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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to a very special edition of *Speciality Food*. The team and I are absolutely delighted to bring you *The Green Issue*. Sustainability and the environment are playing a bigger part in fine food retail than ever before. Consumers are actively seeking out, and demanding, products that tick environmentally-aware boxes. They want recyclable or compostable packaging, clean labels, better conditions for workers (particularly when it comes to coffee and chocolate) and are increasingly looking for products made by B Corp companies. This emergence of a new 'conscious customer' has become a driving force across many sectors and parts of industry, with artisans, packaging manufacturers, and retailers sitting up, taking notice, and making significant changes. In this edition we throw a spotlight on many of issues affecting sustainability and food production today - with insight, commentary and inspiration that could help you make 'greener' choices in the coming year. And we commit to continuing the sustainable conversation throughout 2024 and beyond.

CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS | EDITOR (MATERNITY COVER)

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COP28: Food was on the menu, but will it be a wasted opportunity?

COP28 marked a pivotal moment in the global conversation around climate change. But did it go far enough where food security is concerned? *Speciality Food* reports

The COP28 climate summit, held in Dubai in late 2023, was not without controversy – from allegations that the United Arab Emirates intended to use the UN climate summit to make oil and gas deals, to critics saying the key climate deal, which requires countries to "transition away from fossil fuels", had loopholes that would allow countries to continue producing and consuming coal, oil and gas.

Despite this, for many food industry experts, COP28 was seen as a success. For the first time the global food system, which is responsible for 30% of carbon dioxide emissions, was on the agenda. The Food4Climate Pavilion, led by ProVeg International, World Animal Protection, Upfield and other leading global actors, called COP28 a "turning point" in the conversation about the sustainability of food and farming on a global scale.

Adele Jones, executive director of the Sustainable Food Trust, attended the summit with a sceptical eye, but she was, on the whole, pleasantly surprised by what she saw. "It was a very busy, productive and actually pretty hopeful week in Dubai for the world of food and farming."

Food and farming highlights from COP28

- Over 150 countries signed the food systems declaration, which includes a commitment to include agriculture and food systems in countries' climate targets before COP30.
- More than 200 non-government organisations signed a Call to Action for Food-Systems Transformation.
- More than 16 philanthropies committed funding to transforming food systems, including Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' Bezos Earth Fund, which donated $57 million for climate change and biodiversity loss, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which announced $200 million to help smallholder farmers in Africa adapt to climate change.
- Six major food companies pledged to publish and implement a plan to reduce emissions of methane from dairy production by the end of 2024.
- 26 companies and organisations will work to transition 160 million hectares to regenerative agriculture before COP30 and will report on the impact on soil health, emissions, biodiversity, water and farmer livelihoods.

In addition to pledges made, Adele said COP28 differed from summits in the past because of the joined-up approach between governments, NGOs and private sector companies. What's more, she said, "the private sector has really stepped up". While the wheels may have been put in motion at COP28, questions remain over whether this progress will result in a genuine shift towards a more sustainable and just food system.

Vital next steps

"Getting food on the agenda at COP28 was a great step forward. Moving from the agenda to a serious and actionable plan is a whole other challenge," Sue Pritchard, chief executive of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission told *Speciality Food*. "We will continue to press governments and businesses to prioritise food system transformation – taking fossil fuels out of food and farming, and aligning public and private investment behind more equitable, transparent, resilient and healthy food systems," she added.

RH Amar's James agreed, saying, "The proof will be in the pudding in terms of what global action is achieved before COP29 later this year and whether COP28 really marks a collective turning point.

"My hope is that the legacy of COP28 will be a much-needed consistency of message, and with it, confidence for those of us in the food industry to continue on our sustainability journeys and that our small steps locally will lead to giant leaps globally for the environment and for the future of food and agriculture," James continued. "Actions will speak louder than words."

For Adele, question marks remain around financing. "The big question for me is how we make progress fast on financing the urgently needed agriculture transition, whilst operating within the constraints of a global economic system which is dishonest and unjust."

The industry also needs to do more to amplify marginalised voices, said Food4Climate Pavilion's spokesperson. "From indigenous communities to farmers in the Global South. We have a lot to learn from their lives and stories about the harmful effects of industrial animal agriculture. Once we give these voices a platform, we will be better equipped to make real, positive change that positively impacts everyone involved in the global food system, not just those in the Global North."

Dr Brian O'Callaghan, lead research and project manager at Oxford's Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, said the world can no longer accept "false excuses such as 'we can't afford it' or 'developing countries can finance it themselves'".

"We need a step-change in progress," he said, "or COP28 will fade as another wasted opportunity."



Consumers want farmers to prioritise 'nature-friendly' farming

More than half of adults in the UK would like farmers to prioritise farming practices which preserve and enhance nature and wildlife, according to new research commissioned by the groundbreaking food and farming certification scheme Fair to Nature.

The survey of 2,250 adults, undertaken by Ipsos, revealed 56% of people would like UK farmers to concentrate on "preserving and enhancing nature and wildlife" when asked to select three from a list of six possible different farming priorities regarding the environmental impacts of farming.

In addition, half of the respondents (50%) said they would also like farmers to preserve and enhance natural water systems, while 39% chose preserving and enhancing soil health in response to this same question.

In fact, in research undertaken in December, halting biodiversity loss was one of the top three environmental impacts of agriculture UK adults want to see addressed on farms, with 37% selecting this, along with 39% choosing use of environmentally harmful pesticides, and water pollution chosen by 36%.

The research exposed a widespread lack of knowledge of the terms regenerative, sustainable and nature-friendly farming, with only two in 10 people surveyed saying they either knew this type of farming "very well" or knew a "fair amount" about it.

The findings build on similar research from March 2023, which highlighted growing consumer worry about nature loss and a desire to halt its decline, with 67% of UK adults found to be concerned with the decline in the variety of UK wildlife compared to 50 years ago.



Mark Varney, head of Fair to Nature, said, "These results reveal that one in four people think UK farming has a negative effect on nature and wildlife, but our research also highlights that UK consumers want our food and agricultural system to be a power for good, helping protect and preserve our landscape and wildlife. This is a golden opportunity for organisations to adopt nature-friendly farming and food production to respond to their customers' wants and needs.

"Making sense of what this means in practice can be confusing, especially with buzzwords such as 'regenerative' and 'sustainable' hitting our shelves. It needn't be this complicated, as our new report shows. Setting out a proven approach for including nature as a key component within all food businesses' UK supply chains, it demonstrates how, in the wake of terrifying declines in nature, we can - and must - do something urgently to bring farmers, producers and consumers the clarity needed to enact real change."

Compiled by experts from the RSPB's Fair to Nature scheme, which is the UK's only certification with a focus on biodiversity, the report looks at the vital role of nature in underpinning our ability to do business. From providing raw materials and energy, to the food, water, and clean air we need to survive, nature is the foundation of every aspect of human life. Biodiversity loss means these vital services are under threat.

The report, Without Nature There is no Food, also outlines a proposed solution. That if every farm made 10% of land available for good quality wildlife habitat, nature on farms could be restored and protected, ensuring that the essential services it provides are there for us all in the future.

Mark Varney added, "By restoring the balance of nature in farming and increasing biodiversity, farmers reap the benefits of the RSPB Fair to Nature standard, with increased pollinator numbers, improvements in soil quality, and a reduction in the volume of chemicals required which saves them money.

"Fair to Nature is a proven approach to restoring the balance of nature in farming, providing food businesses with the means to act on wildlife declines, empowering and supporting farmers with a viable way of protecting and restoring nature on their farms, and harnessing consumers' buying power to deliver the transformative change needed in our food and farming system."

RSPB Fair to Nature has already achieved good results. One farm has reported a 226% increase in breeding birds, a 213% increase in farmland butterflies, almost double the floral diversity, and up to 19 times more bees than typical farms.

