that is in harmony with the planet.

Why stock these cheeses? It is obvious, not to mention the fact that the cheeses produced on farms like this are quite frankly brilliant. The taste of Hafod and Stonebeck reflects the terroir, the diet and the biome in which the cows live and graze.

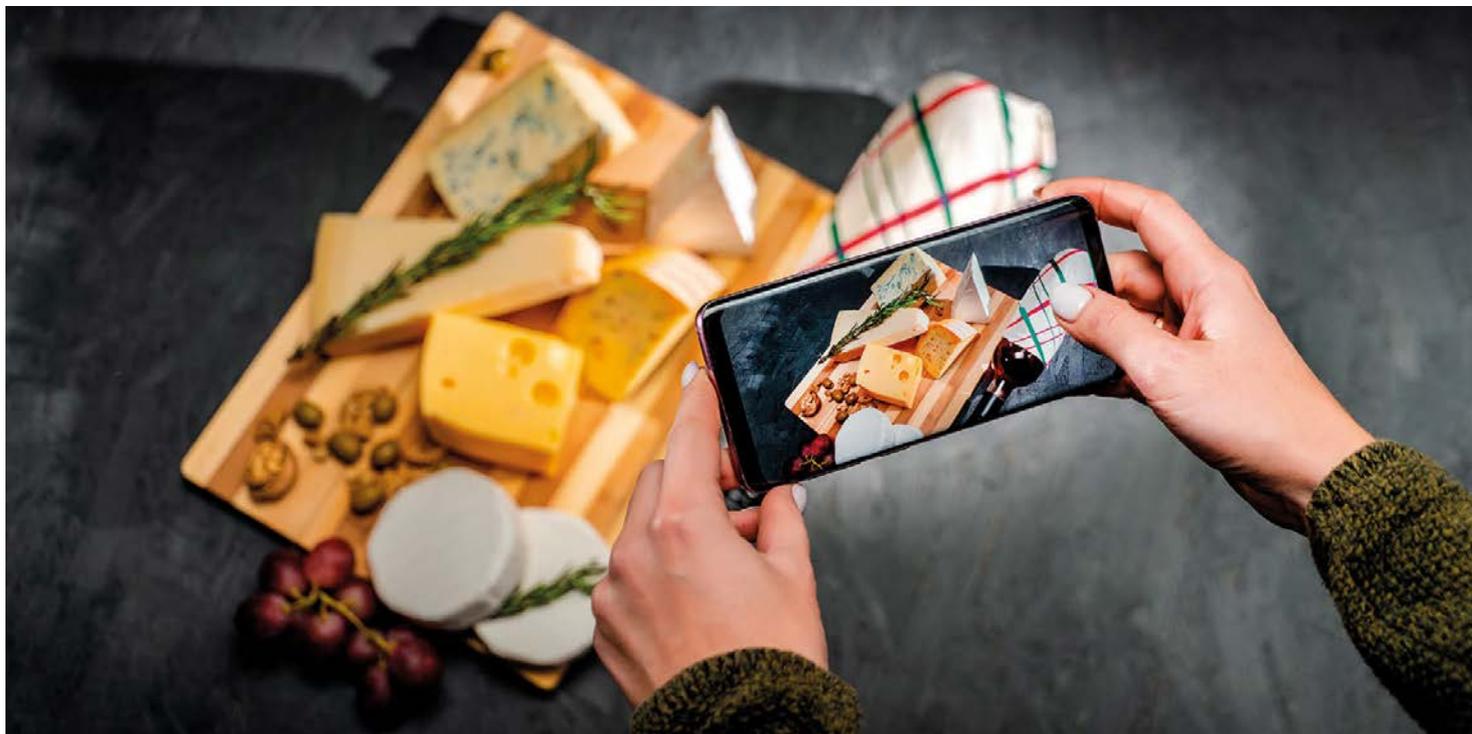
There are other great cheese farmers out there a lot of which we stock at No2. We are proud to buy from conscientious British farmers and love to tell the story about their ethos and why that makes their cheese awesome.

“Simply put, it is without doubt that arable, dairy and meat produce born on regenerative land contains all the right stuff for a healthy diet. This is why my mission in 2023 is to focus on farmers and winemakers that are consciously following agroecological methods to help enrich and keep our soil healthy and full of life”

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PETER'S YARD



HOW TO MAKE YOUR CHEESE BUSINESS MORE SOCIAL

Speciality Food speaks to three cheesemongers using the power of social media to boost their businesses

We all know that independent retail relies heavily on beautiful displays, artisan quality, and of course the support of its local community, but how important is social media?

An essential tool

For small businesses where the focus is on customer satisfaction and making connections, social media can be a powerful tool.

According to Morgan McGynn, owner of Cheeses of Muswell Hill, "I think it is really important to document what you are doing in your business, as this can lead to customers organically coming across your page and visiting your business just by a simple post."

"The staff and I use it as a platform to exhibit what we are doing in our

little shop. The location of the shop is a little tucked away so it's nice to be able to talk to a wider audience."

In particular, Patricia Michelson, owner of La Fromagerie, explains, "Social media is a very important and useful tool to highlight ingredients in season, produce just arrived and give a sense of identity to your business."

"How you take photos and promote your products is important and needs to be in a way that gives a bird's eye view and sense of place so that it is warm and inviting."

Of course, the content you produce and share needs to be authentic, and represent the real story behind the business. Eleonore Deneuve, owner of Cheezelo, adds, "Having social media allows customers and followers (future customers who have an interest in cheeses) to see

the real life of the business. I often post stories to give them insight into the life of Cheezelo."

Choosing which platforms to engage with

The perfect platform for sharing your small business with the wider world will depend on the skills of your staff. Are they better at taking carefully curated photos, creating video content, or writing?

But retailers should also consider the demographic of their shoppers. For Eleonore, this was the main factor in deciding which platforms to capitalise on. "I use Facebook and Instagram as the main social media channels as my customer base is usually aged between 30 to 65."

"I may not have many followers (1600+) compared to some businesses; however, I have a large

percentage of viewers when posting stories on a daily basis (about 30%)."

Patricia agrees, "We use Instagram and then link to Facebook and Twitter, and we try to put a post up every day."

Creating and posting content

When it comes to deciding what to post, Patricia suggests making customers a part of the excitement at your store. "As you cut open a large cheese do a little video and post up immediately as a story or reel, or simply post up. When new season cheeses arrive send a picture out of a grouped shot and maybe add a wine, cider or beer to go with the cheese."

"Always post up for the weekend, and if you can send it out in the evening when people are commuting home or first thing in the morning on the way to work, all the better."

Eleonore agrees. "I post stories almost on a daily basis, showing new products, the arrival of cheeses, how to cut cheeses, the type of food being prepared etc. Giving a life behind the scenes attracts customers who then come or order online."

For Morgan, it's simple. "When posting we look at things that we find interesting and go from there, whether that be a new cheese in the shop or something that goes really

“It is really important to document what you are doing in your business, as this can lead to customers organically coming across your page and visiting you”

well with it. Not worrying about whether people will like it or not, more about whether I love it enough to post it."

