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SPECIALITY FOOD

NEWS, COMMENT AND BUYING IDEAS FOR FINE FOOD RETAILERS



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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the February/March 2022 issue of *Speciality Food*.

The new year is now in full swing, and we're excited to bring you an insightful taste of things to come in the following pages.

After two years of cancellations and postponements across the gamut of trade shows and industry events, we're pleased to bring you a preview of this year's edition of IFE – and hope to see a number of you there.

This issue is full of forward-thinking information to keep you one step ahead of the game; read on to find out what's in store for our industry in 2022, how you can boost your ethical credentials (and why it's important that you do so), what appeals to today's shopper, and trends in frozen, tea and packaging.

Alongside this issue you will find our second annual installment of *Artisan Essentials*. Packed with product highlights, retail advice and need-to-know intel, we hope you find it a valuable resource for the year ahead.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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The big squeeze

The fine food sector is battling inflation from all sides, but retailers are working to find innovative solutions amidst the challenges

It's a perfect storm that's been approaching the UK's food and drink sector for some time, according to Tony Hindhaugh, director of Parson's Nose, a London-based butcher. "Unprecedented demand, large sections of the economy closed, Brexit, Covid... the inevitable is coming," he told *Speciality Food*. "It's as if everyone has been looking the other way."

Margins are being squeezed – even more than usual – as retailers grapple with the highest inflation rate in almost 30 years. Costs are rising for everything from meat to cardboard. "Amazon bought up decades worth of cardboard in a month, and that left people like us not being able to get a hold of egg boxes, delivery boxes and wrapping paper," Tony said. "If we wanted them, the price was doubled and the lead time was quadrupled."

Wages are on the rise too. Parson's Nose increased pay for delivery drivers as the shortage of hauliers inflated pay. "If we wanted to keep them and stay in business, we had to increase wages," he said. Brexit, too, has played a role. "In the farming and food industry, farm labourers and factory workers all headed home," Tony explained. "Our turkey farmer had, for the last 30 years, relied on up to 35 foreign works to help in the season, but they were no longer available. Local English workers needed to be hired, and they are more expensive – as a result, so is your turkey."

Cost pressures bite

This perfect storm is reaching far and wide across the industry. "Rising inflation is just one of many pressures impacting small firms across the country," said Mike Cherry, national chair of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). "After a torrid two years marred with closures, restrictions, staff shortages and a disappointing festive period, many hospitality firms, and those in the supply chain, are now contending with ever-rising business costs, and, come April, a hike in National Insurance. The fact small firms have been excluded from support for those struggling with rocketing energy bills is another blow."

A survey by SME payments company Tyl, part of NatWest, revealed 54% of small businesses in the UK are spending more than £3,000 on their annual energy bills. Micro-businesses with fewer than 10 employees have been particularly hard hit.

"The list of price increases is endless, and every business is facing the same dilemma," Tony said. He predicts that by April or May, businesses will be forced to put prices up. Research by the Institute of Directors found that 38% of businesses are planning to offset rising costs with price hikes. However, there is a fear that raising prices will put newly price-sensitive customers off. "As a small business, if we increase our prices to reflect the price rises we incur, we risk losing customers to the bigger businesses who can absorb the rises. If we don't put our prices up, our margins are squeezed even further, which means we struggle to be viable," said Jez Lamb, the founder of Beers@No.42, a Wirral-based speciality drinks shop. "The cost of living squeeze has been devastating in recent months, whether in the form of food and fuel price rises or raw materials, the list goes on. We're now back on the see-saw of uncertainty yet again."

> "The list of price increases is endless, and every business is facing the same dilemma"

Creative solutions

While the 'see-saw of uncertainty' is a frustrating place to be, retailers like Parson's Nose are working hard to come up with innovative solutions for their customers. For example, the butcher is launching a new 12-month, fixed price meat subscription box. "There are four packed meat, fish and vegetable boxes available on a 12-month subscription. The price will not change, even when meat prices go up."

How can the shop guarantee set prices? "We have already bought the meat, and we have already taken out fixed-price options with the farmers and fisherman to guarantee supply at the right price," Tony said. While he can only offer a limited supply, it's a creative approach to both ensuring a steady supply of customers over the year and keeping prices as low as possible for shoppers.

Yet the FSB's Mike Cherry believes Government support will be crucial to ensuring small business success over the months to come. "If the Government wants to empower the independent food sector to recover, it should extend the emergency VAT cut in April; make sure help finally gets through to the supply chain; and act to reduce employment costs, for example by extending the Employment Allowance to £5,000 a year," he told *Speciality Food*. The British Chambers of Commerce has also called on the Government to reconsider a planned rise in National Insurance contributions. As the Food and Drink Federation's chief executive Karen Betts recently said, "Good collaboration between Government and industry [will be] critical in the coming weeks and months."



"From 50 years to 10 seconds"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

This year Partridges celebrates its 50th Anniversary. For us, this is indeed something to celebrate. As well as the Platinum Jubilee.

It was on 25th May 1972 that my brother Richard opened the doors of Partridges for the first time. I was a schoolboy 'studying' for my A levels back then, but in 1973 I joined the business and – apart from my time spent at university abroad – have stayed ever since.

It has been a long journey with a number of ups and downs along the way, and the evolution of a food business inevitably means adapting to new and very serious challenges.

However, the challenges of the previous 48 years have paled into insignificance, especially when compared with the last two years of grappling with unprecedented situations.

Firstly, and going back a few years, the growth of online selling became a thing which took us a long time at Partridges to get any sort of handle on. Still trying to actually, but at least we are conscious of the benefits it can bring. This in itself has transformed much of the work we do at shop level. Then of course Covid-19, which has to be the Biggest Daddy of them all. And with it the retail landscape has probably changed forever, and we never ever saw that one coming.

To be fair we have always been slow at spotting trends, but these latest ones have forced us to confront so many new disciplines. Still, for those of us who sell speciality foods and were lucky enough to remain open, things continued in a reasonably routine way with the exception of one key ingredient – customers.

Because of our location a lot of regulars disappeared, as did tourists and any form of passing trade. Luckily those customers that remained spent more, but the daily customer count figures through various lockdowns and tiers was a sobering image to digest.

Then came delivery platforms. We have in the past put out to grass several delivery vans and vowed never again to transport any more turkeys in traffic jams during Christmas, until noticing that a lot of other people do the whole process better and apparently successfully. This has led to a rethink.

Shortly after came supply chain issues. It has been very frustrating to note that lots of products that should be in Aisle 4 were more likely to be in the Ile de France.

Then let's not forget the Great Resignation of staff, working from home, self-isolating, self-testing, and finally the Christmas Rush of 2021 which turned more into a Christmas waddle in the last week.

Quite possibly our 50 years' experience helped us to keep going through all of this, more through sheer habit, like a hardened marathon runner, than anything else.

Yet if the future is starting now, it is important to remember that tradition counts for little in today's retail world.

I was recently reading an interesting article called the 10 Second Customer Attention Test, based on a report by the Neilson Norman Group.

It is a reminder that the actual time it now takes retailers to communicate values to customers is incredibly short. They put it at 10 seconds. Other tests have measured the scanning of an internet page at 2.6 seconds.

There are now 1.7 billion websites to visit and two billion new videos are uploaded on Twitter every day. So the importance of redefining our identities will be critical in the post-Covid era.

Standing at the entrance of our shops and taking stock of what messages we see and where 10 seconds will take us has been a useful experience to start the New Year.

For ourselves, there is a lot of work to be done.

However, a lesson of the Covid-19 years must be that speciality foods have a valuable role to play in modern life. We can build on this while celebrating important events in 2022, but never forgetting that every long journey starts with just 10 seconds.

> "It has been a journey with a number of ups and downs along the way, and the evolution of a food business inevitably means adapting to new and very serious challenges"

Key Spanish trade show to return in April

Alimentaria, one of the premier events on the international trade fair scene, is putting the finishing touches on its return to Fira de Barcelona's Gran Via venue 4th-7th April 2022.

With a net exhibition area of almost 85,000sq m, Alimentaria will feature nearly 3,000 companies across the food and drink industry, alongside Hostelco, the leading trade fair for the food industry and its value chain.

The event's international contingent will be strong, with 400 companies flying in from 52 countries, including first-time exhibitors from Brazil, Slovakia, Australia, Canada, The United Arab Emirates and Puerto Rico.

The show remains a firm favourite in the food and drink industry's calendar, with 87% of exhibitors from 2020 reaffirming their participation this year. But new opportunities are propelling the sector forwards too, as more than 200 companies visit the exhibition for the very first time.

For J. Antonio Valls, managing director of Alimentaria Exhibitions, the next edition of the show "will allow us to promote the development of the food and beverage industry, which is a strategic sector for the Spanish economy, as well as to continue strengthening the positioning of Spanish food and beverage products in international markets, connecting businesses and promoting face-to-face networking with key decision-makers in the market".

Ten different shows make up Alimentaria, including traditional sectors such as meat, dairy and preserves, as well as the new Alimentaria Trends space, with sub-sectors including fine foods, organic foods, allergen-free, halal and functional foods.

Alongside exhibitions, the event will feature the Alimentaria Hub, a forum on trends and the future of food that will host more than 200 industry experts; the Digital food Arena, which will bring together eight start-ups set to revolutionise the food sector; and the Experience Live Gastronomy conference, which includes a programme of live cooking, workshops, tastings and presentations with more than 30 top chefs.





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THE STORY BEHIND THE STATS

7.1bn

UK supermarket sales soared in the two weeks to 25th December, exceeding previous forecasts, according to NielsenIQ. The market researcher had only predicted that sales would reach £6.8bn, up from £6.7bn in 2020. What's more, total grocery sales for the four weeks ending 1st January were up by 1% – a notable figure, given that growth of 8% was achieved in the same period in 2020 as Brits were stocking up for Lockdown 3.

3.8%

Kantar's four-week grocery price inflation measure reached 3.8%. Like-for-like grocery price inflation rose again in January. Over the course of a 12-month period, the 3.8% rise in prices would add an extra £180 to the average household's annual grocery bill. The British Retail Consortium's Helen Dickinson said, "Food prices continue to rise, especially domestic produce which have been impacted by poor harvests, labour shortages, and rising global food prices."

£998m

Pilgrim's Food Masters, the parent company of Richmond and Fridge Raider, has forecast the plant-based category will be worth nearly £1bn by 2026, growing a whopping 74% over the next four years. The prediction is down to growth in the flexitarian category, with 43.7% of British shoppers considering themselves to be following a flexitarian diet, compared to just 2% who are following a vegan diet, and 5.2% following a vegetarian diet.

-31%

Footfall across all UK retail destinations in 2021 was 31.1% lower than in 2019, compared to -39.1% in 2020, according to data from Springboard. However, local high streets benefited from the localism trend – Springboard's UK Consumer Survey found that 57% of consumers worked at least part of the week at home in 2021. Following retail's adaptation to the pandemic, Springboard predicts 2022 will be the year that retailers succeed in a Covid world.

80%

Farm shops were a popular destination in the 2021 festive season, and research for insurer NFU Mutual revealed that 80% of those planning to use farm shops wanted to support local businesses and the economy. Nine out of 10 said the friendly service they receive was the biggest draw, 70% said they offer fresher, better-quality produce and two-thirds said they provide food from sustainable sources.

12.5%

Digital grocery orders accounted for 12.5% of all grocery spend in January as customers were more confident about visiting bricks-and-mortar shops, according to Kantar. This was almost double the pre-pandemic proportion, despite being down from its peak. In fact, online purchases were down year-on-year by 15% due to a comparison with the strict lockdown period in January 2021, Kantar said.

Millions buy plant-based in January

Throughout the month of January, plant-based products saw growth that was "well above" the wider grocery market, according to Kantar's Fraser McKevitt, head of retail and consumer insight. The popular, month-long vegan campaign Veganuary confirmed a record of more than 629,000 participants signed up. "As more people become aware of the incredible impact our food choices have on the health of our planet, attitudes towards veganism are changing everywhere and Veganuary's growing global popularity reflects this shift," said Veganuary's head of communications Toni Vernelli.

"There are more and more people joining the cause every year, and as a result, vegan options are gaining awareness for both vegans and non-vegans alike," Paula Alcalde, co-founder of GreenBay, a plant-based retailer, told *Speciality Food*. Matthew Philpott from online retailer Better Food added, "I think that customers are really looking for choice right now. There has been significant growth in the options out there in the market tailored to a plant-based diet, and these are growing all the time. This is a great time to introduce some new, exciting options to help customers make the changes in diet they want to."

Kantar's data confirmed that a record 10.7 million households bought at least one item that was a dairy alternative, a meat substitute or that was labelled as plant-based in January, with sales growth for these items hitting 0.5%. However, Fraser added that fresh fruit, salad and vegetable sales were down compared with the same month last year.

Q&A: Communicating ethical credentials

We ask Sergio Restrepo, VP of innovation at Luker Chocolate, about the ins and outs of ethical marketing

HOW SHOULD BRANDS TALK ABOUT THEIR ETHICAL CREDENTIALS?

"You cannot be authentic if you exaggerate the language you use to discuss your ethical credentials. Consumers and peers will see through this immediately. Use clear, concise language to explain what your company does, and why it helps."

HOW CAN YOU ENSURE YOU DON'T COME ACROSS AS 'PREACHY'?

"You won't connect to consumers by scolding them for their sustainable habits. Your business simply needs to talk about why your product helps and celebrate that, not why you're better than other brands or why you're the only brand that has seen the light on sustainability. You are not, and you sound like you are preaching to consumers."

HOW CAN YOU BACK UP CLAIMS?

"Keep track of what exactly your programmes or initiatives do or save and work this into a well-designed report on all the brilliant work you do. For example, Luker have our sustainability report that shows clearly that we have invested more than 1 million USD during 2018-2019 in applied research, technical assistance and education, reaching more than 1,000 farmers who are now better equipped to run their farm as a prosperous business. This can go to media, clients and employees to really show off your ethical credentials with proof to back it up."

Grocers were 'resilient' in the face of Omicron

Perseverance by retailers ensured that sales remained high over the festive period. According to data by the Office for National Statistics, food store sales dropped by just 1% during December as the Omicron variant rapidly spread through the UK. By contrast, overall retail sales volumes fell by 3.7%, the biggest monthly drop since January 2021. Even with the drop, food retailers remained 3.2% above pre-pandemic levels, when compared to February 2020.

Grocers were more "resilient" as they "scooped up customers who'd cancelled restaurant and bar bookings for a festive blow out at home", according to Susannah Streeter, Hargreaves Lansdown's senior investment and markets analyst. "The spread of Omicron may have slowed Christmas spending, but the perseverance of retailers helped deliver a successful Christmas for consumers," added Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium (BRC).



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ROWCLIFFE

Rowcliffe has long supported British cheesemakers and imported the very best cheeses from across Europe with confidence and assurance. Our recipe for success has been built on a couple of key strategic pillars, and what we have identified as fundamental to our success is the relationships and partnerships we have with our suppliers, the support we provide them, the connection between them and the retailer, and ensuring we understand their business's needs and challenges, and most importantly, embody the passion they have for their businesses and products.

Customers want artisan products, and that is why at Rowcliffe, the skilled team bring artisan products to the UK market, and work with existing and new artisan supplier partners in identifying strategic objectives to grow the businesses for mutual gain. Integrated sales and marketing strategies and plans, and customer targeted strategies, are pivotal to supporting the continued growth and uplifts of Rowcliffe. We are thankful and proud to represent many of Britain and Europe's talented farmers and artisans as they bring forward cheeses with true provenance, hand-crafted skills and stories that our business is proud to keep alive.

An important aspect to supporting our suppliers and their products is to ensure the operations of our company honour the quality our suppliers expect of their products. Rowcliffe has made significant investments to ensure that we not only ensure the current products we prepare and supply are of superior quality, but that we are looking forward, preparing for future growth, and that the business is fit for purpose when it comes to people, training, equipment, vehicles and infrastructure.

When working with fine quality products from across a number of borders, the relationship Rowcliffe has with its suppliers is vital; Clemency Hall – our independent-focused line –shows that we cohesively promote and champion cheeses from around the EU and UK with equal importance, and as some makers rely on Rowcliffe to be an invaluable connection between their work and the international marketplace, suppliers in the UK and EU are Rowcliffe's eyes and ears in the domestic market. Innovation and product development are a key focus for the Rowcliffe business.

We are actively working on growing the Rowcliffe business by adding distribution hubs across the UK along with potential acquisitions to build on successes seen since the Ambrosi Spa takeover. We believe by expanding our current business, this will benefit the artisan cheese and fine foods industry through continued efficiencies, operational capacity increases which will equate to product volume uplifts, personalised supplier support, whilst continuing with the ethos the company currently holds in working with our artisan suppliers to grow their businesses with ours.

New CO2 deal welcomed by food industry

The Government confirmed a new deal with a prominent carbon dioxide (CO2) supplier would mean key sectors like food processing would be ensured supplies of CO2. It came as a previous deal to prop up CF Industries, which supplies 60% of the UK's food-grade CO2, came to an end in January.

Late last year, the Government agreed to subsidise CF Industries after its shutdown led to fears over UK food supplies. CO2 is not only used in fizzy drinks, but also in keeping packaged food fresh and in meat production.

"The deal will enable CF Fertilisers' Billingham plant to continue to operate while global gas prices remain high. It means key sectors, including food processing and nuclear power, are ensured supplies of CO2," the department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, said in a statement.

"In the longer term, the Government would like to see the market take measures to improve resilience, and we are engaging on ways this could happen." However, there is still uncertainty about what the deal will mean for CO2 prices. Emma McClarkin, the chief executive of the British Beer and Pub Association, said, "We are encouraged by the agreement made between suppliers and CF Industries, however we urgently need further details on the nature of the arrangement in order to understand the impact on our sector and the longer-term sustainability of CO2 supply for the UK drinks sector.

"Our sector is still reeling from the impact of a devastating winter and face rising cost pressures from all angles," she said. "A swift resolution to the CO2 supply issue is crucial in ensuring a strong and sustainable recovery for the beer and pub sector."

> "Small business owners have shown resilience, innovation and creativity at every stage of the pandemic. It's incredibly encouraging to see UK entrepreneurs leading the way when it comes to our recovery"
>
> **ALAN THOMAS, UK CEO OF SIMPLY BUSINESS**





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William Reed
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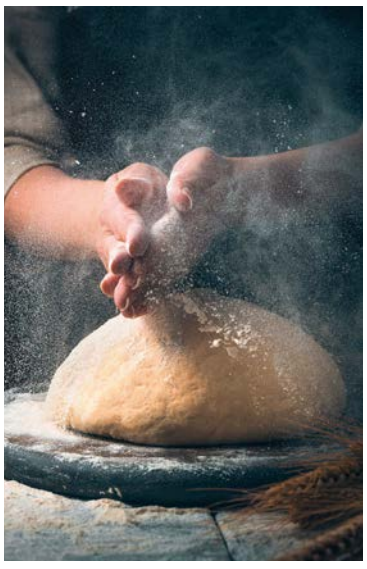
This is a trade event. No under 18s will be admitted.

3 trends to know this month



ETHICAL PRODUCTS

Spending on ethical food and drink soared to more than £14bn in 2020, according to the Co-op's Ethical Consumerism Report, up from just £5bn in 2010. Ethical food shopping trends reflect the changing diets of the British consumer, the report said. Sales in the vegetarian and plant-based alternatives category increased by 34% to reach a value of £1.5bn. Other categories were also boosted: Fairtrade sales grew by 14% and organically certified food rose by 13%. Free range egg sales reached almost £1.5bn in 2020, though sales of sustainable fish fell from £899m to £818m. All this means promoting your ethical credentials – and, importantly, the ethical products you stock – could have a big impact on your bottom line. Turn to page 15 to discover our ethical stocking tips.



HERITAGE

Provenance and authenticity are always on-trend for fine food retailers, but thankfully, this is something that more and more consumers are becoming interested in too. In part, it's down to the rise of sustainable eating. With shoppers more interested in where their food and drink come from, buying products with a great heritage story is the obvious next step. As customers are seeking out products with provenance, don't skimp on storytelling. Products like cheese and meat's origins are already in the spotlight, so make it very clear where your products come from, whether it's artisan British cheese or charcuterie prepared traditionally in France.