As outlined in the report, food brands and supermarkets who support RSPB Fair to Nature, agree to buy from certified farms like these and can display the RSPB Fair to Nature logo on the packaging of certified products, ensuring consumers are able to make positive choices to spend their money in support of restoring critical farm ecosystems and wildlife habitats.

RH Amar releases first Impact Report

Importer and distributor RH Amar has recently published its Impact Report, setting out clear ambitions for improved sustainability in the future, including its bid to be net zero by 2030.

As part of RH Amar's eco initiatives, 75% of its car fleet is now electric or hybrid, 50% of electricity used is from renewable sources, all RH Amar lorry drivers have received eco-driver training (travelling 27km more for every tonne of CO_2 emitted), a sustainable funds pension scheme is in place, and 10% of profits are donated to charity each year.

James Amar, strategy and CSR director, said, "Acting as a responsible business, fully committed to positive social and environmental impact, is something we want to become an integral part of our day-to-day operations at RH Amar. Launching our first Impact Report reflects this and helps keep us accountable.

"We have an ambition to be a Net Zero Business by 2030, and our report highlights the steps and progress we are making to help realise that goal. It gives an insight into what we have achieved over the past year - whether it's decarbonising our transport, reducing the amount of energy we use, or volunteering within our communities. It also includes what we still have on the to-do list such as further reducing the amount of plastic used in the brands we own."



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Contenders for sustainable foods of the future revealed

Cactus cookies, banana peel snacks and wrinkled pea pasta are leading the charge in an innovative food design challenge

Foods designed to be kinder to the planet are one step closer to reaching supermarket shelves having been invited to the next stage of the Big Food Redesign Challenge.

Launched in 2023 by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, in partnership with the Sustainable Food Trust, the challenge tasked participants with designing new products, or redesigning existing ones, using circular economy principles which help nature to thrive and address climate change.

Innovative concepts from 400 applicants (both start-ups and household names) included cookies, juice, yoghurts, gin and pasta.

Entries were received from across the world, including the UK, US, Africa, Europe and Latin America, and more than 160 products are now being supported in developing their first designs.

As selected products enter the production phase of the challenge, the Foundation is calling on retailers to join its partners – Waitrose and major retail group Grupo Carrefour Brasil – in showcasing food items as early as this year.

Beth Mander, food programme manager at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, said, "Our current food system is a key driver of biodiversity loss, and accounts for a third of global greenhouse gases.

We can, and must, redesign our food to regenerate nature and tackle some of the most pressing global issues facing us today.

"It's encouraging to see such a huge appetite by businesses to rise to the challenge of helping to reshape how we design food for the future.

With such an innovative range of product ideas, we hope they will become everyday items on shopping lists.

"This is an exciting time for more retailers to get involved and be among the first in the world to offer their customers unique access to food choices which help preserve and restore our planet for future generations."

Joining the next phase of the challenge is UK-based Hodmedod's and its products made from British peas, beans and grains. The business's selection of pasta, soups, and dahls are sourced from a type of broad bean and other diverse arable crops grown with regenerative practices that help build soil health.

Other submissions include Fortnum & Mason's in-house distilled Amalthea Dry Gin, which has diversified its source crop by swapping grains with homegrown apples.

Old Farmhouse Brewery has also submitted a beer with kelp locally sourced from Wales' first community-owned regenerative ocean farm.

International food corporation Danone has proposed a new yoghurt range for the UK and Ireland markets, aiming to source more than 90% of the milk needed through farms that are using regenerative agriculture practices.

Golden Hooves, a UK-based subsidiary of First Milk, has submitted a butter and cheese containing ingredients sourced from farmers that are all pledged to the earth's regeneration.

Kenya-based Dunia Bora is in the next phase of the challenge with the use of cacti – traditionally considered an invasive plant – as an ingredient in cookies and juice, farmed using regenerative practices in the country's arid and semi-arid regions.

Meanwhile, submissions from US-based companies include Wildway, which has come up with the idea of using banana and its peel as a nutritious snack and a way of reducing waste, and a different take on traditional jerky by 4 Fungi's Regenerative which is proposing a plant-based alternative using mushrooms.

The Foundation, an international charity committed to creating a circular economy, launched the Big Food Redesign Challenge with support from funds raised by players of People's Postcode Lottery and awarded through the Dream Fund; the Schmidt Family Foundation, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

Retailers are invited to find out how they can get involved in stocking nature-positive products. Contact the Ellen MacArthur Foundation to find out more.

Sustainable diets under the microscope in new programme

The Food Systems Accelerator has been created by food and drink businesses in collaboration with young people

The Future Food Movement (FFM), the food sector's climate upskilling partner and food industry disruptor, and Bite Back, a youth activist movement working to make the food system healthier and more sustainable for future generations, have partnered to launch the UK's first industry-leading business programme to create meaningful change for young people and the planet.

The Food Systems Accelerator is a bold two-year programme which will challenge senior leaders of leading food businesses to collaborate and find evidence-based solutions to healthy and sustainable diets that will ensure the UK leads on both the climate and health agenda.

It mixes youth voices from Bite Back activists, who are demanding food and drink companies take action to make it easier to eat healthily, with experts in food system transformation guiding participants to develop a future of food which delivers win-win for health and business success.

"To perpetuate change in the food system we need to work together," said Becky Odoi at Bite Back. "Young people's perspectives through our real lived experiences are essential for food and drink companies to make the changes necessary to protect child health."

The founder of Future Food Movement, Kate Cawley, added, "We can't deliver net zero without delivering on health. We need the food industry to be bold and adopt a braver approach to shift consumers towards healthier and more sustainable diets. This isn't about winning over consumer hearts and minds, it's about putting competition aside to find solutions that work for the next generation to build a healthier and climate smart food system."

Kate said the Accelerator will give businesses a commercial advantage, helping them to become more sustainable, upskilling their teams, and enabling them to integrate youth insights into their thinking to help inform, shape and support product development.

She continued, "Consumers expect the products they buy to be healthier, without having to change their eating and drinking habits, and with benefits for everyone, regardless of income, ethnicity or education. The Government is looking for the industry to step-up and be on the right side of history. Brands that successfully navigate these issues will ultimately reap the commercial rewards."

The Accelerator programme launched with a full day workshop at Waddesdon Manor where businesses heard from young people, collaboratively worked through insights, and discussed strategic health commitments with health and climate experts, with further engagement sessions planned by Future Food Movement.

These discussions, said registered public health nutritionist, Ali Morpeth, are vital. "We are facing a dual challenge of illness driven by poor diets and undernutrition in the UK while the systems that produce our food impact on the environment," she explained.

"A healthier diet is also more sustainable, but we are currently in a situation whereby the average UK diet does not meet the criteria our government set out as healthy. This Food Systems Accelerator programme is pioneering in its approach on working at the food system level to impact the whole supply chain and drive better outcomes for people and planet."



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The state of sustainable farming in the UK

What does sustainable farming really mean, how are British producers championing an environmentally friendly farming method and what can speciality retailers do to support them? *Speciality Food* reports

With about a third of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions being linked to the food sector, there is no doubt that the food industry must take action on the climate crisis.

British farmers are beginning to adopt more sustainable farming methods – but what falls under the umbrella of 'sustainable farming'?

What is agroecology?

"Agroecology is the application of ecological concepts and principles to optimise interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment, while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a regenerative, resilient and fair agri-food system," said Will White, sustainable farming coordinator at Sustain.

A number of farming approaches apply many of these concepts, such as organic, permaculture and biodynamic farming.

Gareth Morgan, head of farming policy at the Soil Association, agrees that agroecological farming, like organic, "is the best and most evidence-based option for a resilient and sustainable farming system in the UK".