It is also important to make sure that your followers and customers feel like part of the business. Eleonore explains, "The key to social media is to engage with the followers, and customers, showing them what they can get at the shop (products/food, etc), also showing them how small business works behind the scene, also showing them some recipes too."

"Engaging with quizzes and questions is also fun, and they feel being part of the story too. To attract new followers, I have a couple of signs in the shop or stickers on the bags/box when ordering online saying to follow @cheezelo on social media for more news."

As Morgan concludes, "Be original! No one is interested in seeing a copy of someone else content. By creating something new and exciting, people will love it, stay engaged and hopefully become a customer."



PETER'S YARD

AWARD-WINNING FIG & SPELT SOURDOUGH CRACKERS

GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME

RETAILER INSIGHT

Stephen Fleming, owner of George & Joseph in Leeds, explores why the North of England is so special for cheese production



The North of England is known for its rich cheese-making history, with several regions in the area renowned

for producing high-quality cheeses. Several factors come into play:

Climate and Geography:

The North is cooler and more temperate compared to the rest of the country, which makes it an ideal location for grazing animals like cows and sheep. The region's rolling hills and lush green pastures provide the perfect environment for these animals to graze, producing milk that is rich in flavour and ideal for cheesemaking.

Traditional Cheesemaking Techniques:

Many of the North's cheesemakers use traditional techniques that have been passed down through generations. For example, Wensleydale cheese, which is made in North Yorkshire, is still produced using the same methods that were used in the 12th century. This commitment to traditional methods has helped to maintain the unique character and flavour of these cheeses. By sharing these stories with customers, we create a connection between them and the cheese.

Variety of Cheese: The North of England is home to a wide variety of cheeses, each with its own distinct flavour and character. From crumbly Lancashire cheese to tangy Wensleydale cheese and creamy Cheshire cheese, there's something for every taste.

Artisanal Cheesemakers:

Many of the cheesemakers in the North of England are small-scale, artisanal producers who are passionate about their craft. They take great pride in producing high-quality, hand-crafted cheeses that reflect the unique character of the region. Some of our Northern cheeses are from very small producers where there is a limited supply or where they're only available at certain times of the year. For example – Hebden Goat isn't available all year round, so when we get stock we are sure to shout about it. This not only creates a sense of urgency with limited stock, but also educates our customers about the importance of seasonality in cheese production.

Overall, the combination of climate, geography, traditional techniques, variety, and artisanal producers makes the North of England a truly special place for cheese production. By promoting these cheeses, we can encourage customers to support sustainable agriculture and reduce their environmental impacts.

SPOTLIGHT ON: CHEESE FROM THE NORTH

Northern cheese offers something special for independent retail, and there is a raft of experts raring to spread the word

Cheeses from the North of England have sometimes been overlooked in comparison to the likes of headliners such as Cheddar and Stilton from elsewhere. But there is something uniquely remarkable about cheese production in the North, with a vast array of talented artisan cheesemakers perfecting their craft. Here, we speak to experts who have made such cheeses their professional focus, finding out just what it is that makes cheese from the counties of Cheshire, Cumbria, Yorkshire, Lancashire and beyond quite so special.



PRODUCER INSIGHT

Hugo Bourne, owner of Bournes Cheshire Cheese, explains the history of Cheshire cheese and what makes it so special



The Bourne family can be traced back as cheesemakers to 1750. Their traditions and methods have been passed down through generations and are still incorporated into today's cheese. In 1930, the Bourne family moved to The Bank farm in Malpas, Cheshire. We began making Cheshire cheese here in 1932. The late Mrs Bourne became well renowned for her tasty Cheshire cheese and butter throughout the mid to late 20th century. Her son and my father, John Bourne, then took over the family business and produced Cheshire cheese that went on to win awards and he became very well-known and respected throughout the cheese world.

Now, I've taken over the reins and started to work towards bringing the business into the modern-day whilst carefully balancing and respecting the history and traditions. The cheese is still made at The Bank farm, using milk from their herd of dairy cows that graze on the Cheshire plains, making the Bourne family, not only the oldest but also the last traditional farmhouse Cheshire cheesemakers still producing Cheshire cheese in Cheshire!

The history of Cheshire cheese is quite fascinating as it's considered to be one of the oldest types of cheese produced in England. It has become less popular as the demand for a product that can be produced more quickly has increased. Despite this, we have stuck firmly to our traditions and do not sell cheese before we all feel it has had a long enough maturation period and has some flavour. Younger Cheshire cheese that you can buy in the supermarkets these days is considered to be bland and quite tasteless by many due to this fact. However, the feedback on Bourne's Cheshire cheese is quite the opposite!

“ The combination of climate, geography, traditional techniques, variety, and artisanal producers makes the North of England a truly special place for cheese production ”

DISTRIBUTOR INSIGHT



Paul Heasman, supplier relationship manager at Rowcliffe, discusses the importance of championing Northern cheese

Ask people in the street about the geographical origins of English cheese and their brains generally wander towards the icons from the South and Midlands; Cheddar, Stilton etc. What too often gets overlooked are many other iconic foundations of British cheese, grouped in with what we in the trade know affectionately as The Territorials.

The North of England is forged from great, albeit often isolated, land ideal for cheesemaking. Sheep were and still are prevalent, but the 1800s saw a big influx of cows in lower lush pastures, increasing the diversity of products and production volume. Despite this, Territorial cheese did not see the global expansion of the likes of Cheddar, remaining localised to

their region, retaining their uniqueness, and thankfully limiting competition.

Consequently, many of the flavour profiles we see in these cheeses are not replicated entirely elsewhere; every style has its own signature with fresh acidity being the common denominator. Each has its own personality, just like its makers.

As I am always keen to point out, good cheese is about good people, and the spirit and true grit of individuals from Yorkshire, Cheshire and Lancashire have kept these regions alive; from Judy Bell at Shepherds Purse, the effervescent Mandy Reed at Swaledale, Graham Kirkham in Lancashire, John Bourne in Cheshire, David Hartley at Wensleydale Dairy Product to give just a few examples of those who have worked tirelessly to keep traditions

alive, and innovate. And whilst many of them are sadly no longer with us, their passion and fortitude carry on through future generations of cheesemakers.

However, amongst all the positive news this is still a category that is in somewhat of a crisis and very much in need of more support from all of us in the industry, but by default, I also see that there is a huge opportunity for incremental sales to be tapped. Territorials have tended to be a Plus One purchase rather than a main feature of a cheeseboard or recipe; there is no reason for this to be the case.

The quality and provenance speak for themselves, but only once you've tasted or heard the stories; this is where the independent sector in particular can play its part in championing products to consumers and benefiting from the efforts. We must ensure these beautiful cheeses from beautiful counties remain a cornerstone of our British cheese heritage.