KOREAN FOOD

Ever since Squid Game hit our screens, Brits have been more interested than ever in authentic Korean cuisine. Trends like dalgona, or sugar candy, and kimchi, have become well known, but one product is expected to become the star of the show this year: gochujang paste, also known as 'Korean ketchup'. If retailers are new to Korean cooking, Jyoti Patel, founder of FeastBox and Red Rickshaw, has a few ideas about how it can be used: "Personally, I like to use this delicious paste to spice up everything from classic Korean recipes and stir-fries to anything else that needs a quick burst of heat and sweetness – it's really versatile with so much cooking potential. Made from fresh and high-quality ingredients, delivering a rich flavour and distinctive aroma to dishes, gochujang paste is predicted to take the UK by storm this year."



Small businesses target growth in 2022

Research by the Federation of Small Businesses confirms that despite inflation and labour shortages, more indies are targeting growth this year than pre-Covid.

The Federation of Small Businesses' Small Business Index revealed that cost pressures have hit a seven-year high, with 78% of the 1,200-plus SMEs surveyed saying their outgoings have increased. However, more than half (54%) still expect to grow their business this year, up four percentage points from the same period in 2019.

"After two years of turmoil, in which firms have once again shown their adaptability and resilience, the small business community stands ready to spur our economic recovery," FSB national chairman Mike Cherry said. "The majority intend to grow over the coming 12 months, and many are looking to increase headcounts." One in six increased their headcounts in the three months to December, and a similar number expect to boost staff numbers this quarter.

Staffing has become an issue for some businesses, with six in 10 saying that the tightening labour market has led them to increase wages. A third say a lack of appropriately skilled staff represents a "substantial barrier to growth". The FSB says more support is needed to help SMEs achieve their growth goals. "We urgently need the Government to start looking closely at the policies that will empower the small business community to spur our recovery from this recession as it did in the last," Mike said. "The growth intentions are there, but we need the right support to turn vision into reality. New enterprises are launched everyday across the UK, never more so than at times like this when the economy is changing apace," he said. "Our start-ups need funding to go on and be the employers and innovators of tomorrow."

> "People get the feel-good factor when they know they are supporting an individual or family business, versus huge corporate companies. But ultimately it comes down to taste, quality, and value"
>
> **KEREN SHAW, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR AT CRIMPLE**



NEWS IN BRIEF

BRITISH FARMERS ANGRY AFTER ASDA U-TURN

In October 2021, Big 4 grocer Asda announced it would supply 100% British beef at its meat counters – but a U-turn by the business in January has angered British farmers. Asda backed out of the commitment because of the rise in the price of British beef. According to the National Beef Association, farmers are struggling to cope with rising costs of feed, fertiliser and energy. "This Government has a role to play in ending the worsening retail price war. We need a radicle rethink on what our trading environment should look like outside the EU," tweeted Minette Batters, president of the NFU.

BUSINESS SECRETARY ORDERS COUNCILS TO DISTRIBUTE COVID GRANTS

Kwasi Kwarteng, the Government's business secretary, has ordered councils to distribute emergency Covid grants worth £253m. Councils have been criticised for their "glacial" rollout of Covid funding. "My message to you today is simple: businesses need you and your staff to help them through this period," Kwarteng wrote in a letter to councils. "The funding we have allocated needs to get to businesses to protect jobs, livelihoods and communities."

TESCO CLOSES DELI COUNTERS AT 317 STORES

The grocer revealed it will close meat, fish and deli counters due to falling demand from customers. Tesco will continue to operate counters in 279 stores where there is stronger demand, and the business said no jobs would be lost because of the counter closures. Tesco also announced that it would shut down Jack's, its discount rival to Aldi and Lidl, which would put 130 jobs at risk.

What does Brexit mean for the food industry in 2022?

Brexit might seem like old news for the general public, but for retailers and food producers who rely on exporting or importing products to and from the Continent, the UK's exit from the European Union is still a daily concern.

Some aspects of the Brexit deal which have critical impacts on the food and drink sector are still in debate, like the Northern Ireland Protocol, while others have only just been introduced after months of delay, like trade regulations for imports from the EU, which were brought in on 1st January. Here's how Brexit is impacting...

... indie retailers

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has warned that SMEs like local delis will be hit hard by the new import checks. "The classic example is your high street deli that is importing delicacies like, say, chorizo from Spain or Parmesan from Italy," James Sibley, the FSB's head of international affairs, told *The Guardian*. "For them, the thought of having to register for these systems is daunting and the process is expensive, so we've a lot of concern there. For those small businesses directly affected, we have picked up a lot of worry."

The Cold Chain Federation similarly warned that speciality food imports could face the same 70% decline that hit exports of food by small businesses after Brexit. "The big casualty of these trade barriers is the business that needs to import small and frequent quantities across borders – a pallet load of speciality cheeses or boxes of onion powder. This is the sort of trade that is going to suffer," said Shane Brennan, CEO.

... food manufacturers

Alex Marsh, CEO of Tweakd, a pre-prepared meal and juice brand, told *Speciality Food* that the new regulations have made importing speciality products, like cooked meat and fish, from France "much, much harder". He said the "badly thought out, last-minute bureaucratic madness" and the "incredibly convoluted British import system" caused import times to increase from about three days to five weeks, as well as adding costs.

"It's completely ludicrous, incredibly frustrating, and will lead to increased delivery lead times, added (and unnecessary) costs, and I suspect numerous suppliers and customers will simply give up and stop bothering. Others will do what some of my suppliers have done and add significant margins onto their costs of products for the UK," Alex said. "They don't want to, but we have now become much more expensive to do business with. That's not a great outcome, and as a British business owner it gives me a massive headache."

The effects of the new rules are wide-ranging, as Jason Bull, managing director at Eurostar Commodities, explained, "The additional paperwork required after the 1st January 2022 is adding cost and complexity to the entire food chain – all products."

... British producers

Brexit has spelled good news for some, however. With imports of European products facing higher costs, their British-made counterparts may see an uplift in sales. "For us generally, Brexit has been a positive thing," says Nick Sinclair, co-founder of artisan butter company The Edinburgh Butter Company. "Our main competition is French imports, so anything that makes it more difficult or more expensive for those imports to land in the UK obviously helps us from a price competitive perspective, as well as a security of supply position of our customers."

Brexit is responsible for accelerating the local shopping trend, Nick said. "Obviously, there was already an established trend within the UK to try and source more locally before Brexit happened, but my feeling is that Brexit increased the pace of that change. Whether because of increased awareness of local produce or issues including security of supply of imports, whatever the case we have seen it becoming more and more of a factor in people's buying decisions. As a business, we are proud to already use local suppliers for making our butter, so for us it's only a good thing that it's filtering into the consumer market too."

... exporters

Despite the positive effect Brexit has had on his business, Nick says the EU exit could negatively impact longer-term prospects. "As we grow and start to look at potential export markets, Brexit issues could prove a barrier to growth."

Exports to the EU have plummeted over the past year. The Food and Drink Federation (FDF) reported that UK exports of food and drink to the EU were down £2.4bn, or nearly 24%, in the first three-quarters of 2021 compared to pre-pandemic levels, thanks to the combined impacts of Brexit and Covid.

Once again, smaller businesses often pay the price. "It is extremely disappointing to see how badly our trade with the EU has been affected, with our smallest exporters hardest hit," said Dominic Goudie, head of international trade at the FDF. "It is essential that the Government works constructively with the EU to improve the implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement to ensure that it works for small businesses, otherwise this downturn will be here to stay."

... hospitality

In addition to affecting the way food and drink products are imported and exported, Brexit has also changed trends in the movement of people into the UK. "Within the hospitality industry, the supply chain crisis is not highlighting the shortage of products, but instead the availability of labour and the impact that this has on suppliers and businesses," said Andy Milner, procurement and supply chain director at WSH, a hospitality business whose brands include independent food service provider BaxterStorey.

"This has been an unfortunate result of both Brexit and the pandemic, with many of those in hospitality leaving the sector as well as the wider supply chain, whether it be HGV drivers, pickers or manufacturing and processing resource," Andy said. "It's still not easy to delineate Brexit from Covid-19 when it comes to supply chain issues, and we are likely to see further challenges to availability and pricing as the UK Border Operating Model evolves over the next 12 months."

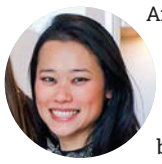
For 2022, with the matter of Brexit still far from settled, independents will continue to sail on uncertain seas.



International Women's Day 2022

Ahead of International Women's Day on 8th March 2022, four female entrepreneurs share their experiences...

"I'm surprised that a female-founder-led business is still surprising"





After joining forces to launch their start up Bundles, a brand of freshly handmade bao buns and dumplings, during the pandemic, Julie Lynch and Jenny Howson quit their corporate careers to take on their dream business full-time. The idea was sparked by Julie, originally from Malaysia, who was feeling homesick during lockdown but couldn't find fresh bao and dumplings that weren't full of preservatives and additives.

She decided to create a brand that she could see flying off the shelf in the UK. "All those experiences of the food, the flavours and the fun of sitting around a table and catching up with friends and family was something I thought would be great for people to enjoy and experience in the UK," Julie said.

FACING CHALLENGES

"I'm really proud that we are a female-founder-led business," Jenny said. "I don't think there are very many around." However, working as a woman in the food and drink industry has brought challenges. "I'm surprised that a female-founder-led business is still surprising. And a number of people have commented on that. We've been to a couple of food festivals..." Jenny began, and Julie chimed in, "And been asked who's looking after our kids."

It's a source of frustration, and something, Jenny says, that she doubts start-ups led by men have to deal with. However, it reveals another pain point for women working in the food industry today: child care. But, "It's not just child care because you can solve child care," with longer nursery hours or nannies, Jenny said. "It's that we both want to spend time with our children. We want to do homework, we want to be there for tea, we want to say goodbye in the morning and drop them off at school. We still want to be actively involved as parents."

Juggling a passion project with the full-time job of being a parent, Jenny said she has learned over the years to set boundaries and be "unapologetic about what I value". For example, setting hours when she won't take calls or schedule meetings. "You're miserable otherwise, if you sacrifice your values." One of the biggest hurdles for female start-up founders, Jenny said, is breaking down those personal barriers. "When you're running your own business, we feel exceptionally passionate about it, and we are incredibly driven. We are very ambitious for the business." The challenge, she said, is "giving ourselves permission to prioritise our own values".

CELEBRATING OPPORTUNITIES

While the food and drink sector has its faults, having come from very male-dominated industries, Julie and Jenny appreciated the passion and support they encountered. "The food industry is very much passion-driven, which is great," Julie says. "It gives it a bit more of a level playing field, and everyone has been so supportive. You find your little support network, and everyone's there to help you out and do whatever they can for you."

For other women who are considering starting their own business in the food and drink sector, Julie says be brave. "It's very generalising, but definitely for me, women can lack self-confidence, and we can doubt ourselves. If you find something that you're passionate about, then you should go for it, give it your best shot and see where it takes you."

"I still remember no one taking me seriously"



Georgie Abbott, founder of CBD olive oil company Drops of Heal, tells her story. "I founded Drops of Heal from my mental health struggles after losing my dad to suicide in 2015. I couldn't find a natural way to cope with everyday stressors and anxiety; shortly after I found CBD. I realised there wasn't a product for someone like me – I wanted something enjoyable and accessible to my everyday life.

"I'm a 23-year-old woman in the cannabis industry. I still remember going to my first cannabis expo and no one taking me seriously. Equally, a lot of the time people wouldn't address me – they would address my business partner who is a man. But, in saying that, I definitely have my privileges being a middle-class white woman.

"We all have different things to offer, and what makes the F&D industry successful is the diversity and range of products. Seeing other women succeeding before me definitely shows me the growth potential within the industry. My advice to other women considering starting up a business is: do it. You don't have to have it all figured out to start. I feel one of the best commodities is your eagerness to learn, so reach out to women you admire, start building a network and definitely don't be afraid to fail."

"They ask me questions men would never be asked"



Evie Waxman, founder of Raw Bake Station, shares her advice. "Generally, I find that as a young female, it's hard to be taken seriously. There have been many occasions when I've been pitching for investment to a room full of men. They ask extremely personal and unnecessary questions that men would never be asked. It's disheartening, but things are starting to change and that's a positive.

"There are plenty of organisations out there today that are looking for and want to back female founders. I believe we could be doing a lot more to help female founders, but there's a lot to be done to be support many different causes: young people, diversity in the workplace, mental wellbeing in the workspace. As a female, we are lucky that there's a strong sense of community."

> "Checkout-free stores are sterilising the high street experience. Yes, they bring some advantages in terms of time savings, but they come at the cost of basic human interaction. Technology is the future but people need to play a part in it, too. If Covid has taught us anything, it is the importance of social interaction. Checkout-free stores may be suitable for some big grocers, but social experience will be key if we are to revive our high streets after the pandemic"
>
> **DR JACKIE MULLIGAN, EXPERT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S HIGH STREETS TASK FORCE AND FOUNDER OF THE LOCAL SHOPPING PLATFORM SHOPAPPY**





6 ways fine food retailers can sell health food now

The taste for wellness-boosting food and drink is growing. Take these tips on board to tempt health-focused consumers to your shop.

1 RECOGNISE THE MODERN CONSUMER'S 'NUANCED' UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTH FOOD

"For a long time, many people associated being healthy with calorie counting, reducing sugars or following specific elimination diets," said Bethan Wallace Higson, founder of switchel brand Mother Root. "However, today there is a more nuanced understanding of health, particularly from a nutritional and functional perspective. We are beginning to connect the dots that what we put in our bodies (more than what we take out) has a powerful effect on how we feel, both physically and mentally."

With consumers drawn to a food-as-medicine approach rather than specific diets, fine food retailers should bring products with natural health benefits to the fore.

2 KEEP TASTE AT THE HEART OF YOUR OFFERING

Supplements and CBD oil might not be quite right for your store, and that's okay! As a fine food shop, taste and provenance are what your customers expect, so prioritise products that taste fantastic and have a great story.

After meeting these requirements, you can branch out to innovative, functional benefits, targeted ingredients like adaptogens or other health claims. "Stay core to your values on taste, but make sure to put on shelf interesting food and drinks that tick some of the key functional and health benefits people are most concerned about today," Bethan concluded.

3 AVOID SPECIFIC HEALTH FOOD SECTIONS

Although health food is not your speciality, experts suggest you'll be better off mixing health-centred products around the store, rather than in a specific 'health food' aisle or shelf that can be easily missed. "Just a few years ago having a 'health' focus was seen as food trend; now health messaging is everywhere," said Edward Taylor, founder of sustainable shake brand SUST.

And if there are specific wellness benefits you know your customers are looking for, like products that promote relaxation or gut health, try highlighting these product benefits on the shelf.

4 MAKE SPACE ON YOUR SHELVES FOR THE BIGGEST TRENDS

If you spot a health trend that you've never heard of, you may take that as a sign: your customers probably haven't either, so they're less likely to be interested. While you can leave the niche products to the health food stores, read up about the industry's biggest health trends, like gut health, low and no alcohol beverages, mood-food teas and immune-boosters.

Look out for headline-grabbing, superfood ingredients too, like apple cider vinegar or ashwagandha. One way of keeping up with these trends is by subscribing to our free Synergy buyer briefing newsletter. Visit specialityfoodmagazine.com/synergy.

5 LOOK FOR GROWTH IN CONVENIENCE

Keep an eye out for innovation in areas like healthy convenience. "Many will point out that simple vegetables and fruits provide all the health and nutrition we need," said Max Spiegelberg, marketing director at sustainable tea brand Greenypeeps, "but there's still a significant demand for convenience, and that's where the health and wellness space has room to grow." Think grab-and-go formats and healthy snacking innovations.

6 REMEMBER: CUSTOMERS WANT PRODUCTS THAT ARE GOOD FOR THEM AND THE PLANET

Consumers are beginning to link healthy eating with their desire to choose products that are healthier for the planet, and the intersection of sustainability and health is area that fine food retailers can make their own.

"At Greenypeeps, we believe the two are intrinsically linked. Foods that are good for you tend to be good for the planet," Max said. For example, he said, "Organic produce is cleaner for our bodies and does not introduce harmful, man-made chemicals into our ecosystem. Vegan or vegetarian diets tend to be healthier with a vastly reduced environmental footprint." Make the most of this eco-health intersection by stocking products that balance sustainable stories with healthy outcomes, like locally grown, seasonal fruit and veg.



World's first African food hall opens in London



Alkebulan, said to be a first-of-its-kind African food hall, will open in London and New York after premiering at EXPO 2020 Dubai. A celebration of African cuisine, art and music, the site will feature 10 chef-led concepts from across the continent, from gourmet dishes to street bites and fusion fare.

The launch comes from global hospitality agency TGP International and is curated by former opera singer-turned chef restaurateur, Alexander Smalls. "Despite its rich culinary heritage, African cuisine has been overlooked and underestimated for many years," Alexander said. "With Alkebulan, we look forward to bringing its diverse and spectacular culinary palates to the forefront by introducing a unique dining concept to two of the world's most thriving food destinations. We aim to not only deliver a taste of Africa but offer a one-stop destination that becomes a boiling pot of the various African cultures at the core of its 54 counties and offer opportunities to young culinary entrepreneurs from under privileged backgrounds."



2022: HOW THE FOOD SECTOR STANDS NOW

As Covid-19 lingers, Brexit debates continue to rage and rising inflation heaps pressure on bottom lines, industry insiders find there are still reasons to be optimistic

2022 is a new year, but the food and drink sector faces many of the same challenges that have plagued the industry for years. While Covid-19 and Brexit continue to draw question marks over the future, the new year brings fresh opportunities for independent retailers, too. Support for small businesses is growing, and conscious consumerism has driven shoppers to spend at stores that align with their values. E-commerce offers growth options for retailers seeking to boost their profile beyond their local community, and delivery services provide unrivalled convenience. *Speciality Food* delves deeper into the issues of the day to discover where the food sector stands now.

Indies' secret weapon against inflation

Experts agree that one of the most significant hurdles facing independent retailers today is rising costs. Inflation has soared due to rising energy prices and supply chain issues, and many retailers are having to absorb these costs. "There has been an increased burden on business," says Andrew Goodacre, CEO of the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira). "Business rates will be doubling compared to this year's payments, cost of labour is set to increase by at least 6% and the cost of energy is increasing by 300%. There is also a cost of importing, which has increased to more than the consumer price index."

As we enter 2022, retailers should revisit their cost base and examine how the rise in the cost of living impacts their customers. As costs go up, consumers tend to shop around more for their food and groceries. "Value for money is front of mind, so independent retailers will need to be mindful of this and demonstrate value credentials to compete with larger retailers," says Michael Freedman, senior shopper insight manager for IGD's ShopperVista.

This doesn't mean slashing prices and endangering your own bottom line, however. Instead, highlight the true value of your products, from their environmental credentials to their support of local artisan makers. "Focusing on ethical and sustainability credentials is a way specialist independents can attract customers," Michael says. "Our latest insight from ShopperVista reveals that sustainability is becoming more important to food and grocery shoppers and we're expecting this to continue to grow. Our data shows that the desire and aspiration for healthier and more ethical food is a trend that has been growing over the long-term. Previous periods of economic pressure, such as the credit crunch and recession in 2008, didn't see shoppers abandoning this desire, so there is no reason to expect they will do now."

Brexit drives 'buy British' movement

Although the UK left the European Union on 31st January 2020, the implementation of Brexit has been far from straightforward. At the time of writing, disputes are still ongoing between the UK and EU over the Northern Ireland protocol, which was agreed in order to prevent an Irish land border, leaving NI in the EU's single market.

Brexit requirements are also continuing to impact food and drink businesses' exports and imports. A recent poll of members of the Federation of Small Businesses revealed that four in ten (41%) exporters reported a drop-off in international sales in the second quarter of 2021, as added Brexit paperwork mingled with supply chain issues and rising shipping fees. This was up 10 percentage points on the same period in 2019. With even more checks being introduced this year, 21% have temporarily or permanently stopped exporting to the EU, and a further 7% are considering doing so.

One importer of fine Italian products revealed to *Speciality Food* that they were changing their shop's entire concept due to the added costs of importing since Brexit and Covid struck. Instead of importing products from Italy, the online retailer Blake & Tate is championing artisan British makers of Italian-inspired products. Although the loss of any artisan European products is a genuine shame, the growing support for British producers can only be a good thing here in the UK.

