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SPECIALITY FOOD

CONNECTING THE FINE FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY



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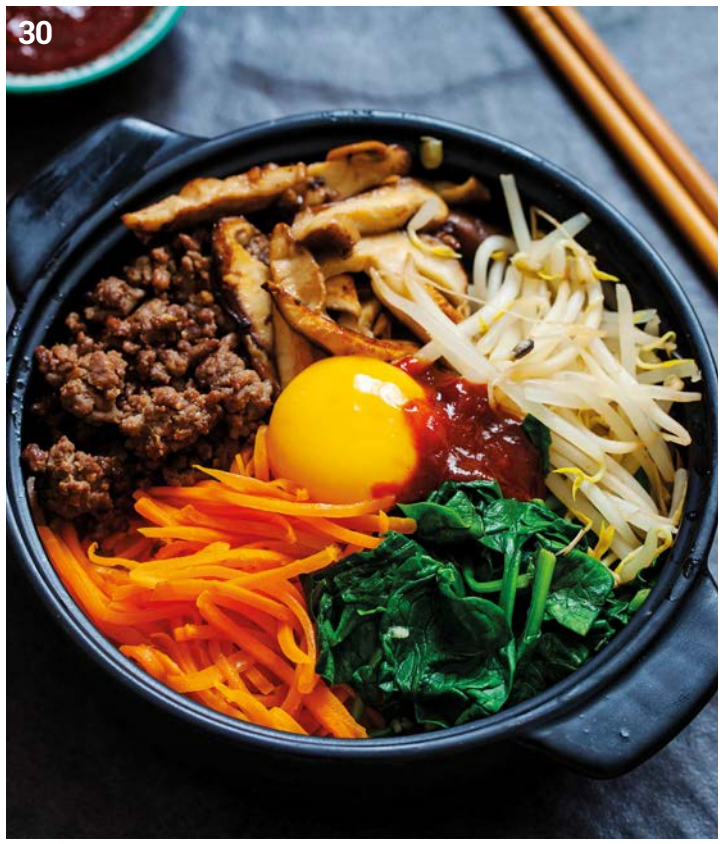
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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the February/March issue of *Speciality Food*.

After what has been a long and challenging winter for many, the evenings are getting lighter and the horizon's getting brighter – although, with Brexit issues and the war in Ukraine still impacting the industry, the sector isn't yet seeing millpond-calm waters ahead.

Personally, the highlight for me at this time of the year is the advent of trade shows. With must-visit events filling up the calendar over the next few months, I can't be the only one impatient to relish these hives of conversation and inspiration. IFE is the perfect example, and you'll find a preview to the 2023 show within these pages.

You'll also find features delving into the world of international cuisine, the future of tea, and the joy of cheese hailing from the South West from the people who know it best.

I hope you find it a valuable and inspiring read.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
holly.shackleton@aceville.co.uk





How the King's coronation provides a unique opportunity for fine food retail

With a once-in-a-lifetime event on the horizon, independent retailers are gearing up for a boost for the high street this spring

Charles I is set to be officially coronated as King on Saturday 6th May, with a celebratory bank holiday weekend planned for the event. As his late mother Elizabeth II held the throne for almost 71 years, the majority of shoppers won't have experienced a royal coronation before, so the occasion is certainly one to mark.

We spoke to industry experts to find out why and how fine food retailers can cash in on such a momentous event this year.

A unique opportunity

The coronation will hopefully bring relief to a struggling high street, as shoppers are set to visit their local promenades and participate in royal celebrations.

Tina McKenzie, Policy Chair for the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), told *Speciality Food*, "The King's coronation arrives at a crucial juncture for small firms, particularly those in the hospitality and food sectors, which have faced real challenges over the past year.

"The last quarter of 2022 saw a significant decrease in confidence within the accommodation and food sector, with a low of -71 points – so any potential for a boost in consumer demand can only be a positive thing for the economy.

"Times of celebration offer a prime opportunity for small businesses, as they tend to drive a surge in demand for products and services related to the celebration. Embracing this opportunity can help small businesses tap into a thriving market and drive growth and success."

In particular, fine food retail is well-placed to capitalise on the royal celebrations, as many outlets champion high-quality, local and sustainable food – which ties into British patriotism.

As Mark Kacary, managing director at Norfolk Deli, explained, "Any royal event is a unique opportunity for specialist food retailers to demonstrate the provenance of the products they sell, the difference they offer in that these are products made by small producers and not major corporations.

"With the King's green credentials, it offers an opportunity to extol the virtues of local, products made, and grown locally."

Emma Mosey, owner of Yolk Farm and Minskip Farm Shop, added, "Like any national public event, the King's Coronation provides a great opportunity for independent retailers to showcase what they do best.

"Farm shops are known not only for the quality of their products but also their local focus, which is the perfect opportunity for events such as street parties for The Big Lunch. Farm retailers stand in a unique position as both producers and retailers of our country's produce, and as such, we are perfectly placed to inspire customers in the run-up to the coronation events."

Cashing in on the celebrations

With such an important opportunity fast-approaching, independent retailers need to consider how to mark the occasion in a way that will excite customers and generate community buzz.

Emma suggested, "Retailers can think outside the box in terms of amazing coronation displays, showcasing amazing seasonal produce and fresh baked goods.

"Think bunting, regal-themed savoury and sweet baking, fresh seasonal produce to add colour, with the aim of really inspiring customers to make their own contributions to street parties and encouraging them to fill their baskets with gorgeous produce.

"Retailers could also think about organising something for The Big Help Out on Monday 8th May, either encouraging their teams to volunteer, or liaising with their local communities to organise charitable events in their communities. This could be good for team morale, and also for community engagement and brand building."

For Mark, it is his local connection to the royal family that makes the coronation such a special occasion. "Having Sandringham only eight miles away from the shop, we will certainly be doing something. I think I would be on safe ground to say that amongst other things (still to be thought of) we will without doubt offer a unique range of Coronation Hampers filled with products made within a 10-mile radius of Sandringham.

"To tie in with the plans for people to get out and party, not only will we create (as we did for several Queen-related events) a special picnic hamper, but the deli and the café will also have coronation-themed food items, many of which we will make ourselves, for people to hopefully enjoy as part of a picnic.

"We'll be joining in and would recommend others to do so as there are relatively few occasions like this where a small business can pull out the stops, decorate the shop, create or make something unique which can be marketed as offering sustainability credentials in keeping with the King's beliefs."

As he concluded, "Never miss an opportunity to offer the public something which doesn't have that corporate feel and instead offers something unique for what in many of our lifetimes will be a unique occasion."



"2022: a sad and beautiful year"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

That was the year that was. 2022 turned out to be a memorable year for all the right and wrong reasons.

And "last year was obviously crazy" is a phrase we have now heard for three years running. It has been widely uttered by suppliers, staff, myself and one person I heard on the radio just recently.

We know why 2020 was crazy and the repercussions of that made 2021 crazy too. But 2022 introduced a new experience of pleasant surprise and disappointing reality in terms of running a speciality food store.

Take our shop sales for example. Every month from May onwards saw a double-digit uplift in sales – apart from November which was a fraction below 10%. This looks like good news. But it had not a lot to do with expertise on our part or customer satisfaction but a lot to do with food price inflation.

There were other unusually uplifting parts to the year and unusually depressing parts of this curate's egg of a year too. Firstly the weather from May onwards was highly conducive to speciality food and drink. Bearing out Shepherd's famous theorem and highly intellectual insight, "when the weather's hot, we sell a lot".

Overlooking the pressing concerns about climate change, and for the first year possibly ever, we did not have to cancel or reduce the size of the Duke of York Square fine food market due to high winds or heavy rains, and with additional seating available the Square became something of a destination throughout the year.

However, at the same time costs were rising alarmingly, particularly the aforementioned food prices, and the additional hiring and staffing expenses managed to dampen the spirits despite the absence of rain.

Then there were events. The Platinum Jubilee delivered our busiest ever day on June 3rd with sales up 26% for the month, but also probably our most sombre day occurred on September 19th with the Queen's funeral. In July sales were up 46% on the previous year and August 26%.

Customer counts were similarly positive throughout the year. June was a massive 74% up thanks to the Platinum Jubilee again, July 43% up and August 30% up.

The most distinctive achievement of all this was that the third quarter, a traditionally difficult quarter, actually contributed positively to the rest of the year's performance. Which has never really happened before. Yet any uplifting short-term outlooks were suppressed by thoughts of the economic travails of the country and the war in Ukraine.

To sum it all up, in 2022 customers spent more and kept coming back, but the volumes they bought were less and the future looked very gloomy as we entered the Christmas season.

I remember in a film called Down by Law, from 1986, the great actor and director Roberto Benigni spoke the words, "It is a sad and beautiful world". I never really understood what he meant in context and in fact it turned out to be a misquote. But it has resonated with people down the years and clattered around the internet quite a bit. Perhaps the craziness of what happened in 2022 can be best summed up as being a part of what proved to be a sad but, at times, beautiful year.

> "'Last year was obviously crazy' is a phrase we have now heard for three years running. It has been widely uttered by suppliers, staff, myself, and one person I heard on the radio just recently. We know why 2020 was crazy and the repercussions of that made 2021 crazy too. 2022 introduced a new experience of pleasant surprise and disappointing reality in terms of running a speciality food store"



Four of the biggest sustainability problems for the food sector in 2023

The food sector has an important role to play in taking action on issues like plastic pollution, growing emissions and biodiversity loss.

Tackling these challenges aligns with shifting consumer demands. According to Kantar, 29% of British consumers, who are responsible for £37bn of grocery sales annually, now consider themselves to be environmentally conscious. With sustainability not only an environmental consideration but also a strong business move, there's no better time to act.

Here are four of the biggest threats that the industry must grapple with:

1 FOOD WASTE

New data has revealed that on average each UK household throws away 28.1kg of food waste each month, 70% of which is still fully edible.

According to the research, the most wasted foods are fresh foods as they're not as commonly frozen, drastically reducing shelf-life. In fact, a quarter (25%) of food waste is from vegetables and a further 22% is from fruit. Similarly, 17% is categorised as leafy greens and 23% from oven-baked goods such as cakes, bread, and leftovers.

In fact, as Christina O'Sullivan, communications manager at Feedback Global, told Speciality Food, "The global food system is responsible for up to 30% of greenhouse gas emissions – wasted food represents a tragic waste of natural resources such as land and water and is also an environmental disaster.

Independents are in a prime position to help. As Peter McTurk, owner of Calcott Hall and council member at the Farm Retail Association (FRA), explained, "At farm shops and independents you get the interactions with experts from butchers to delis to cheese counters.

"This means you can speak to the experts directly; you can bring in your own containers which saves on plastics and is more sustainable and allows you to choose how much or how little food you want to put in it. You're reducing waste and buying what you need."

2 THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

With purse strings tightened, research has showed that shoppers are dropping sustainability in favour of cheaper products.

According to a recent survey conducted by Meatless Farm, one in two (55%) people admitting price is now significantly more important than health, sustainability and quality when it comes to the weekly food shop.

In fact, two fifths (41%) plan to buy more frozen and non-organic (40%) meat whilst almost a third a third of shoppers (28%) are switching to cheaper processed meat. Two in five (39%) also say organic and fairtrade foods are now bottom of their shopping lists despite previously being 'must have' items.

Being in the customer-facing roles they are, independent retailers have the opportunity to explain to customers why they should continue to value sustainability in their shopping choices.

"For consumers, we believe the most important element is justifying their spend – be it through quality, health credentials or sustainability. Retailers can encourage purchases through clearly communicating the benefits to the consumer through marketing efforts and in-store merchandising, as well as offering a premium in-store experience which is attractive to the consumer", according to Maddie Grinham, brand manager at Mr Organic.

3 PLASTIC POLLUTION

Leading environmental compliance data specialist Ecoveritas has issued an urgent call to action on circularity as research shows more virgin materials have been consumed in the past six years than during the entire 20th century.

The eagerly anticipated Circularity Gap Report 2023 has found that we live in the 'overshoot era', where the rising material extraction of over 100 billion tons/year has shrunk global circularity from 9.1% in 2018 to 7.2% in 2023.

In order to tackle single-use plastic, from October 2023, single-use plastic plates, trays, bowls, cutlery, balloon sticks, and certain types of polystyrene cups and food containers will be banned at retailers, takeaways, food vendors and the hospitality industry.

The phasing out of these products will prove a challenge for independent retailers and hospitality venues as they are already battling high energy costs and Covid-19 recovery.

4 SUSTAINABLE FARMING REFORM

The farming industry has been eagerly awaiting clarity on post-Brexit reforms that will enable them to farm more sustainably, but recent announcements regarding ELMs haven't given the sector the confidence it needs to protect the environment during a tumultuous time.

According to Gareth Morgan, head of farming policy at the Soil Association, "The government is failing to make clear how they will give farmers confidence to invest in the radical changes needed for a resilient and sustainable agroecological farming sector.

"We are facing a climate emergency and ecological collapse – there are welcome elements in today's announcement but we must stop tinkering around the edges.

"Government must provide a long-term vision to help farmers do more than make small changes. They need a package of guidance and incentives that spark a shift to nature-friendly farming across their entire farms."

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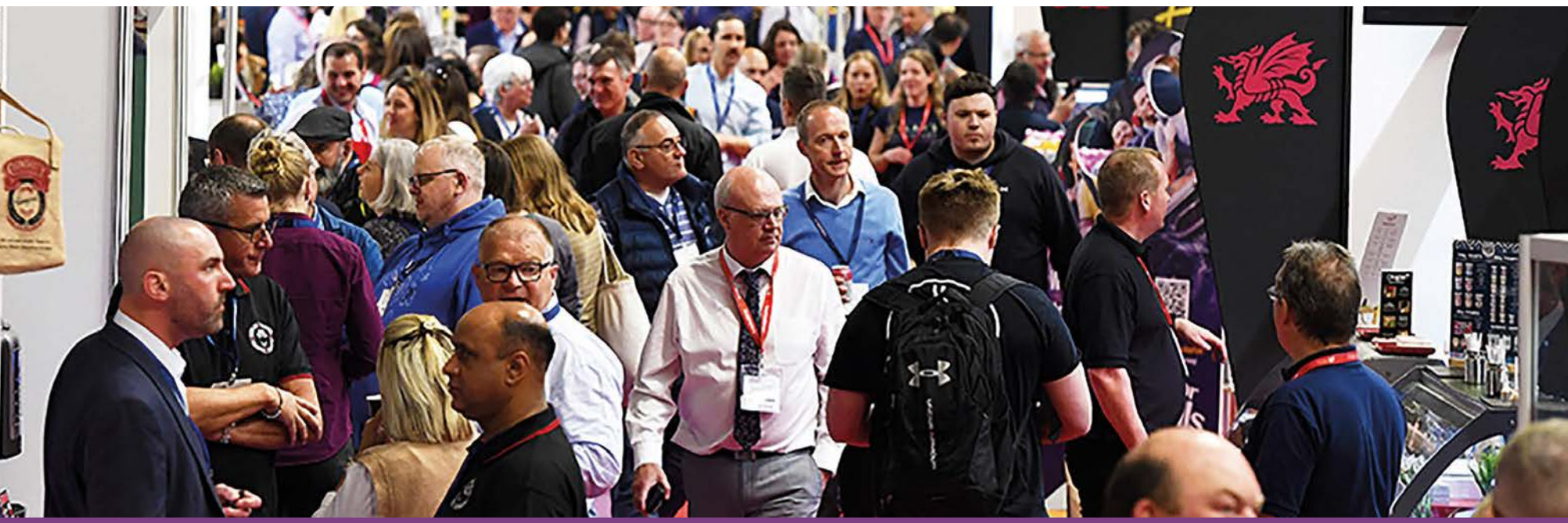
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William Reed.

"Collaboration & partnerships"



STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE

And here it is, the new year... and we are through, through the early weeks of January, through the mythical Blue Monday, chums chomping at the bit for their first sup of 'nectar', folk finding out that vegetables taste good all year!

On a personal note, the birthday season conquered... family, friends, neighbours... what happened nine months ago to create so many of us in these dark days – surely deep mid-winter is the worst time to have offspring (the mind boggles) – mad humans with no sense of seasonality?!

That said, February does bring that nudging sense of rebirth!

Where many fight through January, holding on to the hope of Spring, I love it. It shouts renewal, recalibration – the horizon of opportunity is crystal clear for a moment, before the dropping fog of day to day life begins to dim it, as we roll through the weeks and months ahead... so grab that 'horizon' and don't let it go!!

With these new-year months we have the opportunity to kick in the plans we have been dreaming of! Operationally it is quiet, less footfall, lots of cleaning, repairing, but most of all let's get planning and converting!

And this conversion is collective, it is seeing partnerships being built, collaborations, real intertwined collaborations, marching, hand in hand, towards shared goals.

As humans, what we do best when, well, when 'bested', when faced with great barriers, real or perceived, is retrench, dust down and look around, see our friends and families, gather, plan and then move boldly forward... together.

It is so important that we do not simply hunker down as tough times swirl, but that we find brave ways forward, that benefit us all, and this is always easier with friends!

Collaboration is the key word this year.

Most of my conversations these past weeks have been based in collaborative thought and partnerships, recognising what strengths we as Macknade bring to the table, and what help we need from others.

Not settling for transactions, rather building on long term relationships, talking to others to plan for the future, focusing on collaborative strength to deliver outcomes that suit all parties' objectives.

Sharing resources, giving short term advantages away, to benefit from long term stability – the relationships built up over years of trading are now really working hard, and other than showing that there is a positive horizon ahead of us, it is so much more emotionally satisfying collaborating with others who share our beliefs and so will share in our triumph.

I touched on this in my pre-Christmas considerations: underlining how important an engaged supply chain would be, sharing risk up and down itself to deliver benefit to all...and it is what happened – this past festive season has been the most collaborative and supported I have known.

It separated the partners we really want to work hard for from the transactional acquaintances, the 'nice to haves', easily jettisoned as we recognise their self-focus and lack of collective ambition.

This has continued on into 2023, as we all look to understand the pitfalls we may encounter and look to consolidate our activities, focusing on our core strengths, not so we retrench and stay there, but rather that we are able to rise and push forward again.

This consolidation to move forward has so much more opportunity by being delivered through present partnerships being strengthened, and other newly created associations, as we look for shared ethos and innovative thinking, not necessarily settling on similarity as a condition for collaboration, but perhaps differences, stemming from a shared belief, that will strengthen both parties.

2023 is the start of real platform change as we move through monikered years of 'Brexit', 'Covid', 'Fossil Fuel Dependency' to this new 'platform'.

It will take time, but these new embedded, collaborative ways of working with true 'resource partners', born out of the necessity the pressures of these past years have brought, will be the basis for the collaborative world we will deliver. I for one am hugely excited, it is always so much more fun doing things together, after all you can't have a community of one!

> "It is so important that we do not simply hunker down as tough times swirl, but that we find brave ways forward that benefit us all"

How the proposed deposit return scheme could impact independent retailers

A new deposit return scheme (DRS) announced by environment minister Rebecca Pow aims to incentivise people to recycle their drinks bottles and cans, reducing litter and plastic pollution through small cash deposits placed on single-use drinks containers.