Agroecological farming works with nature instead of against it. "Truly sustainable food is possible but challenging," Gareth said, adding, "Humanity and farming cannot survive without wildlife. In particular, we must stop relying on harmful pesticides and fossil-fuel derived nitrogen fertilisers, which are very energy intensive to make and are driving river and air pollution."

Agroecological farming in action

While Gareth says there is a "groundswell of farmers working productively in harmony with nature, and many more are keen to do so," he admits that progress is too slow.

So what changes need to happen to boost sustainable farming in the UK?

"Our supply chains need to change to prioritise the right sort of farming to make it the obvious business choice," said Will. "Without reducing the top-down pressure exerted from retailers on farmers, the long-term investment and thinking needed for a transition to sustainable farming will be impossible. For this we need more punitive regulation on supermarkets, and more farmer-focussed, localised supply chains," he continued.

Gareth called on the UK and devolved governments to "act now to support transformative change, with farmers adopting resilient, climate and wildlife sensitive methods across their entire farms".

Pioneering agroforestry

Combining trees with crops or livestock is a way to work in harmony with nature – a key example of agroecology.

For example, Helen Browning, chief executive of the Soil Association, is an organic farmer who has been working on an agroforestry project for seven years. She's producing fruit crops now and has also seen increases in biodiversity, including near-threatened meadow pipits, which prefer the scrubby land between trees.

At Eastbrook Farm, the team is growing pear trees alongside grazing cows. The trees provide shelter and shade, as well as food. They also play a role in carbon and nitrogen sequestration, and when cows graze on trees that are high in condensed tannins, this also reduces the level of methane produced in digestion. What's more, the fruit gives the farmers another source of income.

Organic farming

Another way farmers can adopt agroecology on their farms is through saying no to insecticides and pesticides.

Organic farming offers producers the opportunity to be reduce their carbon impact. "We're proud to say that Godminster Farm is carbon negative by 875 tonnes of CO2 per year, thanks to our many long years of sustainable organic farming practices. This means we're locking away more CO2 than we produce, with the difference equating to roughly the same as burning 239 tonnes of coal," said Sarah Norris, head of marketing. What's more, on average, plant, insect and bird life is 50% more abundant on organic farms, she says, and there are around 75% more wild bees on organic farms.

What's next for sustainable farming?

According to Sam Parsons, estate manager at Balcaskie in Scotland, sustainable farming is as much about looking forward as it is about looking back. "Since the 1950s, agriculture has been specialised and simplified with the support of synthetic inputs – from fertilisers to pesticides," he said.

"Simplification also creates homogenised, low labour and quantity at the expense of quality. Regenerative farming brings back the human element and, embarrassingly for us, makes us realise that we were not farming, but applying inputs. We must now relearn the skills our grandfathers had when they were truly farming.

Supporting this transition enables greater improvements in the way we manage land, sequester carbon, benefit biodiversity and swap synthetic inputs for human skill. The output is a product which is proven to be better for human health and the planet."

He believes the largest barrier now is knowledge and a clearly defined meaning of what 'sustainable farming' is. "There have been so many fads, trends and anacronyms over the years which are often well meaning, but quickly adopted without principle, that customers have become wary of labels," he said.

Is it really possible to feed ourselves on sustainably farmed produce? This, Gareth believes, is part of a more complicated question about what and how we eat. "Studies show that agroecological farming, following organic principles, can feed Europe's population, but we need to see a shift to sustainable and healthy diets while transforming farming," he said.

"Half a century of increasingly input-dependent intensive farming hasn't worked for the planet, hasn't made for resilient farm businesses, and it also isn't feeding us a healthy diet. We need to move to grass-fed livestock and end intensively grown crops for industrial animal feed, and instead produce a more diverse range of protein sources for our diets alongside a dramatic increase in fruit and vegetables," Gareth continued.

"We face climate, nature and diet-related public health crises – the time is long overdue for productive nature-friendly farming that works to secure a more sustainable food system for consumers and farmers."





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Collaboration is key to the survival of high street indies



MARK KACARY
THE NORFOLK DELI

Up and down the country there's a common and pressing challenge facing the likes of speciality food and drink businesses such as delicatessens, farm shops, and cheesemongers. Dwindling footfall, and intense competition from high street corporate entities requires a call to action. But what can be done?

It is said that one can measure the pulse of the high street by the level of footfall and the sense of community. The link between the two is like an ever-decreasing circle. As footfall declines, shops are quieter, resulting in a slow death of that sense of local community. Businesses such as fine food retailers, with their array of artisanal produce, stop being the social hubs they were in the past.

The struggle they face is not just economic and is not just theirs alone. It's about preserving the unique character of neighbourhoods, and maintaining that sense of 'togetherness' that is lacking in the striplighted worlds of the megastore supermarkets.

The issue is that we can all wait for a miraculous turnaround, but that's not my style. I feel that if we want a change to happen, we as business owners need to try and do something proactively to make a difference.

Sitting on my local town advisory group, ideas were floated around on what could be done to bring more shoppers into the town centre and our independent shops – to encourage the footfall naturally generated in this space to move around the town and to get businesses involved and engaged. By forging partnerships with the town council and local event teams, we set about creating the type of attraction that's popular across venues and destinations in the UK, but next to non-existent in many town centres – a food and drink festival.

The inception of the first regional festival of its kind on our high street is a beacon of collective effort and innovation. This initiative represents more than a single celebration – it's a testament to what can be achieved when local businesses and authorities unite with a common goal: to revitalise the heart of the community.

March will mark a pivotal moment for our high street with the launch of the inaugural food and drink festival, which is set to host more than 30 local producers, showcasing a kaleidoscope of regional culinary delights. From artisan cheeses to homemade preserves, it promises a feast for the senses. Based on numbers seen at other similar events, and combined with the anticipated pent-up demand for something like this locally, the anticipated footfall increase is significant. This surge should not only serve as a much-needed lifeline for local businesses, but also as a day where community spirit and local commerce blend harmoniously.

For high street businesses, particularly those in rural locations, attractions like this present a golden opportunity. Businesses can benefit by showcasing their best offerings, creating special promotions, and engaging actively with the community. Think outside the box – collaborate with fellow vendors, host mini-events, and leverage social media. It's a chance to not only boost sales but also to forge lasting customer relationships. An event, whether it's a food and drink festival in a town centre or something else, shouldn't be seen as just a day's event - it's a blueprint for revitalisation. It demonstrates how collaboration and innovation can breathe new life into our communities. I'm not saying that this model will work everywhere, and it might not be 100% successful from day one, but even with it being just a few weeks away, it is already creating a buzz locally, and that's not a bad starter for 10.

> "The issue is that we can all wait for a miraculous turnaround, but that's not my style. I feel that if we want a change to happen, we as business owners need to try and do something proactively to make a difference"

NEWS IN NUMBERS

16 Weeks

Is the amount of time free-range eggs can currently be labelled as such if mandatory housing measures are introduced during outbreaks of avian flu. After this time they must be labelled as barn eggs according to Egg Marketing Standards Regulations. New proposals, currently under consultation, seek to amend the rules so that producers will no longer need to change how eggs are labelled during housing orders. This could save farmers considerable money and reduce pressures on industry.

£198.1 million

Worth of food was exported to Canada from the UK in 2023, with cheese high up the list of products sought by the country. Currently trade talks between Britain and Canada are halted due to repeated attempts to force the UK into altering its food safety rules. "The government's decision to walk away from trade talks aimed at enhancing the trading relationship between the UK and Canada would have been difficult, but it's the right decision," said NFU president, Minette Batters.

1950s

Scientists who selected singular strains of mould for ripening Camembert in Normandy in the 50s may have inadvertently set the course for the cheese's demise. Restricting the multitude of fungi used to one variety has had a huge impact on the production of spores, with the future of both Camembert and Brie at high risk.