Online and delivery offer route to convenience

While the demand for ethical products and British-made food and drink has boosted the independent retail sector, another side-effect of Covid-19 offers opportunities for those who have been prepared to pivot. "Online shopping has had the biggest impact on retailers," says Nick Gladding, senior business analyst for Retail Analysis at IGD. "Last year saw an unprecedented surge in sales as shoppers switched from stores to online due lockdown restrictions, but it was unknown if this habit would stick once restrictions lifted," he says. "From what we've seen, the shift appears to be permanent; online shopping for groceries is now only slightly lower than it was at the height of the pandemic."

Bira's Andrew agrees that retailers will continue reaping the benefits from e-commerce in the coming year. "Indie retailers have to embrace technology to make the most of the positive trend for local shopping due to more people working from home. The indies must continue the work they have done to embrace social media, internet sales, consumer engagement and re-double their effort in 2022," he says.

Despite more than three-quarters of shoppers saying that supporting local retailers is important, according to Lumina Intelligence, convenience is still a big driver of purchases. On-demand grocery delivery services like Getir and Gorillas provide new options for shoppers – and retailers. "Mainstream retailers are now operating in this space; Tesco is now one of the most ambitious with its Whoosh within-the-hour service, launched at over 50 Express stores in the last six months," says IGD's Nick. With a growing market of delivery providers supporting fine food retailers, too, the playing field is being levelled. "Demand for delivery has shown little sign of slowing, giving retailers an opportunity to broaden customer reach and target shoppers that are not currently within their usual catchment area," adds Blonnie. Currently, one in 20 convenience store occasions are delivered, and shoppers who use delivery services tend to spend 128% more than in-store shoppers per trip, she says.

Although challenges remain, consumer behaviour trends shed light on how 2022 could be yet another strong year for fine food retailers.

> "Online shopping for groceries is now only slightly lower than it was at the height of the pandemic"

> "Focusing on ethical and sustainability credentials is a way specialist independents can attract customers. Previous periods of economic pressure didn't see shoppers abandoning this desire, so there is no reason to expect they will do now"

5 KEY SHOPPER TRENDS FOR 2022

IGD has identified five trends that retailers should watch in the year ahead...

1 SAVVY SHOPPING
The economic impact of Covid-19 has been severe. Savvy shopping techniques are now the norm as value is front of mind.

2 MEAL SOLUTIONS
Following the reopening of foodservice and the onset of cooking fatigue, shoppers will be looking for alternative solutions.

3 HIGH EXPECTATIONS
With more people shopping around online, shoppers will expect continued innovation in the channel.

4 SUSTAINABILITY
Shoppers are expected to continue to shift their focus towards sustainability, strengthened by the media attention surrounding COP26.

5 BACK TO BASICS ON HEALTH
Shoppers will take small steps to improve their health and wellbeing following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions.



7 WAYS TO BE AN ETHICAL RETAILER

Want to attract new customers and improve your store's sustainability credentials? Here's how to start a green makeover

Whether you run a traditional village greengrocer, a modern delicatessen in a city centre or anything in between, taking charge of your store's ethical credentials could be a boon for business. The so-called 'green pound' has reached a stunning value of £122bn, more than doubling in the past decade, according to the Co-op's *Ethical Consumerism Report*. To discover how to claim a slice of this growing market – and make a real difference towards a more sustainable future – read on.

1 GO PLASTIC-FREE

Single-use plastics are one of the easiest targets in the sustainability fight. A whopping 81% of Britons would support a total ban on single-use plastics, research by YouGov found. For fine food retailers, cutting out plastic creates a clear differentiation between themselves and other local supermarkets or convenience shops. What does this look like in practice? It could be a zero-waste refill station for grains, herbs or milk from the local dairy; using wax wraps at the cheese counter instead of clingfilm; or simply stocking more products that use biodegradable packaging.

Innovations have brought the plastic-free packaging sector to life, with indies often leading the way. For example, the brand Water in a Box was "born out of the ambition to move away from plastic bottles, and to instead find a new and innovative way to package water that is better for our health and for the planet," says Karl Martin, commercial director of Water in a Box. "Consumers are actively looking for more sustainable and environmentally friendly products, and we are seeing this demand across independent retailers, farm shops and delis. It gives owners a real point of difference."

Moves to cut out plastics could extend to your café or food to go offering, too – and soon, they may even be required by law. The Government unveiled a plan to ban single-use plastic cutlery and condiment sachets. Sian Sutherland, co-founder of A Plastic Planet, believes that indie retailers can take the lead on the issue. "With a wealth of alternatives to plastic sachets becoming available, independent businesses should not fear this latest shift away from plastic, but embrace it," she tells *Speciality Food*. "With the public desperate for the industry to meet the plastic crisis head on, smaller businesses can be the catalyst for inspiring this, and they will benefit as shoppers, fed up with the plastic guilt, will support them," Sian says. "Simply put, they can set the tone on plastic."

2 STOCK SMART

Fine food retailers already hold the products they stock to a high standard for taste, authenticity and provenance, as well as shelf appeal. But by adding a few more tick boxes to this list, they can help customers answer one of their biggest questions of our day: "What should I eat to be more sustainable?"

Many of your products will fit the bill already, but with such a huge number of certifications and labels available today, how do you choose what's right for your customers? One label that's quickly becoming an essential credential for sustainable brands is B Corporation. B Corp certification takes a holistic view of a business's social and environmental impact, and achieving it is no mean feat. "Getting B-Corp accreditation wasn't easy, neither should it be; all good things require effort," says Becky Vale, marketing director at Tracklements, which was granted B Corp status in October 2021, a process that took 18 months. "The B Corp accreditation touches every part of the business, from governance, through to community, staff and environmental responsibility," Becky says.

Avallen, a sustainable calvados brand, undertook the same rigorous process on its journey to B Corp status. "The B Lab Impact Assessment is an extremely thorough business review and required us to have a long look at Avallen as a business," says co-founder Tim Etherington-Judge. "While very time consuming, it's an extremely useful exercise as it forced us to really question a lot of areas of our business, write policies that we hadn't gotten around to writing, and





make positive changes to the way we did things." Stocking products which have gone through certification processes ensure a stamp of approval that you can trust.

3 COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS

Dozens of voluntary certifications are on the market today, and keeping track of what they all mean is not only difficult for retailers, but also customers. Research by YouGov revealed that the least well-recognised label of six it researched was the Soil Association's Organic label. "With so many food labels in circulation, understanding organic's defining points can help retailers inform customers' decision-making processes," says Roger Kerr, chief executive of Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G). For example, he says, "Organic certification ensures the integrity of organic food against a clear set of standards. Customers buying organic food can be assured that they are making a positive, verifiable choice for the environment and their health.

"Making staff aware of the benefits of organic and being comfortable engaging with customers about specific organic suppliers or brands will be a real asset. Most organic producers have a compelling story to tell," he continues. The same goes for other certifications, and local or sustainable products. "If you're a retailer, you simply want to communicate with your customers most effectively," says Patrick Holden, founder of the Sustainable Food Trust. "Think about the story behind the food products you are selling. Satisfy your customers' growing interest in the story."

4 CREATE A MISSION STATEMENT

It might sound "a bit American," Patrick says, but mission statements can set your shop's values and principles in stone, making them more easily understood by customers. He explains, "You could say, 'We make every effort to ensure that our foods are sustainably produced and locally sourced where possible, and grown from farmers whose story we know.' If you simply put that up and you adhere to it, that's a big thing, isn't it?" Once again, it draws a clear line between your offering and that of the supermarket chains. "Very, very few supermarkets will be able to say that," Patrick adds.



5 PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY

"Traceability and transparency are increasingly important for both producers who are doing the right thing, and members of the public who are concerned about what they are eating and asking more questions," says the Pasture for Life Association's Jimmy Woodrow. While labels and certifications can provide some degree of transparency, Patrick says current food labelling schemes don't always give the information that consumers are looking for. "One of the things we need is a better labelling scheme, where the provenance of the food and the story behind it is more easily understood," he says.

One group working to push through requirements for more transparent labelling in the UK is CLEAR. Catherine Chong, one of the campaign's leaders, says the consortium of 40+ members is looking into what information should be included on packaging and how it is communicated. "This is not just about the end consumer benefiting, but the whole supply chain. Different stakeholders within the supply chain, including retailers, restaurants, or wholesalers, will be able to make their buying decisions based on a more transparent system."

By presenting the facts about the food's production, this form of labelling would also fight another enemy of the food industry: greenwashing. "One of the motivations is that this system will help against greenwashing," Catherine says. Until a system like this is widespread in the UK, Patrick says retailers can fight for transparency by stocking food and drink products with a known story that they can communicate to their customers. For instance, California-based Sun Valley Rice has a unique level of transparency over its products because the company has ownership over the entire process. "Each bag of rice is grown within 100 miles of where it's sustainably milled, sprouted, germinated, and packaged to industry-leading standards," explains Karye Benton, quality assurance and food safety manager at Sun Valley Rice. "Their ability to balance the art of growing with the science of sustainability is what allows Sun Valley Rice and their rice products to span from a grassroots family beginning to a broader global reach."

> "Stocking a broad range of organic produce can help fine food retailers capitalise on consumers' growing interest in making more sustainable purchasing choices"

> "Consumers are actively looking for more sustainable and environmentally friendly products, and we are seeing this demand across independent retailers, farm shops and delis. It gives owners a real point of difference"

6 SUPPORT REGENERATION AND FAIR LABOUR

As the food and drink industry becomes aware of its duty to protect the earth, retailers can play their role by seeking out brands that are kinder to the planet. "Regenerative agriculture is a conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems," explains Karye. "It focuses on topsoil regeneration, increasing biodiversity, improving the water cycle, enhancing ecosystem services, supporting bio-



sequestration, increasing resilience to climate change, and strengthening the health and vitality of farm soil."

As well as focusing on the soil, Sun Valley Rice has been a champion of improving water quality for two decades, and the business has been part of a movement of US rice growers giving land back to wildlife. "Workplace sustainability," Karye adds, "takes the form of fair labour practices, competitive earning, and deep community involvement." Brands that go above and beyond to promote sustainability, as well as support the farming communities that form the foundations of their business, should be of particular interest to retailers.

7 DECARBONISE

Looking into your shop's carbon footprint can open up many opportunities for sustainable improvements. If you're at the start of your carbon reduction journey, research companies that you can model yourself after, and talk to other business owners taking these steps – many will be more than happy to share their experience and advice.

Puffin Produce is a Welsh potato brand that launched the world's first carbon zero potatoes, Root Zero, and The Welsh Government is working on a Decarbonisation Action Plan for the food and drink industry to help even more brands transition to net zero. "Our vision is to create a food and drink industry which is world-leading in terms of its sustainability credentials," says Lesley Griffiths, Welsh Government minister for rural affairs. It demonstrates the changing priorities of both the Government and consumers.

"This ambition reflects the urgency and commitment expressed across Welsh Government to tackle the climate emergency and to respond to an increased focus by consumers to purchase products with minimal environmental impact and ethically produced from sustainable supply chains," Lesley continues. "It seems likely in the long run, those retailers and manufacturers who can demonstrate business responsibility through sustainable improvements which prioritise environmental, social, health and quality values will be most favoured by consumers."

WHY MAKE ETHICAL CHANGES?

- "When we partner together to tell the story and spread the word, more consumers will demand more ethical, sustainable products," says the Fairtrade Foundation's Anna Barker. "And as we know, consumer power is the biggest motivator for other businesses to make changes."
- "Brands and supermarkets are aware that sustainability is very important to seafood consumers," says Seth McCurry at the MSC. "Consumer spend on MSC labelled products was £1.26bn last year in the UK and Ireland."
- "It's only by growing the numbers of people farming [grass-fed] and working together that we will create real and lasting change," says Pasture for Life's Jimmy.

A **THIRD** OF **MILLENNIALS** ARE NOW **MORE** LIKELY TO BUY **ORGANIC**, AND ALMOST **9** IN **10** HOUSEHOLDS **PURCHASED** ORGANIC PRODUCTS IN **2020**

SOURCE: KANTAR

STOCK CHECK



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BYRUBY



ALEX STEWARD
PACK'D



RICHARD HARROW
BFFF



THEA BROOK
THE BROOK



FROZEN FOOD 2.0

Thanks to the latest generation of innovators, the freezer offers vibrant opportunity for discerning foodies and retailers alike

While the boost in popularity of frozen food over recent years can certainly be partly attributed to consumers' busy lives and the convenience boom, the fine food industry has evolved to offer so much more than a quick and easy fix for time-poor shoppers. Thanks to a unique combination of innovation and an innate pinpoint focus on quality and taste, these days the speciality sector offers a raft of artisanal frozen food products which not only satisfy the current need for speed, but the appetite for delicious produce, too.

Matt Whelan, managing director of Fieldfare, is at the forefront of this new generation of frozen food and calls upon the fine food industry as a whole to step up to the plate. "Frozen is having a bit of a renaissance and it has great momentum at the moment," he begins. "It is up to us, the brands, suppliers and stockists, to ensure that we continue to deliver a great offering that will keep shoppers interested and keep them coming back to the frozen aisles again and again."

A host of benefits

Headed up by Ruby Bell, a Leiths-trained chef and her business partner Milly Bagot, ByRuby is just one of a raft of next-generation businesses serving up just what today's consumers are looking for. "The pandemic has made people realise what goes into making a good meal and the importance of using the best ingredients. When frozen, premium ingredients cooked with care give the consumer flexibility and mean there is no wastage in their kitchen." With the spotlight on additives and the desire to eat 'clean' more widespread than ever, frozen food offers consumers the opportunity to eat conveniently without the need for chemical intervention. "Freezing immediately after cooking is like pressing pause on freshness and flavour until you are ready to press play again," she says. "Freezing is nature's oldest preservation technique and, in my view, artificial additives and preservatives are the least healthy thing we can put into our bodies so avoiding those is a great step forward for the health conscious."

This flavour-first focus on helping consumers to eat healthier and more sustainable lives is shared by Pack'd, a frozen fruit and smoothie kit business co-founded by Alex Stewart. The business offers convenient, precisely portioned mixes of fruit and vegetables alongside a bespoke superfood blend which aims to deliver a targeted nutritional benefit. In 2022, says Alex, "consumers now see frozen not as something with a long shelf life, but actually fresh food that retains its freshness – this change of attitude has been pivotal to the resurgence of the frozen category." The pre-portioned servings presented by ByRuby and Pack'd are progressive in terms of food waste, with Pack'd's Alex having found that fresh fruit being one of the greatest victims of being binned.

Food waste is also a topic high on the agenda for customers of Field Fare, purveyors of a wide range of frozen food products and branded freezer units. "Whilst the wider food category trends such as a focus on health and provenance are of importance to frozen, the key trend for the category really is around people's growing awareness of the benefits of frozen foods - not just from a nutritional perspective but also in terms of sustainability and food waste, which is a growing concern for the contemporary consumer." Field Fare's unique offer of loose frozen foods appeals to shoppers looking to reduce food waste, "offering them a choice they might have otherwise had," says Matt, "as they can pick as much as they want but no more than they need, helping to reduce food waste at home." This proposition is also a boon to retailers, who are enabled to sell a wide range of products without the concern around waste they may have with fresh.

In fact, according to Richard Harrow, chief executive of the British Frozen Food Federation, "research published in the British Food Journal shows that diets containing frozen food have 47% less food waste compared with fresh foods, with a typical household wasting 10.4% of fresh food and only 5.9% of frozen food."

A premium proposition

While the pandemic had catastrophic implications for many sectors, the frozen food segment of our industry saw an uplift in some cases, with new shoppers, says Field Fare's Matt, "driven to try frozen food, motivated by the long shelf life and potential to stock up. Once there, they were delighted with what they found and discovered the breadth of range and increasingly high quality offering, prompting them to re-evaluate the category." Field Fare's extensive range has proven to be a hero in homes across the UK, with its wide range catering to all manner of meal requirements. "Our prove-at-home pastries, such as our best-selling croissants, are incredibly popular and offer people a freshly baked product in the comfort of their own home." Meanwhile, "high quality prepared products that help to complete the meal occasion, such as our award-winning Coquilles St Jacques – an ideal starter – and our unique frozen

THE RETAIL **FROZEN** FOOD MARKET IS NOW WORTH **£7.1BN** AND HAS ADDED **£814M** WORTH OF **SALES** SINCE **2019**; THAT'S **VALUE** GROWTH OF **+12.8%** AND **VOLUME** GROWTH OF **+8.1%**

SOURCE: BRITISH FROZEN FOOD FEDERATION



INDUSTRY INSIGHT

The pandemic and associated lockdowns have led to a boom in retail sales of frozen food, Richard Harrow, chief executive of the British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF) discusses why more consumers are choosing frozen and how independent retailers can make the most of the opportunity.

After two years of disruption, the retail market is returning to pre-pandemic normal, but frozen has attracted over 400,000 more shoppers in the last two years.

The retail frozen food market is now worth £7.1bn and has added £814m worth of sales since 2019; that's value growth of +12.8% and volume growth of +8.1%. With the total grocery market broadly flat, frozen sales have significantly outperformed the market.

Frozen food has always been recognised as a great value option. Today this is combined with quality and innovation to allow us to offer shoppers tasty, restaurant quality food in their own homes, such as dressed lobster and beef wellington available straight from the freezer.

This gives independents the chance to satisfy consumer demand for high quality food without the preparation.

The development of high-quality frozen free-from products and plant-based meals are set to grow further. This has already drawn a new generation of shoppers to the frozen aisle. Millennials have been linked with this trend, but the sector has a growing number of Gen Z fans. According to a report from Packaged Foods, under 25s are 23% more likely to eat frozen dinners. So, stocking frozen products allows shops to appeal to a wider demographic of customers.

vegetable mixes, offer a convenient as-if-made-from-scratch experience for busy consumers."

The buzz around fine dining at home experiences has been building for a few years now – just think of the queues for pre-prepared luxury meals pre-Valentine's Day as a fuss-free alternative to overpriced restaurant set menus – and is an opportunity that premium ready meal producer Noble House Prepared are investing heavily in. "When we first launched this side to our business, we saw people looking for an opportunity to have easy to cook, restaurant quality meals at the beginning of the pandemic," says owner and director Conrad Baker, "however, as things ease and restaurants are back in business, the demand has continued. Whatever one's circumstances, we can all be time-poor and so we see this trend continuing – it's all about flexibility and convenience without compromising on nutrition, taste or quality of ingredients."

With bona fide fine food credentials thanks to the impressive CV of its in-house executive chef, Owen Sullivan – who spent many years leading the kitchens of a number of Gordon Ramsay's Michelin-star restaurants – Noble House Prepared are offering a genuine restaurant-quality experience in the comfort of shoppers' homes. "He focuses on every aspect of the dish including sourcing the finest ingredients and putting priority on provenance to ensure the quality of each meal," explains Conrad. "Fine food retailers want a guarantee of quality and this includes the credentials of the chef and kitchen creating each dish."

Catering for all

Within the impressively varied range of quality frozen food products on the market, there are plenty of options which satisfy the demand for plant-based. Whether your regular customer is vegan or not, they are bound to host a friend of family member following a vegan diet at some point – so offering dairy- and meat-free options in your freezer is a smart move. "It enables customers to have excellent quality produce on hand any time it's needed, whether for themselves or for guests with specific dietary needs," explains Thea Brook, founder of frozen plant-based meal business The Brook. "The freezer has always been a place for both 'cook from scratch' ingredients and prepared produce," she continues, "however, the latter has traditionally been both low price and quality. We see a huge amount of opportunity in raising the bar of this prepared end of the spectrum, whether that's excellent meat alternatives, cooking sauces or complete meals."

Key to the success of frozen meals, says Thea, are the visuals around them. "Hidden behind frosted doors or down in chest freezers, it can be harder to draw the customer's attention to frozen products. It's very different to the beautiful upright rows of ambient products, for example. To overcome this you need great merchandising, showing the product and telling the story as to why it's incredible food." The Brook has its own range of branded freezers to help retailers do just that, and further grow the reputation of high quality frozen food in the speciality marketplace. "Hopefully we'll see consumers continuing to embrace frozen for all its benefits more and more, which will allow the premium end of the market to flourish. I, as a consumer, get very excited about that prospect!"