It would include special machines, known as reverse vending machines, and designated sites where people can return their bottles and receive their cash back. In most cases, it would be the retailers who sell drinks covered by the scheme who would host a return point.

Tina McKenzie, policy chair of the Federation of Small Businesses, appreciated the aim of the scheme, but showed concern about the impact on indies.

She told *Speciality Food*, "The Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for drink containers is a necessary move towards building a circular economy. The majority of small businesses recognise that the planet is facing a climate crisis and more than a third of small firms have already a plan in place to support the UK's net zero agenda.

"However, for small and independent retailers, the scheme could mean extra space required on their premises as well as additional cost and time to administer the scheme.

Andrew Goodacre, CEO at the British Independent Retail Association, agreed, "I have genuine concerns about any proposed DRS scheme in England.

"We have already learned from previous consultations with devolved governments in Scotland and Wales that any DRS scheme is complex and will be a burden on businesses – small and large. Given the rising costs of doing business in the current climate, the last thing we need is to impose further costs on hard-pressed indie retailers."

"We all want to improve recycling levels and there are different approaches to consider, such as increasing the number of recycling points for the general public to use, and encouraging manufacturers to move away from plastic and glass bottles (high energy production and high energy recycling) to aluminium containers."

> "For small and independent retailers, the scheme could mean extra space required on their premises as well as additional cost and time to administer the scheme"



3 trends to focus on this season

As shoppers trickle back to the high street, these three food and drink trends are definitely worth paying attention to this spring

LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE

With rising costs and the after-effects of the pandemic, consumers are viewing their food differently and are turning to local suppliers more. There is a feel-good effect from supporting small businesses, and it's part of a wider move towards being more sustainable. With producers increasingly aware of the importance of sustainability and adopting an eco-friendlier approach, there will be a continued trend to use as many ethical and organic ingredients as possible. Low waste is going to be even bigger in 2023, particularly by using unusual parts of vegetables and meat, as producers look to reduce unneccesary food waste from the supply chain.

LOW/NO ALCOHOL

We're expecting to see a big focus on low and non-alcoholic beverages with a lot of new product development in this area – from beers to sparkling wines –to meet the demand from consumers not drinking, particularly in the first few months of the year. But with awareness of mindful drinking growing, consumers are realising more frequently that moderating their drinking doesn't have to just be for January, but something they wish to enjoy year-round. There is a growing social acceptance that you don't have to drink. In particular, Gen-Z is leading the trend, with a recent report by Berenberg Research discovering that teens and those in their early 20s drank over 20% less per capita than millennials did at the same age. The same report also found that 64% of Gen Z were expected to drink less frequently when they grew older than other generations.

PLANT-BASED FOOD

Plant-based food has taken the culinary world by storm in recent years, and it's clear that it can no longer be dismissed as a passing fad. The industry is set to be worth $30 billion by 2026 according to Statista, giving businesses an exciting opportunity to get involved in the plant-based buzz. In fact, Veganuary has become a major event in the food industry. Recent research has shown half of Brits are planning to make an environmental resolution in 2023, with over a third of non-vegans' new year's resolutions including plans to reduce meat and dairy consumption. While strict vegans will likely remain a smaller proportion of your total customer base, especially post-Veganuary, many retailers will find longer-term success with flexitarians.

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Farming industry finds government environmental targets 'unachievable'

According to the National Farmers Union, environmental targets from DEFRA are "irrational" and "unachievable", much to the dismay of environmental groups.

In documents published by the environment department, Dr Andrew Clark, director of policy at the National Farmer' Union, told the government, "Broadly, we consider the level of ambition across the nutrient targets to be unachievable, inconsistent and irrational. British farmers share the government's environmental ambitions, but these targets must work in tandem with producing quality, sustainable food."

But Rob Percival, the head of food policy at the Soil Association, was deeply dismayed by the NFU's response. "The NFU's attitude towards environmental targets is defeatist, deluded and dangerous.

"Our rivers are choking on excess nutrients, primarily due to the proliferation of intensive livestock systems, but the NFU has dismissed pollution reduction targets as 'irrational'. Instead, they propose more of the same – more poultry, more pollution", he commented.

Environment secretary announces single-use plastic ban across the UK

From October 2023, single-use plastic plates, trays, bowls, cutlery, balloon sticks, and certain types of polystyrene cups and food containers will be banned at retailers, takeaways, food vendors and the hospitality industry.

The phasing out of these products will prove a challenge for independent retailers and hospitality venues as they are already battling high energy costs and Covid-19 recovery.

According to Megan Adams, owner of Re:Store Refill in Hackney, "In the short term their costs may be impacted by more expensive alternatives, however, as volumes purchased increase, those costs will come down.

"Overall, it needs to be viewed as a holistic shift and more investment into changing consumer behaviour will support this."

However, we would continually advocate for businesses of all sizes to apply the waste hierarchy. Remove any unnecessary single-use packaging, introduce reuse and refill schemes and only then offer single-use disposables (which should be chosen for either recyclability or composting depending on the particular business, the products being sold, the customer use cases and available waste management facilities)."

> "It needs to be viewed as a holistic shift and more investment into changing consumer behaviour will support this"

THE STORY BEHIND THE STATS

13.8%

Food inflation leapt to a new high in January, according to the latest report by the British Retail Consortium. The rate accelerated to 13.8% in January, up from 13.3% in December. This is above the 3-month average rate of 13.2%, the highest inflation rate in the food category on record. "With global food costs coming down from their 2022 high and the cost of oil falling, we expect to see some inflationary pressures easing. However, as retailers still face ongoing headwinds from rising energy bills and labour shortages, prices are yet to peak and will likely remain high in the near term as a result", CEO Helen Dickinson reported.

35%

According to research conducted by Vypr, less than 35% of Brits participated in Dry January, with just under 10% more men than women taking on the challenge. When asked why they weren't participating, 57% responded that they enjoyed having a drink, with 22% stating that they didn't drink and 7% saying it was too much effort or they didn't have the support of family and friends. Those taking part had different reasons for joining the challenge. 42% said it was for health benefits, and 33% said it saved money. The post-Christmas and New Year detox accounted for 30% of consumers, and 20% said it was part of wider lifestyle changes.

16%

One in six (16%) of food and drink businesses say recession is a key factor preventing them from implementing digitisation projects for their sales and marketing functions, stifling their business growth. James Clarkson, CEO of Adventoris, commented, "These findings lay bare the impact the current economic climate is having on firms in the food and drink industry and it is disheartening to see the toll inflation and rising energy costs are taking."

90%

The Circularity Gap Report 2023 has found that we live in the 'overshoot era' where the rising material extraction of over 100 billion tons/year has shrunk global circularity from 9.1% in 2018 to 7.2% in 2023. Currently, more than 90% of materials are either wasted, lost or remain unavailable for reuse for years. The report found that a circular economy could reverse the overshoot of planetary boundaries, and could slash the global need for material extraction by about a third.

NEWS IN BRIEF

GOVERNMENT TO REWARD HEALTHY FOOD AND DRINK INNOVATIONS

British food and drink producers can compete for a share of £20 million in Government funding to support projects to boost the public's nutritional intake. The scheme, Better Food for All, was launched to encourage the development of affordable, accessible and sustainable innovations around commonly consumed products. Businesses can partner with other organisations to apply for funding, and have until the 29th March to submit their bids.

FARMING INDUSTRY FINDS UK ENVIRONMENTAL TARGETS 'UNACHIEVABLE'

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) raised questions about the government's proposed targets on water pollution, tree planting and rewilding, calling them 'irrational' and 'unachievable', according to documents published by the environment department. However, nature groups said the union was 'deluded and dangerous' and that it was 'stunting progress towards a greener future' after its lobbying against nature restoration policies was revealed.

BRITISH PORK INDUSTRY IN CRISIS

After a torrid few years, the UK's remaining pig farmers are a shrinking group. The decline is not from a lack of consumer demand for bacon and pork, as the UK imported £2bn of pork products last year. But shrinkage in production from UK farms seems to be unique to pigs.





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Independent retailers warned to be wary of cyber-crime

The British Independent Retailers Association (Bira) has warned businesses to be on their guard against cyber-crime, after a number of incidents on larger retailers and the Royal Mail

Bira, which works with over 6,000 independent businesses of all sizes across the UK, has called for smaller business owners to be wary of links they click or suspicious or unusual communications they may receive.

The call follows a number of brands, including JD Sports, Millets and Blacks, along with the postal service, being hit by attacks in recent weeks, and customer data being shared or compromised.

Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira, commented, "We know that everyone is a lot savvier when it comes to emails and internet safety, but this only means that the cyber-criminals are themselves being even more careful in making their attacks look legitimate.

"If the larger retailers are being hit then that just shows the levels that they will go to in order to obtain data from them, and just because you are smaller, it doesn't mean you aren't a target. So, we really want to urge everyone to be extra vigilant, and don't open links or emails that you weren't expecting and just be on guard for this happening."

The FDF urges UK government to help companies invest in future workforces

UK food and drink businesses are hiring more area-specific apprentices amid current labour shortages, new figures show. As a result, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) are urging the UK government to do more in supporting companies to invest in their resources into future workforces.

In fact, the FDF is looking for greater flexibility in the Apprenticeship Levy, allowing employers to use unspent funds to invest in shorter, modular training and help drive growth and productivity in the UK's largest manufacturing sector.

Caroline Keohane, FDF head of industry growth, commented, "With a footprint in every region and nation in the UK, food and drink companies employ nearly half a million people and provide career opportunities at all levels in a range of roles from engineers and technical operators to marketeers and finance.

"Our manufacturers realise apprenticeships bring a more diverse, motivated and loyal workforce. But we need more support particularly for smaller businesses who need a more hands on approach with identifying the right apprenticeship programmes, funding and training providers."

DEFRA is considering legislation protect wholemeal bread thanks to the Real Bread Campaign

Last year, the Real Bread Campaign started a crusade to protect real wholemeal bread, after brands were found to be using the term while containing at least 50% highly refined white flour.

After fierce campaigning, DEFRA has responded and is considering new legislation to protect what is genuine wholemeal.

Responding to the Real Bread Campaign, a policy advisor in the Food Compositional Standards Team, wrote, "We are currently considering if it would be suitable to adapt the wording on wholemeal alongside any other changes to the regulations taken forward following the consultation.

"I believe the desired goal of the requirements relating to wholemeal is to protect the nutritional characteristics of wholemeal and ensure consumers are not misled as to the nutritional qualities of the product. This being said we would also want to avoid discouraging the use of wholemeal flour and in turn potentially reducing its consumption. We are conscious that any updates should ensure that an accurate description is required for any such products so that consumers are not misled and should maintain protection against the misuse of the term wholemeal."

Chris Young, Real Bread Campaign co-ordinator, commented, "We continue to campaign for our proposed Honest Crust Act of updated and improved composition, labelling and marketing legislation across a whole range of terms and issues. For now, we're glad that Defra is still chewing this one over. After everything we raised was omitted from last year's single-issue public consultation, at least they seem to be giving due consideration to this one."



WWF calls on government to safeguard environmental standards for UK food imports

The WWF-UK has reiterated calls for the government to introduce a set of Core Environmental Standards (CES) in law that would protect farmers' income while also restoring and conserving nature

The proposed CES would set minimum environmental requirements for all farming imports, which would be comparable to mandatory requirements that UK farmers need to meet.

The environmental charity argues that this would ensure that trade policies do not undermine current agricultural reforms in the UK, would not undercut farmers trying to make a living and would ensure that the UK's environmental footprint isn't offshored. Indeed, the UK imports almost half of the food that it consumes.

While the charity commends the Sustainable Farming Incentive, one of three Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS), for ensuring farmers are rewarded for environmental practices, it argues that more needs to be done to safeguard the entire food supply chain.

Angela Francis, director of policy at WWF-UK, commented, "Food shortages following the Ukrainian crisis have shown that our current food system is not fit for purpose; we need a more resilient and fair system that can tackle the climate and nature crises and work for people.

"We know that we can farm in a way that benefits both people and nature but to get there, we need to align our trade policy with our environmental goals. The UK can do this by developing core environmental standards for all food imports, and supporting developing country farmers to meet those standards through financial and technical support for the modern agroecological practices that will generate more resilient income and lower inputs costs."



NOURISH:
FOOD AND DRINK INNOVATION CONFERENCE



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**
- **National Institute for Healthy Ageing - How to make your products healthier and more nutritious**

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.

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Trending Cuisine: West African

African ingredients and flavours are gaining momentum across the food and drink sectors, and independents are well-placed to cash in.

Much of the food and drink focus has been on the flavours of Northern Africa so far, but more recently there has been a groundswell of interest in the largely unexplored cuisine of Western African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal.

In fact, according to Google Trends data, searches for West African recipes have significantly increased over the past 12 months, including Nigerian foods (+250%) and dishes such as egusi (+120%), fufu (+120%), and jollof rice (+70%).

Some key West African ingredients include kola nuts, moringa, plantain, yam, cassava, ginger, scotch bonnet chilies, beans, fonio, okra, peanuts and sorghum. West African dishes are often gluten-free and high in plant-based protein, fitting in with current trends.

We can expect to see more focus on West African cuisine this year, according to Ben Tish, chef director of Cubitt House Group, "It's still relatively undiscovered and unexplored in the UK, but the cuisine is incredible, with interesting flavours and unique cooking techniques."

Aji Akokomi, founder of West African restaurant Akoko, added, "Retailers now have a good selection of essential ingredients used in West African cooking, so more people are trying out recipes at home now, too."

According to Ayisha Koyenikan, global food and drinks analyst at Mintel, "The largely untapped and unexplored cuisine of West Africa offers numerous opportunities for innovation. The region has many varied and unique ingredients, and their use can elevate a product when the West African provenance is highlighted.

"To cater to these consumers looking for 'safe adventure', innovation pairing vibrant West African flavours with well-known modern formats could do well in European markets. 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."



Why Dry January is evolving into a long-term trend

Conducting a nationally representative survey of its 65,000-strong community, product intelligence platform Vypr found that less than 35% participated in a month-long abstinence this year.

The low engagement might be surprising to many, as low/no is a rising trend, with companies of all sizes getting involved, from start-ups to multi-national alcohol brands like Gordon's and Warner's.

However, as Dru Jaeger, co-founder of Club Soda, explained, it is part of the mindful drinking movement, where consumers are drinking less across the course of the year rather than a month-long stint of swearing off the booze.

"Through our work as Club Soda, a mindful drinking movement, we've seen that although Dry January remains a great opportunity for people who want to take a break from alcohol, the rise and rise of the alcohol-free industry and this January's popular 'damp' drinking trend, has led to people deciding to bring greater flexibility into their drinking.

"There will always be those looking to ease off after Christmas, and naturally, want to drink less come the new year, but with awareness of mindful drinking



growing, consumers are realising more frequently that moderating their drinking doesn't have to just be for January, but something they wish to enjoy year round.

"Ultimately, the message to be taken from this January isn't that less people are partaking in Dry January, but that more people are drinking less throughout the rest of the 12 months", he told *Speciality Food*.

This was mirrored in Vypr's findings, as founder Ben Davies commented, "Our data show an appetite for alcohol-free products and an increase in those stopping drinking for long periods."

In fact, just under 50% of consumers surveyed by Vypr said they were likely to continue not drinking after Dry January ends, with 31% saying they might, indicating that mindful drinking is more of a lifestyle change than a challenge.

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A SUSTAINABLE UPGRADE

Boost your sustainability credentials by taking a fresh look at implementing eco-friendly practices

The environmental impact of the cheese industry cannot be ignored. From dairy farms right through to the cheese counter, the industry is responsible for knock-on effects on carbon emissions, single-use plastics and food waste.

While artisan cheesemakers and the cheesemongers that sell their products are already a significant step ahead of industrial agriculture and the multiples, there is always more that can be done to be more sustainable.

The importance of sustainability

For Stephen Fleming, owner of George and Joseph, the importance of striving for sustainability are twofold. "Firstly, the cheese and dairy industry can have a negative environmental impact, so we support sustainable cheese production, and sustainability also supports the well-being of the animals and communities involved in cheesemaking.

"Secondly, more of our customers are looking for sustainably produced products so it is partly driven by consumer demand."

This is also something that Chris Hallam, owner of Chorlton Cheesemongers feels strongly about. "It almost feels a bit flippant to say there is little point in having a business that consumes more than it gives out, as with anything really", he tells *Speciality Food*.

"Customers are far more considerate about what they buy and eat, so at Chorlton Cheesemongers we want to be honest with them and help them to make the best choices for their tables and for the environment.

"Our relationship with food has to change, we consume way too much and we have production practices which are damaging the environment. I believe in diversity in food production, so it is important to supply cheese that comes from producers who are small and focused on making their products in the most sustainable way possible. The natural follow-on is that we, as a shop, have to be part of that process."

Implementing sustainable practices

Of course, aspiring eco-friendly cheesemongers will need to examine the suppliers and materials they use.

As Stephen explains, "We look to source products from sustainable producers who use good practices in their cheesemaking, agriculture and animal welfare.

"Therefore, we support local cheesemakers wherever possible to reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation and provide information to our customers about the sustainability practices used by the cheesemakers we work with, encouraging them to make environmentally-friendly choices.

"We have tight controls in place to minimise food wastage and are also looking into switching to renewable energy sources, such as solar power, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Of course, we also regularly evaluate our sustainability practices and make changes as necessary to improve their effectiveness."

Cheesemongers wanting to make their business more sustainable have plenty of options. According to Chris, "There are some very obvious steps such as using paper bags, encouraging customers to use their own carriers, veg-based pots, and encouraging customers to bring in their own pots which we can fill. We have changed our cleaning products and steered away from nasty chemicals wherever possible.

"Luckily, we are in Manchester with slightly higher humidity and a lower temperature so cooling of the shop is minimal, certainly for the past few months. In summer we use gravity coolers, which have no moving fans and so have much-reduced energy consumption. Condensers still take warm air out of the shop but a mid-term aim is to introduce a heat collector which would heat our water."

The challenges of sustainability

For Stephen, a major problem is cost. "Implementing sustainable practices can be expensive and may increase the cost of products. Customers are very cost-conscious at the moment and higher prices of sustainably produced cheeses can be off-putting.

"There aren't that many sustainably produced cheeses at the moment, which makes it difficult to offer a diverse selection. Also, in terms of non-cheese items, we use a lot of clingfilm on the counter to protect the cut cheeses on display. There's not much in the way of environmentally friendly or recyclable alternatives to this at the moment."

Chris agrees, "We are not perfect and very aware of places where we need to find alternative products (e.g., clingfilm) but we are constantly assessing what we do and making changes where we can."

Reaping the benefits

The advantages of promoting sustainability are clear in Stephen's eyes. "Supporting sustainability helps to maintain the long-term viability of cheese production and ensures a stable supply of high-quality cheese for future generations. It can also attract customers who are concerned about environmental and ethical issues and are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products", he tells *Speciality Food*.