BEST-SELLING NORTHERN CHEESES

Chris Hallam, manager at Chorlton Cheesemongers in Manchester, shares his five top-selling local cheeses

**MRS KIRKHAM'S LANCASHIRE**

Mild and creamy, young, tangy and bright

**OLD ROAN**

A Wensleydale – buttery and fresh

**APPLEBY'S CHESHIRE**

A brothy, full-flavoured crumbly cheese (the northern white version)

**ST JAMES**

A washed sheep cheese from Cumbria, milky and malty

**STONEBECK**

Another cracking Wensleydale, buttery with an intensely deep flavour



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DOUGHLICIOUS

SELLING FROZEN TREATS IN 2023

With consumers seeking a taste of luxury this year, we find out how retailers can make the most of the appetite for ice cream

and toppings to make their products seem more of a treat for comfort-seeking shoppers.

We explore how independent retailers can cash in on this taste for indulgence in 2023 and cater to ever-changing consumer demand.

An evolving industry

According to Felix Baudenbacher, founder of vegan ice cream sandwich brand NEED, "Ice cream has been going from strength to strength, with retailers devoting significantly more freezer space to it in the past couple of years.

"As for why I can only guess, but maybe ice cream is, in a time of economic uncertainty and cost of living crisis, an affordable little 'luxury' to which we like to treat ourselves more often."

As a treat product, quality is increasingly important to consumers. But for Lucia Bly, retail director at Salcombe Dairy, it's a bit more complicated. "I think ice cream quality is becoming more polarised," she tells *Speciality Food*. "There are a few artisan producers out there like us such as Purbeck and Roskilly's who are producing ice cream at a very high-quality level, then there are a whole host of mediocre tasting products on the market, some of which are just skimmed milk powder and air."

Another key factor in the evolution of ice cream is the recent growth in veganism and the free-from market, which has led to an increase in demand for vegan and dairy-free ice creams.

"There are an awful lot of products out there trying to tick that box, so the industry is very competitive" Matt Gilding, managing director of Booja Booja, explains. "But quantity isn't the same as quality and there are a lot of products out there that are, at best, mediocre.

"Increasingly and quite rightly, consumers want really good premium options. This is where the real growth potential is and where independent fine food retailers can play their part, with premium free-from ranges like Booja-Booja."

What consumers want

Most of all, consumers are looking for flavour in their ice cream and desserts in 2023. According to Matt,

"Consumers want ice cream that tastes amazing and those that want or need it to be vegan, dairy-free or gluten-free still want it to taste great. We've been making dairy-free ice cream for 16 years (and won 48 awards along the way) but this is our best ever range, by a long way. These are pots that non-dairy and dairy eaters can share together – they're that good!"

This high quality is particularly important in fine food retail, as discerning customers are looking for something special. Lucia tells *Speciality Food*, "As with all purchases, consumers are happy when they get what they pay for – and choosing ice cream made with fresh, local dairy milk and cream, together with the very best fruit and (in our case) bean-to-bar chocolate, ensures the ice cream is as it should be – bursting with flavour, indulgent and 100% natural."

When it comes to best-selling flavours and varieties of great-tasting ice cream, according to Rupert, "Innovative combinations or flavours that are popular in other categories are sure to pique interest.

"The salted caramel trend is a great example. Born in a French patisserie in the 1970s, it has permeated every category from desserts to shower gel. The next step we expect to see is the pairing of salted caramel with other flavours like banana, popcorn and coffee. This can be applied to frozen desserts and luxury ice cream alike."

While it is wise to take advantage of trending flavours, indies would do well to remember that economic crisis causes shoppers to revert to childhood favourites. As Rupert explains, "In uncertain and troubling times, consumers look for comfort in traditional flavours that remind them of simpler times. Frozen desserts like rhubarb and custard, apple pie and sticky toffee pudding are likely to do well in 2023."

Felix adds, "Ice cream is highly emotive and has the capacity to transport us back to carefree summers in our childhoods. I think people love to connect with that feeling, and we try to help them do that by making high-quality versions of classic ice cream flavours with a bit of a fun twist."

One brand that is certainly creative with their frozen treat offering is Doughlicious. "Our frozen collection consists of our ready to bake cookie dough in six amazing flavours and our new DoughChi (a twist on Japanese Mochi balls) that is beyond innovative. We offer vegan and non-vegan options and traditional flavours such as Chocolate Truffle and Chocolate

Chip as well as the more unique Churro, Blueberry Frozen Yoghurt and Birthday Cake", explains founder Kathryn Bricken.

How indies can cater to demand

Getting your frozen treat offering right can be tricky, especially if you have limited freezer space. But that doesn't mean you can't offer something for everyone.

According to Rupert, "Retailers should stock a variety of flavours to cater for a range of tastes. As a general rule, we'd suggest a minimum of something fruity, something chocolate-based and something new and trending like liquorice or matcha tea flavours. A premium vanilla ice cream that can be paired with baked goods and puddings will usually do well too.

"Don't be afraid to experiment and rotate your offering according to the season. Many artisanal ice cream producers make small batches so there's often no need to commit to high volumes."

Of course, ice cream appeals to everyone, including families and children. Therefore, it's important that indies take this into consideration when stocking individual ice creams and lollies. As Rupert explains, "Make sure there are one or two affordable options for children. Parents begrudge paying for premium products that will most likely end up melting down the stick and will often shop with an 'all of us or none of us' approach."

Fine food retailers also have the significant advantage over the multiples of offering something truly indulgent. "I think the big supermarkets have the bread-and-butter stuff covered, but independents have the chance to



find the special little gems made ethically by smaller and often local producers", Felix adds.

"Since the pandemic consumers have really taken to supporting their local retailers so there is a lot of goodwill out there – make sure that goodwill is rewarded by offering high-quality products that are produced ethically as well as by providing an outstanding shopping experience through store design and

“Ice cream is, in a time of economic uncertainty and cost of living crisis, an affordable little ‘luxury’ to which we like to treat ourselves more often”

INDUSTRY INSIGHT



Rupert Ashby, CEO of the British Frozen Food Federation, shares his top tips for boosting ice cream sales

It might seem like a surefire sale during summer, but there are ways to create hype around your offering, even in the colder months.

- If there's one thing certain to drive ice cream sales, it's sampling. Write off a tub or two of ice cream and a packet of wooden spoons and class it as marketing spend. The likelihood is that the increase in sales will cover it several times over
- Make use of any POS material provided by suppliers and train sales staff to suggest pairing cake and pudding purchases with ice cream
- Advertise your ice cream products so they can be seen by passers-by. Use window displays, chalkboard signs or pavement boards to promote the availability of cooling frozen treats

“As a general rule, we'd suggest a minimum of something fruity, something chocolate based and something new and trending like liquorice or matcha tea flavours”



customer service.”

Matt advises, “Be sure to stock products that cater for the growing vegan and free-from markets, as well as traditional dairy ice creams. Try products for yourself, so you can stock the best and give your customers honest, personal recommendations.

“Your relationship with your customers is what makes you different from the multiples, so

make it work for you. There are great tasting, high-quality ice creams out there, like our dairy-free range, and if you stock these with confidence your customers will enjoy them and keep coming back for more.”

There are plenty of ways to tempt your customers to indulge, so go wild this year as the weather heats up, and stock up on innovative frozen treats.