Olives Et Al pulls out of wholesale supply

The business will sell direct to independents for the forseeable future

Olives Et Al, the 30-year-old artisan food business specialising in olives, extra virgin olive oils and other Mediterranean foods, has chosen to cease distribution through its wholesale partners due to huge increases in the cost of olive oil and olives.

"Extra virgin olive oil has tripled in cost since last January, and the cost of olives is up by between 50% and 80% for this harvest," reported founder Giles Henschel.

"With regret, we've had to inform a number of our wholesale partners, like Cotswold Fayre, Cress, Holleys, PW Fine Foods and Artisan Food Club, amongst others, that we can no longer supply under the current onslaught of cost increases. As a result, we have brought our supply to them to a close until prices and costs return to more normal levels. Instead, we are choosing to keep our prices as they are so we can supply direct to the independents without increasing costs to consumers, which, in the current cost-of-living crisis, we feel is the best thing we can do to support our customers."

Asked why the rises had been so dramatic in the last 12 months, Giles reported that climate change was now both a major factor and reality. "Some areas of Greece were 90% down and we know of producers in Italy who simply didn't harvest at all as there was nothing to pick."



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Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

New palm oil-free spread launches

A breakthrough brand hoping to shake up the plant-based spread market has launched a sustainable alternative to traditional margarine, made without any palm oil.

The Flower Farm's Spread combines sunflower oil with shea butter from the nuts of the karite tree, which grows in abundance in the African Savannah, with the brand saying a family of four switching from a palm-oil infused brand could save up to the equivalent of 27sqm of palm oil plantation a year.

It's a mission close to founder Marcel Van Wing's heart. "The Flower Farm grew out of my personal love for the rainforest," he says. "I lived in Indonesia for four years, and saw with my own eyes the devastating damage to the rainforest for the construction of palm oil plantations. And yet still this continues.

"The rainforest is the basis of everything global nature needs. If we want to preserve the planet for future generations, we have to act now. Using palm oil-free products is a small step, but it's a good place to start. Hopefully one day I can tell my children that I have done something positive to tackle rainforest deforestation."



theflowerfarm.world

Premium ready meals producer expands its reach

Premium frozen ready meal brand, FieldGoods, founded during lockdown by brothers Elliot and Sam Day, has just launched into 80 independent stores, including Partridges and Fortnum & Mason.

The duo moved back to Devon from London during the height of the Covid crisis, where they had successfully been running pop-ups and restaurants.

Spotting a gap in the market for nutritious, sustainable convenience meals made without compromise, they set out to create a range of delicious suppertime solutions, using prime ingredients from British suppliers. Beef is native and grass-fed, chicken and pork is free-range, fish is from Moxon's and ChalkStream, and all packaging is home compostable or recyclable. In addition, the HQ uses 100% renewable energy from the business's own solar panels, or carbon offset sources.

"Our mission is to reinvent and elevate the ready meal market," says Elliot. "The brand has grown its range with sales up over 100% year-on-year. It is clear there is a demand from customers looking for inspirational, fresh and convenient meals."



Options available for independent retailers include Thai Red Vegetable Curry, Tarragon Chicken, Miso Butter Hispi Cabbage, Mac & Cheese, Hasselback Potatoes, Melt in the Middle Chocolate Brownie, and Sticky Toffee Pudding.

fieldgoods.co.uk

Living Things breaks into the functional drinks market



"Tasting good and doing good don't have to be in conflict," says Ben Vear, co-founder of Living Things, a new gut-friendly soda.

The refreshing range of carbon negative drinks have wellness at heart, being low in sugar, and high in fibre and prebiotics, with around two billion live cultures per can.

Flavours include Raspberry & Pomegranate, Peach & Blood Orange, and Lemon & Ginger, and the sodas contain just 13kcal per 100ml, while being free from artificial sweeteners.

"More than ever the consumer isn't looking for another sugar-filled soft drink, but for solutions that don't just taste great, but also pack health benefits and environmental credentials. With Living Things we're creating a new class of soft drink that finally does all three.

"We've taken many months to develop Living Things into what we believe can be a category-defining product, brand and aesthetic, so we're incredibly excited to be finally sharing it with consumers and investors. We're also absolutely delighted with the investment interest we have received so far."

drinklivingthings.com



ChicP reveals range of innovative ambient hummus products

The team at ChicP is delighted to unveil a new range of HFSS compliant hummus snacks, that don't require refrigeration.

It's taken 12 months to conceive the new line, says founder Hannah McCollum, who adds that she's always wanted to create a range of products with a long shelf life to help with food waste in the travel and convenience sector.

Ready to eat on the go, vegan, and high in fibre, the shelf ready pots are available in Plain, Harissa, Basil and Truffle flavours, alongside a chocolate hummus dip, containing less than a quarter of the sugar and less than half the fat of the leading hazelnut chocolate spread brand, while being full of protein.

"ChicP snacks are the perfect health snacks for kids, an office lunch, or 'on the go'," says Hannah, who adds, "New solutions to help food waste while creating delicious, colourful, healthier, plant-based natural foods is our way of contributing to a more sustainable food system.

chicp.co.uk

Suma unveils new organic pestos

Suma has launched two new organic, vegan, authentically Italian pesto, just in time for spring. Available in Green Basil or Red Sun-Dried Tomato, the brand hopes they will become store cupboard staples – ideal for stirring through pasta, or adding to a sandwich.



Kate Willis, brand co-ordinator at Suma, says, "Due to supply issues we couldn't continue with our existing Italian pesto range. This left us with the challenge of sourcing a new range. We were looking for authentically produced Italian pesto and were really lucky to find some which are made in the Genoese area of Italy.

"We think customers will enjoy our new pestos as much as we do. We are really excited about the range and hopefully will bring some more new and existing additions soon.

"These pestos are good to have in stock. They're ambient products, with a long shelf-life, and in recyclable packaging. And a great price too."

The products are available to order from 1st March.

wholesale.suma.coop



Try two new flavours from Mothernutter



Mothernutter, the gourmet peanut butter brand from Lake District-based preserves and sauces maker Wild & Fruitful, has just added two new flavours to its range. Chocolate & Orange Peanut Butter and Hot & Smoky Peanut Butter are available for independent retailers now.

"When our head chef suggested putting orange in the silky-smooth chocolate peanut butter he made, we thought he'd taken the nuttiness a little far," the Mothernutter team says. "We were wrong. The zesty orange develops as you eat. It's as wonderful as it is wild."

Talking about the savoury new addition, they add, "We've taken our signature deep roast crunchy peanut butter and blended it with just the right amount of fiery Naga chillies and rich smoky paprika. We think it's a bit of a first. It's great on toast, with cheese, or in spicy dishes."

Both flavours are 100% natural, and sold in 280g jars. Other flavours in the range include Pumpkin Spice & Seed, and Maple Bacon.
mothernutter.co.uk

New launches from Cambrook

Cambrook has added to its successful line of premium snacks in glass jar packaging by adding three new products for 2024.

The range includes Salted Caramel Chocolate Hazelnuts – a 200g jar of large roasted hazelnuts, caramelised in artisan Italian pans, and coated with smooth dark chocolate in small batches. And, on the savoury side, two products popular in the nation's cocktail bars and hotels have been decanted into jars too.

Extra-large corn kernels grown in the Cusco region of Peru are roasted and flavoured with a lively chilli seasoning for spicy crunch in the 52g Giant Chilli Corn jars. These are being served up as a new offering alongside new 30g jars of Salted Pretzels.
cambrookfoods.co.uk



Healthy new snack from Marigold

Marigold Health Foods, renowned since 1978 for its range of nutritional yeasts and boullions, and more recently, its meat-free alternatives, has unveiled its first venture into the world of snacking.