> "Frozen food has always been recognised as a great value option. Today this is combined with quality and innovation to allow us to offer shoppers tasty, restaurant quality food in their own homes, straight from the freezer. This gives independents the chance to satisfy consumer demand for high quality food without the preparation"



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THE FULL PACKAGE

With demand for temperature-controlled packaging soaring, the industry is moving to the cutting-edge of new product developments

The journey from farm to fork is under the microscope – perhaps more so now than ever before. Supply chains have come under strain over the past year from a lack of workers to pick, pack and deliver goods. At the same time, the rise of e-commerce during the pandemic left more and more shoppers fond of filling up their online baskets, creating new challenges for the industry – especially when it comes to temperature-sensitive products. "The temperature-controlled logistics industry has made urgent and dramatic changes over the course of the pandemic, proving its resilience again and again to carry on providing cold storage and distribution services for frozen and chilled food throughout unprecedented disruption and uncertainty," said Shane Brennan, CEO of the Cold Chain Federation.

A number of these changes were temporary, but lasting adjustments have been made too. "Some of these are a direct result of the pandemic, some are due to the combination of Covid, post-Brexit changes, the labour shortage, the energy crisis and new Government regulations," Shane explains. Changes aside, the cold chain remains "the crucial linchpin in the supply chain for chilled and frozen food," he says, responsible for transporting products safely and securely from point A to point B. A crucial component of this journey is temperature-controlled packaging.

Covid-inspired innovation

"There was already steady growth within the online food sector pre-pandemic, which translated to an increase in the number of companies looking for insulated packaging to ship temperature-sensitive products," says Josie Morris, managing director of Woolcool. But the pandemic lit a fire under the sector. "Since the country was locked down, restaurants were closed and events cancelled, people looked for new ways to celebrate, do something special or just to treat themselves within the confines of their home and the rules. As a result, the online food sector boomed, which in turn drove demand for all types of packaging. It was amazing to see how our team and customers adapted through this time, testimony to the fact that the best innovation comes from challenges!"



Businesses also had to get creative to reach their customers in new ways. "Covid-19 and the subsequent restrictions put in place really highlighted the importance of having multiple routes to market," adds Alex Pawley, sales and marketing director at Icertech. "With restaurants having

> "The demand for insulated packaging is only going to continue as consumer habits have changed over the last couple of years. The very concept of mail order food has become much more normal for the general public"





to close overnight we helped a lot of businesses offer their product direct to consumer."

Another side of the industry that saw huge demand over the pandemic was delivery-by-courier. "We worked with Morrisons to provide ice packs for hundreds of thousands of food delivery boxes that could be sent out on an overnight delivery service, rather than delivered from store a few hours after packing," explains Adam Hart, sales manager at Hydropac. "In addition, the usual mail order food companies also experienced a significant increase in order volume, with home meal kit companies benefiting most, as they were able to provide complete ingredients packs for cook-at-home meals," he explains. "As a result, during the first few months of the first lockdown we saw demand for insulated packaging and ice packs increase by around 200%, and we are working 24 hours a day, seven days a week to keep up."

This intense demand has changed somewhat two years on from when the pandemic first began, but all eyes are still on the temperature-controlled packaging sector. "The key question that should be asked of a temperature-controlled packaging supplier is one of reliability and expertise," says JB Packaging's Samantha Barrett. "Expertise of the supplier and reliability of the packaging they manufacture to keep food at its finest, especially with increased transit delays with the stellar rise of online food shopping."

Today, the industry is pushing forwards with innovation while catering for a customer who has more trust in its product than ever before. "The demand for insulated packaging is only going to continue, as consumer habits have changed over the last couple of years," Adam says. "The very concept of mail order food has become much more normal for the general public, and the ability to have not only high-quality, specialist foods delivered to your door, but also the everyday items, is now commonplace."

Looking to the future

While business is booming, temperature-controlled packaging experts have been driving innovations to meet another consumer demand: sustainability. "There is great commitment from the UK's cold chain industry for change and innovation towards a more sustainable future, driven by social responsibility, by anticipation of changing regulations and by recognition of the commercial and efficiency benefits of a net zero approach," says the Cold Chain Federation's Shane.

Temperature-controlled fleets are moving to low-emission alternatives,

> "In addition to increased demands for packaging, there is an obvious reduction in the demands for plastic-based packaging"

and cold storage firms have boosted their energy efficiency by more than 19% between 2008 and 2020. For makers of temperature-controlled packaging, there is no time to sit on their laurels, according to Icertech's Alex. "Consumers are more aware of the purchases they are making and how they can personally have a positive impact on the environment. Over the last few years, we have noticed a gradual shift towards more sustainable solutions, and as a result we are working with local universities on various research projects, including development of the Enviro-Range, and as a way of validating our green credentials.

"We take our environmental responsibilities seriously, and as a company we're constantly looking for new ways to improve our products and practices. Over the next 12 months we will be working towards attaining ISO 14001 environmental certification as a way to formally improve our internal processes," she adds. As well as improving

PACKAGING AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY



Josie Morris, managing director of Woolcool, explains how the packaging industry can rethink sustainability by investing in a circular supply chain

Wool is abundant, natural, reusable, recyclable, renewable and 100% compostable. Not only that, but when it breaks down it adds many nutrients back into the soil, playing a part in the natural carbon cycle. We encourage reuse of our packaging for those who have the supply chain to do so; otherwise, it can be reused in and around the home or garden and in craft projects. We have so much feedback from those who have found new and inventive ways to reuse or recycle, including as a slug repellent, mulching, pet bedding, draft excluder, cushions, and donations to animal shelters, to schools for textile projects or to homeless charities for use as an insulative barrier. Instead of seeing packaging as a throwaway commodity, why not encourage further life after delivery, too?

We have been focused and driven by sustainability well before it became on-trend. We are always driven to improve the impact we have on the wider world, both environmentally and socially. Our B Corp certification means we are committed to measuring and continually improving this. We all know that the best way to reduce impact is to reuse or re-purpose where possible, and wool's properties mean it can be reused many times without its efficacy being affected. We created our Circular Economy scheme to open up an avenue for the consumer to send Woolcool liners back to us for repurposing.





Q&A: UNDERSTANDING POLYSTYRENE PACKAGING'S ROLE TODAY

JB Packaging's Samantha Barrett answers our questions to reveal how this packaging material can be a crucial tool for the fine food industry



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING POLYSTYRENE?
Expanded polystyrene (EPS) boxes today are still an incredible, yet understated innovation in insulated packaging that has stood the test of time and has been at the core of the JB Packaging business since 1982. EPS has long been, and continues 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 dry ice.

Alongside EPS, JB Packaging's innovations have adopted the use of other expanded foam materials, namely expanded polypropylene (EPP). EPP is a more durable material available in a range of colours which offer the same inherent insulation benefits but which are developed instead to be used and reused in closed-loop systems.

Arguably, where quality is of the utmost importance, insulation and protection of food is key. Retailers need packaging that they can rely on to keep their food cool and safe in transit; polystyrene boxes offer just that to many fine food retailers, with their excellent impact protection properties protecting goods from bumps and scrapes in transit and thermal insulation properties that keep contents cold. We've all seen longer delivery times because of the surge in online shopping, so keeping food cooler for longer has never been more important to avoid unnecessary food wastage and resultant refunds, loss of business and claims for transit loss.

HOW DOES POLYSTYRENE RECYCLING WORK?
Polystyrene has a host of eco credentials, and manufacturers of this material are in a constant battle dispelling the environmental myths surrounding it, because sadly EPS is often disposed of irresponsibly. 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.

Poly boxes are extremely resource efficient, consisting of just 2-4% material. The rest is air which is a poor conductor of heat, making EPS and EPP effective insulators because they're packed full of tiny air pockets, so heat transfer is minimised. Polystyrene food packaging uses less energy and resources to manufacture than comparable paper or waxed coated paperboard products.

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 – any manufacturing scrap can be granulated and some of it goes 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, giving customers the opportunity of a completely branded solution for their home delivery and pallet shipping.



business practices, products are in the spotlight, and consumers want straightforward answers about how to dispose of temperature-controlled packaging materials after their products arrive. For Icertech, the solution is creating 100% paper-based and fully-kerbside recyclable box solutions, as well as water-only coolants that can be used as an alternative to traditional gel-based coolants.

Hydropac too has been busy revamping its product line to be kinder to the planet. "In addition to increased demands for packaging, there is an obvious reduction in the demands for plastic-based packaging due to the increased taxes they will attract in the coming months," Adam says. "Any of our products made from plastic contain the maximum possible amount of recycled material. We developed our EnviroCool packaging be fully kerbside recyclable as it is entirely made from paper, and we were the first to offer expanded corn starch as an insulating material. In fact, our next-generation range of starch insulated packaging will be launching soon," he says. Demand for these products will only be increasing over the coming months and years, so continued innovation is critical to business success. "Our next-gen starch packaging will allow us to offer a better, fully compostable and biodegradable solution to cover every packaging requirement."

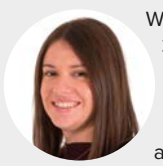
Woolcool is known in the industry for its back-to-nature approach to insulation. Rather than formulating a new product, the business was founded on the idea that wool is a natural insulator developed over thousands of years and created by nature for that very purpose. "The combination of a complex and clever structure of the wool fibre, its many natural properties and the innovative way we have harnessed these in Woolcool, has created an insulated packaging solution with unrivalled performance," Josie says. "Since our founder invented Woolcool in early 2000s we have heavily invested in research and development to really understand the wool, our product, and make it the best it can be."

But materials aside, what's on the horizon for the sector? Josie expects continued growth over the next three to five years. "We are seeing a number of fantastic new food businesses starting up, creating great product offerings, so I believe the demand for temperature-controlled packaging will continue." But, she adds, "We don't take anything for granted, and we will be working hard to ensure we continue to innovate, research, develop and provide the high levels of service and quality that our customers have come to expect." And no doubt the same will be true for the entire sector as it embarks upon yet another busy year.

Learn how mail order can be an asset for your business. Download *Mail Order Masterclass* at specialityfoodmagazine.com/mailorder

A PERSONALISED SERVICE

In a market filled with excitement and innovation, Alex Pawley of Icertech stresses the value of customising products to the individual client



We have over 30 years of experience in the packaging industry, which allows us to offer advice and guidance that we tailor to the individual. Whilst the solutions are all relatively similar, we understand that all applications are unique, and we take the time to fully understand the requirements of our customers. We also love working with our customers on branded packaging, creating unique and branded solutions that not only do the job, but work as an invaluable marketing tool.



ICERTECH

> "The temperature-controlled logistics industry has made urgent and dramatic changes over the course of the pandemic, proving its resilience again and again"



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The Life & Soul of the Pantry



THE POWER OF SOUR

We Brits are often mocked for our sweet tooth. Now we're developing a sour tooth, too, says Sally-Jayne Wright

The ingredients retailer souschef.co.uk saw sales of balsamic vinegar and yuzu soar in 2021. Balsamic vinegar was up 80% compared with 2020 and yuzu – fragrant Japanese citrus juice – up 57%.

We counted more than 35 brands of the lemony spice sumac on Amazon. A surprising number of the products in Waitrose Cooks' Ingredients range is sour: chaat masala, amchoor, black limes, pomegranate molasses, kalamansi juice and tamarind paste.

TALK US THROUGH THEM.

Certainly. Made from dried, pulverised green mangoes, Amchoor is used in north Indian cooking to give recipes fruity tartness without increasing moisture. It's a key ingredient in the spice blend that is chaat masala. Think of black limes as the Persian equivalent of preserved lemons. Kalamansi or golden lime juice is popular in Vietnamese, Malaysian and Philippine cooking.

Tamarind makes Worcestershire sauce and HP (brown) sauce more-ish; it's an Asian and Oriental way to add acidity.

THIS IS ALL DOWN TO THAT OTTOLENGHI FELLOW, IS IT?

Only partly. The vogue for home pickling, brewing and sourdough baking helped, followed by our interest in fermented foods for gut health. Another factor is that acidity makes mocktails more grown-up. Think Nonsuch's Blood Orange & Bitter Lemon shrub or a recipe for mulled pomegranate juice with sumac in January's *BBC Good Food*.

Adventurous home cooks are curious and unafraid to mix and match. A vegan diet isn't repetitive if you whirl preserved lemons into humus or sprinkle chaat masala onto almond butter toast.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SOURNESS?

Sour foods literally make your mouth water. According to Mark Diacono, author of *Sour – The Magical Element That Will Transform Your Cooking* (Quadrille), relative acidity can be measured on the pH scale; lemon juice is 10 times more acidic than pomegranate. Sourness can't be neutralised by adding sweetness because sugar has a pH level of 7, but sweetness can be used for balance and contrast and to create flavour explosions.

TELL ME MORE

Over four years ago, Chocolarder in Cornwall sent us a milk chocolate Easter egg filled with sea buckthorn fondant. We still recall the pleasurable clash of sweet and sharp. Chocolarder's sea buckthorn truffles are sold at Selfridges – an exquisite combination.

The contrast between sour lemons and sweet dates inspired a new preserve from Belazu – Lemon Sweetness.

WHAT'S AN UNEXPECTED BENEFIT OF SOUR FOODS?

They work as salt substitutes. As a spokeswoman for the spice retailer, Spice Mountain, explained, customers increasingly ask for no-salt seasonings; their lime and lemon zest powders are bestsellers.

WHICH SOUR INGREDIENT GETS YOU PARTICULARLY EXCITED?

Tamarind. As Glynn Christian advises in *Taste: How to Choose the Best Deli Ingredients* "(Tamarind is) excellent in all curries. Well worth experimenting with to flavour a sauce for fish, to sharpen a tomato sauce for pasta, in a vegetable soup or as part of an oriental-style salad dressing with soy sauce and chopped, toasted cashew nuts."

Chef Cyrus Todiwala MBE adds that souring balances the flavour of spices and chilli. His Date & Tamarind Chutney complements Beetroot & Coconut samosas on the Café Spice Namaste menu and will soon be available to independents again after rebranding.

I'VE ALWAYS LIKED TART TASTES LIKE POMEGRANATE, BLOOD ORANGE AND RHUBARB.

Sounds like you'd appreciate Craic Foods' innovative, northern Irish range of pickled gooseberries, cherries and blackberries. Laura Bradley of Indie Füde, a deli in Comber, County Down which stocks them, said, "I enjoy (these pickled fruits) at home all the time in everything from savoury dishes and salads to cocktails."

While the blackberry variant is Indie Füde's best-seller, Laura says a salad made with the pickled gooseberries, a bright, citrus goat cheese such as St Tola and with the apple and elderflower notes of the pickle in the dressing is "a fine thing indeed". The pickled cherries make "a brilliant accompaniment to a cheese toastie or pan-fried duck breast."

The gooseberries variant, which outsells the others, won Grand British Champion at the 2021 Great British Food Awards. It would make a classy accompaniment to any cheeseboard or smoked fish platter.

HOW CAN WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE TREND?

Consider ingredient bundles – selling a world cuisine cookbook with themed products as a package.

Showcase sour ingredients in takeaway and café dishes. When Trend Watch served a salad of puy lentils, rocket, beetroot, feta and dried sour cherries, it was the sour cherries that provoked curiosity and compliments.

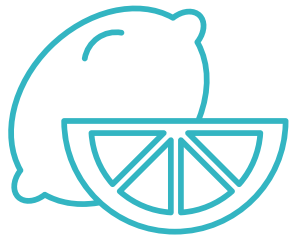
Don't limit sourdough sales to savoury bakes. Sourdough starter gives sweet bakes like cinnamon raisin bread an addictive tang.

WILL THE TREND LAST?

We think it will. Our love of Levantine cuisine shows no sign of abating and interest in Asian and south Asian cuisine is strong.

There's evidence taste buds are moving away from childish, one-dimensional sweetness. If you don't believe this, look at the number of producers launching sharper tomato ketchup alternatives.

> "There's evidence tastebuds are moving away from childish, one-dimensional sweetness"



BALSAMIC VINEGAR SALES ARE **UP 80%** COMPARED TO 2020, AND **YUZU** – FRAGRANT JAPANESE CITRUS JUICE – **UP 57%**, ACCORDING TO SOUSCHEF.CO.UK



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Cheese Talk

"Over the past couple of years we've had tremendous support from our customers – 2022 is the year where we try and repay some of that"



JOHNNY MCDOWELL
INDIE FUDE

Indie Füde is all about being independent and supporting small indigenous food producers from the island of Ireland, not least the wonderfully talented cheesemakers we have.

We set up nearly seven years ago as a small travelling cheese stall, specialising in small-batch Irish cheeses and selling them at farmers markets. This was supported by a good friend and cheesemaker, Mike Thompson (Mike's Fancy Cheese, creator of Young Buck). We are cheese obsessed and focus on the experience and educational side giving the customer something different – local, rarer farmhouse and raw milk cheeses, a bit of chit chat and lowdown on the cheeses and the cheese journey from the maker, to how it's made and the taste profiles, and how these might be best enjoyed.

Encouraged by the feedback, we moved to our first bricks and mortar store in our rural home town, Comber, Co Down in 2016 (and later moved to a bigger store in 2018) supplementing by now over 60 Irish farmhouse cheeses with a wider variety of artisan complementary products focusing on quality and local.

We opened our second store in urban Belfast on the Ormeau Road, packed full of other independent stores. We wanted to do something different with a fully air-conditioned store and a place to mature the cheese and free up some of the vital storage space for cheese makers. The presentation-style and the beauty of the natural cheeses really caught the imagination of the local area and brought us a really different and new customer base.

Life doesn't always go to plan. Over the last two years, we've manoeuvred our way through both Brexit and Covid!

Brexit has, ironically, really helped – we've had unfettered access to our supply chain around the island of Ireland and been able to assist some of the Irish cheesemakers get their product to market in GB using the unique geographical position of Northern Ireland.

Covid brought more challenges with ups and downs throughout. Initially having to self-isolate myself, I was grateful for the commitment and solidarity of my business partner and staff. During hard lockdowns, we began a free delivery service of essential boxes partnering with the local baker, milk suppliers and butchers. Our existing customers rallied to support us and we found a whole new customer base appreciating the local food chain. Online business grew, whether from those isolating or sending gift boxes to loved ones near and far – it was heartwarming to see some of the lovely messages that went into these. As lockdown restrictions eased and people came back out to the shops and started to socialize in smaller groups, there was a real trend for great local food at home – they love the treat of taking home a really great cheeseboard to family and friends... the word has spread fast... to cook at home with the family and to be conscious of spending their money down the local supply chain.

We noticed the love of local products and especially cheese continued to grow. Before a customer may have looked for a bit of Brie or Cheddar but now they're exploring a much wider range, whether raw milk, goat's or sheep's cheeses, or more mature cheeses in particular.

It has been heartening to see the consumer choosing to stay local, to support us as an independent food business. We've loved forging those relationships over the years with local cheesemakers, getting out to meet them on their farms or cheesemaking facilities, painting that picture in our head and relaying that picture to our customers.

Looking forward... We've recently partnered with a local cheesemaker, Davide Tani of Velo cheese based in Belfast. For the last three years he has worked on our roving cheese stall, meeting the customers, learning about Irish cheeses and getting feedback on his own products. During lockdown, we hatched a plan for both businesses to come together. In 2022, we'll be making a city-made cheese on a sustainable level (cheese will also be delivered by a velomobile, a low-level bike shaped like a banana with a nifty chilled trailer powered by cycling). The unit is part of a living museum in a disused warehouse allowing tasting, events and a bit of theatre.

In-store, we're moving the cheese accompaniment side of things to the next level, working with some wonderful local producers to make fantastic chutneys, honeys, balsamics and crackers that can pair wonderfully with certain types of cheese.

It's been hard seeing our hospitality colleagues suffer. We've also worked with a lot of friends in the craft drinks industry in recent months and have great plans for pairing classes and tastings.

The last two years have been hard but we've got through it and we hope 2022 is looking better for all of us.



FRASER MACLELLAN
THE EAST LONDON CHEESE BOARD

2022 is potentially going to be an interesting year for indie retailers such as ourselves. In our experience, we see ourselves as plugging the gaps between cheesemakers and consumers. We like to find cheeses that are not readily available everywhere else, or are from very small-scale producers, with our aim being to help get more cheeses from cheesemakers big and small in front of consumers. As an indie retailer, this flexibility is something that we can cope with easily, whereas larger retailers may have a more rigid product range, so newer or smaller cheeses may take time to get in front of consumers.

We try to be supportive of our cheesemakers as much as we can and this was especially evident during the various lockdowns, when many of them were struggling with too much stock when hospitality closed. Our smaller scale allowed us to shift our model quickly, take more cheese from the cheesemakers who were struggling and get it to our local customers who didn't or couldn't travel far due to Covid.

We created specific selections to help British cheesemakers, and being an indie with a personal relationship with our customers, we were able to get the message across about the need to support cheesemakers in difficult times a bit more easily.