> "Customers are far more considerate about what they buy and eat, so we want to be honest with them and help them to make the best choices for their tables and for the environment"

Of course, fine food retailers champion quality and provenance above all else, and as Chris explains, "You can taste the difference in the cheese that is produced when quality and care is put front and centre. From the soil, crops, feed and livestock care through to the love put into the production by makers who know that they are doing their absolute best at every step of the way.

"These producers are people who care deeply about the products they make and the environment and community it's made in, they want that to continue and, as a cheesemonger, you are the opportunity for their incredible food and message to go further. You are how their dedicated environmental commitments reach the consumer, you demonstrate that change is happening and that effect can be tasted on the plate in front of them."



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NEWS IN BRIEF

CHESHIRE CHEESE FACES EXTINCTION

According to Shane Holland, CEO of Slow Food UK, Cheshire cheese is at risk of disappearing forever. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Cheshire cheese was what Cheddar is now – Britain's most popular cheese with consumers. At its height, there were 3,000 producers of Cheshire in the UK. Now, only the Appleby family produce traditional Cheshire, using unpasteurised milk from their own herd, house-made cultures and salt from the Cheshire plains.

MILLBROOK DAIRY AIMS TO DOUBLE EXPORTS

Devon cheese and butter wholesaler Millbrook Dairy has secured a £4m funding deal to support European growth plans. The Bideford-based business is looking to double its export sales – which already account for a fifth of its current total – across the Continent over the next three years. The company said it was looking to drive growth from its office in the Netherlands, from which it sources cheeses locally and sells to cheese specialists, manufacturers and retailers in markets such as Belgium, Germany and Poland.

REALISTIC VEGAN CHEESE IN THE WORKS

Start-up Better Dairy is recreating casein at a lab in East London's Hackney in order to produce a realistic vegan cheese alternative. The team brew yeast and then re-write the yeast's genetic code to tell it what to make, add sugar and oxygen, and then ferment it in vats to produce casein. The result is molecularly identical to the real milk protein, but vegan. It says it can cut emissions by up to 97% and freshwater use by 99%, compared with traditional dairy. And because it can be grown in a lab, it doesn't require any pasture land.

Inspirational Cheese Retailers: Farmer Copleys

THE EDUCATOR

Running a successful shop takes a great deal of time, passion and dedication – and these are just a handful of the sparkling qualities on display at Farmer Copleys, run by Rob and Heather Copley. While the farm is home to pick-your-own events, a café and even glamping sites, the deli counter is at the beating heart of the operation – for the team and customers alike. "Myself and the team strive to be the best we possibly can be and to keep the customer's experience fresh, interesting and real," Heather says, "and of course, cheese forms an integral part of this journey."

The customer's cheese journey begins with the shop's Queen of Cheese, Debbie, who is responsible for selecting a range of local, British and Continental cheeses. While Heather assists, she admits, "What Debbie doesn't know about cheese really isn't worth knowing." With the cheeses chosen, Debbie focuses on transferring her vast knowledge with the rest of the team, encouraging them to try the cheeses as they go. Samples are key to the artisan cheese experience, but like other retailers, Farmer Copleys' deli proved its resourcefulness by adapting in the pandemic. For instance, some tasting events were still able to go ahead outdoors. "Le Gruyère were fabulous with their lovely outdoor pop-up sampling station – it really added to the retail experience." And experience is what it's all about at Farmer Copleys. Covid didn't derail the team's laser-sharp focus on the customer experience, as Heather explains, "We weren't going to let the pandemic stop our Farmer-Copleys-style friendly, safe retail experience."

What's more, new customers were visiting the shop in their droves during the pandemic, and the team believed it was important to display artisan cheeses in their best light to newcomers. "We wanted to showcase cheeses to new customers and keep them coming for years to come."







Bradburys Imports USA Cheese from Sartori

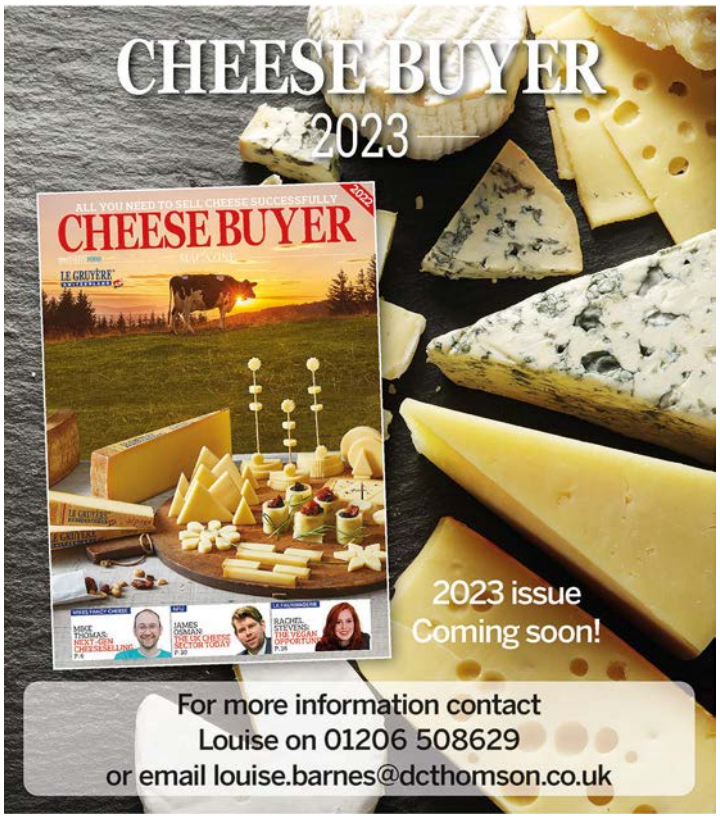
The UK will get the chance to taste premium quality American cheese as Bradburys, the UK's largest independent cheese supplier, is launching a new range of cheeses from USA-based cheese maker Sartori.

Bradburys will be stocking and supplying Sartori's premium BellaVitano cheese range for sale in the UK. BellaVitano is a Sartori original premium aged cheese that begins with fruity notes and ends with hints of melted butter, and features varieties for every palate that are hand-rubbed or soaked with flavours including Espresso, Balsamic, and Tennessee Whiskey.

The supplier will be importing the range for their extensive retail and food service sectors in the UK. The variants are available in bulk 2.27kg quarters ideal for counter cheese or in 150g retail-sized packs.

Chris Chisnall, sales and marketing director at Bradburys, commented, "Our partnership with Sartori is fantastic, we're pleased to be working with a family business that produces premium quality, award-winning American cheeses that will add a new dynamic to our cheese portfolio and something different to consumers in the UK."

Sam Allison, global sales director at Sartori, added, "Sartori is proud and excited to partner with Bradburys to bring our premium, award-winning cheese produced with world-class milk from local, Wisconsin family farms to consumers in the UK."





Carron Lodge acquires artisan cheese brand Singleton's to save it from administration

Carron Lodge have successfully acquired the Singletons premises in Longridge, as well as the majority of its brands including the popular Grandma Singleton's brand

Founded in 1934 by Dullia and Robert Singleton, whose family had been making cheese since the 18th century, Singleton's dairy has a rich history. Trading as Singleton's & Co, the family business has been handcrafting award-winning cheeses in the UK for more than 80 years, such as the famous Grandma Singleton's, Probiotic Cheddar and Parlick Fell.

It supplies produce to both retail and wholesale, as well as exporting to more than 30 countries worldwide.

Following the news that Singletons were entering administration, and with a historical connection between the two businesses, Carron Lodge decided to act. Duillia (Grandma Singleton) used to make cheese from a young age for the Rhodes family. These recipes were handed down through generations to allow Adrian and Annette Rhodes to start making cheese in 1988, and start Carron Lodge.

Tom Rhodes, operations manager at Carron Lodge explained, "We simply could not see the Grandma Singleton brand disappear from the industry. Not many people know that Grandma Singleton was a relation to the Rhodes family, and therefore this brand was very important to Carron Lodge. Her recipes helped Carron Lodge to start our wonderful cheese journey, and we felt that her legacy had to live on."

Michael Harrison, marketing and branding executive, added, "Singleton's was important to us mainly due to the family connection and it would be a shame to see some great cheeses like Grandma Singleton's and Forrest of Bowland Cheddar go.

"The expansion of Carron Lodge with the acquisition of Singletons has not only allowed us to continue some of their established lines but to also expand some of our own. Allowing us to develop more lines to add to our portfolio of artisan cheese."

CHEESE FACT FILE...



AULD REEKIE

- **Country of origin:** Scotland
- **Milk:** Unpasteurised cows'
- **Description:** Made in the eastern Cairngorm mountains by Alex Reid, using traditional methods employed by Scottish cheesemakers for centuries. This cheese is smoked over whisky barrel shavings, giving it an oaky, smoky flavour with a hint of whisky and a tangy finish.



"Blessed are the cheesemongers"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

As I write it's just about freezing temperature outside. This is something that I experience on a weekly basis whilst attending various charter and artisan food markets. There are plenty of cracking foodie markets springing up in the UK, with an ever-increasing range of delicious foods to be had.

As a shop owner and market trader I am constantly on the lookout for new cheese producers. Since the Middle Ages cheese was made available at charter markets and sold directly by the cheesemaker. Many cheesemakers have stopped direct selling at markets as it allows them spend more time to make cheese. Today it is mostly pedlars (traders) at markets that sell a variety of cheeses and condiments.

For those of you that don't know, a charter market in England is a street fair or market originally established by Royal Charter. Many charter fairs date back to the Middle Ages, with their heyday occurring during the 13th century.

Today the charter market is still part of the fabric of many villages, towns and cities. The quality of produce found at some of these markets can be questionable, although increasingly you will find better quality food as the population has become a lot more food-wise. Over the last 20 years our new-found understanding of good food has been made available through television and media.

A large part of the renaissance of proper cheese has been brought to the public via farmers' markets. Although cheese has always been available at charter or public market it has not always been of the best quality. This is due to pedlars buying cheaper mass-produced cheese that generally lacks flavour and is not always made sustainably. These pedlars have no understanding of the produce accept that it makes them money. A farmers' market, however, draws the consumer in as more often than not the actual producer is selling his/her wares and can talk about the provenance etc. Also, it is an opportunity to taste and get feedback. The manager of the farmers market also vets the traders to ensure that the product is good.

To call yourself a cheesemonger you should have knowledge about all of your cheese, its provenance, taste and manufacture. As a seller of artisan cheese for over three decades, I believe that I can now officially call myself a cheesemonger. For the most part cheesemongers are the right arm for artisan cheese producers as we all work tirelessly to champion their work and the exceptional quality of cheese being produced. Our job is to spread the word on artisan cheese and explain why it tastes like it does when compared to more commercially produced alternatives. As a cheesemonger I believe you should be focusing on sustainability and ethical farming.

My column this month is to help highlight the hard work that my cheesemonger friends do to help drive awareness about real cheese. Daily we engage the public with tastes of fine cheese; often the eureka moment is witnessed as the customers smile hits the top of their ears. Mostly the customer will say, "Oh my goodness I never knew, that is so delicious...." This is the reason I do this job: to allow people to experience genuinely honest produce from producers that like me are passionate and happy with subsistence.

Of course, there are some producers that put money in front of quality and people. Some cheesemakers may also think that cheesemongers are just retailers that know nothing about cheese. Well for those that may think that, think again – real cheesemongers are shouting from the rooftops to help keep your artisan cheese alive. Thank goodness for Patrick Rance who helped to put real cheese back on the map. So, the next time you see a cheesemonger looking pretty cold with a massive smile talking cheese to a passer-by, go say hello. Blessed are the cheesemongers.

> "I do this job to allow people to experience genuinely honest produce from producers that like me are happy with subsistence. Real cheesemongers are shouting from the rooftops to keep artisan cheese alive"

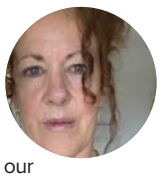
SPOTLIGHT ON: CHEESE FROM THE WEST COUNTRY

Long considered a destination for cheese lovers due to its world-famous native cheeses, the West Country has a raft of experts raring to spread the word

For generations, cheeses from the West Country have been renowned internationally. Of course, it's not only Cheddar which has gained foodie followers from across the region; there's a veritable cheeseboard of options which are award-winning and revered across the UK and beyond. 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 Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall so special.

BEHIND THE COUNTER

Debbie Priestley of The West Country Cheese Co gives us a behind-the-scenes glimpse of this proudly West Country-focused business



My husband Nick and I have always been big foodies, and of course, cheese lovers which started from a huge passion for cooking and using and understanding different cheeses in recipes. We started The West Country Cheese Co in 2007 with a small shop and market stall running a couple of times a week in Devon. Over the following years, the business grew (particularly due to the success of our wedding cheese 'cakes') and we ended up expanding the shop and launched online in 2012. Due to overwhelming demand for our products across the UK, we ended up selling our physical shop at the end of 2014 and started focusing solely online. And at the end of last year, we moved to even bigger premises near Bude to be able to accommodate the ever-increasing number of online orders. Everything we do has the personal touch, from our communication with our customers to the products themselves (handwritten gift cards, hand tied ribbons/wrapping, bespoke orders etc).

Being based in the West Country certainly helps to give the business a sense of history, heritage and legitimacy – for customers living in other parts of the UK (particularly in areas where there aren't any local cheeses being made), being able to buy West Country cheeses from a small family business here feels authentic. Every order is hand-packed by us and we like to think it has a lovely personal feel, so customers really are getting a little piece of the West Country delivered to their door.

We're geographically close to many of our wonderful cheesemaking suppliers who we have regular contact with, and we're also grateful that many of our customers who used to visit the shop and market stalls continue to buy from us.

It's difficult to pick a favourite West Country Cheese as we are so blessed with so many amazing cheesemakers in this area. We find many of our West Country cheeses are popular in our cheese wedding/celebration cakes, because of their large size and sturdy structure, so they can work as great base/mid layers, such as Quickes Mature Cheddar, Devon Oke and Cornish Blue. Also, Lynher Dairy in Cornwall who make Yarg, known for its distinctive green nettle wrapping, looks fabulous as a layer in a cheese cake.

We're huge fans of White Lake in Somerset who make the fabulous Rachel and Driftwood cheeses. Sharpham Dairy, have certainly honed their craft and they produce not only a fantastic range of cheese but also superb wine. And we were deeply saddened to hear the news of the passing of Graham Townsend of Vulscombe cheeses. He was an amazing character who would cycle to our nearest village and greet me with a box of his lovely goats cheeses. I also had the honour of spending a fabulous day learning the art of cheesemaking with him.

> "It's difficult to pick a favourite West Country Cheese as we are so blessed with so many amazing cheesemakers in this are"

FROM THE DISTRIBUTOR

Rowcliffe's Tim Collings talks about the role the West Country has in the business and shares a tour of the cheeses it supplies from the region



When one thinks of West Country Cheese the mind is instantly programmed to Cheddar and the role it plays within the nation's psyche. The nation's favourite cheese, which was born in the farms and smallholdings nestled around the Mendip hills, is still today, centuries later, the cornerstone of the British cheese industry.

At Rowcliffe, we proudly champion West Country artisan cheese producers whose hand-crafted methods still align with those centuries-old techniques and we are so very lucky that the South West produces so many varied and wonderful cheesemakers. You only have to spend five minutes in the company of Tom Calver at Westcombe to see how one of the best examples of hand-crafted, traditional clothbound Cheddar production is combined with regenerative farming and pasture-led grazing on their farm in Somerset. The Calver family's devotion and husbandry of their land and herd results in a wonderful cheese. Aged between 12 to 18 months the clothbound Cheddar is full of hazelnut and caramel notes with a delicate citrus finish.

Moving through Somerset to Puxton we find the Trethowan brothers Todd and Maugan who make the sublime Gorwyyd Caerphilly. The pair have been producing this excellent example of Caerphilly for over 25 years. Having recently won super gold at the World Cheese Awards their Caerphilly is really three cheeses in one; the rind has a mushroomy, umami flavour that leads to a creamy breakdown, while the centre is lactic and citrusy with that distinctive, crumbly texture you would expect from an award-winning Caerphilly. Both Westcombe and Gorwydd Caerphilly are staples of Rowcliffe's Clemency Hall brand of hand-cut and wrapped artisan pre-packed range.

This year Rowcliffe's are also proud to be launching a full range of cheeses from the talented team at King Stone Dairy in Gloucestershire. Led by David Jowett, King Stone has won countless awards over the past few years for their range of soft and washed rind cheeses resulting in a supreme champion at last year's British Cheese Awards for Ashcombe. Ashcombe, Jowatts delicious take on a French Morbier, has also been selected for our Clemency Hall label which again showcases Rowcliffe's pursuit of excellence when deciding on its artisan offering.

From Cornish Yarg to Rachel Goats Cheese and everything in between Rowcliffe's partnership with the finest artisanal South West cheesemakers remains as committed today as it was when we began in 1967.

> "From Cornish Yarg to Rachel Goats Cheese and everything in between Rowcliffe's partnership with the finest artisanal South West cheesemakers remains as committed today as it was when we began in 1967"



EXPERT EYE



Justin Tunstall, consultant, has been at the grass roots of the West Country's cheese scene for decades

Growing up on the Devon/Dorset border in the 1960s, cheese was Cheddar. We had no idea where it came from, save for the occasional slab of Cracker Barrel, a Canadian Cheddar – a relic of Empire, perhaps? Variety was thin on the ground. Dorset Blue Vinny was mythical. Blue cheese meant Stilton at Christmas, Danish Blue the rest of the time. Occasionally we had plastic-wrapped Double Gloucester, sweet and oily. Dairylea triangles belonged in packed lunches and didn't seem to have anything to do with cheese. Visitors to France brought back wider variety, but that was infrequent.

When I returned to open a cheesemonger in the West Country in 2009, much had changed. Sadly, Traditional West Country Cheddar was in decline, but cheesemakers in the region were producing a comparative cornucopia of varieties, of all styles from fresh curds to washed rind, blue (Vinny had been resurrected), soft and hard cheeses. Cow, goat, ewe, and buffalo milks had all been used to experiment and create cheeses new to the British palate. Consistent quality was achieved, and shoppers were interested in where and how these cheeses were made. My decision to become a West Country cheese specialist was an easy one; a manageable roster of cheeses to get to know and a growing range to satisfy requests for almost any style.

Some very strong brands had established themselves, amongst them Yarg, Old Winchester, Ticklemore and Rachel, alongside renowned makers such as Denhay, Quickes, Montgomery and Sharpham.

Since then, some makers have gone out of the market (e.g. Denhay, Wooton Organic) and some have changed hands – (e.g. Sharpham, Ford Farm). All successful entrants to the market seem to follow a standard progression – experimentation, a drive for consistency and volume, (sometimes by broadening the range) and then distribution and marketing. While the largest Cheddar makers seem to live or die on their relationships with supermarkets, there's a thriving independent scene, and hopefully a living to be made there.