Popcorn Plus is a vegan, gluten-free brand, enhancing the nutty flavour of popped corn kernels with Marigold's savoury, umami, almost cheesy Engevita nutritional yeast, and a touch of sea salt. Each 20g bag contains less than 100 calories, and is high in Vitamin D, Vitamin B12, and fibre.

"After some thorough and fun production trials, Marigold is very happy to introduce a healthier snack, based upon wholegrain popcorn, and our ever-popular Engevita nutritional yeast. Great taste. Great price. What's not to like?" says managing director Peter Langsam.
marigoldhealthfoods.co.uk



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EXPLORE THE FUTURE OF FOOD & DRINK AT IFE 2024



The event returns to ExCeL London from 25th to 27th March as part of Food, Drink & Hospitality Week, with three packed days of networking, learning and new product discovery for the food and drink sector

For 45 years IFE has been a trusted product sourcing resource for thousands of retailers, wholesalers and hospitality professionals, highlighting the very latest new products from the UK and around the world, and providing a sneak peek into the trends of tomorrow.

IFE is made up of 14 distinct food and drink zones, covering everything from grocery to frozen to bakery and confectionery. New sections for this year's event include the Cheese Pavilion and the Fresh Produce Section, brought to life in partnership with the Fresh Produce Consortium.

Nigel Jenney, chief executive of the Fresh Produce Consortium, says, "It brings me immense pleasure and pride to announce a groundbreaking collaboration between the Fresh Produce Consortium and IFE. Fresh produce is a central part of the global food and drink industry, and this partnership recognises the transformative potential that both our organisations hold within the global food industry."

This year's event is also set to welcome exhibitors from more than 50 countries, showcasing hundreds of innovative global products, including Turkey, Thailand, France, Sri Lanka, China, Ecuador, Hungary and Cyprus.

Countless retailers, wholesalers, hospitality professionals and more are already registered to attend this year's event, including Country Range group category buyer, Viki Wilkinson, who says,"It's important that we attend IFE to meet new suppliers and keep our member wholesalers' offering fresh and update. It's also great to keep forging relationships with our long-standing existing suppliers that we can visit at the show too."

Jean Rossignol, senior buyer at Classic Fine Foods, adds, "I visit IFE to look for new products, meet partners and customers, learn about new trends and products...and taste great food!"

The Future of Food

On IFE's Future Food Stage visitors will have the chance to hear from leading industry figures including retailers like Co-Op and Ocado, sustainability pioneers such as Abel & Cole and Rubies in the Rubble, and innovative insight partners including Tried & Supplied, IGD, European Food and Farming Partnerships and Avocado Social.

Kelly Orme, buying manager - community buying at Co-op, who will be taking part in a panel titled 'Navigating the startup scene: Advice from those in the know', says, "Startups are an important source of innovation and fresh ideas in the food and drink industry. I'm looking forward to joining this panel at IFE 2024 and discussing how retailers can support and mentor suppliers as they scale and further develop their product ranges."

Ed Ayton, sustainability and ethics advisor to Abel & Cole, and panellist on the session, 'Sustainability pioneers: Global food and drink companies setting the standard', adds, "Our team always comes back from IFE buzzing with new ideas and networks, so I'm delighted to be taking part and supporting the programme this year."

Day two of the show will see IGD curate a fascinating day of content on the Future Food Stage, sessions cover everything from economic forecasts for food and drink retail, to sustainability, health, international retail, and an exclusive case study with a key client of IGD.

Sarah Baldock, marketing and communications director at IGD, says, "As IFE's insight partner we can't wait to welcome industry to ExCeL London for Food, Drink & Hospitality Week. IGD will be taking to the Future Food stage to offer retailers and suppliers a wealth of insight to help them identify opportunities over the coming year and beyond.

"Our combined team of retail, shopper, health, sustainability and economics experts look forward to helping delegates get closer to the UK market within an international context, and our exhibition stand on the show floor will offer a space for those vital one-on-one conversations. We're delighted to be partnering with IFE this year to help delegates get the most out of their visit. We look forward to seeing you there!"

Other sessions taking place on the Future Food stage include a discussion on putting customers at the heart of wholesale hosted by the FWD, a social media masterclass from Avocado Social, insights into retail's evolution in the age of AI by Sabine Benoit, professor of marketing at The University of Surrey, a session on female-led food businesses hosted by Women in Food, and advice on how AI could enhance the buyer journey.

Trends and Innovation

IFE's sister event IFE Manufacturing will feature a wide range of presentations and discussions on the Trends & Innovation Platform this year, focused on various topics within food production and development.

Topics under the microscope on the show's Trends & Innovation Platform this year will include the disruptive forces impacting the world



THE EXPORTERS HUB

Returning for IFE 2024, the Exporters Hub is an opportunity for international buyers to quickly and efficiently source export-ready food and drink brands with infrastructure in place for international sales.

For brands and manufacturers, the Exporters Hub also presents an opportunity to meet with export consultants and organisations who will be on hand to answer any questions, provide guidance on successful international selling and shipping, and advise on complementary foreign markets for specific products.

This year the hub will see organisations including the UK Government, the Food & Drink Exporters Association, the Institute of Export & International Trade, and the Food & Drink Export Council sharing insights and best practice on topics including sustainable export, reaching international customers, international online selling, overseas marketing strategies, navigating the UK/EU border and much more.



of food and drink, the AI revolution, changing attitudes to ultra processed foods, building more resilient supply chains and the projected impact of rising prices on consumers in 2024.

Richard Werran, global director of food and retail at BSI, and moderator for the session, 'The AI revolution: a food transformation', says, "AI makes precision agriculture a reality and will optimise on-farm resources through data analysis of soil health, weather conditions, and crop growth, boosting yields while simultaneously minimising environmental impact. I'm hugely looking forward to joining this discussion at IFE Manufacturing 2024."

Mark Thompson, co-founder of Edinburgh-based insight and innovation company TRKR, and panellist for the session, 'Ultra-Processed Foods: What is all the fuss about?', says, "I'm looking forward to attending IFE Manufacturing and sharing my thoughts and views on the topic of ultra-processed foods. "It's an important topic as whilst many of the foods that fall under the umbrella of 'ultra processed' are

SPECIALITY FOOD AT IFE

The Speciality Food section of IFE is packed unique artisanal and fine food products from across the UK and around the world. Here are just some of the brands you can meet at this year's event:

BARRIES - STAND 631
Barries has a family recipe that has been lovingly crafted for generations. The brand has been protective over keeping it in the family, but it's too good not to share. This is not just a simple mayo, it's an age-old recipe for a new generation and proud to be egg-free and vegan.

CALVISIUS CAVIAR - STAND 723
Calvisius Caviar was born in the 1970s in Calvisano, a village located near Brescia, Northern Italy. For over 40 years, the expert hands of its dedicated Calvisius Masters have been taking care of the caviar, using advanced techniques combined with traditional production methods to offer top-quality caviar.

KENTASTE - STAND 724
Kentaste is East Africa's leading producer of coconut products. It builds enduring, sustainable relationships with farmers and employees and sells high-quality, authentic Kenyan products. These include virgin coconut oil, coconut chips, coconut flour, desiccated coconut, coconut milk and cream, and coconut water.

LITTLE BIG FLAVOUR KITS - STAND 639
For foodies with a passion for culture cuisine, this is your sustainable meal kit brand. With its unique spice blends and traditional recipes, customers can enjoy healthy and authentic flavours, making Sri Lankan cuisine easy and accessible to everyone.

TAJÍN BY MEXGROCER - STAND 731
Tajin is a Mexican company that produces several varieties of seasoning, most consisting primarily of chilli peppers, lime, and salt. Its most popular product is a tangy, spicy 'fruit seasoning' powder (called salsa en polvo in Spanish) consisting of chilli peppers, salt, and dehydrated lime juice.