This is one of the aspects I really love about being a small business. We really get the chance to connect with our customers, understand their likes and dislikes, tastes, willingness to experiment, budgets, etc. This allows us to really tailor what we offer them to their individual needs, and over time as this understanding grows we're able to tinker with what we can offer them or suggest some perfectly matched products.

This has an impact on the wider food industry too, as we are able to recommend other items to go with the cheese, such as crackers, chutneys, and other accompaniments. We also love pairing products, especially drinks, with the cheeses we stock, and in our shop and café, Froth & Rind, we have a good range of wines and beers that we pair with our cheeses. We like to seek out slightly out of the ordinary pairings that you might not normally expect and work with local suppliers when we can. At the moment we're working on pairing some small-batch Scottish rums with cheeses, and we've come up with some amazing matches. This means that as cheese sales grow, we can also increase the sales of these other products and hopefully help some of the smaller producers in this area too.

> "It would be great to see more collaboration across the whole cheese ecosystem in 2022. It's quite a big ask and would take a lot of organising, but you never know..."

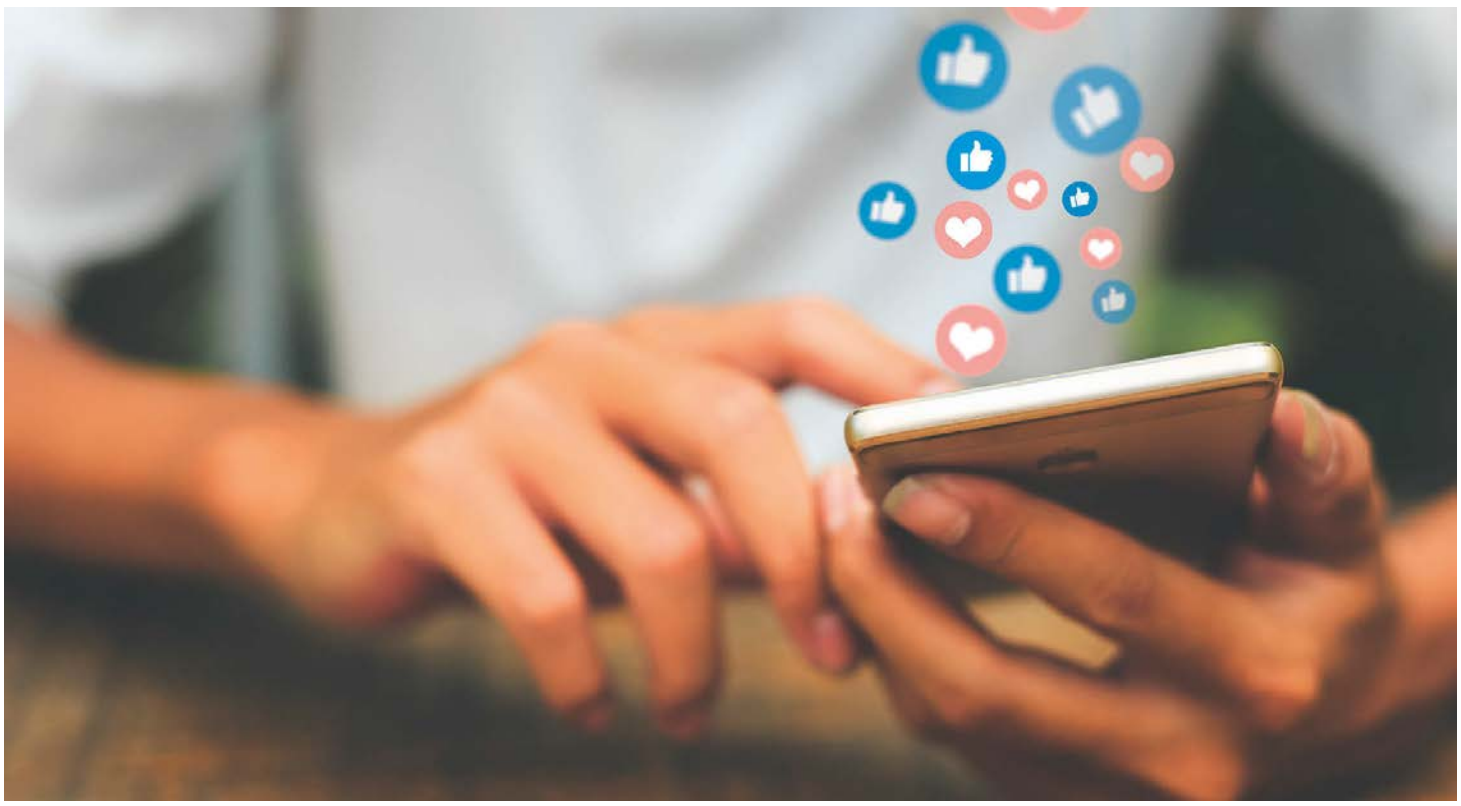
We also use our customers to try new products for us. Whenever we get samples of cheese or indeed other products, we'll share them with some regular customers and get their feedback. This is valuable feedback on the product for us and we think it helps build a bond between us and the customer.

Some things will change for us going into 2022 as things slowly head back to normality. Over the past couple of years, some of the cheesemakers have had to find new ways to get their cheese to customers, including direct sales online and farm/dairy shops. This is great, as it gives the consumer much more of a choice and there's something nice about buying direct from the maker. It does, however, create another challenge for us to adapt to, but that keeps us on our toes, which is no bad thing.

For ourselves, we've gained a lot of new customers over the past couple of years and as we're welcoming more people back into the shop, we're looking forward to introducing them to a whole new range of great cheeses.

I think there are also some nice challenges for indies going into 2022. Over the past couple of years we've had tremendous support from our customers, and I think 2022 is the year where we try and repay some of that. Whether it be new products, rewarding loyalty, or other means, I think it's important for us to find ways of saying thank you to our customers and continuing to innovate and bring in the best products we can find.

One thing it would be great to see in 2022 is more collaboration across the whole cheese ecosystem. For example, there were a number of cheeses we just couldn't get a hold of for Christmas, despite ordering well in advance, which resulted in us having some disappointed customers. Then, in January, I noticed a number of larger retailers selling off these same cheeses at a huge discount. So they obviously had too much, we and some other indies didn't have enough, some customers missed out on their favourite cheeses at Christmas (although may have got it heavily discounted in January), so there's a bit of a loss for everyone involved. It'd be great for some way of all working together to make sure the right cheeses get to the right customers via whatever outlet works best. It's quite a big ask and would take a lot of organising, but you never know...



DIGITAL UPSKILLING

We find out how cheese sellers can up the ante of their digital business in 2022

Is 2022 the year you take your business to the next level online? For cheesemongers and delis, digital platforms offer opportunities to reach new markets, tap into an ever-growing customer base and engage with shoppers to encourage repeat sales. If you've yet to take advantage of this growth market, there's no time like the present. Discover four tips from industry professionals who have paved the way.

1 NARROW YOUR FOCUS

It may seem wise to make your shop visible on every social media platform out there to maximise potential followers, but chances are if you're a small, artisan retailer, you don't have loads of spare time to learn the ins and outs of every picky social media algorithm. For that reason, don't be afraid to narrow your focus and concentrate on using one or two platforms really well. "Instagram is the main social media channel we use at Slate," explains Clare Jackson of Slate Cheese. "Since April 2018, I have been posting regularly on behalf of the business. Our account is a vibrant visual record of what goes on in the shops, and also my personal journey in the world of cheese.

"I tend to push posts across to Facebook, but since I don't use it personally this isn't a focus in terms of following others and interacting. I have also stopped using our Twitter account as I feel Instagram is better suited to the visual appeal of cheese," Clare says.

2 BE CONSISTENT... BUT ALSO AUTHENTIC

"The best engagement comes from making a content plan and posting regularly," Clare advises. Although, she admits, "Posting regularly and putting things on our Story can be time consuming, and I find when things are busy on the shop floor, I often overlook posting – even though there's lots to share." It's a scenario that many cheesemongers will no doubt be familiar with. Clare's advice? "I find a scheduling app such as Later can help with this, but I also like to be spontaneous and share what I am doing or enjoying at a moment in time."

Consistent posts certainly keep a constant stream of customers engaged, but once again the quality of your message is more important than quantity of posts. Authenticity can win your shop loyalty online, too, so don't be afraid to veer away from the slick studio shots to day-to-day photos of your changing cheese displays, a behind-the-scenes visit to a cheesemaker or photographs from around town. After all, if you're promoting your shop as a cheese destination, it's a good idea to show off what makes your shop and the local area around it so great.

> "The best engagement comes from making a content plan and posting regularly. A scheduling app can help with this"

3 TRY NEW THINGS

In the ever-changing online world, beware of getting stuck in a rut. Try new types of posts, collaborations or giveaways to boost engagement. Some cheesemongers are even partnering with bloggers or influencers to broaden their customer base. Slate, for example, has sent out cheese boxes to individuals to share feedback with their followers and run giveaways. "I am always careful to choose who we work with so that the look and feel of their account fits with our brand," Clare says. "It can be difficult to assess the impact of these collaborations in terms of new followers or online orders, but I like the energy they can create, and hopefully they spread our offering to new eyes."

Svetlana Kukharchuk of The Cheese Lady advises that anyone going down this route plans carefully. "I would definitely recommend checking that the influencer has your target audience and agree the exact terms of the interactions before starting. Bullet point everything you are going to the influencer for in terms of product (if it's an exchange) and ask them to do the same in terms of posting."

Don't be afraid to take centre-stage in your posts either. Take The Cheese Shop Nottingham for example – owners Rob and Webb Freckingham have created a persona, Dr Cheese, who introduces new cheeses via videos on Facebook and Instagram. It's become so popular that he is now recognised around the local area. Braving the camera with videos through Instagram's Reels or Stories, TikTok or posting directly to your shop's website engages your audience and gives a personal touch to your e-commerce site.

4 LEARN FROM THE PROS

If you have any experience using social media already, you'll know that the companies behind these apps are quick to update and change the way their systems work. E-commerce capabilities are always advancing, too, which means learning digital skills isn't a one-time box to tick but a constant journey.

"Over the years I have done online courses and research on the best practises to raise my social media game. But of course, there is always more to learn in this fast-evolving industry," Svetlana says. For the most part, she has found helpful webinars through her Instagram and Facebook feeds. "Their clever algorithms always 'knew' the right webinars to suggest to me based on my interests." But she insists that there is advice out there for anyone. "There are so many influencer courses for any taste, but the influencers I found most interesting were Jenna Kutcher and Beth Kirby, even though their businesses are not directly related to food," she says. "They are always up to date on the best practices."



PAIRING IDEAS



CANDICE FONSECA
PROPRIETOR OF DELIFONSECA

WHAT'S ON YOUR DREAM CHEESEBOARD?
I don't want to be disloyal to the fantastic new British cheesemakers, but I'm all about strength of flavour on my dream cheeseboard. Époisses would be the first one; it's quite a naughty, smelly washed-rind cheese that originates from France. It actually smells stronger than it tastes. Then we'd add Roquefort, which is a classic blue mould king of French cheeses and is made from sheep's milk. Since it's my dream board I'd get them via the affineur Hennart, as they add extra magic to all the cheeses they mature. Next up is Reypenaer XO Reserve, a Dutch cheese that can be ripened for us to three years and is amazing. Last but not least I'd add Gubbeen, from Cork in Ireland, which has a distinct creamy, nutty, mushroomy, savoury flavour.

WHAT'S YOUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE CHEESE PAIRING?
One suggested by our deli's general manager Boo – Bison Grass Vodka with Cerney Ash. It's a pyramid-shaped cheese coated in a mix of oak ash and sea salt to protect the light and fragile contents within. Never be afraid to be daring when it comes to cheese pairings!

ANY UNUSUAL PAIRINGS YOU'D RECOMMEND?
One that I enjoyed on our business' 10th birthday last year was plum sake and Cashel Blue. Believe me – it works. Likewise, Naga Chilli Vodka and a really mature Cheddar can be a 'shockingly' good combination.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE TO DRINK WITH CHEESE?
When it comes to the perfect drink to accompany cheese, there's a variety of go-to brands and bottles. I would say Lyme Bay's fruit wines often go well. Think of them as a liquid equivalent of pressed fruit or a fruity chutney. Quince or damson wine or liqueur go well, but their Blackbeer & Raisin Wine is especially with a nice strong Cheddar.

WHAT CHEESE GIFTS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?
Cheesemaking kits are very popular, and our favourite is The Ultimate by the Big Cheese Making Kit Company, especially at Christmas. I would always suggest a good cheese book though – lots of them give you that nudge to make you a bit more adventurous when it comes to what cheeses you try, and that's always a good thing.

Hartington Creamery launches new cheese for Platinum Jubilee

Artisan, farmhouse cheesemaker Hartington Creamery has launched a soft blue cheese to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The limited-edition cheese, called Platinum Blue, has a unique recipe that is "both sweet and savoury but mild and delicious too," according to farm and creamery director Robert Gosling.

"As this is such a special year of celebrations, we have drawn upon our years of expertise within our family of cheesemakers here at Hartington, led by our head cheesemaker Diana Alcock, to create such a unique new cheese which we are delighted to bring to market," Robert continued. "We hope [Platinum Blue is] a crowd pleaser and indeed fit for royalty." The Platinum Jubilee will mark the Queen's 70 years on the throne and will culminate in a four-day UK bank holiday weekend from 2nd to 5th June.



COMPARED TO **2019**, VOLUMES OF CHEESE IN **2021** WERE UP **13.5%**, SHOWING **COVID** STILL HAS A STRONG **IMPACT** ON RETAIL SALES. **SPECIALITY** AND **CONTINENTAL** CHEESE SAW THE GREATEST **GROWTH**, ESPECIALLY MOZZARELLA AT **+6.5%** COMPARED TO **2020**

SOURCE: AHDB

Goat's cheese crowned best organic product of 2022

After more than 5,000 people cast their vote and a professional jury debated 31 different products, Mèkkertaler, an organic goat's cheese from Dutch cheese specialist Treur Kaas, was named the best organic product of the year.

The jury included trend watcher Anneke Ammerlaan, innovation expert Bart Fischer and Michaël Wilde, managing director of Bionext, which helped organise the awards. The group selected the winning organic product on the basis of its sustainable production process and innovation. They said Mèkkertaler was, "A fantastic new product on the cheese shelves. A fine piece of innovation through industrious labour, and that deserves an award." They continued, "All principles of the organic sector are found in this product. Care, honesty and the social aspect, all is included in the production of this goat's cheese. A story that we of the organic sector should tell more often."

The Emmental-style cheese, which has holes called eyes, is made by De Mèkkerstee, a farm in Ouddorp, before being matured for around eight weeks by Treur Kaas.





NEWS IN BRIEF

US COURTS RULE AMERICAN COMPANIES CAN MAKE 'GRUYERE'

American cheesemakers will be able to continue marketing cheeses under the name 'gruyere' after a federal judge in the US ruled that it was a generic style of cheese that could be made anywhere. Gruyère is highly protected, and in Switzerland and France producers must follow strict rules to use the name thanks to their respective AOP and PGI designations. However, the judge ruled that American consumers don't take Gruyère's long history into account when they buy cheese labelled gruyere, rendering the term "generic". French and Swiss producers have vowed to appeal the decision.

FETA CHEESE HIT BY SHORTAGES

Seasonal production cycles and the rising price of milk in Greece have led to a shortage of Feta in the UK, *The Grocer* reported. In December, global dairy prices were up by almost 17% for the year, compared with 2020. Panos Manuelides, founder of UK-based Greek food importer Odysea, said shortages of Feta had been ongoing in the UK since October, and even Greek supermarkets had seen shortfalls. Despite Brexit border changes taking place at the same time, insiders said they didn't believe Brexit was the cause of the shortages.

Virtual Cheese Awards launches for third year

The Virtual Cheese Awards is back with a bang for 2022, with entries across a range of classes now open. Entries close on 20th March 2022, and the live final will be held on Friday 13th May 2022, hosted by BBC broadcaster and local food and drink champion Nigel Barden.

The online awards' innovative format offers a completely open and transparent judging process that is shared online, so every single cheese will receive valuable and thoughtful feedback from its panel of esteemed cheese judges.

"Knowledge is power and for the British cheese industry to continue thriving, we need to arm producers with solid, informed feedback on their products," said Sarah de Wit, co-founder of Virtual Cheese Awards. "Cheesemakers pour their hearts into carefully crafting, maturing and testing their cheese so it can be frustrating to be left in the dark when the cheeses are entered into awards.

"The Virtual Cheese Awards aim to lift the lid on the secret world of judging as well as showcase the immense amount of creativity in our amazing British cheese industry," she continued. "Whether it's brand-new cheeses, classic British territorials and Cheddars, twists on traditional or Continental styles or great examples of British handmade artisan cheese, we want to celebrate them all."

Thousands of cheese fans tuned in to watch the live unveiling of the 2021 Best British Cheese, which was awarded to a Spanish-inspired fresh cow's milk cheese, La Fresca Margarita, from Somerset-based Feltham's Farm. Joint silver was awarded to Harvey & Brockless by Cellar Dairy for its goat's cheese Blanche and Butler's Farmhouse Cheeses for its oak-fired Red Leicester Smouldering Ember. Wyke Farms was awarded bronze with its Ivy's Reserve Vintage Cheddar.
The Virtual Cheese Awards Best of British cheese prize includes:

- Free editorial features and digital coverage in both *Speciality Food* magazine and *Great British Food* magazine, worth £4,000
- An opportunity to have the winning cheese showcased at Speciality & Fine Food Fair 2022 by the VCA team, worth approximately £5,000
- A Level 1 Academy of Cheese course and a year's subscription, worth over £300

For more information on the third edition of the awards, head to **virtualcheeseawards.com**.



FELTHAM'S FARM, 2021 BEST BRITISH CHEESE WINNERS



"Seasonality is key"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

Putting together a selection of fine cheese can be a challenge. There is so much to consider. Balance is key when considering types of cheese to be sold. Relationships with the cheesemakers are important, but as a retailer/cheesemonger you have to put your business first in the buying decisions. Do not just buy from the same producer because you have done for years and you like them...

The artisan and farmhouse cheese making world is changing for the better. New producers are springing up all over the country. Naturally there are some that do it better than others so it is always important to know your products and sample the goods before committing. Never buy cheese blind.

In the middle of winter, consider the seasonal cheese that suits this time. A great cheese in the winter is Stilton or if you can get it Stichelton (a raw milk version), cheese like Ogleshield (made by Jamie Montgomery) similar to the French Raclette cheese is also a must for the colder season as it melts perfectly over potatoes with a side of pickles and meats. Consider other cow's milk washed rind cheeses such as the new "Pippin" cheese made by cheesemaker Sam Guinness and washed in brandy. Listen to my podcast "No2's The Cheese Wrap" available through Spotify, where I talk to Sam Guinness about his cheesemaking journey.

A great Cheddar will also bring cheer to any winter cheese board. Personally, I suggest a cracking Montgomery; as this is a such a super expressive Cheddar, you really taste the terroir along with exceptionally savoury notes closer to the rind that lead to a bright fudgy, buttery and fruity heart. Do not forget the terrific soft cow's cheese produced in the UK such as Baron Bigod Brie, from Suffolk and Caws Cenarth's Golden Cenarth from Carmarthenshire, a washed rind that is perfect for roasting.

When considering sheep and goat's cheese it is best to stay with the harder aged cheeses. This is because in the UK the milk will generally be from last spring, summer or early autumn. For the rest of the year the sheep and goats have some time off between lactations and they are able to keep out of the cold and rain. One great ewe's milk cheese well known for this time of year is Corra Linn, from Errington Cheese from Lanarkshire, Scotland – and if you can get it – Tinto, a hard goats cheese from the same producer. In Sussex we have a fabulous cheese named Ewe Eat Me, which is not dissimilar to Manchego and just perfect with a good cured meat selection and roasted almonds.

So, when you are putting your selections into the counter this year, do take time to consider the seasonality of your produce. I am sure that the more we respect the seasons it can only benefit the land, animals and the producers. Ultimately, we need to educate our customers. For too long supermarket shelves have been filled with foods that should not be available at the time they are being sold. Seasonality needs respecting, as do the animals that produce milk to make cheese. Why feed animals with prescriptive substitute foods that make the cheese characterless? I think you will know the answer there...