IN THE UK, 48% OF CONSUMERS CITE THAT IT HAS BEEN EASIER TO JUSTIFY EATING INDULGENT FOOD AND DRINK SINCE COVID-19

SOURCE: MINTEL



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LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Ellen Manning explores the opportunities and challenges that can arise from where you set up shop

COMMENTATORS



MONICA TAYLOR AND
DAISY-MAE PREWETT
NOISY LOBSTER



KAY CROOT
CROOTS FARM SHOP



CHARLIE WELLS
THE FARM, STRATFORD



RYAN BARRIE
BONNIE & WILD



HUGH BROWN
THE STOCKYARD

When we talk about choosing a new home, the mantra "location, location, location" is often bandied around. But what about when you're choosing where to set up a new business? The factors that can influence the success of a business are many. But while some elements can be tweaked as you go along, location is a factor that needs to be considered from the get-go. After all, it's not something that can be easily changed down the line without time, effort and expense. So how do speciality food and drink retailers avoid that and choose the best place at the outset?

Tourist hotspots

Food and drink often go hand-in-hand with holidays, and the sheer footfall through tourist hotspots makes them an appealing option for an artisan shop. The owners of Dorset's Noisy Lobster restaurant, who also own beach huts, a coffee cabin and a chunk of beach on their doorstep, were looking for the right idea to give a new lease of life to their gift shop when they noticed that their restaurant customers often asked if they could buy the items they had enjoyed on the menu, from cured seafood to seaweed truffle butter and pâtés. Suddenly the shop's future was clear. "Being so close to the restaurant, it was the perfect location, plus with the beach and sea on the doorstep, the produce could not be any fresher," marketing manager Monica Taylor and deli manager Daisy-Mae Prewett tell *Speciality Food*.

On top of its proximity to the restaurant, the location itself is a

bonus for the family-run business, which has tailored its offering to its audience. "Being a seafront business we have a very high footfall, particularly in the summer season," Prewett and Taylor explain. "Many customers often look for 'grab and go' items which is why we introduced our range of baguettes, toasties and seacuterie to create the perfect beach picnic. The business also owns 120 beach huts available to hire and is located just along the coast from a popular holiday park which results in people looking for their everyday essentials such as milk, bread and eggs. Our on-site bakery provides all the cakes, pastries and bread which are freshly baked every morning. They even offer bespoke celebration cakes for those with a special occasion!"

Being by the sea also influences the direction of the business. As well as aiming to provide seasonal, fresh and local produce, the Noisy Lobster does what it can to help the environment – including staging events that educate the importance of reusing, recycling and encouraging a 'plastic-free' sea.

Rural retailers

A tourist hotspot might be an obvious winner, but plenty of rural retailers thrive despite being somewhat off the beaten track. When Kay Croot and her late husband Steve wanted to open a farm shop in 2008, the logical place was on the farm near Duffield, Derbyshire, run by Kay's parents where she had grown up. The couple converted former stables and created Croots Farm Shop. For Kay Croot, the shop's location brings

plenty of advantages. "We're set in a beautiful location, overlooking the Ecclesbourne Valley and with fields of sheep and Shire horses out the front," she explains. "Our café looks out to amazing views, which is undoubtedly an attraction. Being set on a farm means we immediately have that farm to fork link, which many customers like. We rear our own lambs, for example, and offer products from almost 50 local producers from within a 50-mile radius." The connection to the farm also gives the shop another avenue for promotion, she adds, and allows them to get involved in rural events such as LEAF Open Farm Sunday where they organise displays like sheep shearing and blacksmithing - using it as another way of attracting new customers and offering a platform for promotion.

It's not all plain sailing, admits Croot. "There were some challenges to overcome – customers have to drive to us rather than walk and we are at the end of a long drive, so we've had to work hard on our signage and raising awareness about where we are and what we do. Staff also have to be able to get to us." But equally, the benefit of a rural location meant as soon as Croots became established it became part of the local community,

building up a band of loyal customers as well as winning numerous awards – local and national – to help raise its profile.

Be on a busy route

Popular destination farm shop, restaurant and artisan food destination The Farm, near Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, may be in a relatively rural location but also benefits from proximity to several busy routes in the area. "The location is ideal," says director Charlie Wells.

She had visited the farm shop and PYO business on the site as a child, as had her parents, so when it came up for sale they jumped on the opportunity. "We are located on one of the busiest roads in Stratford (A46) and just off the old Warwick Road, which is a key road going in and out of Stratford town," she tells *Speciality Food*. "Being on the A46 means we are only a few miles off the M40. These main roads mean we are more easily accessible from larger towns/cities – Leamington Spa, Solihull, Birmingham, Coventry etc." Also, the proximity of cycle paths and walking routes including the Monarch's Way, which runs through the farm, are also an asset, attracting more customers.

Its location often works in The Farm's favour, bringing a steady flow

“ While any retailer can organise their own events, being part of a wider collective of businesses can broaden the scope for such events and the number of people they can attract ”



HOW TO LOOK FOR THE PERFECT LOCATION

The considerations are many, and what works for one fine food retailer won't be right for another. For those in a rural location, thought around access, signage and parking are important, says Wells. "Key points and lessons learnt from my own experience would be: ensure you can have the correct road signs to help support your business; check you have main roads nearby for easy access and shout about the footpaths and cycle routes nearby." Her final tip? "Invest in a good quality car park! It'll be worth it!"

For Noisy Lobster's Taylor and Prewett, it's about listening to your customer base - which for a tourist location can vary. "We have varied audiences dependant on the time of year, with mainly locals in the winter months and holidaymakers in the summer. Our offering changes throughout the year in response to the demand."

Barrie agrees. "Build your model and offer to appeal to the people who will be likely coming to your venue. Know your market and understand your value chain." So while speciality food and drink might not be quite the same as choosing a home, the message in his view isn't that far removed.

"Location is everything."

of customers and easy access, but like Croots can also cause problems. "Busy roads also sadly means more accidents," says Wells. "This can mean the A46 can be closed for hours and hours. We've even had the air ambulance land on the front lawn! Our other main issue is that we still do not have a road sign directing people to the farm shop/restaurant due to signage restrictions on the highways. We have petitioned to have road signs, mainly to warn traffic of the farm shop turning, however we've had no luck."

Despite stumbling blocks, The Farm has proved successful, winning awards and attracting a wide customer base. But this is, in part, due to tailoring its offering to its location and working with the location, rather than against it. "We've worked hard to get the destination 'event friendly' by making the courtyard family friendly," adds Wells. "We've also invested in new polytunnels where we hold indoor markets, corporate events and workshops. Our farm animals also add to the event experience, plus we have plenty of parking to host events."

City slickers

The benefits of a rural location might seem obvious, but what about artisan

retailers in more urban areas?

Bonnie & Wild has made a home in the heart of Edinburgh, which means the independent businesses within it all benefit from a city centre location and high footfall that would normally be the reserve of chain F&B brands, says managing director Ryan Barrie. "Our Scottish Food Hall is close to tram links, Edinburgh bus station and Waverley Train Station, so it's easy for guests to visit, and we find that our diverse and high quality Scottish food and drink offer really resonates with tourists, city visitors and residents alike," he says. They also benefit from relationships with local Edinburgh-based businesses, he says, and work with them to put on tailored events, from drinks receptions to VIP dinners."