> "Our team always comes back from IFE buzzing with new ideas and networks, so I'm delighted to be taking part and supporting the programme this year"
>
> **ED AYTON, ABEL & COLE**

BESPOKE BEVERAGES

STAND 4633

Fitch & Leedes is the preferred mixer for those with discerning tastes. Inspired by the adventurous merchantman of London, Ralph Fitch and William Leedes, who sailed in 1583 seeking exotic tastes in India and the East. Fitch & Leedes authentically captures the romance and integrity of a bygone era, crafting drinks that transcend expectations. Offering unmatched quality mixers.
fitchandleedes.co.uk



THE MAC FACTORY

STAND 4316

London's favourite mac n' cheese company, is proud to present its gourmet ready meal range and convenient ready to eat mac n' cheese pouches for the restaurant and service industry. The Mac Factory was born in Camden Market at the start of the street food revolution, and has gone on to be a permanent fixture in the market, as well as at events and festivals across the UK. The team are well known for their seriously good mac n' cheese variants.
themacfactory.co.uk



CORNWALL PASTA CO

STAND 726

Cornwall Pasta Co is the only British organic pasta producer. Nick, the founder, makes all his unique pastas at the brand's purpose-built factory in Falmouth. The Everyday Organic range consists of four beautiful, plain organic British pastas, made the traditional way with bronze dies, for maximum flavour. Then there's the Seasonal & Speciality range, offering distinct flavour combinations such as Wild Garlic and British Basil. Unique pastas you simply won't find anywhere else.
cornwallpasta.com



FRANKE COFFEE SYSTEMS

STAND 5139

Franke Coffee Systems, a division of the Franke Group, is a technology and solution provider of fully automatic coffee machines for professional coffee-making needs. The Swiss manufacturer will be showing its brand-new machine Mytico for the first time in the UK at IFE. The Mytico coffee machine line spearheads the introduction of Franke's new product category, BeyondTraditional, blending cutting-edge technology, Swiss quality, Italian design, and the timeless aesthetic of a traditional portafilter machine.
The brand's passion for the best coffee quality motivates it to elevate the customer experience through sharing state-of-the-art innovations and profound industry expertise.
coffee.franke.com





BOBA BOX

STAND 4811

A premium ingredient supplier with over 13 years in the bubble tea industry, Boba Box has established itself as a trusted partner for retailers, restaurants, dessert lounges and franchisees across the globe. The first to market in the UK, with a central London HQ and a European base in the Netherlands, the brand's bespoke services and unwavering commitment to quality have helped countless businesses thrive in the ever-evolving bubble tea market. Boba Box will be showcasing new ingredients, unique flavours and the latest equipment at IFE 2024. Meet the team to discuss how they can help you elevate your offering with bubble tea.



bobabox.co.uk

CAMBROOK FOODS

STAND 5349

Cambrook Foods is delighted to be attending IFE/HRC. Cambrook is a specialist producer of award-winning baked, salted, seasoned and caramelised nuts. It is a Great Taste producer, operating from a BRC accredited (AA grade) factory in Andover Hampshire, offering a range of nuts and snacks to suit all hospitality and retail requirements.



cambrookfoods.co.uk

JUST DESSERTS YORKSHIRE

This luxury white chocolate and orange cheesecake features a delightful digestive biscuit base with a creamy ganache topping, finished with a tangy orange glaze and detailed with white chocolate to create the most indulgent dessert combination.



just-desserts.co.uk

STAND 3161

RO-GRO

STAND 571n START-UP MARKET

Ro-Gro is a modern vertical farm using aeroponic technology to grow salad and microgreens in Kent. The brand's mission is to grow food with maximum health benefits and minimum environmental impact. In an industry first, Ro-Gro is bringing B12 biofortified pea shoots to market, available to retailers and hospitality from March 2024.



ro-gro.uk



everyday staples for most consumers. A loaf of bread for example. The very fact that these items are part of our weekly diet means that as an industry, we need a measured and informed approach to tackling their uptake."

Ruth Dolby of Food Science Fusion will moderate a session on efficiency in food and drink development. She says, "Working across the food chain, we will be looking at best practice for optimising NPD value in all areas of the process. It is great to be invited back to facilitate this panel on the Trends & Innovation Platform and to be joined by colleagues with some great insights and to share."

The 2024 programme will also see startup founders and brand owners taking to the stage to share candid experiences of business failures, sharing key lessons and resilience tips for future success.

The Trends & Innovation Platform will also play host to the World Food Innovation Awards winners ceremony at 2.45pm on Monday, 25th March, followed by the winner presentation for the inaugural IFE Manufacturing Ingredients Awards, in partnership with the IFST, at 4pm.

The New Products Tasting Theatre

The New Products Tasting Theatre at IFE is a bustling hub of new product tastings, demos and pitches from innovative startups. Across the three days of the event various exciting brands from the show's Startup Market will have the opportunity to pitch their product to a live audience, host tastings and answer any buyer questions in person.

Plus, the New Products Tasting Theatre will be host to several Distributor Discovery Hours, where wholesale brands including Bidfood and Sysco will be showcasing some of the most unique brands in their ranges.

The Certification Clinic

Returning to IFE's sister show IFE Manufacturing is the Certification Clinic, where a number of key industry accreditation bodies will be available for one-on-one consultation and advice for food and drink brands. This year the organisations taking part are Coeliac UK, RSPCA Assured, BRCGS, Soil Association Certification, Halal Certification Europe (HCE), SALSA Food, The Vegan Trademark, Red Tractor, Halal Certification Organisation Ltd (HCO) and Loop Certified.

Jacqui Slatter, development manager at SALSA, says, "While virtual meetings help people to stay connected, in-person events allow for a more personal approach, encouraging deeper discussions on more complex issues. SALSA is delighted to be participating again in the Certification Clinic at IFE Manufacturing 2024, which is a unique opportunity for businesses to speak one-to one with experienced food safety professionals and to seek advice in the area of auditing and certification.

"SALSA is recognised as the UK's leading food safety certification scheme for smaller producers. As a membership scheme - not just a standard – SALSA can also provide businesses with support, advice, guidance and training services. We look forward to meeting with small businesses looking for certification of their food safety management systems and providing insights into the best solutions for their position."

Kayleigh Plumbridge, regional marketing manager (EMEA), adds, "BRCGS is delighted to be taking part in the Certification Clinic at IFE Manufacturing 2023 once again. Confidence in quality and safety remains a top priority but the increasing globalisation and complexity of food supply chains across all elements of the industry can present new challenges.

"BRCGS certification is the leading solution that provides much-needed confidence and reassurance for consumers, suppliers and brands, and we are really looking forward to meeting like-minded professionals to discuss BRCGS certification in more detail."

Food, Drink & Hospitality Week

The newly launched umbrella brand Food, Drink & Hospitality Week brings together sister events IFE Manufacturing, IFE, The Pub Show, HRC and International Salon Culinaire for the UK's biggest celebration of industry innovation.

With more than 27,000 industry professionals expected to attend and thousands of innovative products on display, the upcoming event is not to be missed. Visitors can expect to taste, test and discover a wide range of quality products and meet the faces behind the brands.

THE STARTUP MARKET

This year the Startup Market is once again home to the show's newest suppliers and up-and-coming food and drink brands. Startups are the lifeblood of the sector, bringing in new ideas, fresh approaches and innovative approaches to familiar products.

The Startup Market is not only a reflection of current food and drink trends but also a predictor of future industry shifts, making it a key component of the event for both exhibitors and attendees.

Here are just some of the brands you can meet at the Startup Market at IFE 2024:

BETTER FOOD MOOD - STAND 571H
Better Food Mood create wellness teas, superfood blends and nut and seed breakfast toppers. This young wellness brand offers products including turmeric chai, rose chamomile lavender tea, masala chai and tea masala powder.