Currently, I keep a close eye on developments from White Lake, in Somerset, whose run of three Supreme Champion awards at the British Cheese Awards involved three different cheeses – a strong track record in innovation from Roger Longman. I've been impressed, too, by the work done by Greg Parsons since taking over Devon's Sharpham. They have long had a fine range of steady sellers, but Greg has made impressive additions to the offering, with his customary marketing nous. Third, a newer entrant to the scene is Peter Morgan of Book and Bucket in Dorset, where cheeses are named after figures in literature. He started making with ewe's milk but was offered a surplus of cow's milk during lockdown and created a raft of new cheeses while many makers were on furlough. Blyton was a star of our Christmas spread, and hits far outnumber any cheeses that I find less appealing. Attracting much interest from hospitality and wholesale clients at the World Cheese Awards, The Book & Bucket Cheese Company could make a large impact. But these are but a few of the characters and cheeses that form the West Country cheese world.

> "From market stalls to food halls, there's always something new and fascinating, as well as the stalwarts that have earned their place in any 'library' of West Country or British cheese"





PRODUCER SPOTLIGHT

Jon Corpe, West Country buffalo farmer and creator of Buffalicious Mozzarella and Bocconcini, tells the story of this unique business



Initially starting in 2002, we began our journey with 22 weaned calves. Although we did not start milking them at this stage, we started off selling home bred buffalo meat which proved to be very popular. In 2016, once we had started to milk the buffalo, our Buffalicous brand was born. It was at this point we wanted to bring together everything that is great about water buffalo and provide a unique range of products for our customers to enjoy – this started with the raw milk and ice cream – and at the end of 2018 we began our journey to produce Buffalicious Mozzarella.

Buffalo milk has a much higher solid content, therefore making it perfect for Mozzarella, and we were keen to get started! After searching around for someone in the UK to produce this for us and failing, we decided to bring this in house and hired someone to teach us the process. We wanted to produce a real Buffalo Mozzarella with an authentic taste and texture, but with strong influences from its Somerset Terroir – I think we succeeded!

We have had an amazing response – both locally and nationally. We are lucky enough to feature on the menus of some great restaurants and supply to farm shops and delis up and down the country. We intend to continue to grow and expand our range of buffalo cheeses – bringing customers more variety and choice, its challenging for many – and some local cheesemakers have not been able to continue their production – but hopefully customers continue to see the wealth of awesome cheeses being produced in this cheese rich part of the country.

> "The West Country is home to some of the best cheese in the UK. To be located amongst some of the best cheesemakers in the UK helps to build up a great rapport and relationship with fellow cheesemakers – and instantly customers are drawn to this cheese rich county, making it so beneficial to be here!"



Give your customers' afternoon tea spreads a boost this year with our pick of the best teatime treats

1 ORIGINAL BISCUIT BAKERS
GINGERBREAD BISCUITS

The aromatic taste of ginger, the smooth velvetiness of liquid gold syrup and the delicate crunch of fine sugar. Only the finest ingredients are used to create Original Biscuit Bakers gingerbread biscuits before they are lovingly hand iced into delicious summer favourites. Visually striking with a taste to match, they make the sweetest treat to add a wow factor to any afternoon tea.

originalbiscuitbakers.co.uk

2 CAKEHEAD
CAKES & BAKES

Made from farm fresh British ingredients and hand crafted and hand finished in their Oakham-based cakery, Cakehead have the recipe for more customers with their fantastic range of award-winning cakes and bakes. Lemons are squeezed from fresh, eggs cracked by hand and even the caramel is made using their own secret recipe, to ensure that every bake is as delicious as can be.

cakehead.co.uk

3 (UN)ORDINARY
BARISTA OAT DRINK

Made from 100% British oats, this product was created to pair perfectly with coffee. When steamed, it produces a smooth, consistent microfoam and adds the perfect texture to any espresso. It also has a wide range of applications in the kitchen, and makes a delicate addition to tea. (Un)Ordinary Barista Oat Drink is excellent for cooking, baking and everyday use.

unordinaryoats.com



4 BODDINGTON'S BERRIES
STRAWBERRY CONSERVE

Boddington's Berries have been growing strawberries for over 70 years and producing high fruit-content preserves for over 20. Their strawberry conserve is made with strawberries, sugar, and lemon juice and contains 80g of fruit per 100g, making it deliciously fruity and rich. The jam is free of any pectin or other additives, so you can enjoy the natural flavour and texture of the strawberries.

boddingtonsberries.co.uk

5 TWISTEA
ALCOHOLIC TEA

Fancy a tipple? Twistea offers a range of semi-sparkling alcoholic teas, cold brewed for 24 hours for a tip-top taste. The range includes four tempting flavours, each with a refreshing fruity twist: Blood Orange & Mandarin, White Peach & Mango, Rhubarb & Ginger, and Lemon & Lime, and is made using all natural flavours, vegan friendly, and 4% ABV. They're the perfect addition to any afternoon tea.

broadlanddrinks.com

6 POSITIVE BAKES
FRUIT SCONES

An absolute staple in any afternoon tea, these handmade fruit scones are packed with raisins and are the perfect tea time treat. What's more, the scones are vegan, gluten-free and contain no palm oil or refined sugar. Perfect slightly warmed, served with Positive Bakes Not Clotted Cream and jam, in whichever order you like, there's no judgement here!

positivebakes.com

7 POSITIVE BAKES
NOT CLOTTED CREAM

This Not Clotted Cream is a delicious vegan alternative to classic clotted cream. Made with 100% plant based, natural ingredients and containing no palm oil, it looks and tastes like traditional clotted cream. Thick, creamy and absolutely indulgent, it adds a touch of luxury to vegan afternoon teas. It is available in 115g plastic-free and compostable retail packaging and catering sizes.

positivebakes.com

TIME FOR TEA

Far from just a teabag, hot water and a splash of milk, tea is evolving into something innovative and functional in 2023



COMMENTATORS



URVASHI AGARWAL
JP'S ORIGINALS



ALEXANDRA FOSTER
WHOLE FOODS MARKET



FREYA TWIGDEN
FIX8



KAT HALL
BROADLAND DRINKS



ANGHARAD GOODE
MINTEL

The tradition of tea drinking is certainly a British one, with consumers sipping 100 million cups of it every day of the year. After all, there's nothing that can't be solved by popping the kettle on.

The art of brewing a cup of tea isn't something to be taken lightly. From the mug used through to the order of tea-making events, everyone has their own individual way of doing things; it's what makes tea time so special.

But while the ritual remains, the tea itself is evolving into something new in 2023, and independent retailers are well-placed to lead the revolution.

From kombucha to CBD and matcha, we explore what the sector looks like and how indies can stock up and cash in on the latest tea trends.

Catering to 2023's consumer

Things are changing in the 'tea sphere' this year, and today's consumer is looking for more than just a teabag and a splash of milk.

According to Angharad Goode, research analyst at Mintel, "Tea holds a comforting constancy for people. The cost-of-living crisis will boost the appeal of this perception, as consumers seek out emotional support during stressful times, while cost-saving efforts fuelling at-home occasions should prevent a steeper drop in tea retail sales. Localism and alcohol moderation trends represent potential areas of growth in the longer term."

This is something that Urvashi Agarwal, founder of JP's Originals, has noticed, "People are no longer just throwing their tea bags in with hot water and milk. There is now an interest in enjoying tea how it should be, which involves filtering your water, boiling it to a specific temperature and paying attention to the required brewing times for different teas. Enjoying tea is no longer only about comfort."

Enjoyment of tea is something that has really come into play as purse strings are tightened and retailers see the Lipstick Effect.

Kat Hall, senior brand manager at Broadland Drinks, creators of Twistea Sparkling Alcoholic Teas, added, "As the cost-of-living crisis continues, we'll see consumers looking for frugal luxuries, and tea can play a key role in this, it's already seen as a comfort to many consumers so innovation in this category may be seen as a treat that won't break the bank, whether that's trying a more premium offering, a new flavour or venturing into alcoholic tea."

In fact, we are in the middle of the tea revolution, like coffee before it. Just as consumers are interested in the origin of the bean, the type, and the roast, people now want to feel connected and learn about where their favourite teas are grown and why.

In Urvashi's experience, "Consumers are no longer just looking for the first box of tea they can get their hands on or the cheapest option. They now consider factors such as origin, provenance, quality, social responsibility and environmental impact. This is something that Kat has also identified. "Coffee has already succeeded in stretching into other areas and categories and we've started to see this happen in tea in recent years with the launch of cold brew and cold infuse products", she explains.

"Tea lends itself well to flavour innovation and consumer trends including low sugar, low calorie, functional benefits and more sophisticated flavour profiles so there are endless opportunities to evolve the category."

> "Tea lends itself well to flavour innovation and consumer trends, so there are endless opportunities to evolve the category"

Indeed, as Urvashi points out, "There is definitely a growing interest in single estate teas, of which will likely continue to increase. Instead of simply asking for green tea, people have started to ask for more specific types of green tea, for example a Sencha, Lung Ching or Chunmee green tea.

"Consumers are becoming more adventurous in line with these kinds of teas becoming more accessible and as they are educated on the plethora of tea varieties out there to be enjoyed."

The healthy choice

The pandemic undoubtedly had a huge impact on the way in which consumers look at health, and inspired a newfound appreciation for the power of plants and holistic methods of wellness. Whilst regarded as a comforting brew, different varieties of tea actually offer a host of health benefits.

As Freya Twigden, founder of Fix8 Kombucha, tells Speciality Food, "We've long loved a good 'builders brew' which is full of polyphenols and l-theanine from the black tea. But more studies are showing the benefits of green tea (including matcha, which is high in caffeine).

"The catechins in green tea have even been scientifically linked to preventing types of cancer. We use sencha green tea in our kombucha, which when fermented acts as a super-tea as the benefits (like polyphenols) are more bio-available."

Alongside this realisation of the power of green tea, matcha powder has grown in popularity. According to Urvashi, "From a tea perspective, matcha is making a massive emergence in the market, simply because of its incredible health benefits such as its nutrient density, and antioxidants.

"Although matcha is becoming trendy it will likely retain its popularity well into the future as people discover how beneficial it can be for their health. We have noticed people switching from a daily coffee to a daily matcha. Whether enjoyed at home or out and about, there is a ritual involved in the preparation of matcha and so it becomes ceremonial and part of one's routine."

This is something that Alexandra Foster, category merchant for non-perishables at Whole Foods Market, has also noticed. "We have witnessed the peak of Matcha and customers trading up for better quality Matcha. OMGTea is a gorgeous artisan brand and an example of a high-quality Matcha that consumers enjoy.

"In addition, new brands are using matcha as their source of caffeine in drinks outside of traditional matcha teas and lattes such as chilled energy drinks."

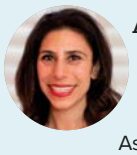
The function of tea

Tea has long been touted as the beverage to calm nerves, lift moods and boost energy. In fact, according to the Tea Census 2022, 15% of respondents drink tea because they want a break from work or life, and a further 20% say they drink it because they need or want to relax.

Many respondents also admitted to sipping on a cup of tea to help with certain emotions such as when they were feeling down (14%), upset (12%) or lonely (9%). In 2023, brands are taking these functions to the next level.

As Alexandra explains, "We are seeing customers looking for more than just a regular cup of tea. Consumers are focusing more on functional beverages and teas that provide additional health benefits, with products supporting focus, immunity, gut health, and sleep, becoming more mainstream."

TRENDING TEAS AT WHOLE FOODS MARKET



Alexandra Foster, category merchant for non-perishables at Whole Foods Market, reveals her trending brews

As a receptive retailer, in 2023 we seek to lead the way in offering customers unique and innovative teas that are targeted to help with different needs. The rising trend of Kombucha is something that we have been supporting for years, and consumers are increasingly looking to it to help maintain their gut biome. We are now seeing this trend evolve into consumers actively seeking prebiotic and probiotic drinks.

Through the high-quality and diverse products, we stock, Whole Foods Market is not solely looking at tea, but instead looking wider, at hybrid drinks. We recently launched OHMG, a unique sparkling magnesium water, which has been one of our top-selling products, with great sales and engagement.

Besides OHMG having as much magnesium as an avocado, which aids in relaxation, each flavour has an added supplement which also helps support immunity and calmness, like the Ashwagandha in the Peach & Rosemary (the top seller in the range) or the Echinacea and Vitamin C in the Blackcurrant sparkling water.





Kombucha is a product that caters to this trend, providing gut-friendly live cultures and slow-release caffeine from green tea. As Freya explains, "In recent years, fermented food and drink have had a huge surge in interest – from kefir to kimchi to sauerkraut, they're all the rage. Not just for their incredible flavour, but also their 'live probiotic' nature and the subsequent benefit to the gut."

Aside from the physical benefits tea can offer, at Whole Foods Market, "We are seeing increasing numbers of tea brands offering more targeted products to support mental health and pushing to introduce almost 'medicinal' teas", according to Alexandra.

As Urvashi explains, "The tea aisle has shifted to having more functional infusions than ever before, aimed at helping with things such as sleep, bloating, and detoxification amongst others.

"For those prioritising wellness, our range of functional CBD blends has been formulated to target specific concerns. They are packed with antioxidants, fight inflammation, assist with balance and most importantly aid relaxation and sleep, which has been imperative, especially since Covid."

By experimenting with the new generation of flavour profiles out there, catering for the growing demand for health and functionality-focused options, and making sure your selection offers something extra special for those seeking enjoyment and a one-of-a-kind experience, you're sure to become a go-to for discerning shoppers thirsty to fill their cup.

The face of tea is changing, and consumers are no longer just seeking taste. After all, paying attention to the needs of your customers will serve independent retailers well in 2023, as function and health drive a revolution for the Great British brew.

TEA BUZZWORDS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN 2023

Make sure your tea offering is bang on trend with the help of this brew-related jargon.

- **Functional**
- **Single-estate**
- **Fermented**
- **Loose leaf**
- **Ceremonial grade**



STOCK CHECK



HAMPSTEAD TEA ENGLISH BREAKFAST

A full-strength black tea that goes well with milk or cream, featuring a robust blend of leaves from India and Africa.

hampsteadtea.com



FIX8 GINGER & TURMERIC

Slow-brewed authentic kombucha paired with ginger, turmeric and black pepper for the ultimate digestive fire and detox kick, with added live cultures.

fix8.com



JP'S ORIGINALS DEEP SLEEP

A calming blend of natural herbal ingredients infused with 15mg of the finest full spectrum water soluble CBD per pyramid bag.

jpsoriginals.com



TEAPSY MOONDUST

A calming chamomile tea featuring coconut flavouring for a fruity twist on top of the classic chamomile and lavender combination.

teapsy.co.uk



MATCHA & CO PREMIUM MATCHA

100% organic ceremonial grade Matcha of the highest quality from Japan selected from the best plantations in Kyoto.

matchaandco.co.uk



TWISTEA WHITE PEACH & MANGO

This semi-sparkling alcoholic tea is made using real tea leaves and cold-brewed for 24 hours to create a lighter, more subtle flavour than hot brewed tea, with a sweeter, smoother finish.

broadlanddrinks.com



SUMMERDOWN PEPPERMINT

A strikingly crisp, refreshing and intensely aromatic herbal tea made with pure Black Mitcham peppermint leaves that are dried and infused with the essential oil from the brand's distillery.

summerdown.com



OMGTEA AAA+

This coveted high-grade matcha is made exclusively with the finest leaves from the top of the plant and first harvest ground using a traditional granite stone mill, a process that takes more than an hour to grind 30 grams.

omgteas.co.uk



AHMAD TEA DIGEST

This tea infusion is deliciously sweet and refreshing, fortified with added Biotin (Vitamin H) and spearmint to help aid in feeling cleansed and restored.

ahmadtea.com



PERFECT TED MATCHA SPARKLING ENERGY PEAR & GINGER

An all-natural energy drink using organic, ceremonial grade matcha and real fruit juice with the flavours of pear and ginger.

perfectted.com

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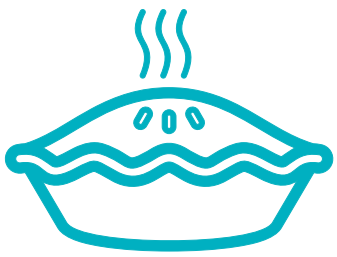
Tracklements

The Life & Soul of the Pantry



NEXT LEVEL PIES

Comforting to eat, but time-consuming to make, superior pies are a golden opportunity for indies says Sally-Jayne Wright



"A **FOCUS** ON OFFERING LOTS OF FILLING IN PIES/ PASTIES WILL ADD THE MOST **VALUE** TO PRODUCTS FOR CONSUMERS, WHILE MORE **PLANT-BASED** PRODUCTS, WORLD **CUISINES** AND **HEALTHIER** FILLINGS OFFER FURTHER **OPPORTUNITIES** FOR **GROWTH**"

RICHARD CAINES, MINTEL

We Brits eat £1billion worth of pies every year. Some 976 creations in 23 categories were entered into the British Pie Awards in 2022, with many more entries expected this year. The organisers define a pie as a filling wholly encased in pastry which is baked not fried.

At Trevilley Farm Shop, Newquay, they sell pies in the store and also supply a sister business delivering food boxes throughout mid-Cornwall. Partner Errol Warman says, "Pies are seeing an upward trend. Pre-Covid, we had just one chef in the kitchen. For the past two years, we've had four, including a person dedicated to pie and sausage roll production, plus another whose sole job is to cut up meat for pies and pasties."

WHAT'S BEHIND THE PIE TREND?

- Comfort eating and nostalgia
- The cost-of-living crisis
- Plant-based eating. Pies are ideal vegan and veggie options for restaurants

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS WITHIN THE TREND?

Matthew O'Callaghan, organiser of the British Pie Awards, reports that, "In recent years, vegan and vegetarian pies have grown substantially with the Vegan Pie category being the most entered in 2021. Development of the gluten-free pie has also been significant. Economy, family-sized pies are trending, also gourmet pies for one."

WHAT MAKES A PIE AN AWARD-WINNER?

Good pastry – it should be crisp, evenly-baked, golden, not over-processed, and well-seasoned with no rancid notes. Soggy bottoms and raw dough are no-nos. While many pastry makers swear by a combination of butter for flavour and lard for texture, pies made with vegan pastry also win accolades. The Bristol-based pie company Pieminister supplies indies and supermarkets alike, and uses pastry made with sustainable palm oil in all its products.

WHAT ABOUT CONTENTS?

Generous, please. Eaters feel cheated if they have to play 'hunt the meat' or discover a large gap between contents and lid. Robust fillings such as cheese and onion work well as they're tasted through pastry layers. Discerning customers appreciate when a pie is packed with high welfare meat or fresh veg as budget pies contain cheap fillers such as breadcrumbs and sauce to bulk out contents. "Customers trust our beef and turkey from the farm and know they'll find no nasties," says Errol.

WE'RE IN A VEGAN HOTSPOT BUT FIND MAKING TASTY VEGAN PIES IS HARD.