Its city centre location influences the direction of the business, with high footfall, access to suppliers and staffing and the chance to tap into the events market and corporate partnerships all proving helpful in its success, Barrie admits. But the business also reflects its audience, by championing Scottish produce and producers in its offering and curating concessions to ensure the food hall represents a modern Scotland and cosmopolitan Edinburgh.

Making a hub a home

For many artisan retailers, location isn't just about where an individual retailer is, but where it is in relation to others. Hugh Brown from The Stockyard in Melton Mowbray outlines the bonuses that come from being in a hub alongside other speciality retailers and producers. For Brown, the key is collaboration. "Food and drink producers and retailers are well known for working together - sharing knowledge, passing on information, supplying each other and generally supporting one another. At The Stockyard, for example, Round Corner Brewing supplies used oak barrels from its brewing process to smoked food specialist Feast and the Furious, and these barrels are used to provide a unique smoked flavour to the meats and cheeses."

Being part of a hub means being able to tap into extra footfall, he adds. "A food and drink hub is the sum of all its parts... which means a door opens to additional customers. Visitors to one specialist store may be tempted to pop into the one next door, and so on. Each shop in a hub is likely to have its own social media accounts - promoting the site to its own customers. This can add up to a potentially much larger

pool of customers to create extra sales." On top of this, many food hubs have access to experts who can help food and drink manufacturers and retailers overcome different challenges, says Brown, citing The Stockyard's links with Melton Food Enterprise Centre and access to technologist Alice Jones who can provide free support to eligible businesses on everything from product development to food safety, quality management and compliance and scale-up technology."

Another benefit is the chance to participate in events. While any retailer can organise their own, being part of a wider collective of businesses can broaden the scope for such events and the number of people they can attract.

Similarly, the power of numbers at Bonnie & Wild can help independent businesses set up in a location they might not otherwise be able to afford, says Barrie. "Cost-wise, things like rent and rates can make a city centre location prohibitive for speciality food businesses, which is one of the reasons Bonnie & Wild is such a great addition to Edinburgh. It means the small businesses that wouldn't ordinarily have access to this prime location can trade more cost-effectively."



CATERING TO COFFEE AFICIONADOS

We find out how the premium coffee industry has evolved and what discerning consumers are looking for in 2023

COMMENTATORS



PAUL ROOKE
BRITISH COFFEE ASSOCIATION



ATHENA LEE
SHELFNOW



ZAIN PEER
LONDON NOOTROPICS



LEX THORNELY
BLUE GOOSE



MARK KACARY
NORFOLK DELI



LAURA ROBERTS
LAURA'S LARDER

With UK consumers averaging two cups of coffee per day, the industry is certainly a hot topic. In fact, the UK coffee shop market is worth £15 billion a year, and the overall market is expected to grow annually by 6.92% between 2023-2025 according to Statista. This means that whether you've got an in-store café or simply sell coffee by the bag, it's important to get your offering right.

Consumers are looking for something that provides more than just a caffeine hit in 2023, so we explore how you can make sure you're hitting the trends and catering to demand.

Innovation and diversity

Some Brits are satisfied with a classic brew. However, innovation is rife in the coffee industry, and many consumers are looking to diversify their caffeine hits.

"There has been a continued push to deliver innovation and provide consumers with a wider coffee experience, whether that be in terms of coffee from new and different producers; ready-to-drink products; cold brew and single-serve units – capsules or other forms", says Paul Rooke, executive director at the British Coffee Association.

"Behind the scenes, the industry is also working more closely together, across producing and consuming countries to maintain the geographical diversity that encapsulates the coffee scene today."

This is felt by many coffee producers, as Lex Thornely, co-founder of Blue Goose, explains.

"Despite being a mature market, innovation and changing tastes and interest levels have really seen the coffee sector grow. Like wine, people increasingly want to know more about the flavours and processes that make their chosen coffee unique and the people who grow it too.

"From different coffee varieties and changing processing methods to new brewing gadgets and machines, Brits are becoming coffee boffs and embracing the speciality coffee scene. Speciality coffee and everything it stands for is getting coffee-loving Brits excited."

In fact, globalization has shaped the coffee industry through the rise of speciality coffee. According to Athena Lee, marketing manager at ShelfNow, "Speciality coffee refers to high-quality coffee beans that are carefully sourced, roasted, and brewed to highlight their unique flavours and characteristics. As coffee culture has spread around the world, different regions have developed their own unique coffee traditions and preferences.

"This has led to an increased demand for single-origin beans, which emphasize the coffee's unique terroir and flavour profile. Coffee shops and roasters are now offering a wider range of speciality coffees from different regions, catering to

consumers who are interested in exploring the diverse flavours of coffee."

This is something that independent retailers are becoming all too familiar with. As Mark Kacary, managing director at Norfolk Deli, explains, "Customers know where the beans come from, the name of the grower, the location, the altitude of where the beans were grown, and the methods used.

"It is more about the roast than the beans themselves. We like to show the tasting notes on our bags of coffee and give coffee the same level of respect given to wines and cheeses when it comes to taste. We now have customers who buy a different bag of coffee every time they come in.

"They have developed a love for coffee which far exceeds the caffeine hit, but which like a good bottle of red wine, offers complexities which they never realised existed when they ditched their cup of instant and joined the world of coffee enthusiasts.

"This caters to the developing palates of consumers who will come to an independent looking for something different, and something to excite their palate."

Sustainability sells

One major trend that has been gaining momentum in the coffee industry is sustainability. In fact, coffee was named one of the five foods on the decline due to climate change in a recent report from CIA Landlords.

The production of coffee is expected to reduce by 76% in Brazil alone in years to come. This is because coffee plants grow at their best in moist, tropical climates, with soils and temperatures that reach around 21°C. But increasing temperatures are drying the air in Brazil, making the climate less than

ideal for growth, thus causing a decline in coffee bean production.

According to Athena, "Consumers are increasingly interested in the environmental impact of the products they purchase, and coffee is no exception. Coffee companies and retailers that prioritize sustainable and ethical sourcing practices, such as fair trade and organic certifications, are likely to resonate with these consumers."

Independent retailers should be wary of greenwashing and focus on key factors that discerning consumers are looking for. "Sustainable production including deforestation, water usage and profitable income for producers are all elements which consumers are focused on alongside sustainable consumption aspects such as packaging, waste and recycling," Paul explains.

"There is a growing level of interest across all these topics from all age groups with consumers wanting to understand what actions businesses are taking. Coffee has the real potential to be carbon positive and there is work underway across the whole sector to deliver that."

Blue Goose is one brand that certainly caters to this demand, as the UK's first compostable pods for Nespresso® machines. Founder Lex tells *Speciality Food*, "Our customers know that our plant-based and plastic-free pods are better than the aluminium or plastic alternative but if our pods don't taste better than the alternatives then they'll simply switch back and all our sustainability efforts will be in vain.

"This is exactly how we've grown Blue Goose – by relentlessly focusing on taste, value and ethics, in addition to sustainability, to capture consumers' attention and imagination." Showing your commitment to sustainable coffee production as a retailer to prospective shoppers is paramount.