HEALICIOUS - STAND 571P
Healicious is passionate about millets, an ancient superfood the brand is reviving for the modern consumer's palate. Its grains are gluten free, high in fibre, non-GMO, packed with vitamins and minerals, and with a low glycaemic index, too.

KIN + DEUM - STAND 571A
kin+deum means to eat and to drink in Thai. This brand is dedicated to preserving the rich traditions of Thai cuisine and snacks, focusing on the art of well-being through the use of natural ingredients, herbs, spices, and fruits to create authentic and delicious flavours.

NEED TO KNOW

To find out more about everything happening as part of Food, Drink & Hospitality Week on 25th-27th March 2024, visit fooddrinkandhospitalityweek.co.uk



A TASTE OF FRANCE
AT YOUR FINGERTIPS IN 2024

Visit the Business France Marketplace online, or the Business France Pavilion at IFE this March, to discover new flavours and innovation

"France has long been synonymous with fantastic food and drink," says Pauline Gauthier of Business France. "And despite trends coming and going, the country's offering remains at the beating heart of the industry, with thousands of traditional businesses complemented by those that are setting the bar for the 21st Century."

If French food and drink have fallen off your radar, make a beeline to Business France's online Marketplace. With thousands of products listed, there's no better place to get stuck into all France has to offer. And a small selection of those producers will be exhibiting on the French Pavilion at IFE, offering the chance for a real-life sample of the online platform.

An initiative of Business France – the trade arm of the French Embassy – the Marketplace is a hub of excellence, designed as a highly accessible online one-stop-shop, connecting buyers, importers and distributors with thousands of French companies.



It "gives B2B customers the ability to browse and sample a broad range of food and beverages from French producers," adds Pauline. "It's a meeting point for French exporters and British businesses. Perfect for anyone looking to enhance their portfolio. All the exhibitors at the French pavilion are on the Marketplace, facilitating their connections with British buyers, and making British professionals' lives easier by streamlining sourcing," she adds. "It's a fantastic way to enhance your business network."

The Business France Marketplace is easy to navigate, and allows users to not only request free samples, but also to place orders via producers, who are all ready to export immediately.

Discover more at marketplace.businessfrance.fr





MEET THE PRODUCERS

Business France Pavilion at the 2024 IFE will showcase a range of producers featuring on the online Marketplace. They include:

COOPENOIX
A collective of 400 PDO walnut growers, with orchards spanning the French Alps. All members are committed to the highest environmental and agricultural standards. Discover how good walnuts can taste, and more about their health and nutritional credentials. The nuts are available under Coopenoix's brand, or can be own-label.

SAGA CHOCOLAT
Founded by expert pastry chef Jacques Morillon in 2006, the business specialises in frozen desserts made using the best ingredients, combining traditional artisan methods with cutting edge technology.

PLANTIN
Black truffles (also known as 'black diamonds') are prized by chefs and food lovers across the world for their unmistakeably complex, earthy flavour and heady scent. This Provence-based family-run business supplies some of France's finest restaurants, and has developed techniques to perfectly preserve truffles, offering them frozen or in jars all-year-round.

LA FABRIQUE COOKIES
La Fabrique has 14 shops across France, and is renowned for the clean credentials of its cookies and cakes – made with fresh French butter, milk and flour, and packaged in certified biodegradable and compostable cellulose film.

KOKI
The number one hazelnut producer in Europe, made up of a cooperative of 350 farm members, who grow both hazelnuts and walnuts to the most stringent standards.

LARNICOL
Founded by Georges Larnicol, a former winner of France's Best Baker. The business is known for the Kouignette – its take on Breton speciality the kouign amann. Available chilled or frozen in individual portions.

CEPASCO
Purveyor of spices, condiments and Provencal herbs, with more than 1,000 spices and blends under its own brands and private label. New to the business is Epice Tout – a collection of 20 products that are 100% organic and additive-free.

PATISSERIES GOURMANDES
An expert in the cakes and pastries of Western France, from madeleines to pound cakes, all made with real butter, free-range eggs, and no nasties or palm oil.

SAINTE LUCIE
Sainte Lucie has been travelling the world since 1885, discovering delicious ingredients and introducing them to discerning customers. From dried fruits, to spices, nut pastes, essences and extracts.

FAMILLE MICHAUD
Based in the Pyrenees, Famille Michaud is dedicated to bringing rare and precious honey (as well as agave syrup and maple syrup brands) to the market. The family-run business takes nature seriously, with a charter ensuring it only works with beekeepers whose apiaries are protected from noise and pesticides, and found in rich, fertile grounds, far from pollution. The business also set up a foundation dedicated to saving bees and beekeeping.

CRUSTAMAN
Manufacturer of sweets, pralines, chocolates, pastas, cereals and drinks, under private label and its own brand.

SAINT MAMET
Experts in fruit – from canned, to individual cups, compotes, and a breakfast range of jams, hazelnut spreads and honey. At IFE Saint Mamet will present its Flavour of the Year 2024 award-winning new Coconut Cocktail, blending peaches, pears, pineapple and crunchy coconut.

ENSEMBLE FOODS
A subsidiary of Tereos – a cooperative of farms across France. The brand's vision is to bring affordable plant-based products to the market, aimed at vegans, vegetarians, flexitarians, and the veggie-curious. The range is high in plant-based protein, soy free, Halal and Kosher.

> "Despite trends coming and going, France's offering remains at the beating heart of the industry, with thousands of traditional businesses complemented by those that are setting the bar for the 21st Century"
>
> **PAULINE GAUTHIER**

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BRITISH FUSION

Add adventure to comfort food classics to refresh menus and stimulate spend says Sally-Jayne Wright

Many diners think twice before ordering unfamiliar foreign dishes. But you can win them over with the new British fusion trend. That was the conclusion of a 2024 survey conducted by CGA/NielsenIQ for foodservice wholesaler, Bidfood.

WHAT'S BRITISH FUSION?

This is when chefs give well-recognised formats such as Sunday roasts, full English breakfasts and desserts, new twists of globally-inspired flair. How about roast chicken with Chinese stir-fried greens? Or Italian sausage rolls containing fennel seeds, sun-dried tomatoes and garlicky salsiccia Toscana? According to the survey, more than one in three respondents felt British fusion spanned the divide between vibrant international cuisine and British comfort food; 68% of 2,003 UK respondents found the concept appealing.

ANY MORE EXAMPLES?

Marks and Spencer's Garlic Haddock Kievs are a spin on chicken kievs. The Bombay-inspired restaurant group, Dishoom, reinvented the bacon sarnie when they offered Ayrshire bacon with tomato chilli jam on a naan roll. Pieminister has also put one of our best loved takeaways, chicken tikka masala, into the cosy confines of a pie.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE TREND?

- Brunch culture, where it's okay to break the rules and serve hybrids.
- International chefs adding their own touches to British staples.
- Our appetite for world flavours coincides with a rise in sales of comfort food (because of the cost-of-living squeeze). Nearly a third of consumers (32%) surveyed for the Waitrose Food & Drink Report 2023-24 reported regularly eating such classics as shepherd's pie and macaroni cheese. In 2023, Waitrose shoppers bought more rice puds, pies, sausages, ready-made roast potatoes and Yorkshires.
- People are craving a variety of dining experiences (Open Table 2023 Q2 Diner Survey).



WHICH CUISINES SHOULD WE BORROW FROM TO INJECT MORE EXCITEMENT INTO OUR BRUNCH MENUS?

Almost every country has an egg dish, from huevos rancheros to shakshuka, Parsi scrambled eggs to frittata, Turkish eggs to Spanish tortilla.