Helping to judge the vegan category at the British Pie Awards one year, I found common faults were: too watery (spinach not squeezed out); too sweet (root veg and squashes need lifting with savoury ingredients); and confused combinations. Yet there's huge potential for sales if you can develop a good recipe. How about chestnut, black chickpea, mushroom and stout, an idea from the Vork Pie website.

YOU CAN'T BEAT A PIE FRESH FROM THE OVEN AND THAT AROMA OF FRESHLY RISEN PASTRY.

That's why, at Trevilley Farm Shop, as well as cooked products, they sell raw pies and pasties, both fresh and frozen, for baking off at home.

WILL THE COST OF ENERGY NEEDED TO HEAT OVENS AFFECT PIE SALES?

Pie companies report that while some consumers are resorting to air fryers, many use their microwaves to heat pies topped with gravy or mushy peas, the crispness of pastry apparently not an issue.

MINTEL SAY THE FUTURE OF THE CATEGORY LIES IN HEALTHIER FILLINGS AND WORLD CUISINES. IS THAT TRUE?

In the food industry, timing is everything. Pieminister's head of press, Romany Simon, reports, "We tried an edamame beans, spinach and soy 'Evergreen' pie. It won three gold stars in the 2020 Great Taste Awards but didn't sell that well. We think it was too much, too soon for what people want in a pie. Our Mexicow chilli beef pie with melted cheese inside also didn't sell that well. We received feedback it was too spicy." They have launched a 'not too spicy' chicken Tikka to Ride pie this January. Their bestsellers are still Steak & Ale, and Chicken & Ham.

WHICH BRANDS DO YOU LIKE?

Ripon-based Yorkshire Handmade Pies scooped a handful of Great Taste Awards last year. Distributed by Hopwells Food Service, Wild & Game's luxury pies include such fillings as venison, beef, red wine and cranberry.

HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE TREND?

- Upsell ice cream with apple pie; piccalilli with pork pie
- Venison sounds superior to beef, justifying a higher price
- If your meat sells well but your pies aren't shifting, get professional feedback on your recipes. Under-seasoning of pastry or contents is a common fault
- Sell separate mash, mushy peas and gravy
- Could you make pies in customers' dishes for entertaining at home?
- Play to your strengths. Trevilley found game pies too time-consuming
- Celebrate national and regional heroes such as wee Scotch pies and Fidget Pies from Shropshire

WILL THE PIE TREND LAST?

Yes, because quality pies are premium ready meals and more affordable in tough times than eating out and takeaways. With veg, salad or mash alongside, a pie is an easy family dinner. Cheering on winter tables, portable for summer picnics, pies sell well year-round.



The Life & Soul of the Pantry

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HOW TO CAPTURE THE **SUSTAINABLE POUND** IN 2023

Courtney Goldsmith uncovers the new trends and hot tips that will keep sustainable products flying off your shelves this year

The sustainability movement has proven an unstoppable force in the food and drink industry. But this year, even amidst the clamour for green credentials and sustainable innovations, tough economic conditions are forcing independent retailers to weigh up the value of environmentally friendly food and drink. "Every business owner is having to make tough decisions at the moment," says Sian Sutherland, co-founder of the campaign organisation A Plastic Planet.

Yet in 2023, she says it's more important than ever for indies to double down on their sustainable values. "Despite the choppy economic waters, I truly believe that stepping back from sustainability is not only detrimental to our environment but also an irresponsible business move," Sian warns. "With a growing percentage of consumers crying out for sustainable products, it would be ill-advised to revert to a stagnant business model which ring-fences the consumers of the future."

The numbers back up her claims. Over half (53%) of consumers actively seek out companies and brands that offer ways to offset their impact on the environment, while 51% are prepared to invest time and money to support companies that try to do good, according to Kantar's research. Similarly, a survey by Cleanhub, which helps brands cut down on plastic, found that a third of consumers worldwide are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products.

"If we take our foot off the pedal now, we risk not meeting the targets we set ourselves," says Heather Morris, co-founder of food start-up specialists SH Foodie. So how can retailers ensure they're hitting the sustainable brief in 2023? We gathered advice from sustainability experts and food and drink industry leaders to understand the key trends that will help retailers cash in on the sustainable pound this year.

Exciting innovations

With customers becoming more price-conscious, it's important for retailers to look out for innovations that move the needle – particularly those that offer shoppers that chance for an easy win. "Sustainability innovators must ensure that their products present consumers with a frictionless choice to make change intuitive and easy," Heather says. "Innovators need to overcome initial instinctive concerns to make it easier for the purchaser to reap the long-term rewards for themselves and the planet."

Brands that repurpose by-products of the food and drink industry, for example, present customers with a clear narrative to get behind. "Circularity is the focus of an increasing number of emerging brands – upcycling, reusing 'waste' products or operating in more of a closed loop. The most elegant examples seem to be coming from the drinks industry, like Black Cow Vodka and East London Liquor Company," says Jason Gibb, founder of Bread & Jam, which is running a Future Summit to help food and drink businesses become more sustainable.

Heather that this trend will be on the rise in 2023. "Over the coming months, I predict there will be more companies looking at how so-called 'waste' materials can be put to good use, which can only be a good thing for all of us," she says. The upcycling of by-products from non-dairy milk production, such as oat, soy and almond pulp, also ranked in Whole Foods Market's top 10 trends forecast for 2023.



7 SIMPLE SUSTAINABLE WINS FOR 2023

Whether you're looking to start small or dive headfirst into sustainability this year, these tips will help you take the next step

1 REVISIT YOUR PLANT-BASED PRODUCTS

"Due to the cost of living crisis, but also for health reasons, consumers are turning to plant-based ingredients to replace some or all of their meat intake," Heather says. "Veganuary participation in 2022, according to Kantar, was primarily for health (38%), but closely followed by environmental (25%) and ethical reasons (25%)." With quality improving for plant-based meats like 'bacon' and dairy-free cheeses, there are many options for indies to choose from – but watch out for a backlash against highly processed vegan foods. Pluses, beans and organic veg may prove a more popular option with customers.

2 SUPPORT THE B-CORP MOVEMENT

Certified B Corps have been gaining popularity over the past few years. The logo signifies that a business that has committed to balancing profit with people and the planet, and a rigorous certification process must be undertaken before you can slap it on your label. In 2023, Jason says, "B-Corp will be going mainstream as it becomes more widely recognised by consumers. So why not join the fun and have a B-Corp section or shelf?" You could even consider certifying your own business.

3 RIDE THE HEALTH WAVE

"The aftermath of the pandemic spurred a strong consumer commitment to good health, and a high percentage of conscious consumers now demand fresher foods with no artificial ingredients as they look to cook more at home and gain greater control over what they eat," Peri says. Even in the cost of living crisis, Mitch says Eversfield Organic has seen consumers prioritising their health. Look for brands with strong on-pack messaging about their health credentials, and seek out organic products or whole foods which consumers will be on the hunt for.

4 CHECK YOUR CARBON EMISSIONS

Zeroing in on your carbon emissions is another way to win conscious consumers. "If you are making any food-to-go, you should look at calculating the carbon footprint and displaying it on your dishes or products," Jason says. "Consumers are becoming more carbon literate and you need to be ahead of the game." Jason recommends looking for free online carbon emission calculators – some may even integrate with nutritional platforms that you're already using for allergens.

5 GO ZERO-WASTE

Retailers should take a fresh look at how to deal with any surplus stock. "All retailers should be making sure that there is zero wastage on stock," Jason says. Could you partner with popular surplus food distributors like Too Good To Go or Olio to make sure you hit the mark on food waste?

6 EXAMINE YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN

Take a closer look at your supply chain. "With food, it's all about the provenance of ingredients – and this means looking closely at the supply chain to ensure you're using the right, sustainable options," Gary says. Consumers want brands they can trust, and producers who have shorter supply chains and guarantee provenance, traceability and transparency will be ahead of the curve. "Provenance of ingredients isn't just a nice story, but a short history of traceability versus cheap blends of commodity ingredients, the origins and processing history of which are impossible to know," Peri says.

7 ADD A REFILL STATION

Sian believes 2023 is the year that refill packaging takes off. "There has been an introduction of permanent packaging on a microscale, but I believe this year we will see this model being scaled across the UK in a big way, hopefully once again reinventing our consumption of harmful plastics." Start small with dried foods or common household products to get a feel for what running a refill scheme will entail and how interested your customers are in the idea. "Offering refill systems and prefill products not only boosts sustainability credentials and tackles this pressing issue facing humanity but it will also carve out a niche for your business, showing you are ahead of the trend whilst many will lag behind," Sian says.

But sustainability and waste-reduction in the food and drink arena take many forms. One item that's perennially in the spotlight is single-use plastics. "The impact of single-use plastics in the beverage industry is well documented, as are the proposals and plans to reduce usage," Heather says. "It's obviously not a simple problem to resolve, which requires more cooperation and joined up thinking between countries and companies."

Indeed, the single-use plastics fight has been taken to Downing Street. Environment secretary Thérèse Coffey announced a ban on a range of takeaway products in England, including plastic plates, trays, cutlery and polystyrene cups and food containers. The ban has been wildly popular with the public: more than 95% of those who responded to the consultation were in favour.

A **THIRD** OF **CONSUMERS** ARE **WILLING** TO PAY **MORE** FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY **FRIENDLY** PRODUCTS

SOURCE: CLEANHUB

Many independent retailers are already shifting away from plastic packaging. Eversfield Organic's Mitch Thorne says sustainable packaging has "gained serious traction in recent years". The retailer itself uses cardboard boxes made from recycled pulp, as well as compostable trays and paper bags. "The devastating effects of single-use packaging are well documented and it's positive to see many companies taking responsibility and either minimising or completely eliminating this threat to the environment," Mitch says.

Redefining 'sustainable' for 2023

While some sustainable swaps will take investment in new technologies or leaps of faith in trending products, independent retailers can also cash in on the sustainable pound by looking to the past. "We haven't always been shackled to a throwaway culture of consumerism," Sian says. "We used to put bottles outside our front door for the milkman. Our food didn't used to be wrapped up in a plastic cocoon."

Simplicity is making a comeback.



At a time when the prevalence of greenwashing can sow seeds of doubt in consumers' minds about brands' sustainability claims, presenting a tangible alternative can be extremely impactful.

For fine food brands, sustainability is often baked into the business. Take the artisanal Italian food

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brand Seggiano. "Our company was founded on our love for Italian food, a passion for a holistic approach to wellbeing and sustainable agriculture," says co-founder Peri Eagleton. "Our company's ethics reflect our way of life, as opposed to an adopted policy. We work with specialist producers who share this passion and use quality ingredients and production methods that preserve the nutritional integrity of food and respect sustainable agricultural practice."

This focus on quality will be essential in 2023 as bigger brands sacrifice the best ingredients or production methods for a better margin. "As prices have risen sector-wide, mainstream commercial food brands have tended to make compromises on quality and sustainability to help maintain margins," says Peri. "But with the concerned consumer the arbiter of choice here, it is companies that remain true to their ethics that will reign supreme – as they continue to scrutinise the sustainability, integrity, provenance and traceability of ingredients, production methods, packaging, and trading practices behind every product on the shelf."

Whole Foods Market has acknowledged the 'back to basics' trend with a surprising entry in its 2023 trends list: the humble date. Following a viral craze on TikTok in 2022, dates are now popping up in recipes and on retailers' shelves, but as a sweet treat they date back to ancient Mesopotamia. "Now, thousands of years later, the dehydrated fruit often referred to as 'nature's candy' is having a major renaissance as a sweetener – not only for at-home bakers, but also in the form of pastes and syrups, and hidden in everything from ketchup to overnight oats," Whole Foods' Trends Council states.

The redefining of sustainability in 2023 also extends to the savings produced for consumers – whether that is saving water, saving wonky fruit and veg from the bin, or even saving energy for the home cook. Indies can think creatively about the products they're stocking as consumers crave home-cooked meals that use less energy. "Mintel's cooking in the home report identifies that home cooks' interest in learning new skills offers opportunities for sustainable products," Heather says. Think meal kits for the slow cooker or air fryer or simple, flavour-packed ingredients like cooking sauces.

Building trust with customers

Revamping your shop to be more sustainable is a noble effort, but don't forget to shout about your achievements, however big or small. A survey commissioned by Tetra Pak found that two-thirds of consumers "highly value" companies that take steps to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions and 68% value companies that provide recyclable packaging options, so don't let your hard work go under the radar.

For Eversfield Organic, sustainable advances are a big part of their marketing strategy. "We endeavour to consolidate [our sustainable] practices through our marketing materials, such as social media, e-shot, and our Newsbeet blog, all of which provide an entertaining yet transparent insight into our mission," Mitch says. "Without being condescending, we want to educate our customers to make informed choices and decide whether they can alter any of their purchasing to contribute to a more sustainable production line."

Effective communication is crucial in 2023, says Gary Lewis, chief commercial officer at KTC Edibles. "Articulating why you've chosen specific ingredients enables you to stand out from competitors – and also offers an opportunity to defend or justify these choices," he explains.

Whole Foods also noted that 'climate-conscious callouts' on labels are becoming more popular. "Across our aisles, products are taking to their labels to talk about sustainability efforts in a time when consumers expect brands and retailers to do more related to carbon and climate," their trend report states.

Some certifications, like Fairtrade, can be a fast-track to building trust with consumers. "Our latest consumer research tells us that Fairtrade remains a highly trusted and visible mark, with 87% consumer awareness and 79% trust," says Anna Mann, head of responsible business at the Fairtrade Foundation. "Our strong brand is a useful platform for independent retailers to leverage when it comes to communicating the value of Fairtrade products and helping to expand the drive for sustainable and fair supply chains."

Giving consumers the information they need to make environmentally conscious choices goes hand-in-hand with building a sustainable brand. As Heather explains, consumers know that sustainability is important – they just need a push in the right direction. "They need the help of us in the food and beverage industry to lead the way and facilitate the changes we need to implement to benefit us all on our planet." In 2023, it might be tempting to let sustainability fall to the wayside, but the businesses that commit to stocking sustainably are poised to reap the rewards.

BEWARE GREENWASHING

"Sustainability is a hot topic – and many businesses are rushing out promises and making commitments and claims to sustainability that they simply can't back up or implement," says KTC's Gary. "This can result in greenwashing, which can be hugely damaging to businesses. In addition to undermining the basic concept of sustainable practices, greenwashing prevents real, tangible progress from being made – and we should all be wary of it."

Greenwashing has no legal definition, but research by the European Union found that more than half of the green claims it studied were vague or misleading, and a study by Sensu Insight found that nearly a third of Brits expect companies' environmental claims to be exaggerated. Another 14% don't believe them at all.

Jason expects to see the conversation around net zero greenwashing grow this year. "One of the biggest outcomes of COP27 was the clampdown on net zero greenwashing, and there are loads of retail and food businesses that are making bold claims that are not based on Science Based Targets (SBTs). They'll need to get their houses in order, and quite right too," he says. In practice, Gary says that rooting out greenwashing can simply involve staying up to date with regulatory information or checking that all key emissions data is recent and accurate.

> "Without being condescending, we want to educate our customers to make informed choices and decide whether they can alter any of their purchasing to contribute to a more sustainable production line"

2023 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE STOCK CHECK



TRACKLEMENTS FRESH CHILLI JAM
This addictive, sticky-sweet chilli jam smoulders with a gentle heat from fistfuls of fresh red chillies.
tracklements.co.uk



BIONA ORGANIC QUINOA GRISSINI
Made with organic Italian wheat flour, ancient quinoa grain flour and extra virgin olive oil.
biona.co.uk



ROOTS & WINGS ORGANIC SEVILLE ORANGE MARMALADE
Made in in traditional open copper pans to create a deep and tangy marmalade.
rootsandwingsorganic.com



CHEERFUL BUDDHA MATCHA LATTE
Enriched with coconut milk for extra creaminess and containing Reishi mushrooms and Ashwagandha to further support good health.
cheerfulbuddha.co.uk



CLEARSPRING ORGANIC INSTANT MISO SOUP PASTE – CREAMY SESAME
A convenient way to enjoy the umami-rich taste of naturally fermented miso, with the creamy, mildly nutty flavour of sesame.
clearspring.co.uk



GIGLI RIGATI ORGANIC SPELT WHITE PASTA
This 'elbow' shaped pasta is bronze drawn, ensuring its rough porous texture binds perfectly with sauces. Certified compostable packaging.
sharphampark.com



AVALLEN
A floral, fruity, and completely natural Calvados.
avallenspirits.com



MINOR FIGURES CHAI CONCENTRATE
Made with an infusion of high-quality loose leaf teas and the finest natural spices. 100% organic.
minorfigures.com



PLAYINCHOC ORGANIC PERUVIAN CACAO DARK CHOCOLATE
A delicious dairy, nut, gluten and plastic-free indulgence.
playinchoc.com



MR ORGANIC CANNELLINI BEANS
Cannellini beans simply in water, made with organically grown ingredients.
mr-organic.com





SHOW PREVIEW
IFE 2023

IFE is back for 2023 and has positioned sustainability firmly in the spotlight

IFE, International Food & Drink Event, returns to ExCeL London on 20th-22nd March to deliver high quality and effective business connections for the retail, wholesale and hospitality sectors.

With more than 1,500 suppliers from over 90 countries taking part in the event, IFE is the UK's most comprehensive showcase of British and international food & drink. Taking place alongside IFE Manufacturing and Hotel, Restaurant & Catering (HRC), visitors to IFE will have the opportunity to meet with quality suppliers, gain insights into the very latest industry trends and network with fellow professionals in the world of food and drink.

Pavilions representing countries including Australia, the United States, Italy, Romania and many more will be on hand to showcase a wide range of quality international products, while international buyers will have the opportunity to visit the Exporters Hub, powered by Institute of Export & International Trade, sponsored by K International, to quickly and efficiently source export-ready food & drink brands with infrastructure in place for international sales.

An unparalleled showcase of food and drink innovation

IFE is packed with features for 2023, including the Startup Market, an area of the event dedicated to new and exciting food and drink brands. Products on show include decadent plant-based chocolate from Dirty Cow, cricket protein-based snacks from Saved and 'permissible but indulgent' frozen bananas dipped in chocolate from Pukpip.

New for 2023 is IFE's Big Business Break, where food and drink business owners will have the opportunity to pitch their product to a panel comprised of David Jago, Mintel's head of market intelligence, Noor Ali, Head of World Foods (All Categories) at ASDA and Harry Dulai, Managing Director of Surya Foods.

Meanwhile, Harry Dulai, the MD of Surya Foods who co-founded the initiative said: "We are ready to invest up to half a million pounds in the right product. This could take the form of equity stake, investment in working capital, profit share, marketing and PR support or loan agreements to help a business break into the highly competitive UK FMCG market."

As always, the Speciality Food section of IFE is packed with exciting artisan, fine food and speciality products. Visitors to the section will have the opportunity to sample gourmet sweets from Ask Mummy & Daddy, delectable caviar from Gourmet House Caviar, British-grown chillies from South Devon Chilli Farm, and much more.