Cheese can form part of a balanced diet and should be respected as an important food source that can provide us with protein, fats, calcium, minerals and vitamins. It is a food source that has been made for tens of thousands of years. Harder cheeses could be kept for several months so would have been an important part of our ancestors' winter diets.

Seasonality is key and will help you form points of interest with your team and audience. Have a seasonal cheese box available with tasting notes; make sure you say a few words about the producer. If you want to add value to your offering by selling seasonal produce that is made ethically and with good land management then you know what to do.

> "When you are putting your selections into the counter this year, do take time to consider the seasonality of your produce. For too long supermarket shelves have been filled with foods that should not be available at the time they are being sold. Seasonality needs respecting, as do the animals that produce milk to make cheese"

COMMENTATORS



MATTHEW HALL
BUTLERS FARMHOUSE CHEESES



CLARE JACKSON
SLATE CHEESE



EDWARD HANCOCK
THE CHEESE GEEK



RUSSELL ALLEN
AUBREY ALLEN



JEN GRIMSTONE-JONES
CHEESE ETC

HOW TO: SELL CHEESE

Ellen Manning uncovers the recipe for cheese retail success

It's been a torrid few years for the UK cheese industry. From the disastrous effects of the Covid pandemic's initial lockdown to a surge in sales as people focused on the edible pleasures they could enjoy at home, it's been a rollercoaster for the sector. According to *The Grocer*, the category added £49.4m in 2021. Smaller than the previous year's gain of £257m but still a strong sign of the nation's renewed love for cheese. An increased focus on health and concerns for the environment around dairy could affect sales this year, but the popularity garnered by cheese over the past 24 months means its future remains bright. Writing in Mintel's *UK Cheese Market Report 2021*, its author Alice Pilkington said, "Covid-19 has provided a considerable boost to cheese thanks to its affordability, versatility and the increased cooking from scratch trend. Whilst an increased consumer focus on health and the environment poses a threat to the market, openness to vegan/plant-based alternatives offers a way to keep people engaged. The use of cheese as a meat replacement and long-term working from home should also help to support the market going forward."

Cheesemakers themselves are noticing the continued support and are optimistic for the year ahead. "Products with purpose and provenance is a trend that we expect to continue this year," says Matthew Hall, fourth-generation owner of Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses in rural Lancashire. While the pandemic brought heightened consumer awareness and desire for quality, British-made products, it also allowed customers to recognise their part in dictating what's available to them when they shop, he told *Speciality Food*. "We are seeing it in the growth in speciality cheeses, people have become more adventurous with their cheese choices as usage occasions have soared – they want to explore something different or a little bit special which, in turn, is driving retailer behaviour on what to stock."

1 COMMUNICATE WITH SUPPLIERS

For many cheese retailers, the key to getting sourcing right is by working in partnership with suppliers. "The main thing is to really listen to those who are supplying you, be that your wholesalers or the farms directly," says Clare Jackson, owner of Slate Cheese, a specialist cheese retailer in Southwold and Aldeburgh in Suffolk. "They are the people who know the cheese best. They can advise on what's tasting really good, or can explain why something is maybe looking or tasting a bit different at the moment. We have some really knowledgeable wholesalers and take a lot of guidance from them. We also buy directly from cheesemakers and they are the best people to help you understand their cheese." She gives St Jude as an example, whose appearance can vary – a change that her supplier explains to her and she in turn can explain to a customer. "If we didn't have that direct connection and we weren't listening to the person providing cheese, we might think there was some kind of problem. Listening to the person you're sourcing the cheese from is really important."

2 BUILD TRUST

While every retailer would love to have a hotline to cheesemakers across the country, Edward Hancock, founder of online cheese retailer The Cheese Geek, admits a new business may not be able to start that way. Like other newcomers, when he started out, Hancock had to source from wholesalers until he could build trust and relationships. "It was important that they understood what we were trying to achieve, what sort of customers we wanted to attract, and ensure it was a two-way relationship," he told *Speciality Food*. "I did go out and meet a lot of cheesemakers to get to know them, to understand their story, but the reality is when you're first starting out, it's quite difficult to source directly." That can shift as you become more established, he says, but it might take time and is based as much on trust as volume.

3 GROW YOUR NETWORK

Longstanding relationships are something Russell Allen, managing director of Warwickshire-based butchers and deli Aubrey Allen, has built over decades. They not only ensure steady supply but also allow a dialogue that can help a retailer discover new cheeses and potentially stock them ahead of rivals. "Speak to your wholesalers constantly, have a relationship with them and say, 'Let us try some of the different stuff. Let us give you feedback from our customers." For Allen, it's also important not to overlook the old favourites in a drive to focus on British-made cheese. "A lot of people now are just focusing on British and Irish, which is admirable, but let's not forget some of the great cheeses out there from the Continent to complement it. I admire the move and I understand why, but we're ignoring a lot of the fantastic French, Italian and Spanish cheeses out there."

4 CARE FOR YOUR STOCK

As a small bricks and mortar retailer, stocking and storing cheese you've carefully sourced to keep it in the best condition can be a challenge. For many shops, the key is stocking just the right amount so you don't have to store it, whilst making sure you still have plenty to offer to customers. "We have an old-fashioned shop with serve over fridges," says Jen Grimstone-Jones, owner of Cheese Etc. The Pangbourne Cheese Shop, near Reading. "I'd love to have a walk-in cold room but our lease doesn't allow for major changes. Everything is kept refrigerated and cut cheese is wrapped in clingfilm. I unwrap and check each cheese every day and trim as required. On the whole though, we have almost no cheese wastage as we have a great customer base and also sell to local schools, caterers and restaurants so we have a lot of avenues to move cheeses which are in optimal eating condition." Jackson adopts a similar approach at Slate. "You need lots of space to store cheese, so we don't particularly hold a lot of stock, and we don't mature cheese ourselves. We tend to buy stock based on what we'll sell in the next two or three weeks."



If you are planning on storing cheese, it's important to do it right, says Martin Gott, owner of Altrincham-based New Market Dairy, which sells British Isles artisan farmhouse cheeses direct to the public and to hospitality businesses across Manchester. A cheesemaker too, producing a range of specialist goat's and sheep's milk cheeses with partner Nicola Robinson at their Holker Farm dairy, near Cartmel in Cumbria,

> "Good cheese is a big, big growing market and if you've done your job correctly, people will come back"





Gott's advice is to think about the kit you'll need. "Look really carefully at refrigeration systems – selecting the right system for your space is critical to ensuring the quality of your cheeses. Don't forget about lighting either, because if you get it wrong it can be disastrous. Invest in high quality LEDs for a shop setting or make the most of all available natural light if you're trading outside – remember heat is your enemy."

5 CONSIDER DISPLAY

Of course, you can source the right cheese and keep it in perfect condition, but the real aim is to sell it. While lockdowns changed the way retailers sold cheese to their lactose-loving customers, a slow return to normality has seen newer sales tactics continue alongside the return of more traditional cheese-selling techniques. For Allen, it's about making sure your display looks great – boasting a decent choice that will offer the right balance of old favourites and new options your customers may not have tried before. "One of the difficulties is to have a full counter, especially in quiet months like January, but I think it's essential. If you're not prepared to put a good counter out, even in the quiet months, your sales will be low – it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy." It's still wise to adapt your counter, he says, potentially stocking more hard or semi-hard cheeses that are less perishable during quiet times, but



it's imperative to have a good range on offer at all times. "You've got to be bold, you've got to stick with it." For him, the key to selling face-to-face is to start a conversation, offering a customer something to try and engaging them what you've got. "They want to be guided, they want to be recommended. I always have a piece of cheese behind the counter and cut a piece off and say, 'Would you like to try this cheese?' Get into the conversation, and quickly it moves from a browsing position into a purchase."

6 CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS – IN PERSON...

Grimstone-Jones agrees that customers often actively seek recommendations, willing to put their trust in their cheesemonger. "It's all about making the cheese counter look inviting and guiding customers. Letting customers try before they buy helps, but our customers trust us and we get to know the things they like. We're in a small village and know our regular customers by name, some always buy the same things, others will be adventurous. At the end of the day we're selling an amazing product and we do it with a smile!" Jackson agrees, admitting cheese almost "sells itself" when you can give customers a taste. But part of the added value that comes with a higher price point is the benefit of knowledge and advice. That includes a cheesemonger's ability to find the right vocabulary to bring that cheese to life for a customer, whether through an explanation of its story, or the tasting notes themselves.

... AND ONLINE

While online selling may miss out on those face-to-face moments, it doesn't mean certain tactics can't be used to make sure the customer gets the best experience possible, says Hancock. For The Cheese Geek, curation is key – guiding customers in the same way a cheesemonger would, but virtually instead. The Cheese Geek initially only offered curated selections, and while it may have developed since then, the ability to guide a customer remains key to selling. "We're trying to say to people, 'if you don't necessarily have that knowledge base, you haven't had this long relationship with cheese, but you love cheese and you want to get into it, it's easy to do and it's accessible'. It's like when you go to a fine dining restaurant, you take the tasting menu, because you're entrusting the chef to put it all together for you." Putting together a cheese board to suit a particular person's tastes and preferences may be hard through an online interaction, but Hancock says there are ways to make it happen, from providing as many interactive moments as possible to allow the customer input into their decision, as well as collecting data over time to help understand that customer's preferences – in the same way a cheesemonger would learn their regulars' likes and dislikes.

When it comes to fulfilling customers' needs, it's important to remember that cheese rarely stands alone, so successful selling may rely not only on putting different cheeses together but offering pairings with wines and beers, or adding to people's purchases with other products. "Don't forget to think about the array of products you can cross sell to supplement your income," says Gott, "such as artisan breads, condiments, crackers and so on, so you'll need to think about displaying these too." It may seem daunting, but those in the industry are optimistic. The return of in-person shopping and the fact cheese retailers didn't just survive – but thrived – during such a difficult time, means they are ready and willing to make sure cheese sales stay at the top of their game. For Allen, 2022 is looking promising. "I think people are going to be more and more interested in buying good cheese. It's something that is a big, big growing market and if you've done your job correctly, people will come back."

> "If you're not prepared to put a good counter out, even in the quiet months, your sales will be low – it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy"





MEET 2022'S FINE FOOD SHOPPERS

Speciality Food explores the different consumer profiles on the scene this year, and how retailers can attract each one to their shop

From the emergence of the bright-eyed e-commerce shopper in 2020 to the swift rise of conscious consumption in 2021, the past two years have seen a complete overhaul of consumer shopping habits. New behaviours have taken shape over the course of the pandemic because of the effect Covid-19 has had on consumers' ideas of health and wellness, their ability to visit shops safely and, of course, their wallets. At the same time, Brexit and supply shortages have played their part in changing the way we shop. To win business in 2022, fine food retailers need to understand who their customers are now.

The price-sensitive shopper

Although the message during the pandemic was 'we're all in this together', Covid-19's effects have been far from universal. While many home workers saw their savings accounts grow in lockdown, those that were in a less stable position were hit harder by the shut-down of the economy. On top of that, inflation has rocketed in recent months, leaving many households worried about their spending. Two in five Britons (43%) reported that their household income had fallen behind the cost of living over the last few months, according to a poll by Kantar in late 2021. Seven in 10 Brits were very or fairly concerned that the price of fresh food would increase. The British Retail Consortium said food inflation in December had reached its highest rate since March 2019, and fresh food inflation "accelerated significantly" to its highest since April 2013.

HOW TO SELL TO PRICE-SENSITIVE SHOPPERS

Rather than trying to attract these shoppers by slashing prices, retailers can appeal to customers for whom supporting local businesses is important. Remember to shout about your ethical credentials, such as local suppliers, plastic-free options or community-support initiatives. Focus on your unique selling points too, like on-site experiences that provide families with a fun and affordable day out, and put permissible treats front and centre. "With living costs on the rise, shoppers will prioritise saving on their day-to-day spending to allow themselves occasional treats and do things that they have missed during the various lockdowns and restricted periods," Dan Gillett, shopper insight manager at IGD, tells *Speciality Food*. "The more affluent amongst them may look to independent retailers for treat occasions when they replace an out-of-home visit with a special meal at home," he continues. "If independent retailers can provide an offering specifically aimed at special, treat occasions and make this quick and easy for shoppers, including delivery via quick commerce operators, then they should be able to achieve some success despite a potential cut back on their daily spending."

The eco shopper

The profile of the sustainable consumer was boosted last year due to COP26, but how big is this opportunity in 2022? According to the *Who Cares, Who Does?* study by Kantar, 22% of households in the UK are classified as 'eco actives', meaning they are highly concerned about the environment and are taking action to reduce their waste, up from just 16% in 2019. The largest proportion (40%) are eco-considerers, who are worried about the environment and plastic waste but are not taking many actions to reduce their waste.

While the eco-active category remains in the minority today, Kantar's experts say the segment will grow to 40% of all households over the next five years and to more than half by 2029. With conscious consumption on the rise, this group's purchasing power is only going to grow – and fast. Research by PwC published in December said 52% of respondents were more eco-friendly than six months ago, up two percentage points from its June 2021 survey. It's estimated that FMCG and consumer packaged goods shopping by eco-actives globally will be worth a stunning $925bn by 2026, up from $446bn in 2021, with a growth rate more than five times faster than the grocery market as a whole.

HOW TO SELL TO ECO SHOPPERS

"For 2022, we expect shoppers to continue with familiar behaviours – trying to limit the plastic they buy and, where they can't, recycle the packaging that they do have to buy – and looking to the industry and the government to take bigger actions around greenhouse gases, energy use and water use on their behalf," Dan says. So stress your sustainability credentials, however big or small, and keep your customers in the loop with new changes that you make to reduce waste, cut plastic use or decarbonise. Think about the ways in which you're already ahead of the crowd, like local sourcing and shorter supply chains. And don't forget to check out your suppliers' eco credentials – by stocking sustainable brands, their successes can be yours too. Find more ideas for boosting your shop's ethical credentials on page 15.

> "Since the pandemic, many consumers are deciding that they want to consume more responsibly and ethically"



The digitally savvy shopper

E-commerce is now an expectation for retailers large or small, rather than a nice-to-have. After Covid-19 inspired many to shop online for groceries for the first time, 90% plan to keep buying their food and drink online after the pandemic ends, according to research by Mintel. And it's not just Generation Z driving the e-commerce industry forward. Out of necessity, many older shoppers began their online shopping sprees, and Euromonitor reports 'digital seniors' are one of its top 10 global consumer trends for 2022. "People aged 60+ are the predominant cohort of the top income band, accounting for nearly one-quarter and making older consumers an important target for businesses," the report said. "Easy-to-use technology and seamless solutions combined with face-to-face communication define the future of digital inclusion for seniors."

Mobile shopping is on the rise, too. According to research by PwC, 41% of those surveyed say they shop daily or weekly via their mobile or smartphone, compared with just 12% five years ago. With quick-commerce apps like Getir and Gorillas promising deliveries in minutes, the e-commerce landscape is changing fast.

HOW TO SELL TO DIGITALLY SAVVY SHOPPERS

While speciality retailers' in-store shopping experiences are focused on exploration, when it comes to e-commerce, customers' motivators are time and money. "Shoppers



> With living costs on the rise, shoppers will prioritise saving on their day-to-day spending to allow themselves occasional treats

value their time more than they did before, having re-evaluated how they spend it over the pandemic period," Dan says, "and with various financial challenges, they need to economise. Online, this will mean that the winners will be those providing the best loyalty schemes or delivery discounts, those who offer the easiest and quickest service, and those that offer the best guarantee that shoppers will get everything they want in one shop." And as well as the weekly shop, more customers will be heading online to buy evening meals and food-to-go thanks to the rise in quick-commerce deliveries, Dan says, so don't forget to cater for these areas too.

The nostalgic shopper

Nostalgia has been a common theme since the pandemic arrived in the UK, and it's going nowhere fast. Comfort is key, and although health food is used as a way to manage anxiety by the modern consumer (more on this later), traditional meals and retro products provide a dose of comfort that's hard to beat. According to The International Food Information Council, the prevalence of nostalgia means "all things simple and familiar will guide our food choices, whether it's the recipes we follow or the snacks we reach for".

"Nostalgia in Western Europe had been growing in popularity over the past few years, but since the world was beset by Coronavirus, consumers have increasingly turned to the past to give themselves a sense of stability and manage their anxieties," says Nina Marston, a senior research analyst at Euromonitor International. "Hence nostalgic food and drink products have seen an uptick in demand since the first lockdowns in 2020."

HOW TO SELL TO THE NOSTALGIC SHOPPER

Stock the classics. Products like Rodda's Clotted Cream and traditional flavours like chocolate and orange and saw a huge uplift last year thanks to the nostalgia trend. As well as looking for sweet success stories, why not give a fresh twist on classic dishes in your café? Think about 'next-generation nostalgia', too. "Since the pandemic, many consumers are deciding that they want to consume more responsibly and ethically," Nina says. "For this reason, brands can turn to what can be called 'progressive nostalgia' which celebrates authenticity and returning to their core values while adapting to modern day ideas about social progress." Think traditional-flavoured crisps made to sustainable recipes, or nostalgic packaging designs alongside revamped product formulations.

The wellness shopper

Health, wellness and wellbeing are now "a substantial consideration" in consumers' everyday choices, according to Genevieve Aronson, global head of thought leadership at Nielsen IQ. Immune-boosting products have achieved mainstream status, and gut health claims are boasted by a number of food and drink companies – including in the fine food sector.

Mintel predicts that nutrition will begin to be practised as self-care. According to its research, 78% of US consumers say eating healthy is important for their emotional wellbeing. In China, 44% of adults believe having a good gut reduces anxiety. This trend offers food and drink a way to tap into the wellness movement with products that promote 'mindful eating' or which boast 'mood food' claims.

HOW TO SELL TO THE WELLNESS SHOPPER

Even in their treats, health-seeking consumers will want products that carry a wellness claim – whether that's adaptogen ingredients like trending ashwagandha and magnesium that promote relaxation, or more familiar botanicals like lavender and chamomile. They'll be seeking out clean label products in order to cut down on artificial ingredients and promote everything natural. The low-alcohol trend will also continue to make waves as shoppers look to moderate their drinking habits. If your customers aren't swayed by buzzy superfood ingredients and vegan labels, appeal to classic healthy eating trends with local, fresh produce, grass-fed meat and organic goods.

LOOKING AHEAD: A UNIQUE CHALLENGE ON THE HORIZON

"April and May 2022 will hit shopper finances hard, with national insurance rises as well as the energy price cap review," says Dan. "These changes will impact the least well-off hardest, as more of their disposable income goes to energy bills, with more affluent shoppers faring relatively well. This is likely to create a division amongst shoppers, giving rise to a challenge for retailers and manufacturers to deliver to two groups who both have similar priorities – treating themselves and enjoying their time post-pandemic – but with very different financial situations and budgets."

74%

OF GLOBAL RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THEIR PRIORITIES AND SHOPPING HABITS HAVE BEEN IMPACTED TO SOME DEGREE BY COVID-19

30%

FEEL THEY HAVE A TOTALLY DIFFERENT SET OF PRIORITIES NOW VERSUS PRE-COVID IN 2019

SOURCE: NIELSENIQ 2022 CONSUMER OUTLOOK SURVEY

> Shoppers value their time more than they did before, having re-evaluated how they spend it over the pandemic period





SHOW PREVIEW
IFE 2022

The UK's most trusted food & drink product-sourcing event returns to London 21st-23rd March

IFE, International Food & Drink Event returns to ExCeL London on 21st-23rd March to reunite the food and drink sector and kickstart business for 2022.

With a history going back over 40 years, IFE has long been a trusted resource for food and drink buyers to source a wide range of British and international products and gain valuable insights into key industry trends and thought leadership. Most importantly, the show gives retail and wholesale professionals the chance to grow their business, meet the people behind the brands set to line their shelves and taste a huge range of products all under one roof.

In addition to representing the world's largest selection of UK food and drink suppliers, IFE 2022 will showcase innovative businesses from over 100 countries, something that the event's key buyers are welcoming after two years of challenging travel restrictions.

Mahesh Patel, director of buying - group commercial at Bidfood, said, "It will be great to see what IFE will be showcasing this year, from connecting with existing suppliers to finding new ones along with an update on trends and products coming into the industry. It will also be great to see overseas suppliers attending the show, after the lockdowns and the prevention of visits aboard and vice versa over the past two years. This should benefit everyone in the supply chain network within the food industry."