To do this, Athena suggests, "Independent retailers and cafés can appeal to this market by adopting eco-friendly and ethical practices. From sustainable packaging to fair trade and organic coffee sourcing, there are many ways retailers can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability."

A healthy option?

Wellness is also becoming an increasingly important consideration for consumers when making purchasing decisions.

As a result, coffee companies may begin to offer added health benefits, such as antioxidants or probiotics, to appeal to this market.

One brand championing the power of wellness in the coffee industry is London Nootropics. Made with the highest-quality medicinal mushroom extracts and other adaptogens, each blend in the range is designed for a specific purpose: Flow for mental clarity and focus, Zen to alleviate stress and anxiety, and Mojo for a natural boost.

Speaking to *Speciality Food*, co-founder Zain Peer explains, "As part of the wellness industry we've seen functional mushrooms and other adaptogen extracts becoming increasingly popular mainstream, we see this having an impact across the food and beverage market, including with coffee. We love blending

“ Like wine, people increasingly want to know more about the flavours and processes that make their chosen coffee unique and the people who grow it too ”

adaptogens with coffee as they have good synergies together.

"We have a wide variety of customers, from health-focused biohackers to students to entrepreneurs to those sensitive to coffee or going through menopause.

"Our adaptogenic coffees are different in the sense they add another dimension – each blend is designed to help you have your most productive today depending on what you need."

It's not just retail that is seeing an increase in demand for healthy coffee alternatives. According to Athena,

consumers are demanding healthy choices in cafés too.

"We are seeing more coffee shops and brands offering healthy alternative options like matcha or turmeric lattes, or plant-based coffee alternatives such as oat milk or almond milk."

In fact, while Laura Roberts, owner of Laura's Larder sticks to traditional coffee in her store, she has seen increased interest in plant-based alternatives too.

"I would say oat milk is as popular as cow's milk these days so making sure you use brands that people enjoy is key," she adds.

Cashing in on evolving tastes

While some everyday coffee beans or grinds may sell themselves, independent retailers have a unique opportunity to engage with customers and diversify their purchases.

Lockdown dramatically changed where and how people enjoy their coffee. According to Lex, "Pod machine sales are unrelenting and bean-to-cup consumption is only growing, so a diverse offering will only help increase basket spend among coffee consumers, who tend to be extremely loyal once they've found 'their brew'."

Like many other areas of the food and drink industry, coffee has become 'Instagram-able', and independents can use their social media platforms to show off their selection or barista skills. As Athena explains, "Social media has further amplified the influence on the coffee industry, enabling coffee shops and roasters to showcase their products and reach a wider audience.

"Platforms like Instagram and Youtube have made it easier for coffee enthusiasts to share their coffee experiences and connect with other coffee lovers worldwide. Social media has also helped to popularize trends like speciality coffee and latte art, which highlight the artistic and creative aspects of coffee-making."

Above all, coffee drinking is an experience, so keep this in mind if you have an in-store barista or café. This is something Paul firmly believes in, as he concludes, "I would say don't underestimate the social value that your premises offer to many consumers, to relax, to catch up with friends, to spend a few moments of reflection between appointments. A great coffee and food mix in comfortable surroundings provides an affordable luxury that we all look for."

INDUSTRY INSIGHT



Athena Lee, marking manager at ShelfNow, shares the top-selling products at the digital wholesaler

First on the list is Bottleshot Cold Brew Coffee, which offers an authentic New Orleans style cold brew that is both bold and smooth, with a high caffeine content and low acidity.

Not only is it delicious, but it is also made with Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee beans and comes in recyclable cans, making it a sustainable choice for coffee lovers.

Another product that fits into the current trend is Rokit, which produces CBD coffee and matcha Nespresso-compatible capsules. These capsules make it incredibly easy for consumers to enjoy healthy, organic drinks at home. With the growing interest in functional coffee products,

Rokit's CBD coffee and matcha capsules are an excellent choice for those seeking a more health-conscious coffee experience.

Caffè Barbera, the oldest coffee roasting company in Italy, has also embraced technological innovation in the form of blockchain technology to ensure full and complete traceability and transparency of its supply chain process. This move has reassured trade buyers and their end consumers that their products are sustainable and ethical.

As consumers become more environmentally and socially conscious, companies that prioritize sustainability and ethical practices are likely to gain a competitive advantage in the market.

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bluegoose.coffee



LONDON NOOTROPICS ZEN
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londonnootropics.com



**ALT COFFEE LONDON
THE CAPTAIN'S ROAST**
The beans used in this blend vary seasonally to ensure the very best quality, and The Captain's Roast is roasted darker to bring out deep and rich chocolatey notes.
altitude-coffee.co.uk



**VELO EL SALVADOR
GROUND COFFEE**
This ground coffee has delicious flavours of milk chocolate, almond, shortbread and hints of orange, and the medium body and acidity lends itself to a balanced and mild cup.
velocoffeeroasters.co.uk



**LITTLE COFFEE COMPANY
ETHIOPIAN**
This ethically sourced Ethiopian coffee supports female farmers and has sweet and floral notes of lemon and apricot.
littlecoffeecompany.com



DIRTEA MUSHROOM COFFEE
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dirteaworld.com



GRIND HOUSE BLEND
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grind.co.uk



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This coffee is naturally grown under the rainforest canopy, a haven for birds and other wildlife.
birdandwild.co.uk



BONUS POINTS

From accommodation to champagne bars, greater numbers of farm shops are adding that extra little bit for customers, John Bensalhia reports

COMMENTATORS



ASH SINFIELD
TEALS FARM SHOP



PAMELA LILBURN
BROOKVALE



EMMA STEVENSON
THE LITTLE PIG FARM SHOP

Whether it's the hidden bonus tracks at the end of an album or the special 'making-of' featurettes on a Blu-ray or DVD, the modern world continues to provide just that little bit extra.

Today's farm shops are no exception. Once upon a time, the average farm shop provided exactly what it said on the tin. But more modern businesses are building on and adding to their success with extra facilities for customers to enjoy.

Diversifying into new sectors can be a financial boon. Having re-launched its farm shop with a new café in 2021, Hirsts' reported an increased turnover in July 2022 from around 5% to 33%. Because Hirsts' is located within walking distance of both countryside and coast, opening a café makes it an ideal stop for families to eat. Meanwhile, Hartley Farm is set to increase its restaurant premises as part of an expansion project set to commence later this year. Hartley Farm, which also has its own farm shop, says that the new restaurant will have a projected revenue increase by £600,000 to £2.4 million.

Eating facilities are only part of the picture. Farm shops are diversifying into a wide range of new ventures. Teals Farm Shop is one example, offering customers what co-founder Ash Sinfield describes as "unexpected facilities".

"We have great disabled access and a toilet, a dog jog where customers can walk their dogs, in the summer there's a cricket pitch that families can use free of charge, a cider orchard to enjoy, sit under the trees and picnic in, free Wifi and the Arc that can be used as a workspace for a couple of hours, also FOC plus all the local products in the food market, restaurant, food-to-go and gift areas."