Returning bigger and better for 2023 is the show's Vegan & Plant-Based Section, in partnership with The Vegan Society, launched to a rapturous reception from the food and drink sector in 2022, this year's selection of innovative vegan and plant-based businesses includes plant-based meat from Heura Foods, naturally delicious tempeh from Creative Nature and dairy-free cheese from Just Like.

An inspiring seminar programme

This year's edition of IFE sees the addition of the Sustainability Stage, sponsored by Elopak, reflecting the importance and complexity of ESG as a topic within food and drink. Across the three days of the show, including a day of content curated by the Food & Drink Federation (FDF), leading industry experts and speakers will delve deep into a range of topics within sustainability, from decarbonising food systems to creating a circular economy for food and drink packaging to the evolution of sustainability in the world of frozen food, and a whole lot more.

IFE event director Philippa Christer comments, "A sustainability strategy has gone from 'nice to have' to vital for a large percentage of our audience of food and drink retailers, wholesalers and hospitality professionals in their product sourcing journey, and we're seeing incredible innovation and dedication from suppliers taking part in IFE. Sustainability is a huge topic and having a dedicated Sustainability Stage will enable us to host in-depth conversations covering a number of key issues."

Ben Goodwin, head of policy at the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), a panellist on the session 'Low carbon future: What skills do we need to achieve Net Zero?', comments, "I'm delighted to be participating at IFE 2023 to shine a light on the importance of green skills development throughout the food and drink sector.

"The sector will play a big part in our transition to a cleaner economy, so ensuring that those individuals working within it are ready to deliver is critical. IFE 2023 provides a fantastic opportunity for discussion on how we drive this agenda forwards."

The Food & Drink Federation will be curating a full day of content on Tuesday 21st March, with head of climate change and energy policy Emma Piercy commenting, "The FDF is delighted to be partnering with IFE for the inaugural Sustainability Stage at this world class event.

"Global food systems make up around one quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Bringing all stakeholders together and collaborating at IFE is essential to building the resilient and sustainable food systems we need."

Elsewhere at the show, the Trends & Innovation Platform will be packed with sessions taking a look at a wide variety of trends and topics within the worlds of food and drink.



In 'Where to begin with a brand extension? Unlocking the profitability of powerful partnerships', Business coach and food mentor Karen Green will be joined by an all-star panel of industry experts to discuss what it takes to build successful partnership with complimentary brands, and how both retailers and food & drink brands can look to take advantage of opportunities in the market.

She comments, "IFE 2023 is going to be THE food expo with amazing exhibitors, the right business visitors and a seminar programme packed with interesting insights on the subjects that matter. I am proud to be part of the seminar programme and wish I had a clone so I could attend everything on offer!"

Another must-attend session taking place on the platform is 'How should the food industry be managing allergens?', where Bertrand Emond, head of membership and training at Campden Bri will be joined by speakers including Anita Kinsey, senior technical and safety manager at Pret A Manger, Nicki Clowes, brand and marketing director for the Free From Awards and Julianne Ponan MBE, founder and CEO of Creative Nature.

"I'm looking forward to leading the discussion on allergens at IFE 2023," says Emond. "This is a complex topic and it's hugely important that food & drink brands and foodservice businesses ensure they are meeting legal standards and following best practices when it comes to managing allergens responsibly and accurately conveying information around allergens to consumers."

The awards ceremony for the World Food Innovation Awards, in association with IFE, will conclude the first day of content on the Trends & Innovation Platform, highlighting innovative food and drink suppliers from around the world in categories covering product, ingredient and packaging innovation.

A host of exciting new features

Another new addition for the 2023 edition of IFE is the New Product Tasting Theatre, a curated showcase of the most exciting new products at the event.

Startups and larger brands launching new products will have the opportunity to take part in five-minute pitching sessions across the three days of the event. Suppliers and distributors will also have a chance to participate in longer 'Discovery Hour' sessions where distributor products will be showcased in various dishes by guest chefs in sessions hosted by Chef Consultant Steve Walpole.

Walpole says, "I'm delighted to be hosting the New Product Tasting Theatre at IFE 2023. It will be a great opportunity to explore some creative and delicious uses for quality products and a unique chance to showcase their potential to buyers at the show."

Buyers across retail, wholesale and hospitality have expressed their excitement at the launch of the new theatre and the additional opportunities to see innovative products showcased at the show.

Shiada Drysdale, manager – IFS food and beverage – beverage lead at Virgin Atlantic, says, "I am looking forward to sampling at the New Product Tasting Theatre and keen to see the innovation and curation. Plus, there is nothing better than experiencing products at their best."

Kevin Watson, managing director



of Amadeus, adds, "The New Product Tasting Theatre is a great addition to an already fantastic show, and I especially look forward to the Distributor Discovery Hour sessions. IFE just keeps getting better and better."

Visitors to the show will also have the opportunity to take advantage of valuable one-on-one meetings. Ask the Expert, sponsored by Langdon, will host industry experts including FDReviews, Leatherhead Food Research and food mentor Karen Green to answer visitor queries and provide bespoke business advice.

Austen Bushrod, co-founder of FDReviews, comments, "Visitors to Ask the Expert will be able benefit from the decades of experience across the FDReviews team of experts. From working with retailers to product development to consumer research, join us to learn how to perfect your product, strengthen your brand and grow your business."

Meanwhile at the Certification Clinic visitors can drop in on organisations such as The Vegetarian Society, Vegan Friendly, RSPCA Assured, Fairtrade and BRCGS to learn more about the certification process.

Partnering with leading industry organisations

Each year IFE benefits from partnerships with a wide range of leading organisations in the worlds of food, drink, retail, wholesale, export and more. The show is delighted to partner with the Department of International Trade.

Rachel Gwyon, director for UK Nations and Agriculture, Food and Drink, at the DIT, comments, "2023 is set to be a year of huge opportunities in international trade and DIT is delighted to support IFE in the launch of the Exporters Hub and in supporting the growth of UK food and drink businesses and brands overseas.

"Trade shows are a fantastic way to build international relationships, access global markets, benefit from key industry insights and gain invaluable exposure to potential partners, and we're looking forward to meeting with innovative food and drink businesses at the event."

The show has also partnered with organisations such as the Federation of Wholesale Distributors to further connect with the UK's thriving wholesaler community.

James Bielby, chief executive of the FWD comments, "IFE is a fantastic opportunity for our members to check out new and exciting products in the world of food and drink and to hear all about the latest industry trends. We can't wait to attend!"

In the Chilled & Frozen Food Section at IFE 2023, the British Frozen Food Federation will have a curated member's pavilion to showcase the innovation taking place in the world of frozen food, as the organisation celebrates its 75th anniversary.

Rupert Ashby, chief executive of the BFFF, says, "To mark the 75th anniversary of the British Frozen Food Federation, we will be hosting the very first BFFF Frozen Food Member Pavilion at IFE. 2023 is set to be a standout year for the industry as frozen food plays an important role as an option for both consumers and foodservice operators in the challenges ahead.

"The BFFF pavilion will demonstrate some of the latest NPD coming from the BFFF members assembled showing the quality, taste and benefits of frozen food. IFE will also showcase the industry, highlighting insight and trends in the world of food and drink, and the BFFF are delighted to be involved as speakers at the event."

Drinks @ HRC & IFE

New for 2023, IFE and sister show Hotel, Restaurant & Catering (HRC) will be combining their respective drinks offerings. Drinks @ HRC & IFE will see the full range of drinks products from both events – from soft drinks to hot beverages to alcohol and low and no – come together in one central location alongside focused content and networking opportunities.

Buyers from the worlds of hospitality, food and drink retail, wholesale and more will have the opportunity to discover unique new drinks products from creative start-ups and innovative launches from some of the biggest brands in the sector.

Paddy Willis, executive chairman and co-founder of food and drink investment firm Mission Ventures Ltd, comments, "Drinks brands, whichever category they sit in, are typically reliant on a multi-channel distribution strategy. Putting them together in one place enhances their opportunities for being discovered by buyers who might normally not visit all three of the shows. I believe this move will benefit both buyers and sellers."

Suppliers and distributors confirmed for the section so far include Bacardi Martini Ltd – Tails Cocktails, Folkington's, Boutique Brands Ltd, New English Teas, and Esprala Drinks.

The section has the support of a number of key association partners, including the British Soft Drinks Association (BSDA), whose director general Gavin Partington says: "The British Soft Drinks Association is pleased to be renewing its partnership with IFE to connect soft drink brands and manufacturers with thought leaders and innovators from across the wider food and drink industry. The launch of Drinks @ HRC & IFE is a valuable opportunity for retail and hospitality buyers to learn about the latest trends and NPD in this dynamic category."

NEED TO KNOW

To learn more about everything happening at IFE 2023, and to register for your complimentary trade ticket, visit ife.co.uk. IFE takes place alongside IFE Manufacturing, HRC, The Pub Show @ HRC and International Salon Culinaire on 20th-22nd March at ExCeL London.

What: IFE
Where: ExCeL, London
When: 20th-22nd March 2023
Website: ife.co.uk

TWO FARMER'S CRISPS

STAND 3725

The journey of Two Farmer's Crisps began in 2015 over a pint in the local pub. The founders' idea was to turn their potatoes into crisps in a sustainable way, a way that celebrated local ingredients and protected the local countryside. The Two Farmer's team grows, harvests, stores, cooks and packs using renewable energy that they generate on their farm. Two Farmer's are the UK's first 100% compostable and plastic-free crisp brand, with their packets completely decomposing in home composting in just 36 weeks.

twofarmers.co.uk



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dugdrinks.com



STAND 911

COCOA CANOPY

Cocoa Canopy's exquisite tasting drinks are crafted for enjoying hot or iced as an alternative to coffee. There are five varieties in the range: Rich Dark, Smooth Milk, Salted Caramel, 'Milk & Dark' and single origin 70% Ecuador Dark. All varieties are made with sustainably sourced cocoa, are palm oil-free and all packaging is 100% compostable, including the inner bag.

cocoacanopy.co.uk

STAND 6459





COMMENTATORS



UPULI AMBWATTA
EMPIRE BESPOKE FOODS



KATE KEHOE
FMCG GURUS



TARA MEI
MAHALO



ABBAS ZEIN
BILADI FOODS



MARIA BRADFORD
SHWEN SHWEN



LOUISE ALLEN
WHOLE FOODS MARKET



A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY

While indies are renowned for their local produce, by also offering a kaleidoscope of international flavours they'll become a must-visit for modern foodies

Ty now, retailers across the UK are well aware of the tangible impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on consumer tastes. In the absence of travel – domestic as well as international – consumers of all persuasions were more tempted than ever to enjoy their favourite world foods in the comfort of their own homes. Of course, the closure of restaurants meant a step-change for non-home cooks, many of whom learned to – if not master – at least appropriate the key elements of the international dishes they were used to enjoying on holiday or while eating out; from Indian curries and Italian staples to adventurous foods from the likes of Africa and Asia.

"We are seeing a change in cooking patterns and meal occasions," agrees Upuli Ambwatta, brand manager – World Food Portfolio at Empire Bespoke Foods. "First, the Covid pandemic triggered growth in scratch cooking while flexible working patterns made lunch an increasingly significant meal occasion. With more time spent at home and the prolonged closure of food service restaurants shoppers explored more and developed greater confidence in their home cooking."

Of course, while supporting local producers became more tangibly important than before for many shoppers, few could resist the lure of far-flung flavours – and this appetite still holds strong. "Fundamentally consumers are looking for food adventure, Upuli continues. "From Mintel we know that 74% of world cuisine eaters say that world cuisine flavours make an at-home lunch more exciting, and 42% would like to see more products that guide them through authentic cooking techniques.

Indeed, according to consumer insights from FMCG Gurus, 66% of consumers in Europe enjoy food and drink products with new and unusual flavours – especially those which challenge their sensory perceptions. This number increases when you scale up to a global audience, showing that there is plenty of room for growth in the UK market. "FMCG Gurus insights demonstrate that 76% of global consumers like to try new flavors from around the world, and 71% of global consumers like to try new flavors from specific regions around the world," explains Kate Kehoe, marketing executive at FMCG Gurus, stating data from the business's *Flavor, Color & Texture 2022 Global Report*.

This research exposed an interesting detail – not only do 82% of global consumers enjoy spicy flavours associated with non-traditional UK food, but 49% considered 'new and exotic' flavours originating from some international regions to be healthier. "This implies that consumers associate certain regions in the world with healthier diets," says Kate. "As a result, food and drink products from certain regions have a health halo. This creates an opportunity for brands who sell certain cuisines to utilise storytelling and their origin to promote certain flavors with health-boosting benefits."

International appetite

"International food is a hugely popular sector in the UK's fine food market because we are a nation of food lovers," states Tara Mei, founder of Mahalo – a new distributor of the best emerging food and drink brands – and co-founder of Bread & Jam. "Being an adventurous, knowledgeable foodie plays a huge part in our identities and having a wide ranging, seasoned palate is something to be revered" – something which swathes of Speciality Food readers' customers would undoubtedly agree with. "We are also a nation of explorers," she continues. "We love new experiences and international food is an easy way to indulge and embark on an adventure from our own kitchens. The fine food market in particular has always been where we turn to for an experience so it is no surprise that the international food category is expanding within it."

For retailers, producers and distributors both established and new to market, world food is undoubtedly a flavour and opportunity-filled sector. "When I launched Mahalo, I spotted an opportunity in the international foods category and the growth that we've experienced so far, with turnover doubling year on year, is partly due to our focus in sourcing brands within this category," explains Tara. "Mahalo has been able to offer our customers an eclectic mix of high quality, artisanal products with a wide-ranging heritage that really meets the demands of the adventurous British palate. Some of our bestsellers include the mighty White Mausu, a range of Japanese inspired condiments; Payst, an innovative range of Thai dipping sauces; Rempapa, Southeast Asian curry pastes; Now Now, South African curry kits and Bold Bean Co, Spanish heirloom beans. As well as outstanding taste, these lines are fantastic, tried and tested entry point products for farm shops and delis who are perhaps diversifying to the international food category for the first time."

For Empire Bespoke Foods, one of the UK's leading importers, distributors and brand-builders since its launch by Chandresh Patel in 1997, international food is part of its DNA. "Our vision is to

> "Being an adventurous, knowledgeable foodie plays a huge part in our identities and having a wide ranging, seasoned palate is something to be revered"





inspire consumers with indulgent flavours from around the world so international food brands are very much at the heart of our business," explains Upuli. "We are passionate about bringing authenticity and provenance from around the world, whether you're wanting the finest Pad Thai (Thai Taste) or simply want to try the UK #1 gherkin brand (Mrs Elswood). Our selection of products stretches from traditional French lemonades, American barbecue sauces, cereals and confectionary, authentic Thai, Vietnamese and Malaysian foods, to the finest German gingerbread."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, giving Brits' penchant for Indian feasting, foods from India make up over a third of ambient ethnic world food, followed by Mexican and Chinese, says Upuli. "Indian world foods continues to evolve with shoppers exploring new cuisines from across India with one in five people eating Indian at least once a week," he explains, "and Oriental cuisines are also gaining popularity and have the highest growth contribution to the overall ethnic world food category. Restaurant chains like Rosa's (Thai), Busaba (Thai) and Pho (Vietnamese) let consumers explore tastes that may be new to them." The most outward-looking foodies? "We find it's younger shoppers (16-34) who are the most receptive to new cuisines."

For Empire Bespoke Foods, plant-based and healthy options are key pointers for the coming year, with one third of world cuisine shoppers seeking out ideas around making their dishes healthier. "39% of world cuisine eaters are interested in products that are suitable for use with both meat and meat-free dishes. We put continuous effort into tracking new food trends and gaps in the market which helps us to bring in exciting new cuisines and brands to UK consumers. Our new brand, Master Cook – launching with an Indian food portfolio (meal kits and heat and eat dals) – are 100% plant-powered meal solutions for those who are looking to taste authentic Indian cuisine, and we've also refreshed our existing Vietnamese range (Nem Viet Summer Roll and Pho kits) so that they are 100% plant-based."

> "39% of world cuisine eaters are interested in products that are suitable for use with both meat and meat-free dishes"

A taste for adventure

There are many producers championing their internationally-inspired produce in the UK



EXPANDING HORIZONS

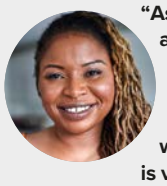
Three experts share their predictions for the future of world food in the UK



"Lots of growth!" according to Empire Bespoke Food's Upuli. "By 2026 Mintel forecast world cuisine to grow to over £2.5 billion. New foods, new formats, new cuisines will help drive much of this growth – we'll see more shoppers exploring Thai, Vietnamese and other less established cuisines which shoppers are keen to explore."



"As travel returns to normal for the UK, I'm confident that we'll see the international foods category expand even further," predicts Tara of Mahalo. "People will become more experimental, keen to recreate the flavours and dishes they have discovered on their holidays and international foods will feature increasingly in our everyday lives. For retailers, I think they will experience an increase in the informed customer who is well versed in international flavours and an expectation that their ranges in-store will reflect these interests. For small batch producers, the future holds a fantastic opportunity to capture the palates of the British public with new and innovative flavours beyond the occasional use condiment. I'm looking forward to seeing internationally influenced innovation in grains, breakfast products, pulses and drinks."



"As a nation we are keen to experience international food and flavours but we are now also considering issues like Fairtrade and sustainability and what effect producing and transporting these products has on the world as a whole," says Shwen Shwen's Maria. "This means that we are having to be more innovative, and I think the UK is very good at this."

> "There are many producers championing their internationally-inspired produce in the UK market, and they all are gaining in popularity thanks to a heady, thoroughly-modern mix of experimentation and twenty first century media"



RETAILER INSIGHT

Louise Allen, senior local forager at Whole Foods Market, explains the importance of international cuisine to the destination retailer



WHAT ROLE DO INTERNATIONAL FOODS PLAY IN WHOLE FOOD MARKETS PRODUCT RANGE, AND WHAT OPTIONS DO YOU STOCK?
At Whole Foods Market, international foods are an integral part of our product range, and we stock a wide variety of international flavours including Mexican, Korean, Chinese, Thai, Indian, Caribbean, Japanese, Middle Eastern and Italian. We seek to lead the way in offering our customers unique products from artisan producers, that are fun, exciting, and most importantly delicious, all sourced within our strict quality standards.

IN YOUR VIEW/EXPERIENCE, WHAT ARE THE MOST POPULAR INTERNATIONAL CUISINES IN THE UK RIGHT NOW?
Making international foods accessible is key to their popularity. As an example, Korean cuisine is increasingly popular, with numerous brands adding Korean flavours to their products, making them increasingly accessible for consumers. Whole Foods Market leads the way in representing trend-driven cuisines and this year we have launched the popular and versatile Gochujang Hot Honey from Wilderbee, Korean Chilli Oil from Nakasero, as well as stocking a range of three Korean sauces from BomBom Market.