The latest trends

The show's Future Food Stage will host a wide range of fascinating topics across the three days of the event, delving deep into issues such as meeting the needs of the 24/7 customer, predicting and driving changes in consumer behaviour and reaching key goals on the road to achieving net zero. Visitors to the event can hear from leading food, drink and retail brands such as Gorillas, BOSH!, and Nestle, plus research and insights from key partners including thefoodpeople, Euromonitor, HRA Global and WRAP.

Charles Banks, co-founder of thefoodpeople, will be discussing the very latest trends in sustainability in his session at the show, and he comments, "For many consumers the past two years have triggered a re-evaluation of values and purpose that in turn impacts purchasing decisions beyond price and quality. In terms of how this manifests practically, consumers want to support businesses that share their values, they need to trust the businesses that they support. This means that sustainability matters more; they want to support local where they can, they want a hybrid shopping experience both on and offline. Place matters less, as we had to get used to conducting everyday tasks in different settings, but at the same time consumers want in-person shopping and dining to safe and clean as a given."

New for 2022

New for IFE 2022 is a dedicated Vegan & Plant-Based section, in partnership with The Vegan Society, reflecting the huge growth both in the number of vegan & plant-based products on the market and interest from consumers throughout the year.

Veg Capital investor Matthew Glover commented on the trend, saying, "Most vegan businesses are striving to compete with animal-based ingredients in three main focus areas: price, taste and convenience. As more energy and funds are invested in plant-based foods, economies of scale are helping make alternative proteins more affordable. Scientists and chefs are creating better-tasting products in the development kitchens, and retailers and restaurants are allocating more space. But, it's an increasingly crowded space, so to stand out from the crowd vegan businesses also need to engage with consumers on a new level, through innovative marketing strategies and meeting consumers' ever-changing needs."

The Vegan & Plant-Based section at IFE will make it quick and convenient for vegan and plant-focussed buyers to meet with these businesses and see the diversity and creativity on display in this thriving product category.

IFE Manufacturing

New for 2022 is the launch of IFE Manufacturing, a dedicated trade event for end-to-end food & drink manufacturing and product development. This new event will provide visitors with unrivalled insights into the trends and technologies shaping new product development in food & drink, from ingredients and supplier partnerships to the very latest manufacturing and packaging solutions.

Innovation hub

The show's Innovation Platform will host a range of insightful seminar sessions, presentations and panel discussions providing a peek behind the curtain on topics such as precision fermentation, regenerative agriculture, brand licensing and the latest innovations in sustainable packaging.

Danny Bayliss, new technology research manager at Campden BRI, and panellist on the 'Is technology the route to a more sustainable future? discussion commented, "This session will be beneficial to visitors who are looking to further improve their sustainability and explore alternative ways to support decarbonisation of processes and production through new technologies.

"We will also explore future technologies which may change how manufacturers produce products for consumers, such as vertical farming, cell-cultured or plant-based alternatives to meat, better utilisation of waste streams and the development of technologies which take advantage of different energy sources, enabling a change in the way some products are produced."



Food product development consultant Nick Henson, speaking on a session entitled 'NPD Sessions: From kitchen table to factory floor', commented, "Historically, this area of new product development was dominated by established brands and companies, with large budgets, in-house resources and an openness to invest capital in manufacturing capability.

"Now the landscape has changed, such that there has never been a better time for entrepreneurs and SME to compete within the NPD arena due to consumer interest in, and acceptance of, new products from new brands, access to finance and funding options, availability of external networks, expertise and facilities to support collaborative innovation and to resource the process and access to co-manufacturing facilities.

"Innovation in the food market is still very open to entry and exploitation from entrepreneurs and SMEs, but NPD is a complex, risky, challenging activity requiring diverse experience and resource. Hence going in with a strong body of knowledge on how to approach the process is critical.

"Understanding specifically what is required, and where to find all the appropriate resource and support can be bewildering. This session will be able to answer the key burning questions in this area, and critically to ensure that entrepreneurs invest in the most fruitful areas."

Backed by the industry

A number of key associations and industry bodies are backing the show as they see it is vital support for the industry, including the Food & Drink Federation; BSI; BBIA – the Bio-Based and Biodegradable Association; the BCMPA – The Association for Contract Manufacturing, Packing, Fulfilment & Logistics; BRCGS and the Institute of Food Science & Technology.



BCMPA membership & marketing director Emma Verkaik commented, "IFE Manufacturing is a key event for bringing the full supply chain industry together to discuss the challenges, trends and innovations in the food and drink industry."

IFE 2022 takes place alongside IFE Manufacturing, London Produce Show, Hotel, Restaurant & Catering (HRC) and The Pub Show, creating the UK's largest gathering of food, drink and hospitality professionals, with more than 30,000 buyers and 1,500 suppliers.

Discover everything happening at the show, and register for your complimentary trade ticket, at ife.co.uk.

FOOD AND DRINK BRANDS AT IFE 2022

WHILL FARM OILS
STAND 3620
Hillfarm Oils is part of a farming business that grows rapeseed, among other crops. The seeds are pressed to produce Hillfarm Cold Pressed Rapeseed Oil which is bottled for retailers, caterers and manufacturers. All this happens in Hillfarm's solar powered, BRC-certified, production barn. The Hillfarm Oil is used to produce a range of flavoured oils, mayonnaises and salad cream while the 14 million Hillfarm bees produce honey from the flowering crops on the farm.

AGROFUSION STAND 1459
Agrofusion is a vertically integrated group of companies in Ukraine and a global B2B tomato grower and processor. Their companies are located in the south of Ukraine, which is traditionally known as a tomato growing region. They seed, nurse, and grow tomato plants in their greenhouses; then process them into premium quality InagroTM tomato products.

SIMPLY ICE CREAM LTD
STAND 3780
Natural ice cream lovingly handmade in small batches in the heart of Kent. Simply Ice Cream believe that simple natural food tastes

best. Their ice creams, sorbets and vegan ice creams are lovingly handmade in small batches using only simple, natural and fresh local ingredients where possible. No artificial colours, additives or preservatives and only the finest ingredients. The result is an award-winning truly unbelievable taste!

EATPLANTED LTD.
STAND 4061
Switzerland-based EatPlanted plant, harvest and produce delicious plant-based meat. Bite by bite they put a tasty end to the conventional meat industry and the resulting suffering for animals and the environment. They want to revolutionise the way meat is perceived and consumed globally, and to initiate a fundamental rethink to reduce the devastating consequences of livestock farming on our planet.





VANILLABAZAAR STAND 3452
Vanillabazaar is a London based company that has been trading Madagascan vanilla products since 2006 and which supplies a wide range of commercial and domestic users. Their product range includes vanilla pods, extracts, sugars, powders and caviar (seeds from the pods) and it has been growing year-on-year due to the company's direct links with Madagascar and ability to supply high-quality products consistently.

CLOOTIE MCTOOT DUMPLINGS STAND 3560
Clootie McToot Dumpling is a Scottish family-run business, creating each Clootie Dumpling individually with the best and freshest of ingredients. They prepare and cook traditional Clootie Dumplings using a recipe handed down through generations of the family. They also have a selection of traditional Clootie Dumplings incorporating a modern twist to the recipe.

KARU STAND 1927
The London-based start-up KARU has its roots in Brazil from where it brings a selection of delicious and nutritious cashew nut products, ranging from lightly salted to coated in cacao salted caramel. Their cashews are consciously sourced, roasted in the UK, and packed using recyclable materials. The business also gives back a percentage of its revenue to help preserve tropical forests and their communities.

KOOKY – PRETTY UNIQUE FRUIT STAND 1706
Through their passion for exotic fruit and their unique relationships with Thai farmers, co-founders Aline and Deena created Kooky, a brand which brings the best fruits of the East to the West. They believe these super-fruits deserve to be embraced and enjoyed by everyone – not only for their antioxidant and nutrient-rich profile, but also for their unusual and quirky physical appearance and unique flavours.



BUYERS & PARTNERS

Industry reactions to the return of IFE

SUSANNA MONTGOMERY, NPD MANAGER AT THE SOHO SANDWICH CO:
"Attending IFE is a fantastic opportunity to discover and re-discover products, ingredients and overarching trends that keep our business at the forefront of innovation, quality and profitability. It's an invaluable way of doing weeks' worth of market research in one day!"

SANDRA SULLIVAN, EVENTS MANAGER AT THE FOOD & DRINK EXPORTERS ASSOCIATION:
"The Food & Drink Exporters Association team are buzzing to get back to IFE to connect with our export community and seek out brands that have yet to take their first steps into export. IFE is always such a strong showcase of UK food and drink. UK products that offer something unique and brands that are well established in the UK are always in demand by international buyers. Can't wait to see what we can find at IFE."

EDWARD DANON, TRADER AT VOICEVALE GROUP:
"For us, IFE is a one-stop-shop to catch up with friends, customers and suppliers across our whole industry, from the smaller start-ups to the established brand leaders, all displaying and sampling their products in innovative ways. Each year the show gives us a great insight in the direction of consumer behaviour and clears our minds, generating new ideas for the year ahead."

KRIS WADE, IMPORT AND EXPORT AT NORTHGATE FOODS**:**
"The past two years have proven to be the most challenging the food sector has faced in living memory and with more headwinds to negotiate for the foreseeable future. This has highlighted the importance of the relationships we have with both our suppliers and customers to help navigate these troubling times. IFE presents an opportunity to foster those relationships further with present but also future partners, also allowing the opportunity to spot current and future innovation in this ever-changing industry."



TEA TRENDS: A MODERN TRADITION

Rachael Perrett discovers how the nation's favourite beverage is evolving and why indies need to adapt to stand out from the crowd

COMMENTATORS



JAMIE RUSSELL
THE WEE TEA COMPANY LTD



JO COLMAN
SUMMERDOWN



KATIA SOKOLSKAYA
NAUTEAS ARTISAN TEAS



DAVID YOUNG
DAVID YOUNG CONSULTING

It's one of the world's oldest beverages and the most consumed drink in the world. In fact, global consumption has increased by 2.8% over the last decade, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. Here in the UK, there's no doubt the comforting drink is a huge part of British culture.

"Tea has been ingrained in our culture for generations and is much more than a drink," says Katia Sokolskaya, founder of Nauteas Artisan Teas. "It's a wake-up call in the morning before the day begins; it's an opportunity to gather our thoughts before making a decision; it's a welcome break in our busy lives. Tea is part of our social tapestry."

Today, with a new generation of consumers driving change and arguably more variety than ever before, it's safe to say the popularity of tea is on the rise. But what is driving this growth? How are cultural shifts impacting trends? And how can indie producers and retailers cater to demand?

Tea for '22

Look at any grocery retailer and you'll notice a wide array of teas lining the shelves. Where once these brews could easily be categorised into black and green, today the variety on offer is much more colourful, with everything from white and blue, to herbal tisanes that focus on wellbeing. Amongst all of this innovation, the traditional black cuppa is arguably still going strong despite increased pressure from growing competition. But as marketing campaigns such as Tetley's For the Love of Tea hint at, a wider variety of tea drinkers are taking up their share of the market, and they're helping to drive the industry's growth.

Even Pinterest is predicting tea's rise in the ranks based on the visual discovery app's trending searches. Eight out of 10 of Pinterest's 2021 predictions came true, and now the platform says afternoon tea is set to become the new after-work drinks meet-up.

According to foodtruckempire.com, around half of UK tea brands are purchased by Millennials aged 24 to 35 years old. With more Millennials and Gen Z consumers ditching booze for mental health reasons – according to a study by alcohol-free wine brand Eisberg – and additional drinkers reducing their alcohol consumption for other health reasons, it's perhaps no surprise that tea is increasing in popularity. With more awareness around the health benefits it offers coupled with the increasing variety on the market, tea seems a prime candidate to become people's beverage of choice, no matter what the occasion.

"Over the last decade or so, the drive for affordable luxuries coupled with the boom in foodie culture has seen vast changes in the tea industry," explains Jamie Russell, director of The Wee Tea Company. "Even in supermarkets, the shelf space dedicated to big brand standard tea products has decreased, making way for a larger 'range' of speciality teas and infusions that offer higher quality and new experiences for discerning tea drinkers. Tea has also become cool to an extent, due to the reported health benefits and positive coverage many tea and tea-related drinks receive in relation to a younger culture of health, beauty and wellbeing. The demographic of people buying tea has definitely changed, but only because the product range has changed, and the two are driving each other forward at a fast pace."

DURING THE **FIRST** WEEKS OF **LOCKDOWN**, IN-HOME **TEA** SALES **INCREASED** BY **75%** IN SOME **COUNTRIES**

SOURCE: UN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION

Trend or tradition?

Innovation helps to drive growth in any industry, and that's certainly no different when it comes to tea. So, what key trends should independents heed in the coming months?

Health and wellness are having a growing impact across the board, so we can expect to see more teas containing additives with perceived health benefits, including mushrooms, CBD, adaptogens, spices and herbs. Gut-friendly kombucha, relaxing herbal remedies and antioxidant-rich matcha, perhaps more aimed at in-home-drinking, as well as low- or no-alcohol sparkling tea and tea-based cocktails for out-of-home drinking are also on the rise. The introduction of ready-to-drink teas, including cold brew infusions, is worth noting too, particularly given the health benefits as an alternative to fizzy drinks and sugar-laden RTD beverages.

But it's not just health habits that are driving change. Consumers' increasing concerns over sustainability and ethics have trickled down into the tea industry too, as Jamie explains: "Ethical, organic, and quality are definitely all in the tea drinker's peripheral. I think current attitudes towards 'where our food comes from' are driving this, along with an aspiration from buyers to seek quality, artisanal products.

"Sustainability has impacted the tea industry hugely, too," Jamie adds. "A few years back, the 'discovery' by the mass population that paper teabags contain plastic (it's how they can be sealed) made massive waves in the industry. There has been a clear race by businesses to completely move away from teabags containing plastic; buyers and consumers make no secret of the fact they want to know about the environmental impact before buying."

Keep in mind, however, that it's not just about "jumping on the bandwagon"; it's about those key indie traits of transparency and provenance, as Jo Colman, head of sales and marketing at Summerdown, explains: "Consumer loyalty will come from sustainability being at the core of a brand's values. Sustainability may not be the key motivator in the buying decision (taste and price usually come first), but it will keep consumers coming back.

"A 2019 Mintel report found that consumers were willing to pay more for tea that is ethically and environmentally farmed. The noise around plastic-free teabags over the past few years has also led to consumers asking more questions about the entire tea journey: it's not just the packaging, but also the ingredients in their tea, where they come from and how they are farmed. Furthermore, shopping local hasn't disappeared post pandemic. Though 'local' may no longer mean the village/corner shop and now encompasses a sense of community and shopping small, independent and friendly."

It's easy to get caught up in all of the hype around the market's growth and emerging trends. But as an independent producer or retailer, it's important to balance catering to demand and being innovative with staying true to your brand's values, as Jo explains: "What is apparent is that today's tea drinkers are now actively seeking out teas with added value – whether this is ethical farming methods, unique flavours, natural health benefits or an additional usage occasion. To compete in this current market, a tea brand needs a clear point of difference. Traditional teas will need to adapt and evolve with the market to survive as consumers have become more educated around packaging, sourcing and



INDUSTRY INSIGHT

Food consultant David Young offers insight for indies to help them cater to demand while managing industry challenges

CATER TO CONSUMERS:
"Growth in tea is in green, fruit and herbal, and if independents want to attract a new consumer, they will need to consider the environmental credentials of the brands they stock as well as the quality."

FIND A BALANCE:
"Supply chains have already become pressured and stretched in both stock and cost of materials and labour. Keeping a consistent RRP and avoiding price promotions for smaller and growing brands is a tricky balance. Stocking B Corp brands, plastic-free teas and infusions are ways to differentiate. Inflation will no doubt hit independents hardest as disposable income gets squeezed."

BE PREPARED:
"Although easing, there are still labour shortages in production and transport. Getting involved in the supply chain, contracting or partnerships with specific groups of farms offers better security of supply, consistency in planning and although contrary to Kaizen, having a UK-based 'buffer' stock is worth considering."



sustainability, for example."

Katia adds, "Although there may be many new tea brands on the market, the big trends have remained the same for years: slow decline of everyday black tea, growing appreciation of different provenance and flavour profiles, a move towards plastic-free and sustainable packaging, ethical sourcing and traceability of teas, and a growing wellness tea category. A good retailer tea selection would have a balance of classic teas mixed with more experimental brands and flavours which give the customer that magic of discovery."

Overcoming challenges

With the majority of tea consumed in the UK being imported, it's safe to say there will be challenges that affect your supply chain. Brexit has already impacted many in the industry, as Jamie admits, but it also offers a great opportunity for businesses to adapt.

"Many of our ingredients come from German brokers (Germany has been a hub of tea and coffee brokerage for many years now), and timescales for imports have almost quadrupled [since Brexit]," Jamie says. "Packaging is also becoming a headache as most boards for printing come in from mainland Europe. Our attitude is that we must continue to learn and change our buying habits. We also began a process five years ago of preparing for this, by learning new ways of blending our teas to reduce our reliance on buying from German brokers."

While learning to be flexible could benefit your business in the long-run, it may also open up new opportunities for you, as Katia explains: "Many producers and retailers have had the Brexit and Covid double whammy experience in the last 12 months or so, ranging from delayed deliveries, material and ingredient shortages, to exponentially rising shipping costs. For us, being upfront with our customers about potential hurdles, frequent and transparent communication as well as extended delivery times made a big difference. For retailers, there is a hidden opportunity to trial new and exciting brands if the regular favourite is out of stock. Last year we managed to creatively pivot on numerous occasions, so if you are a retailer, do share your challenges with your suppliers – you never know what solutions they may come up with!"

> "What is apparent is that today's tea drinkers are now actively seeking out teas with added value. To compete in this current market, a tea brand needs a clear point of difference"

STOCK CHECK



D'AMAZONIA SLEEP TEA
Packed with lavender, chamomile, rose petals, lemon balm and oat flowering top to calm the senses and reduce anxiety.
damazonia.co.uk



JOHN FARRER AND CO GREEN SENCHA TEA
Packed with antioxidants and refreshing with intense grassy notes and an underlying sweetness.
farrerscoffee.co.uk



JEEVES & JERICHO BOMBAY CHAI CONCENTRE
Micro-brewed in small batches by hand using the finest single estate Assam black tea, Indian spices and unrefined sugar available.
spicedbombaychai.com



BORN WILD RASPBERRY LEMONADE TEA
Served hot or old, this caffeine-free tea combines whole raspberries, refreshing lemongrass, juicy apple, hibiscus and goji berries.
bornwildtea.com



LAB TONICA UNPLUGGED
From the brand's sleep collection. A floral and herbal blend of passion flower, lavender, chamomile, Linden blossom, hawthorn and rose.
labtonica.co.uk



COPENHAGEN SPARKLING TEA COMPANY SPARKLING TEA
Based on a blend of high-quality organic teas, each bottle contains up to 13 different varieties to create a complex flavour.
sparklingtea.co







NON FOOD: 5 TRENDS TO KNOW NOW

Whether it's a few add-on sales or a significant new income stream, these non-food categories could really raise your profits, finds Anna Blewett

You sweat over the right mix of fresh and frozen, and pray for a decent turnover of stock before a huge tranche of store cupboard items hit their BBE dates, but is it time non-food items did a bit more heavy lifting in your shop? Here are some big macro trends affecting your customers' spending habits.

OPPORTUNITY 1: HOME AND GARDEN WARES

It doesn't take a retail genius to work out why homewares have been such a runaway hit in the pandemic era. Whether locked down, isolating, ill or working from home, the nation has spent a huge amount more time in the house, and the shift is predicted to last. Analysts at Mintel have noted a sharp rise in the number of UK households spending money on their homes, whether to improve living areas or adapt spaces to working from home, and your customers will be part of this homeware-hungry demographic. Outdoor living has been a big trend, with research from Statista suggesting the 53% of the Brits spending more on DIY and their homes after lockdown see this as their top priority. It's no surprise; continued uncertainty around the trajectory of Covid cases and restrictions makes outdoor eating and entertaining an attractive option. Barbecues, premium shatterproof serveware, candles, all-weather cushions and lighting are all great, food-adjacent products that will be in big demand as the weather warms. Add in the ongoing trend for novice gardeners to have a crack at growing veg, and everyone with an outdoor space to start seeding wildlife areas and you have a heady mix of opportunity to grow gardening sales.