Erin Jeffery of Farrington's explains, "We pride ourselves on being a destination, not just a farm shop!" On the site, Farrington's has a farm shop, café, fish & chip shop and play barn (with a café within it). "In addition to this we have a number of units we rent out to local businesses meaning there is plenty more for customers to visit. Units include a gift shop, book shop, hairdresser, treatment and beauty salon, kitchen



shop and gluten-free bakery."

Farm shops have various reasons for introducing extra facilities. Pamela Lilburn, partner, Brookvale, says that it gives customers of its farm shop the opportunity to have a look around its working farm. "We believe that it's important for our customers to see where their food comes from. Customers can get the whole picture and see how well our animals are cared for. Animal welfare is our number one priority."

Originally, Brookvale started out selling its own fresh, gently pasteurised milk to the public, quickly growing into a farm shop, which showcases top quality local produce from Northern Ireland. "Our milk is sold in reusable glass bottles,

as we encourage sustainability to customers," says Pamela. "Today, we have a small Play Park with picnic tables where customers' can enjoy their milkshakes and other farm shop purchases."

Ash Sinfield explains that the reason for providing bonus facilities is twofold. "We wanted customers to relax and enjoy the environment when they are with us, We also wanted it to be fun and memorable."

Ash's mention of disabled access reinforces the point that one of the most important aspects of any farm shop facility is accessibility for everyone. The Hollies Farm Shop has covered every base for disabled and elderly visitors. Ramps can be used for wheelchair access into the farm



“ Modern businesses are building on and adding to their success with extra facilities for customers to enjoy ”

shop itself as well as the gift barn and the takeaway. In the case of its forest lodges for those who choose to stay, a ramp can be provided on request. Disabled toilets and car parking spaces are also provided at Hollies.

Other disability considerations have been taken on board. Coldharbour Farm Shop caters for visitors who have vision difficulties. Its disabled toilet facility features colour coded accessories that can help partially sighted customers. Coldharbour also includes disabled parking bays and ramp/spacious doorway access to the shop's Field Kitchen, making it suitable for wheelchair-bound, disabled and elderly visitors.

“Happy children mean happy parents!”

A big draw for customers is children's facilities. As The Little Pig Farm Shop's Emma Stevenson says, “Happy children mean happy parents!” Playgrounds or soft play centres provide a welcome distraction for youngsters while their parents go off to do their shopping in the farm shop or sit themselves down with a coffee or soft drink.

“Children are catered at Teals for with the menus and through products (particularly in the gifting area) and wild spaces that they can

explore outside,” says Ash Sinfield.

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

While kids can be happily entertained, special activities can also provide an education, as Pamela Milburn explains. “One of the most important aspects of our farm is educating children. Kids can come and see the animals, watch them being feed, watch as the cows get milked by our state-of-the-art robotic milking system and learn about our other animals on farm. For example, we can teach kids about where eggs come from when they come and see our chickens!”

“We have provided educational visits, including young farmers' group tours and visits for pre-school children, which they found very enjoyable. We are hoping to get these back up and running again in the near future.”

Farrington's has a large outdoor farm park (play area) and an undercover 'straw pool' free of charge for customers to use during

the spring and summer months.

“During summer weekends and school holidays we also run a slip and slide in the farm park which is also free to use,” says Erin Jeffery. “The farm park has a ‘snack shack’ within it where customers can conveniently purchase hot and cold drinks and snacks. We also have farm animals for children to see, plus seasonal events (Easter trail, flower picking, pumpkin picking, kids festival).”

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

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

Accommodating customers' needs

Farm shops are ensuring that visitors get the maximum experience of their environment. To that end, more businesses are investing in accommodation that allows customers to not only make a day of it, but also a weekend. Emma Stevenson says, adding extra facilities is a great way of boosting custom. “We wanted to increase footfall to the café and farm shop by adding in accommodation.”

The Little Pig Shop is arranging an eclectic choice of accommodation on its site. “We have installed two safari tents, an RV caravan and have just built a beautiful two-bedroom en-suite lodge: all in our field,” says Emma Stevenson. Little Pig's brand-new accommodation will be available to rent from April 2023.

Hilltop Farm Shop now has its own glamping site called Hilltop Hideaways. Visitors can choose from accommodation options including shepherd's huts, bell tents and cabins or, if they wish to bring their own tent pitches, these are also available. Glamping at Hilltop also features a toilet block, converted horse trailers which now feature high-pressure showers, and a barbecue area.

Hollies has built five woodland lodges which are a brief walk away from its Farm Shop. The accommodation is designed to sleep up to four or six people, boasting outdoor terraces, open plan living quarters and hot tubs.

The Hollies experience extends to a champagne Deli Bar. Visitors to the bar (located in the far, shop) can choose from locally roasted coffee, foods (such as ploughman's lunches), meat boards and artisan cheeses) or a glass of either wine or champagne.

Creating a different kind of experience, some farm shops have entered the world of event planning. The Farm Stratford now puts on a wide variety of events, whether they be for corporate businesses or private individuals and families. In terms of private celebrations, The Farm Stratford's own private dining room is available for birthday and anniversary parties, baby showers and general get-togethers with family

“ There have been cost issues recently as prices have increased massively in the last 12 months, but we are confident we will receive a good return in our investment ”

and friends. On a business level, The Farm can also be hired out for team building initiatives, including a cookery school, a meeting room and private dining room.

The concept of the masterclass extends to both team building groups and also individuals seeking out a new hobby or just a bit of extra enlightenment. Daylesford Organic has its own masterclasses, which are helmed by qualified experts in their individual fields.

These run the whole gamut from meat butchers' courses (including demonstrations from local butchers and practical preparation and cooking of meats) to flower arranging (featuring handy advice on making all kinds of hand-tied bouquets).

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

Positive feedback

“Customers generally feel they are getting value for money when they visit due to the additional facilities we offer free of charge, including the farm park, animals, straw pool and slip and slide,” comments Erin Jeffery. “Promoting the extra attractions helps to drive footfall and boost sales.”

While finance can prove to be a potential problem in terms of growing costs, extra facilities ensure that farm shops bring in significant returns on investment. “There have been cost issues recently as prices have increased massively in the last 12 months, explains Emma Stevenson. “But we are confident we will receive a good return in our investment.” The Little Pig Farm Shop has big plans for its future, as Emma sums up. “We have permission to build five lodges in our field. So over the next two to three years, we will be investing in building lodges and creating happy memories for our guests.”

The proof of the extra facilities is in the pudding. As well as awards, positive reviews in feedback books and on websites like TripAdvisor show that there is great demand for bigger and better facilities. Farm shops like Teals have received warmly positive reactions. “We have had lots of good feedback from customers,” concludes Ash Sinfield. “We just work on adding colour to people's journeys whether it be through food, products, environment or experience.”



FINAL CALL

After a tough winter, longer and brighter days have finally arrived in the UK alongside daffodils and birdsong, giving us all a much-needed reason to be cheerful. With experts hoping inflation will fall in 2023 and plans set in motion to relieve the chaos caused by Brexit, it's looking like this summer could really be one to celebrate.