ARE THERE ANY NEW TO THE UK WORLD FOODS SET TO TREND IN 2023?
We have found that African and Caribbean foods are yet to have a strong offer in retail, however, we are seeing more come to the market. As a receptive retailer, this January, we have launched three, high-quality Caribbean sauces from Lesley's Sauces showcasing the delicious flavours of the Caribbean and the brand's heritage.

WHAT MAKES INTERNATIONAL FOOD SUCH A POPULAR SECTOR IN THE UK'S FINE FOOD MARKET?
We live in a wonderfully diverse society, which provides an exciting melting pot of cuisines and flavours. Consumers love exploring new foods and culinary experiences as well as enjoying the richness that this diversity brings. Through the high-quality and diverse products we stock, Whole Foods Market provides consumers with the experience to have fun in their kitchen with different international foods.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THIS SECTOR?
There are still many international cuisines that remain less represented than others, and as new flavours and trends continue to enter the market, we certainly expect to see growth within this sector. With inflation and the cost-of-living crisis we may see people travelling and eating out less, therefore we hope people will experiment with new cuisines at home, bringing that experience to their dining table. As a retailer leading the way in producing a variety of unique, high-quality products, we are expanding our international food category to reflect the success of previous launches and the demand for international cuisines.

> "There are still many international cuisines that remain less represented than others, and as new flavours and trends continue to enter the market, we certainly expect to see growth within this sector"



market, from Korean hot sauces to storecupboard staples, seasonings and beverages – and they all are gaining in popularity thanks to a heady, thoroughly-modern mix of experimentation and twenty first century media. Thanks in part to the visibility shared by the likes of TV chefs Yotam Ottolenghi and Sabrina Ghayour, tahini is fast becoming a storecupboard staple for food lovers across the UK. Whether people are whipping up a simple lemon and tahini dressing to adorn their vegetables, making their own hummus or baba ghanoush, or baking with it – tahini adds a unique nuttiness to cakes and biscuits – it is a favourite ingredient for many consumers in the know.

Enter Biladi Foods, producer of authentically Lebanese sweet and savoury spreads boasting delicious ingredients and unique flavour combinations. On a mission to help bring Lebanese and Middle Eastern recipes to British consumers' homes, co-founders Abbas Zein and Khodor Faraz are proud to tell the cuisine's story. "Sitting on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, Lebanon has been a crossroads and meeting-point of cultures and flavours since the days of the Roman empire," they explain. "It brings together fresh ingredients, spices and flavours, and is based around small 'mezze' dishes, which encourage sociability and sharing. Lebanese and middle-eastern food is essentially the Mediterranean diet, but with more flavour. It's becoming increasingly popular with restaurant goers up and down the country."

Representative of healthy and vegan food – both key players in today's fine food market – the Great Taste Award-winning range currently covers four versatile tahini products (Tahini, Chocolate Tahini, Carob Tahini and Grape Tahini), Zaatar & Olive Oil and Spicy Zaatar and Olive Oil – both blends of aromatic thyme, sumac and toasted sesame seeds in olive oil, with the spicy variant also showcasing paprika.

"There's currently only a handful of Lebanese or middle-eastern food brands in UK supermarkets, and none, as yet, really 'owns' the market," continue Abbas and Khodor. "We want our target audience to think of Biladi Foods when they consider exciting Lebanese food. Biladi is the gateway to a whole new world of middle-eastern flavour."

One international cuisine which has not yet enjoyed the media focus currently shining on some other world foods is African – which is not to say that intrepid foodies are not seeking it out. "Africa is the final frontier of food, and foodies are always seeking out new and interesting flavours," begins Maria Bradford, chef and founder of retail brand Shwen Shwen who was brought up and learned to cook in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. "I think that British people have always been adventurous in their food choices but I'm pleased to see a recent greater interest in African ingredients and dishes." Education undoubtedly has a role to play. "I think there's a real lack of awareness of what African food is, and definitely Sierra Leonean food would be a small niche within that," she continues. "One of my primary drivers is to connect people through food and share our culture so I see breaking down barriers and raising awareness as all part of it. I think retailers could be a little more open minded; I've certainly got some ideas on new products and dishes."

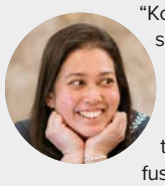
One of Shwen Shwen's most popular products is Salone Fire chilli sauce, which feeds into the UK's appetite for adding heat to dishes either within the cooking process or as a condiment. "I have repeat customers who say that they can't eat their meals without a spoonful of my Salone Fire!" Equally popular are the brand's traditional juices, which really pack a flavour punch with ingredients like hibiscus, tamarind, and ginger. "I regularly serve these at events either as a non-alcoholic drink or topped up with prosecco for a special drink," Maria says. "The reception has always been very positive, and many comment on the intensity of the flavours."

With a myriad of international flavours ripe for indulging in – from all around the world – 2023 is truly an exciting time to be an outward-looking foodie.

> "As a nation we are keen to experience international food and flavours but we are now also considering issues like Fairtrade and sustainability. This means that we are having to be more innovative, and I think the UK is very good at this"

LOOK EAST

Tara Mei, founder of Mahalo, highlights her must-stock world cuisines



"Korean cuisine is set to trend within the fine food sector. I am also looking forward to seeing more fusion world foods as local producers take inspiration from international flavours and combining them with local heritage ingredients. Southeast Asian spicy, sweet, tangy flavours continue to triumph as the most popular cuisines in the UK, with our Thai, Malaysian and Singaporean-inspired products going from strength to strength. Korean and Japanese-inspired products like our newly launched Gojuchang Chilli Honey by Wilderbee Kitchen and Katsu Ketchup by Conbini are also receiving huge interest as independent retailers grow in their confidence in international foods."





FINDING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED PACKAGING

With consumers and retailers increasingly wanting fine food and drink delivered safely to their doors, producers are busy innovating sustainable methods of keeping cool and satisfying consumer demand

The journey from farm to fork is something shoppers are increasingly focusing on with the rise in conscious consumerism.

The past few years have certainly created new challenges for the industry – especially when it comes to temperature-sensitive products. The Covid-19 pandemic and national lockdowns completely changed the way consumers shopped. E-commerce grew exponentially, and producers had to adapt to keep up with demand for delivering chilled and frozen goods safely.

In the new normal, consumers are concerned about the environmental impact of what they eat, drink and use, and packaging is a big factor. But with the current financial crisis a major consideration for shoppers, retailers and producers alike, there is certainly a cost to keeping cool.

But innovation is ripe in this sector, and producers have a unique opportunity to satisfy current consumer requirements. We explore how producers are striving for sustainability in 2023.

CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABLE BRITISH SUPPLIERS



Alex Jackson, sales and marketing director at Icertech, explains how the brand has made switches to local suppliers as part of their sustainable endeavours

There are more environmentally friendly options available now than there were five years ago which is great to see, however, there is still room for improvement.

For example, the environmentally friendly options that are available tend to be more expensive than the plastic-based alternatives. Developing a solution that is not only environmentally friendly, and sustainable, but also cost-effective too, is probably one of the bigger challenges the temperature-controlled packaging industry is facing.

At Icertech, we are continuously working on our existing product range, striving to make sustainability improvements wherever possible. Both our Foil-Boxes and Icer-Pack coolants now contain 30% recycled content. Prior to Covid, we saw a strong shift over to more environmentally friendly packaging solutions, with significant demand for fully kerbside recyclable boxes.

2022 proved to be another challenging year, and the cost pressures associated with this have forced businesses to re-evaluate certain aspects of their business to remain competitively priced. We have seen an increase in enquiries for our more economical solutions, such as our cost-effective Foil-Box combined with our Icer-Pack coolant.

We have recently moved to an alternative manufacturer for our supply of paper liners. Previously we imported the liners from America, but we have had ongoing issues with supply and numerous price increases that forced us to look at alternatives.

We have partnered with a UK manufacturer and another UK distributor to develop this product over the last 12 months, to the same specification as the previous supply. It's a really high-quality product and we are very pleased with the finished product.

The switch to a UK-based manufacturer fits well with our company ethos, as we make a conscious effort to source our raw material as locally as possible. The change has also meant we are able to remain competitively priced.

That said, we still believe there is room for improvement, and we have just recruited a Sustainable Packaging Development Lead, to enable us to give this area the attention and focus it requires.



> "The switch to a UK-based manufacturer fits well with our company ethos, as we make a conscious effort to source our raw material as locally as possible"





Q&A: MYTHBUSTING POLYSTYRENE'S REPUTATION



Samantha Barrett, senior sales and service manager at JB Packaging, sets the record straight when it comes to the sustainability of polystyrene as an effective insulator for fine food

The challenges faced by temperature-controlled packaging are very similar to those in other industries; the cost-of-living crisis, rising energy costs, rising inflation and recession fears are financially impacting manufacturers, suppliers and the end customer.

Arguably where quality is of the upmost importance, insulation and protection of food in transit is key. EPS or EPP boxes have excellent impact protection properties protecting goods from bumps and scrapes in transit whilst thermal insulation properties keep contents cold for longer in comparison to other TCP solutions.

Polystyrene boxes have always been and remain one of the most thermally efficient ways to ship perishable products, JB Packaging have been manufacturing EPS boxes since 1982, these boxes continue to be, a reliable, well performing method for insulating and protecting food in transit with the ability to keep contents fresh for over 48 hours with the inclusion of ice.

It's important to note that all packaging leaves an environmental footprint regardless of material type. It takes energy and raw materials to produce, transport, and recover or dispose of all materials

Polystyrene has a host of eco credentials and manufacturers are in a constant battle to dispel the environmental myths surrounding it because, sadly, EPS is often disposed of irresponsibly.

Poly boxes are extremely resource efficient, consisting of just 2-4% material, the rest is air which is a poor conductor of heat making expanded polystyrene and expanded polypropylene an effective insulator because it's packed full of tiny air pockets so heat transfer is minimised resulting in packaging that is lightweight and exceptionally thermally efficient for both hot and cold goods.

Polystyrene food packaging uses less energy and resources to manufacture than comparable paper or waxed-coated paperboard products; using less energy is considered one effective way to slow global warming and no ozone-damaging CFCs or HCFCs are used during the manufacturing process.

Post-Covid, the demand for temperature-controlled packaging remains high for suppliers of artisan produce, meat, seafood and dairy products, whilst some have switched to reusable expanded polypropylene (EPP) boxes for even more sustainable options.

Recycled polystyrene represents an emerging market. A number of municipalities are instituting effective programs to reclaim this valuable resource. Post-consumer recycled polystyrene in some cases becomes 'green building' construction products whereas most single-use, coated paperboard foodservice packaging materials are not recycled because the coating and paper cannot be separated economically.

Clean EPS is fully recyclable and has unlimited recycling potential, unlike cardboard where fibres become damaged every time it is processed. Any EPS manufacturing scrap can be granulated and dosed back into the production mix to make new boxes or it can be compacted and converted back to pellet form and made into different products such as durable wood substitutes.

Polystyrene itself is also widely chosen throughout the construction industry to improve the thermal performance of buildings and the HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) industries to reduce heat loss and improve energy efficiency. It is a material that is truly able to do more whilst using less.

> "Polystyrene has a host of eco credentials and manufacturers are in a constant battle to dispel the environmental myths surrounding it because, sadly, EPS is often disposed of irresponsibly"



THE POWER OF WOOL

Josie Morris MBE, managing director of Woolcool, shares why wool is such a powerful tool for the fine food industry



Without a doubt, this year we will hear the term 'sustainability' more than ever, as brands try to align with consumer trends, and create products and packaging which suits their customer's needs. Of course, price is also a massive influence now as almost every supply chain faces instability in terms of costs, and consumers' incomes are being squeezed.

Over the last 20 years, we have invested heavily in research and development to really understand the materials we use, in particular, wool. This includes how to get the best performance from our systems, using the minimal amount of material, whilst also ensuring we understand our wider impact on the planet, ensuring that we are analysing our product's beginning, middle and end of life.

Created by Nature, Driven by Science, Wool is nature's Smart Fibre. It is natural, abundant, renewable and compostable, our mantra is to use the right material for the right application, fully researched from beginning to end of life. Wool provides superior performance and results in less material use both in terms of the insulation and ice packs needed. Our customers also see a reduction in spoiled products, increased customer retention, lower requirements for ice packs, and the advantage of using economy delivery services, while still delivering products in perfect condition.

Wool is not only compostable and reusable but also a by-product





of rearing sheep, which means that it's available in abundance and has evolved specifically over thousands of years to be the perfect natural insulator. What's more, our Wool is certified compostable, meaning our solutions are made using, simple compostable, recyclable and recycled content materials.

As a business, we've worked hard to improve the efficiency of our processes and supply chain, to make sure we are providing a high-performing, sustainable and cost-effective solution. We always say, packaging doesn't have to cost the earth!





> "As a business, we've worked hard to improve the efficiency of our processes and supply chain, to make sure we are providing a high-performing, sustainable and cost-effective solution"

AN EXPERIENCED SOLUTION

Adam Hart, commercial manager at Hydropac, explains how the brand's 20+ years of experience make it a high-quality solution to temperature-controlled packaging needs



Following the pandemic, customers are once again looking for an environmentally responsible packaging solution, but there is also a much higher focus on price as people try to cut costs wherever they can as they look to survive the current cost of living crisis.

Hydropac has always strived to be at the forefront of sustainable innovation, and over the years have been first to market with product options that minimise the environmental impact of delivering food by courier to the end consumer.

We continuously develop our manufacturing capabilities and increase our already substantial production capacity to ensure we can meet whatever demand the market has. We truly are experts in what we do and constantly look to offer support and advice for anyone sending chilled or frozen food through mail order.

We have 20+ years of technical knowledge behind how our ice packs work in harmony with the insulated packaging, and the way different shapes, sizes, weights and pocket configurations of ice packs will give different results with different foodstuffs. We are able to fully optimise the temperature control packaging system and ensure the food products are delivered in perfect condition. In years gone by the first impression of a company would be the shop front, which the company would ensure is kept clean and presentable to entice people inside.

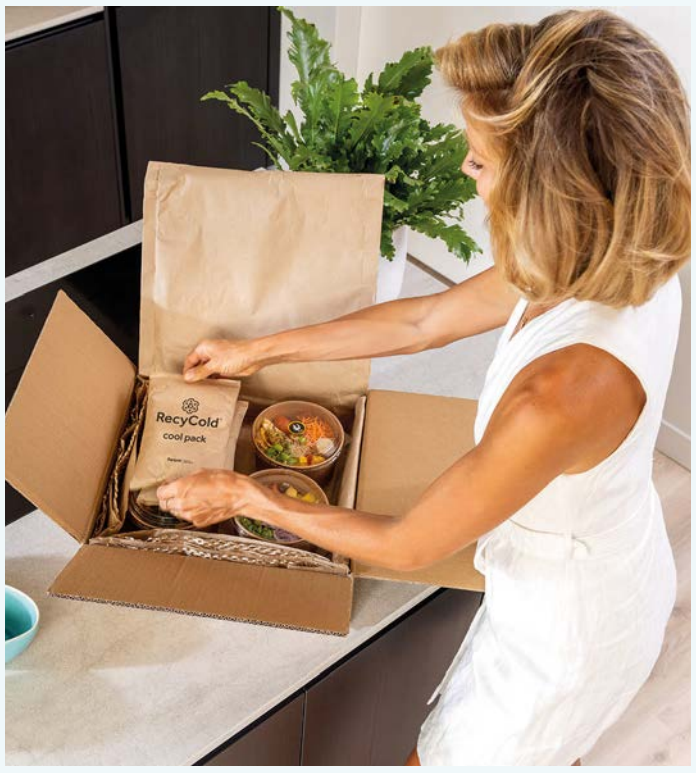
When supplying via mail order or home delivery, consumers' first impression is made up of a website / online shop and the insulated packaging sitting on their doorstep. We always put our customers first and want to help them make the best possible first impression on their customers, by not only offering a sustainable solution but also by ensuring everything is perfectly presented and perfectly preserved at the ideal temperature for the entire delivery cycle.

EnviroCool was a complete game changer when first launched – fully certified and tested temperature control, entirely made from paper (all FSC sourced) and incredibly strong to protect from any mishaps in transit. When developing the product, we wanted to test it to destruction and proved that an empty EnviroCool shipper could support over 350kg on top without any compression. EnviroCool is just one of the packaging options we offer, all of which are available in a range of sizes straight from stock or produced to match a customer's requirements without any tooling costs and with relatively low production runs.

We always look to work with our customers to ensure they have the correct ice packs and packaging to meet their specific needs, with one of our sales team always on the end of the phone or stopping by to give advice and suggest how improvements can be made.

> "Hydropac has always strived to be at the forefront of sustainable innovation, and over the years have been first to market with product options that minimise the environmental impact of delivering food by courier to the end consumer"

PARTNER CONTENT



THE INSULATING POWER OF PAPER

Looking for a cool solution? Discover Ranpak's new paper-based packaging solution: RecyCold™ climaliner



Ranpak's new paper-based insulating RecyCold™ climaliner is the ideal eco-friendly packaging solution to protect food from temperature fluctuations and physical damage during transit. Climaliner uses environmentally friendly paper for reliable temperature control when packing ambient, chilled or frozen goods.

Why not use the RecyCold™ climaliner in combination with RecyCold™ cool packs which are 100% drain safe as they are made from plant-based gel and contain no microplastics? Optional custom printing on cool packs is also available to support your brand awareness.

SUSTAINABLE
Undoubtedly, the RecyCold climaliner paper solution is one of the greenest solutions on the insulated box market. Our paper is 100% recyclable, FSC approved, renewable and biodegradable in contrary to the plastic and EPS versions of thermal protection.

THERMAL PROTECTION
RecyCold climaliner together with RecyCold cool packs provide excellent thermal protection for up to 48 hours, for ambient, chilled and frozen products during shipment.

COST EFFICIENT
Thin paper climaliners optimise box volumes and allow box size flexibility. Ready to use they are quick to pack. One-way packaging saves on return flow.

AESTHETICS
What better way to demonstrate your eco-credentials and enhance the unboxing experience than by using a paper-based thermal solution?



For more information, visit ranpak.com or contact the team via uk.info@ranpak.com

COMMENTATORS



RUPERT ASHBY
BFFF



JOE HILL
ONE PLANET PIZZA



FINN DUNLOP
MACKNADE



MATT WHELAN
FIELDFARE



EXPLORING THE FROZEN OPPORTUNITY

Fine food retailers are yet to fully capitalise on the benefits of premium frozen produce – find out how and why to stock this ever-evolving sector

As the UK embraces a post-Covid world, retailers are battling a cost-of-living crisis and the need to adapt to conscious consumerism, and frozen meal solutions are only growing in popularity. But the fine food industry has evolved to offer much more than just a quick fix for busy shoppers.

Thanks to a unique combination of innovation and a laser-sharp focus on quality and taste, the speciality sector offers a raft of artisanal frozen food products which not only satisfy the current need for affordable, sustainable options but the appetite for delicious produce, too.

Catering to demand

This year will no doubt be challenging for many, with the cost-of-living crisis continuing to impact both consumers and suppliers. So how can independent retailers cater to demand in 2023?