"The spotlight the pandemic has shone on outdoor areas will continue to drive sales of garden furniture, heaters, lighting and outdoor dining," predicted Mintel analyst Marco Amasanti last April. "There will also be a great opportunity for garden makeovers, conservatories, and a significant new opportunity for garden rooms, which offer a comparatively affordable means of adding living space to the home, whether as a place to work, exercise, entertain or for storage." Testing customers' appetite for homewares that fit with your brand (whether that's a range of rustic, handmade local ceramics or highly decorative Middle Eastern storage jars) is a no brainer.

Takeaway: sourcing home and garden wares from local makers or distinctive international markets will amplify the high quality, provenance-strong essence of your shop's ethos.

OPPORTUNITY 2: POSH PET FOOD

Here's another incredible stat from these strange times: 3.2 million households have acquired a pet since the start of the pandemic, taking the UK total to 34 million homes (or 59% of the UK total) hosting animals. With more people than ever working from home, and finding themselves in a position to accommodate a pet, the UK market for pet food has grown to £3.2bn, according to the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA).

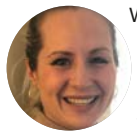
Feeding these extra mouths every day makes pet food a big convenience buy, but research suggests pet food is increasingly moving into the premium sphere, with Mordor Intelligence citing 'pet humanisation' leading to "the commercialisation of human-like goods and services for pets such as pet food, which is acting as a major driver behind the growth of this market."

Mordor identifies a trend for owners applying their own food standards to their pets' diet. This increasingly means fresh food, or dried foods with strong focus on quality and health, are trending. Start-ups like Butternut Box, which secured £20m investment in 2020, are proving that fresh, human-grade foods have a huge appeal for devoted pet lovers. Interestingly the biggest spike in ownership is among millennials, driving demand for natural, plant-based and ethical pet foods (including insect protein). According to figures from Mintel, 72% of consumers who purchase food for their dogs and/or cats sometimes treat their pet to premium pet food, and Mintel sees the opportunity for retailers to tap into "nascent markets, such as plant-based, grain-free and raw food diets. The demand for these is clear... moreover, interest in these will only grow with the mounting recognition of wellbeing, highlighting an opportunity moving forward."

Takeaway: with human and pet tastes reportedly converging, your reputation for top-quality foods makes you a trusted retailer for premium pet foods.

CASE STUDY

Jo Meacock, Thrussington Village Stores in Leicestershire



We're in a very rural area serving several villages. We always had a very small gift area – cards, wrapping paper, a bit of stationery – but the majority of floor space aside from the deli was taken up by our tearoom. Just prior to lockdown we'd had a big extension to fit in 50 covers; bad timing! We closed the tearoom according to guidelines but by September 2020 we felt it was wrong for the space to be used just to process online orders, so we started looking at how we could expand the gift offering.

We've turned over half of the tearoom now to gifts: we've got clothes, and prints, cups, candles, children's bits from quite a few local suppliers. It's been difficult. Small indie suppliers of gifts seem to be only just finding their way in terms of pricing and margin. We used to struggle to find suppliers who could give us the margins we need. Quite often they wouldn't understand we have to put a margin on, but we've found a few now who are getting to grips with it. To begin with, people would be pleasantly surprised by seeing a few extra bits in the shop but the gifts are proving to be their own draw now, and people who come in for presents then buy a few bits from the deli too. People are starting to come to us for presents rather than going into town, and coming from quite far afield. I think people are pleased to find something local and a bit special to give as a present.

> "We've turned over half of the tearoom to gifts"



CASE STUDY



Mandira Sarkar, Mandira's Kitchen in Surrey

First a supper club and caterer, then a shop with a café, Mandira's business in the Surrey Hills was thriving until the pandemic came along, hitting everything but its home-cooked freezer meals of superior Indian dishes. "Our strategy was to push them, as people had nothing to do but stay at home and eat," recalls Mandira. It worked; the frozen meals – authentic biriyanis, dals, samosas and vegetable curries – flew off the website. "When the country was locked down we sold more meals in one day than we had in the previous nine months put together! But we realised people were coming to us for the food and going to others for the tableware to serve it nicely."

Mandira decided to create a one-stop shop for customers buying store cupboard ingredients and ready meals from her, stocking hand-painted kettles to sell alongside her chai blend; hammered copper serving dishes, thali sets and vintage tiffin carriers. "Often when someone orders a thali for two online they add the thali set too, so they can serve it nicely at home. Or for Mother's Day they'll buy chai and add a kettle and glasses to the basket. What we've seen is people unable to go out trying to recreate special experiences themselves at home. The perception of Indian food is often of something greasy and salty – ours is nothing like that. Our dishes are like something a friend would cook you, and they deserve to be served nicely. It's like if you made a lovely afternoon tea; if you haven't got the china it won't be so special. I started this business on £750 and turnover is touching half a million now!"

> "We realised people were coming to us for food and going to others for the serveware"

> "Gifts are proving to be their own draw now; people who come in for presents buy from the deli too"

OPPORTUNITY 3:
ECO CONSUMABLES

If you haven't already started stocking the environmentally sound FMCGs that more households are hankering for, where have you been?! Household consumables – cleaning products, sanitary ware and beauty goods – with a strong environmentally friendly selling point could be the perfect additions for add-on sales. Why? According to consumer spending experts Kantar, 'eco actives', the UK's most environmentally conscious demographic, are growing in number and are now worth £37bn to the British grocery market. Meanwhile, numbers of 'eco dismissers' – consumers who don't take active steps to reduce their impact – are dwindling, creating a clear sales opportunity for ranges with an authentic eco angle.

This macro trend is shaping food and drink sales (both Meridian and Brewdog have seen big brand growth thanks to their well-signposted eco credentials) but it applies to non-food groceries too. Kantar finds plastic waste is the number one concern for this population of shoppers, and on-pack messaging around recycling is a top concern. Meanwhile Insider Intelligence has labelled making addressing consumers' preference for sustainability a high priority for retailers in 2022. Adding in a few sundries lines that tick the right boxes could really make a difference to the average transaction value in your store; as a starting point, check out eco home cleaner spray Cert – a two-in-one product which minimises plastic usage thanks to clever pre-dosed tabs and a reusable spray bottle.

Takeaway: Kantar predicts 62% of the population of Great Britain will be an 'eco active' by 2030, so grabbing every opportunity to cater to their needs is a smart move.

OPPORTUNITY 4:
CUT FLOWERS

The meteoric rise of seasonal blooms can be witnessed in the growth of a number of phenomena. Firstly, subscription models; last year Freddie's Flowers won $60m investment for its £25-a-bunch mail order, and a host of similar businesses have sprung up to meet blossoming demand. Secondly, regional flower farms. While around 80% of UK cut flowers are imported, mostly from the Netherlands, umbrella organisation Flowers From The Farm has seen its membership of UK flower farms and florists grow by a whopping 75% in the last two years. Local, seasonal bouquets or bunches, often certified organic or boasting other sustainable credentials, are proving a massive hit in the age of self-care. Indeed, around 60% of the £2.2 billion spent each year relates to people buying flowers and plants for themselves, and for their own homes, says the Flower & Plants Association.

Takeaway: Mintel found average household expenditure grew to £18.70 on flowers and £24.80 on houseplants in '20/21, proving this category's value even when the cost of living is rising.

OPPORTUNITY 5:
LOCAL MERCH

'Re-localisation' has been a strong trend in the last couple of years as travel restrictions and public health uncertainty has seen Brits explore destinations on their doorstops. Rediscovering local heritage, as well as local businesses that carry cache in their own community, has seen a refocusing of consumer horizons, and a new opportunity to grab unused holiday budgets. What's more, VisitBritain has forecast a recovery for domestic tourism spending in 2022 after a tough couple of years, and while inbound tourism hangs in the balance, there's a great opportunity to grab add-on sales with locally-specific merchandise. Local artwork, community-branded tote bags and even artist-designed tea towels will appeal to staycationers with excess holiday spending to splash. Meanwhile 'self-gifting' is a strong trend spotted by Mintel this Christmas; it found a quarter of Brits splashed out on goodies for themselves, but this figure rose to a massive 42% among 16 to 24-year-olds, so house-branded goods – tote bags, mugs and even T-shirts – could work if your business has a cult following.

Takeaway: tempt customers to flaunt their love for local with beautifully designed goods that sing their provenance.

ACCORDING TO CONSUMER SPENDING EXPERTS **KANTAR**, **'ECO ACTIVES'**, THE **UK'S** MOST ENVIRONMENTALLY-CONSCIOUS **DEMOGRAPHIC**, ARE **GROWING** IN NUMBER AND ARE NOW WORTH **£37BN** TO THE BRITISH **GROCERY** MARKET





FINAL CALL

If you're feeling optimistic about 2022, you're not alone. Recent research from the Federation of Small Businesses found that even though independents' confidence has faltered as they face huge cost pressures and labour challenges, the majority are positive about business growth. More than half (54%) are optimistic about growing their businesses over the coming 12 months, which is up four percentage points from the same period in 2019, pre-Covid, and many are looking to increase their headcounts too.

It's positive news as the fine food industry gears up for another year amid the pandemic. Although (at the time of writing) restrictions are relaxing, footfall has largely returned to shops and we're all looking forward to meeting each other once again at long-awaited trade shows, Covid-19 always leaves a lingering uncertainty in the back of the mind.

Covid and 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 optimistic about this year. Even amid the cost of living crisis, delis and farm shops can offer a personalised service and experiential events that the multiples, in their battle to 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 low travel miles to offering the small luxuries that make hard times a bit more bearable.

And the good news keeps on rolling in. Food sector start-ups were among the top 10 fastest-growing in 2021, according to research by insurance firm Simply Business, and high street vacancy rates have gone down for the first time since 2018, driven in part by the opening of new independent businesses. Energetic new entrepreneurs are following their foodie passions, and fine food retailers continue to report strong support from their local customers. We're certainly optimistic about the year to come. Are you?

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

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5 MINUTES WITH

JAMES HAGERTY, FOUNDER OF PRESTO COFFEE



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
Working in the technology or product development. I would love to invent a product that makes people's lives better!

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
A labourer on a building site. It was a good eye-opener to what real hard work is.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
To name a few: delivering super fresh coffee to customers who share the same passion I do; growing an incredible team behind the Presto brand; and doing good for others. Donating coffee bags to the less fortunate was my highlight of 2021.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
Posting flyers door-to-door for some much-needed student cash.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
Tasting coffee. Don't get me started on how good our House Espresso Blend is.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
I am really, really guilty of not being able to switch off.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I find it inspiring. A group of like-minded entrepreneurs all collectively trying to make people's lives better through quality food and raising the bar of industry standards.

TEA OR COFFEE?
Coffee of course. Love tasting it, trying new blends and exploring coffees from new regions.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
A Mediterranean board – olives, sun-dried tomatoes and fresh bread, yum! – followed by a burger. Lots of cheese, all of the condiments and a plate full of chips! Blackberry and apple crumble with vanilla ice cream for pudding.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
"Never give up on something you think about every day."

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
Crickets at a food festival.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Start With Why by Simon Sinek.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Love sweets. Jelly beans, Jelly Babies and Fruit Pastels are my favourite.



TRIED & TESTED

BOUNDLESS SEA SALT & CIDER VINEGAR



Like countless other Brits, I started this year with a mission: get my health back on track after a rather indulgent holiday season – and, let's face it, pandemic. Thankfully, many brilliant brands saw this tsunami of health concerns coming from a mile away, and there are new launches aplenty to try on your shelves. A new favourite of mine is Boundless Activated Snacks' Sea Salt & Cider Vinegar crisps. Deliciously vinegary snacks made with the ancient supergrain sorghum, which offers protein-packed vegan goodness? Don't mind if I do.
weareboundless.co.uk

PIQI SPARKLING WATER KEFIR

Looking for the next big thing in healthy fine food? Gut health is it, and PiQi's fermented, non-dairy sparkling water kefir is a great place to start. Water kefir offers an alternative to traditional dairy-based kefir, and not only do PiQi's products tick the health box by containing billions of live cultures and naturally occurring probiotics, antioxidants, vitamins, and more, but they are also traditionally fermented in small batches, so its artisan credentials are strong. I'm fond of the electric purple Butterfly Pea flavour, made with organic flowers from Thailand.
piqilife.com



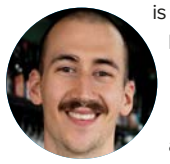
TONGUE IN PEAT

How does a brand improve upon a classic drink? For the Bloody Mary, restaurants and bars tend to bring pizazz by adding more – more vegetables, more skewered prawns or even a submerged stick of bacon. But why not try better? Tongue in Peat offers a first-of-its kind peat-smoked tomato juice, which creates a deeper, richer and more complex Bloody Mary – all without raiding the fridge for extra ingredients. Fresh, seasonal tomatoes meet peat smoke from the Scottish Island of Islay on a traditional smokehouse, before being blended and bottled. Perfect for your mixers shelf.
tongueinpeat.com



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Ronan Shaftoe, head chef, Brett



Glasgow's west end has a great reputation for having some lovely shops and restaurants. With all the students around, you find a great energy about. You've got a great neighbourhood vibe with everything you would need on your doorstep! What a weekend in our corner of Great Western Road might look like: dinner at Brett with some awesome natural wine followed by cocktails at Banana Moon and a concert at the Hug & Pint. On Sunday you'd be catching a class roast at The Lovable Rogue, and not to miss out squeezing in a coffee and cake from Broken Clock Café.

As a non-native to Scotland, I would say the most inspiring thing about the food and drink of Glasgow is about more than just the produce. I find the people of Glasgow to be very proud of what they produce and who they are. Something about the experience of living here really brings people together and it shows with the people. Bringing that idea to the food, you find a lot of people that are very proud of what they do, no matter where they sit in the industry. There are plenty of microbreweries, coffee roasters, butchers and fishmongers serving some great produce.

We get honey for one of our main desserts from Ed's Bees. Ed's Bees are urban bees that have been harvested from the beautiful gardens and parks all over Glasgow. I'm planning to join him in the spring to learn about what he does and help with the bees. I've been curious about beekeeping for some time, and I'm sure that looking forward to it will help get me through the winter.

We're also working with the Hundredth Monkey bakery. Ciaran started out as a guest and our relationship quickly developed into more than that. At Brett, we don't have much space to work with, so Ciaran helps us out with making our sourdough focaccia. He does a fantastic job and is in the process of expanding his business.

For our seafood, we work with John Vallance. They do an awesome job in helping us source our Gigha halibut and our Cumbrae oysters. Gigha halibut is an amazing product, they are grown and fed in a completely sustainable environment and use certified organic fish meal to help them grow. With so much care and attention, it's no wonder they are so delicious. It is a really beautiful Scottish product. Cumbrae Oysters are a family-run company in the west of Scotland and work hard to provide an excellent product. I've seen their oysters win over those who normally aren't oyster fans countless times.

> "I find the people of Glasgow to be very proud of what they produce and who they are. Bringing that idea to the food, you find a lot of people that are very proud of what they do, no matter where they sit in the industry"

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Garofalo



FOOD FOR THE SOUL

We're all for feeding our bodies the healthy, nutritious foods they need. But artisan food speaks to the soul

Health food has had something of a revival over the past couple of years. It's true that the pandemic has had consumers reaching into the snack cupboard more than usual, and a couple of stolen moments with a particularly rich and creamy chocolate bar has done many a stressed and overwhelmed Brit a favour over the past two years. But health – along with its cousins natural, clean-label, plant-based and free-from – is one of the biggest buzzwords of the moment.

Consumers aren't just reaching for bog-standard fruit and veg, however – they're doing their research on gut health and immune-boosting foods. And unlike the superfoods of years past (think açaí and kale), these exciting products aren't solely focused on physical health; they're also promoting a deeper sense of wellbeing. Shoppers are reading up on functional ingredients and botanicals like guayusa, which boosts focus and energy; ashwagandha, which relaxes the body; and CBD, which boasts calming effects.

It's an exciting time for makers of boundary-pushing health products, but this movement also stands to benefit the artisan food sector, including makers of fine Italian delicacies and ingredients.

With more consumers scrutinising labels, paying attention to how the food they eat makes them feel and demanding products that positively impact their wellbeing, a preference for artisanal food and drink with a rich heritage is only natural. Because as well as choosing the best ingredients to boost our health, nutrition and wellbeing, we should also be considering how the food and drink we consume feeds our soul.

This is where the good quality artisan food – small batch and sourced from family makers – that characterises Italian cuisine steps in. The benefits of eating healthy food may be tangible, like fitter bodies and fewer health conditions, but traditional food which is good for the soul can go deeper. It has the power to spark a smile after a stressful week and offers links to the past through cooking techniques and recipes that have been passed down over the generations. While health food may be good for the body, Italian food is good for the soul.

Are you passionate about Italian food and drink? Get in touch via holly.shackleton@aceville.co.uk.



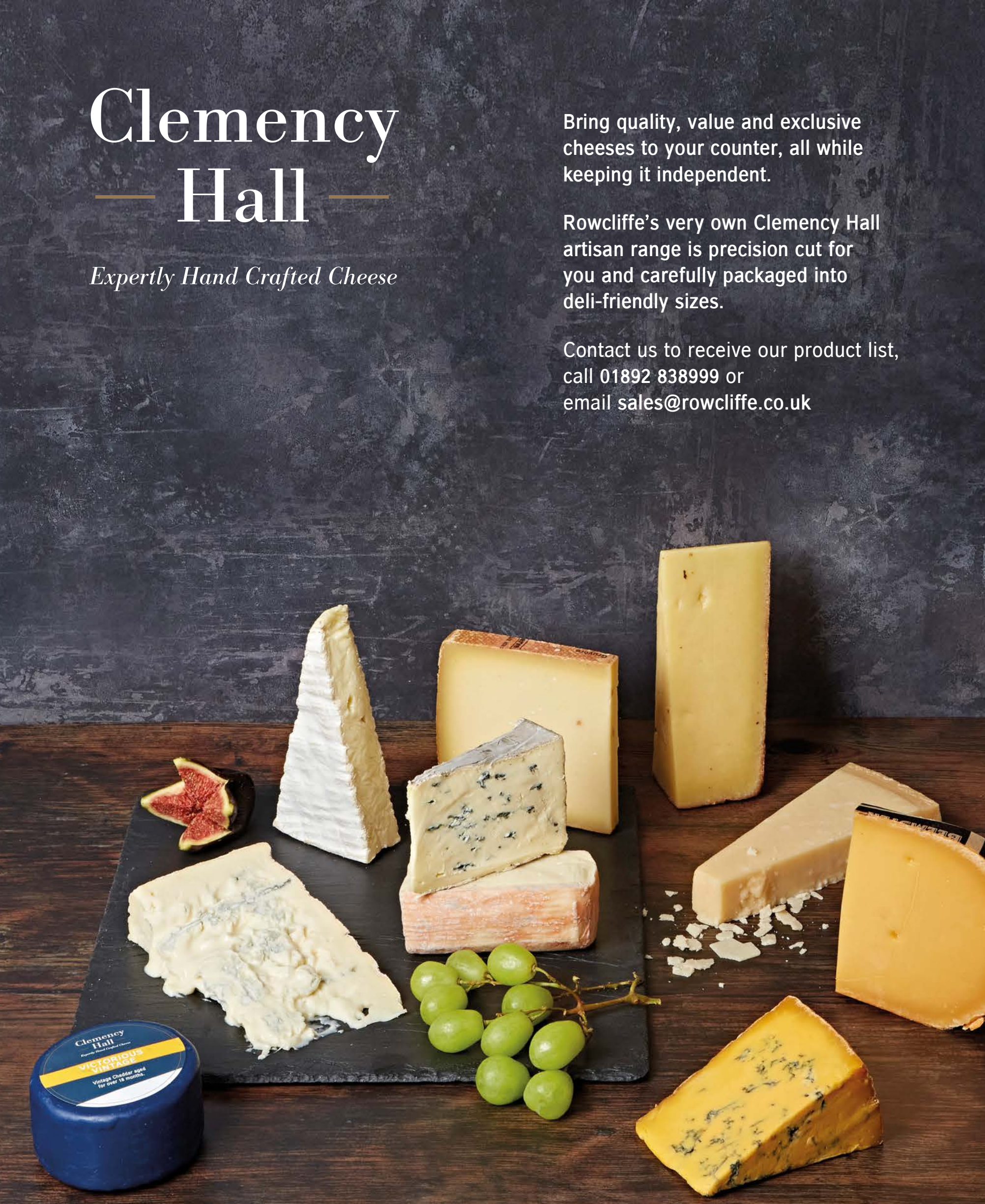
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