Easter is once again upon us, and it is lovely to see indies stocked to the nines with artisan chocolate shapes and freshly baked hot cross buns. Of course, lamb sales skyrocket as Easter approaches, and fine food retailers are well-placed to offer the very best cuts of these animals.

But before we run full speed ahead into these foodie opportunities, it's important that independent retailers take some time to reflect. This winter was likely a hard one for you, your staff and your customers, too. Despite growing support from local communities and an impressive boom in spending on food and drink, the cost-of-living crisis took a toll on everyone, regardless of which side of the counter they stood on.

First, check in on yourself. Many of us have started new ventures over the last year in a bid to keep business competitive and respond to the changing circumstances and shopping behaviours of consumers, adding extra pressure on ourselves to adapt, learn and grow in an already challenging environment.

Consider what you've learned about yourself over the last year – which are the projects you really enjoy, and which have you just been powering through? Can you delegate some of these tasks to other team members? Reprioritise and turn your focus to the things that really matter.

It's never too early to start planning for what the future holds, and spring offers us a natural bit of breathing space to do this. Even a few spare moments spent reflecting on what 2023 has brought so far, and how you might need to adjust your plans for the remainder of the year, can make a world of difference.

So take a minute to smell the flowers and fall into the warm embrace of spring – after all, brighter days are on the way!

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

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5 MINUTES WITH DAMIEN BYRNE, CO-FOUNDER OF HUX



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?

The food industry has me so captured I can't imagine doing anything else. All other ideas haven't endured beyond a wistful thought... At one point I wanted to be a doctor. At another point, I wanted to be a barman. I don't think either would have panned out particularly well.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?

Bread merchandising. 5am starts. Attempting to corral unwieldy bread dollies in supermarkets.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Persistence; people that just steadfastly march on, irrespective of what they encounter. Also, generosity of time; it seems like the biggest gift anyone has to give.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?

Builder's labourer. Jackhammering concrete all day to the point I couldn't grip the steering wheel to drive home. I was probably doing it wrong.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR JOB?

Being around the team. Especially when trying to tackle something that has no obvious solution. The obstacle is the way, in all senses.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?

Any and all forms of admin.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?

Food availability and quality are such intrinsic needs for everyone, every day. That makes anything attached to it feel worthwhile.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?

Pizza and wine. The basics done really, really well.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?

Whatever you hope to do with ease, you must first learn to do it with diligence.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?

Emu. Conflicted moment eating the national emblem. Tasty though.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?

The Thought Gang by Tibor Fischer.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?

Sweet!

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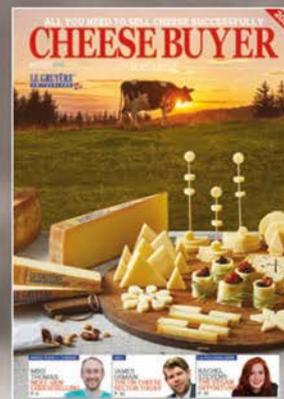
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PARTNER CONTENT



GET READY FOR SPRING WITH ITALIAN CUISINE

Forget spring cleaning, stock up with Italian produce instead and reap the benefits

When shoppers think about Italian cuisine, they may conjure up images of pastel-coloured houses along azure seas, bustling markets with fresh fruits and vegetables, Aperol spritzes being enjoyed on sun-trap piazzas and windows full of rows of gelato.

While Britain arguably can't compete with this paradise, fine food retailers are well-placed to bring a taste of the Mediterranean to UK consumers this spring.

In fact, spring is the perfect time for independents to spark a passion for Italian cuisine with the latest and greatest products. Revitalising your Italian offering for the season ahead can help bring lighter sauces and fresh products back to the fore.

As the weather improves, your customers will be looking for fresher options such as zingy basil pesto, zesty lemon and fresh, creamy cheeses. Sourcing seasonal vegetables grown in the UK will

help customers add a local British twist to their favourite Italian dishes at home.

For example, fresh bunches of crunchy asparagus, spring greens, and globe artichokes adorning your storefront will tempt customers to try a variety of Italian dishes this spring, brought together with artisan pasta, risotto rice and shavings of Parmesan.

As fewer people spend on eating out in 2023 to save their disposable income, they will be looking to recreate restaurant-quality dishes at home, so make sure your shelves are stocked to the nines with these premium products.

Spring is a great time to embrace Italian cuisine, and as customers refresh their fridges and cupboards, giving them a gentle prod towards artisan food products can make all the difference this year.

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



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Ryan Marshall, executive chef at Marine Troon

I am executive chef at Marine Troon, where we have The Rabbit Restaurant and The Seal Bar serving breakfast, all-day dining, and afternoon tea, in addition to a pot of tea and homemade cake if someone wants to sit and watch the waves for an hour or so.

I'm originally from Somerset, but made the move up to Scotland 20 years ago because I was so inspired by the landscape and quality of the produce. It is often said that Scotland's larder has the very best fish and seafood and being here on the West Coast at Troon we are spoiled for choice, our spring menu will include brown shore crab panna cotta caught just a few miles down-shore from the restaurant. I'm very passionate about working with local suppliers and have been building my relationship with producers in Ayrshire and Glasgow for 15 years while I've been living here.

Being in Ayrshire, we have the islands on our doorstep, and I'm pleased that we can have produce from Arran and Mull on all our menus. The Reade family first began producing milk from their Sgriob-Ruadh farm on the Isle of Mull in 1979 before they transitioned



into cheese making in 2000. The award-winning cheese is made with unpasteurised milk from cows fed on grass and whisky grains from the nearby Tobermory Distillery. The farm produces 100% of the heat and electricity it uses, making it one of the most sustainable farms in the UK, and is the only remaining dairy farm on the island.

Using Braehead Foods, a specialist food supplier based in neighbouring Kilmarnock, means we're able to use a network of small-scale producers across the region, including Taste of Arran cheeses, Arran Fine Foods chutneys and Wooley's of Arran 'oaties' oatcakes. These appear on our cheese board in The Rabbit

Restaurant and The Seal Bar, it's great for customers to be able to see the place their food is from without leaving their table.

The most popular dish for locals and visitors has to be our haggis bonbons with Arran mustard mayonnaise and apple gel. Our haggis is sourced from Macsween, a third-generation family butcher in Edinburgh who use a recipe from the 1950s as well as a vegetarian version.

Our meat comes from John Gilmour Butchers who use Tweed Valley reared beef from the Scottish Borders. It is aged for 35 days for the best quality breakfast sausage and sharing steaks. Since joining the team and putting together our new spring menu I've been in contact with new and familiar suppliers, such as Nartutrie in Ayr who deliver freshly baked sourdough bread for our kitchens to use each day.

Our fish and seafood come from a fishmonger called The Fish People, who I have been using for years. They source an incredibly varied range of fish and seafood from the West Coast of Scotland and the North Sea for dishes such as Ayrshire mussels, smoked salmon and of course, when you're by the sea you have to have fish and chips! small local farms; Fungi Delecti for fresh eggs and vegetables; Fresh Fish Company for seafood including the most fantastic tasting crab; and then there's also Kaz who is a renowned local forager who brings us a never-ending selection of incredible ingredients.



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