According to Rupert Ashby, CEO of the British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF), "Despite the cost-of-living crisis, quality remains exceptionally important to consumers. There are more luxury frozen products than ever before that give consumers the opportunity to cook restaurant-quality food at home."

This is something that Macknade abides by, as Finn Dunlop, group buying manager, agreed. "Despite the increasingly busy lifestyles we all lead, customers are also rightly demanding quality and healthy frozen food made using great ingredients, countering the traditional image of convenience at the expense of quality."

Therefore, in 2023, shoppers are looking for solutions to save money while still enjoying high-quality, healthful products. Fieldfare offers loose frozen vegetables, fruit, and 'meal makers', allowing customers to only buy what they need, reducing waste and in turn, saving their precious pennies.

As Matt Whelan, director at Fieldfare, explains, "Our concept particularly appeals to the single and two-person households – of which there are significantly more than there were two decades ago. Dynamics within the traditional family home have also changed and personal requirements, be it due to work commitments or personal tastes, often dictate that there are different mealtimes for family members or even different dishes at the same table.

"We are constantly looking at the market and what consumers want to ensure that our range addresses shopper requirements. For example, our latest line (launched in late summer 2022) of individually portioned desserts and party-pleaser bites is proving to be particularly popular with shoppers, as they look to spoil themselves and their families with small, everyday treats."

"By presenting our high-quality foods loose or with as little packaging as possible, we allow shoppers to scoop as much or as little as they like. This helps them to cater for individual needs in their household, avoid food waste at home and even manage budgets more effectively, as they are not tied to buying pre-packed quantities."

Moreover, according to Joe Hill, co-founder of premium plant-based pizza brand One Planet Pizza, "Consumers are seeking convenience, affordability and value for money above all. But we're also seeing a growing demand for 'healthy indulgent' products that offer comfort without the negative health impacts associated with unhealthy foods.

"Recent research suggests the majority of consumers want to eat products that are less harmful to the environment and buy from more responsible brands. The rise of these 'conscious consumers' will continue to drive product development and shape the market in 2023."

The sustainable factor

Of course, the pinnacle of the fine food retailer is quality. But while this may conjure images of fresh ambient and chilled products, it doesn't mean frozen can't live up to this standard. Indeed, it can provide a more sustainable form of quality.

As Matt explains, "Freezing is of course nature's preservative, and freezing our products as fresh as the day they were picked or created means that we can offer our stockists and their shoppers a wide range of foods all year round. The much-extended shelf life also means that retailers, and shoppers, can save on food waste as there's no need to worry about short sell-by or use-by dates."

According to Finn, "Where fresh fruit and veg is obviously the cornerstone of our business, we should also recognise the benefits of frozen produce, being picked and preserved at the peak of their condition and minimising food waste.

"Frozen is a great method of minimising deterioration and wastage of produce sitting in larders and fridges without being used."

This focus on waste reduction is certainly something Joe echoes. "Focusing on frozen allows us to greatly reduce any food waste right through from sourcing ingredients to the shelf life of the end product. All our raw materials are stored frozen and applied to the pizzas frozen which means almost no wastage occurs within production.

"On top of this, consumers won't ever have to throw away a forgotten pizza that's found at the back of the fridge (as long as they're following our storage guidelines!)", he tells *Speciality Food*.

RETAIL INSIGHT: SUCCESSFUL STOCKING

Finn Dunlop, group buying manager at Macknade, shares his tips for stocking a premium frozen range



Rather than being dominated by one label we have wanted to maintain a tight range of a few different brands across the ranges. As well as a range of Frozen ready meals including Cook and ByRuby, we also stock two freezers of Fieldfare, complementing our greengrocery as well as some patisserie. In addition, we stock a range of fantastic ice-cream including Simply Ice Cream, Solleys Ice Cream and Ariela Gelato. We also have an amazing frozen dumpling range from My Neighbours the Dumplings.

Over the last couple of years, we have seen far more really good quality brands of frozen meals spring up over the Covid years which we are keen to explore further.

By introducing additional brands, we have continued to increase frozen sales, and warm summers combined with a surge of outdoor dining certainly increased ice cream sales last year.

When making buying decisions as a business, we should be considering frozen produce in the same way as the rest of the range, understanding the provenance, quality, impact and benefits of the produce to steer our decision.



INDUSTRY INSIGHT: THE FROZEN OPPORTUNITY AND HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT



Rupert Ashby, CEO of the British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF), shares his insight into the state of the frozen sector and how indies can take advantage

The frozen food category is worth £7.25bn, up 1.5% on last year. Like all areas of FMCG, the market is still levelling out after the Covid lockdowns and restrictions in 2020 which drove unprecedented retail growth.

The frozen category continues to attract new customers helped by innovative product development. That development is particularly seen in premium luxury products, meat-free, and Halal which all continue to drive growth and cater for varied dietary requirements.

The variety and specification of frozen products is vast, and still expanding. There is very little that cannot now be purchased from the frozen aisles.

However, the success of frozen ranges in fine food stores often depends on product selection and merchandising. Frozen foods should complement the other products on offer so that customers can easily create meals in their baskets, so it is important to understand your customer base and select ranges according to their preferences.

For example, shops that specialise in artisan bread can take advantage of great frozen bakery ranges, and retailers that offer speciality groceries could look to stock hand-finished pre-prepared meals.

Frozen also allows the independent retailer to reduce costs during a tumultuous economic climate as they embrace sustainability. According to Matt, "For retailers, frozen has the potential to help reduce some of their costs, which is a welcome prospect at a time of rising inflation and operational costs.

"The naturally long shelf life means that food waste is reduced significantly versus chilled. Retailers can stock up on essentials, especially during key selling periods, without the fear of having to dispose of a large volume of leftover stock afterwards.

"With Fieldfare's chest freezers using only 3.3 kwh of energy per day, there is also the potential to save on energy bills as chest freezers use significantly less energy to run than open chillers. This then also makes for a positive story which may appeal to the sustainability-aware shopper."

Stocking the frozen opportunity

As consumers seek out many of the benefits that premium frozen food can offer in 2023, independent retailers should certainly take advantage.

According to Rupert, "Firstly, stores with unpredictable footfall can benefit from the longer shelf life afforded by frozen which can help with managing stock and what is on offer for the consumer.

"Secondly, the rising cost of restaurant meals might dissuade consumers from eating out as often as they'd like this year, but this doesn't mean that they don't want the occasional treat. Premium frozen ranges can help to bring the restaurant experience home and allow consumers to try dishes that would be too difficult or time-consuming to prepare from scratch.

"The increasing ranges of great frozen food can drive such footfall to the retailer and provide them with quality goods that customers will want to come back for."

According to Matt, "The opportunity is significant as demand for high-quality frozen food continues to grow. The care and focus that fine food manufacturers place on quality and taste, the interesting recipes and innovative ideas alongside the convenience factor make fine frozen food a very attractive proposition for the shopper."

But as frozen food doesn't allow the same level of decadent display that ambient and chilled benefit from, a little more effort is required to draw attention to your range.

Rupert suggests, "To ensure that products have shelf appeal, the same housekeeping rules should be applied to frozen food as to chilled and ambient. Freezers should be kept clean and frost-free. Stack products so that the packaging can be read clearly and make sure that each SKU has the appropriate space and visibility.

"If you visit a range of different retailers, the difference in the way they display their frozen produce is often stark. Some with faceless cabinets, frosted up doors and broken products at the bottom, to welcoming open freezers that are well branded and can attract new customers to the frozen aisle to browse and ultimately try the products."

"To raise awareness amongst shoppers, we actively promote the Fieldfare brand to consumers. Our recent magazine and social media advertising activity reached over eight million prospective shoppers, which is great news for our stockists", Matt adds.

Of course, independent retailers should be aware of foodie occasions, and Rupert concludes, "Annual calendar events will always provide good opportunities for upselling luxury frozen products. The frozen aisle can be enhanced by using Point-of-Sale material available from your supplier and inspire customers around Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Easter when the occasion calls for a special meal."

> "Stores with unpredictable footfall can benefit from the longer shelf life afforded by frozen, which can help with managing stock and what is on offer for the consumer"



STOCK CHECK



BYRUBY THAI RED KING PRAWN CURRY

Sustainably sourced king prawns in a fragrant and spicy red Thai curry sauce, topped with bamboo shoots, peppers, spring onions and a sprinkling of sesame.

byruby.co.uk



ONE PLANET PIZZA SPICY PEPPERNOMI

A deliciously handcrafted thin and crispy pizza loaded with One Planet Pizza family recipe tomato sauce, spicy dairy-free cheese and jackfruit pepperoni.

Oneplanetpizza.com



GOURMADE FISH PIE

A recipe of haddock, salmon, smoked haddock and prawns in a creamy spinach sauce topped with buttery mashed potato.

gourmade.com



SIMPLY ICE CREAM HEAVENLY HONEYCOMB

Thick, creamy, luxurious honeycomb ice cream swirled with crunchy pieces of homemade honeycomb.

simplyicecream.co.uk



ALLPLANTS LASAGNE AL FORNO

This plant-based lasagne is made with layers of roasted aubergine, courgette and lasagne pasta sheets, covered in a rich, sweet red pepper tomato sauce and a creamy garlic bechamel.

allplants.com



PACK'D CAULIFLOWER RICE

Picked and frozen on the day of harvest to capture all that goodness, this organic cauliflower rice is a sustainable addition to your frozen offering.

packd.co.uk



SOUPOLOGIE PEA & LEEK SOUPER CUBES

Sweet garden peas with mellow leeks blended into a soup and frozen into portion-sized cubes, sealing in all the nutrients and goodness in the process.

soupologie.com



FIELDFARE MELTING CHOCOLATE FONDANT

This heavenly melt in the middle dessert will impress any party guest. Simply send in a spoon to release the velvety chocolate centre.

field-fare.com



SUPPER CLUB COTTAGE PIE

Minced British beef and root vegetables cooked in rich red wine gravy. Topped with savoy cabbage, creamy mashed potatoes, cheese and breadcrumbs.

supperclubcompany.com



ROOT KITCHEN BUTTERNUT SQUASH LASAGNE

Butternut squash, mushrooms and spinach in a delicious herby tomato sauce layered between lasagne sheets and topped with a creamy béchamel sauce and vegan cheese.

rootkitchen.uk



FINAL CALL

February is in full swing, bringing with it a chill in the air, and 2023 is looking optimistic for the independent retail sector. Show season is on the horizon, and with them comes the opportunity to create new connections and be inspired.

Brexit may continue to cast shadows of doubt over our industry for some time to come, but independents have proved there is plenty to be hopeful about. Even amid the cost-of-living crisis, delis and farm shops can offer personalised service and experiential events that the multiples, in their battle for the lowest price, can't compete with.

While consumers' finances may be stretched, indies can bang the drum for issues that their local shoppers care about, from supporting the local economy to battling single-use plastics or providing food with sustainable credentials to offering the small luxuries that make tumultuous times a bit more bearable.

Valentine's Day is on the horizon – the perfect opportunity for fine food retail to help shoppers indulge in top-quality produce and show their love through good food. Before we know it, Easter will be upon us, bringing the irresistible scent of freshly baked hot cross buns and roast lamb.

Soon, we will also be crowning our next monarch, King Charles I, in what will be a once-in-a-lifetime event and fine food retailers are well-placed to contribute to the celebrations. What better time is there for independent delis to whip up a top-quality coronation chicken sandwich?

There's plenty to look forward to as we enter 2023, so continue doing what you do best as independent fine food retailers, and let the blue skies emerge. Let us know what your big plans are for the year now that the first month is over and 2023 can truly begin!

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

5 MINUTES WITH
VASILISA SOLO, CO-FOUNDER OF GRECHKA



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I was in sport and wellness industry before entering the food industry. I believe I would stay in the wellness industry as I see it all interconnects.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
My first ever paid work was a marketing executive in an online wine shop. So, kind of food industry too!

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
I am inspired by how just one idea can create a business, great connections, happy customers, and meaning in life in the end. I have a truly entrepreneurial spirit.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I love seeing the opportunities for small new brands in the food industry. I think the industry becoming more and more open for small start-ups and this is great.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
When I worked in a lifestyle magazine, I hated cold calling for selling sponsorships. But I gained experience in event organisation, so I am still grateful for that work.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR JOB?
I love the creativity in my work. As I am responsible for marketing side of the business, I love to create interesting marketing initiatives, campaigns, and social media content. As we are at the beginning of our journey, I work on branding strategy and I really love this part of formalising business values, mission, tone of voice etc.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
It is hard to name any. I honestly appreciate any kind of work I am doing now!

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
A salad with glazed baked salmon mixed with avocado and of course, Grechka Buckwheat.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
I am not afraid to fail, I am excited to try!

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
Wild garlic pesto.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Gone with the Wind, by Margaret Mitchell.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
I am not a sweet tooth and always choose savoury meals!

BE CONNECTED



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linkedin.com/company/speciality-food

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Editor
Holly Shackleton, 01206 505981
holly.shackleton@dcthomson.co.uk

News & Digital Editor
Victoria Smith 01206 505969
victoria.smith@dcthomson.co.uk

Head of Commercial
Sam Reubin 01206 505936
sam.reubin@dcthomson.co.uk

Advertising Manager
Jessica Brett
jessica.brett@dcthomson.co.uk

Account Manager
Louise Barnes 01206 508629
louise.barnes@dcthomson.co.uk

Accounts
Sue Carr 01206 505903
Art Director
Lee Whiteford
lee.whiteford@dcthomson.co.uk

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01293 312188
specialityfood@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk



TRIED & TESTED



OMBAR COCO MYLK 55%
This delightfully creamy 'mylk' chocolate is made using Ecuadorian cacao and smooth, creamed coconut for a delicious melt-in-the-mouth bar. It contains 55% cacao solids and billions of added live cultures for indulgence with a good-for-you twist. In fact, the cacao is unroasted to preserve the heat-sensitive polyphenols (healthy plant compounds), ensuring the chocolate stays nutrient-rich and full of flavour, as nature intended. Perfect for dairy dodgers and chocoholics alike, this bar is definitely a must-stock for the *Speciality Food* team!
ombar.com

SWEET FREEDOM HAZELNUT SYRUP
This deliciously sweet and nutty syrup actually gets its sweetness from all-natural sources, including apples and carob. It's the perfect addition to any coffee, hot chocolate, dessert or breakfast pancake stack, without any added nasties. It's also gluten-free and vegan, and comes with a boost of fibre, making it a delicious treat for everyone.
sweetfreedom.co.uk



BESAUCY BASIL MAYO
This egg-free mayo is the perfect addition to any retailer's shelves, providing a fresh and vibrant condiment that is suitable for everyone. What's more, the brand uses a waste product to create its mayo base – aquafaba. If you're not familiar with aquafaba yet, it's the liquid found in a can of chickpeas and can be used to replace eggs in a variety of bakes and recipes. Infused with basil, garlic and a touch of Dijon mustard, this pesto-inspired sauce will soon be your go-to!
besaucy.co.uk



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Callum Graham, Bohemia

Bohemia Restaurant is located on the incredible island of Jersey, in the Channel Islands. The restaurant sits within The Club Hotel & Spa, a luxury hotel in the heart of St Helier. We are extremely proud to be the only Michelin-starred restaurant on the island and to have held our Michelin star for 18 years.

Bohemia also holds a rating of Four AA Rosettes. We offer ever-changing seasonal tasting menus, including a surprise tasting menu and a set lunch, and we also recently added a new four-course menu too, of course, all served alongside an impeccable wine and cocktail list.

We are incredibly lucky to have a diverse bounty of local produce from the isle of Jersey, as well as from France, which is just 14 miles away. Our location means we're really spoilt for choice, and I think Jersey truly is able to offer something quite unique and special in terms of food.



In my opinion, the fantastic thing about being able to use local ingredients is that you can get the full story behind them from start to finish. People are becoming more aware and conscious of provenance these days and want to know these details, which is great, as I think it makes everyone (chefs in particular) work that much harder to source locally and really know where their ingredients have come from, and understand the story from field to plate.

For example, there are days when I go out foraging with my dog, and it's amazing what you can stumble across. I love that I can accidentally find something that I wasn't even looking for, and then that evening it can be in a dish on our menu. It's a real privilege to live and cook somewhere where this is possible. It adds another level to the cooking, and it's great to have a story to tell guests when serving a particular dish.

We work with so many amazing local producers at Bohemia, I really do feel lucky to have so many choices on our doorstep. Some local producers that we source from, just to name a few, include Woodlands Farm where we get the most amazing tasting Angus dairy beef; Homefields Farm and Anneville Farm for fresh fruit and veg that's hand grown in 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.

> "In my opinion, the fantastic thing about being able to use local ingredients is that you can get the full story behind them from start to finish"

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo



EMBRACE POST-JANUARY INDULGENCE WITH ITALIAN CUISINE

As the new year's resolutions to eat healthier and cut out 'indulgent' foods start to fade away, shoppers will be on the hunt for comfort again in 2023

With the January health kick now over, consumers are reaching for those classic comforts. Undoubtedly, Italian cuisine is the perfect place to start – offering rich and luxurious sauces, ingredients and dishes.

One important occasion where indulgent Italian food shines is Valentine's Day – of course, Italian is the language of love. What says 'I love you' more than reenacting a certain spaghetti and meatballs scene? And with the cost-of-living crisis taking its toll in 2023, consumers are predicted to continue the stay-at-home trend and treat themselves to a luxury meal in rather than eating out.

Fine food retailers are in a prime position to offer this degree of indulgence for such occasions. Indeed, from the cosiest delis, packed floor-to-ceiling with exciting, artisanal food and drink, to a vast central London food hall, for any lover of Italian food, the joy is in the sharing. In truth, passion comes to life easily when surrounded by shelves of authentic products.

Stocking a variety of premium Italian brands and products is the key, and allowing customers the opportunity to peruse their own leisure and treat themselves to something truly special.

Think slow-cooked beef shin ragu, creamy carbonara, and hand-stretched sourdough pizza when it comes to classic Italian indulgence. Paired with a high-quality Rioja or bottle of bubbles and an authentic Italian dessert for two, shoppers will be spoilt for choice.

As the winter chill continues into early 2023, keep your customers cosy and comforted with the warm embrace of Italian food. If music be the food of love, play on!

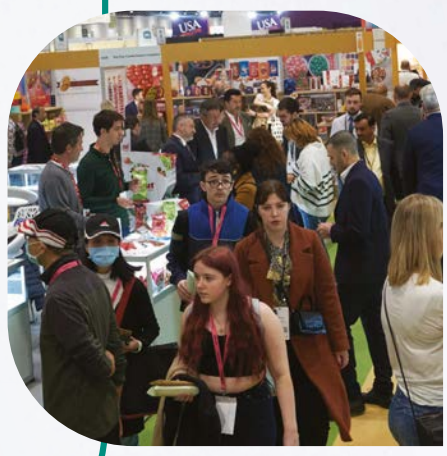
Are you passionate about Italian food and drink? Get in touch via victoria.smith@dcthomson.co.uk.



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