At Hatch, Manchester's retail and street food courtyard, there are breakfast classics with twists inspired by Africa, Brazil, Texas, Australia and Mexico. They include an Ethiopian-inspired full English - Ethiopian scrambled eggs, lamb sausages, a fava bean medley, fried onions and tomatoes, hash browns and sourdough toast.

THAT'S TOO BOLD FOR OUR CUSTOMERS. CAN YOU SUGGEST SOME GENTLER TWEAKS?

How about a bacon sarnie on focaccia or on a bagel? The restaurant website Square Meal has tipped bagels as the 'square croissant of 2024'. Customers who've only ever tasted supermarket-bought will be in for a pleasant surprise if you can track down a good supplier.

At Tebay Services Farm Shop on the M6 northbound to Cumbria, in a new take on the British sandwich, they're serving flatbreads with such home-grown fillings as pulled lamb shoulder (using lamb from the farm), rocket salad and tzatziki.

HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE BRITISH FUSION TREND?

- Social media visibility is more important than ever (Open Table). Create anticipation for the arrival of your next hybrid dish.
- Showcase local produce with global touches. Younger customers who wouldn't order game casserole will surely like bao buns stuffed with char siu (Chinese barbecue-style pork) venison and Asian slaw made from fresh farm veg.
- If, as at Macknade Food Hall cafe in Faversham, the menu lists a potato and kimchi hash, reveal where in store customers can buy kimchi.
- Know your customer. Chocolate pots with Thai chilli may appeal. Kimchi cheese croissant might be a step too far.

WE'VE GOT SOMEONE FROM ANOTHER CULTURE WORKING HERE. SHOULD WE PICK THEIR BRAIN FOR IDEAS?

Good thinking. Dezi Dalton, owner of the Rye Deli in East Sussex, was born in London of Indian heritage. She says, "Working with a diverse team we are able to draw on Mauritian, South Indian and Pakistani [influences] as well as being able to offer British food classics. Most popular is our Brindian range - our Indian shepherd's pie, chicken korma pasties, spicy chickpea turnovers, and rye Delhi burgers."

Now that spag bol is a British staple, Rye Deli is not afraid to jazz it up with a few cumin seeds or to put ground cardamom in a classic French tarte au citron.

"Recently, to go with a harissa-spiced roast leg of lamb, we layered potatoes, Dauphinoise-style, with coriander, turmeric, chillies and roasted aubergines. It wasn't Moroccan, French or Turkish, but it was delicious!"



34% OF CONSUMERS ARE LOOKING FOR COMFORT FOOD CLASSICS SUCH AS SHEPHERD'S PIE

WAITROSE

WHOSE BRITISH FUSION PRODUCTS DO YOU LIKE?

One of our favourite condiments is Pico Punjabi Ketchup which tastes like butter chicken sauce. It's one of numerous spins on classic tomato ketchup. Hibiscus Lily's Lemon and Ginger with Turmeric Marmalade is another Brindian product we love.

WILL THE TREND LAST?

We think it will. As food writer, Bee Wilson, says in her book The Way We Eat Now, "The truly successful food trends are those that offer something new to excite our neophiliac (novelty-loving) side while also appeasing our cautious, neophobic (novelty-fearing) side with the familiar".

Kateline Porritt, head of trends for Egg Soldiers, a food intelligence company for hospitality and retail, says, "Fusion options are really starting to emerge back into the limelight with considered inauthenticity a new cool in food."

> "Successful food trends are those that excite our novelty-loving side"

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THE GREEN ISSUE 2024



WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS

There's a huge amount to unpack on the topics of the future of farming, food security, and sustainability. It's clear much needs to change to ensure we continue to support homegrown, robust supply chains that put feeding people well and being environmentally sensitive at the top of the agenda, alongside paying those working in agriculture fairly. The UK desperately now needs arbiters of change within government and policy making to address these concerns, and assure a brighter future for the people and the planet.

At *Speciality Food* we've been proud, in this edition, to really hone in on some of the environmental issues affecting fine food and drink producers and retailers. We hear from experts and insiders what's needed to strengthen the UK's position, and action that's already happening to make a difference. Within this section we explore the sustainable credentials of frozen food, exciting technology advances in packaging and spirits, speak to some of Britain's 'greenest' dairies, and celebrate the successes of just a few of the sector's Sustainable Champions. The Green Issue is part of our own ongoing commitment to platform leading voices in sustainability. We hope you will find the content within the following pages enlightening, informative, and engaging.

CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS | EDITOR (MATERNITY COVER)

62% OF **FARMERS** PARTICIPATING IN THE **FARM PRACTICES SURVEY** INDICATED IT'S **IMPORTANT** TO CONSIDER **GREENHOUSE** GAS **EMISSIONS** WHEN MAKING FARM BUSINESS **DECISIONS**

DEFRA



EMMA MOSEY

CO-FOUNDER, YOLK FARM YORKSHIRE

'Farm shops have never been more important'

"The thing about businesses like ours is they are really really sustainable," says Emma Mosey, co-founder of Yolk Farm in Yorkshire, and current chair of the Farm Retail Association.

"As a farmer, you can either expand, get bigger, and likely become less sustainable, having to rely on chemicals, or you can go 'B to C' and diversify, more sustainably, while remaining small."

Farm shops, Emma says, have a duty of care when it comes to protecting the environment that "makes sense when it comes to providing the best for customers, but also from a business point of view too.

"Rural businesses, in particular farm shops, more often than not grow their own produce (for example we grow vegetables close to our shop), and some have their own animals, using local abattoirs. The animals are not moving very far, and are incredibly local. We also tend to have a really strong basis of local producers and suppliers. At our farm shop, 96% of what we sell comes from suppliers within 30 miles."

This way of working and stocking makes farm retailing a strong model where sustainability is concerned. "Because we are not using resources beyond our area, and because the money people are spending in our shops is going back into the local economy. Also, we pay our staff, and they spend money in the local area," adds Emma. "It's a way of maintaining the planet, while maintaining the robustness of our local connection so we can continue to flourish."

When you run a farm shop "everything you do anyway is as sustainable as possible. We care about our patch of earth, and it makes economic sense. For example, we use produce in lots of different ways. If the cauliflowers aren't perfect, we will use them to make soup or a cauliflower tart in the restaurant. We only pick what we need when it's fresh, and our kune kune pigs are our waste warriors. They eat around two tonnes of waste from the shop each year!"

Emma "genuinely believes" farm shops are crucial for the future of food, particularly with commodity farmers leaving the industry in droves. She sees them as becoming 'hubs' where customers can be assured they'll be able to buy fresh, seasonal ingredients at a fair price.

"I do think we are at this crunch point. People are being paid to leave farming, or are turning farms into conservation areas, which is great on paper, but look at it in practice. Riverford Organic did research showing 51% of farmers are thinking of leaving the industry. It's quite terrifying really because no one is replacing them. If our plan is to do less of our own production and to import more, it doesn't seem like there is a plan to solve the problem of food in this country. If we do have a Covid situation again, or war, we won't have the resources to feed ourselves."

Another dimension to food security, Emma adds, is the rising prevalence of ultra-processed foods over fresh food in the UK. Again, she feels farm shops, but also genuine farmers markets, have a part to play. "We're missing that connection with real food and educating people around how to cook. I think farm retailers and farmers' markets have a massive part to play in the future of how we feed people. If the government want to get good food to people in an affordable way, markets that source from local farms are a credible, sustainable option."



ROB PERCIVAL

HEAD OF FOOD POLICY, THE SOIL ASSOCIATION

'Organic is increasingly being considered as the most sustainble option for consumers'

As extreme weather becomes more common, it's hard not to dwell on the impact that our poor choices have on the environment. Food waste is one obvious environmental issue, but the full story is more complicated. Almost half of our food's sustainability impact comes from how it is grown, far more than its transport or packaging, or eventual waste. Half a century of increasingly intensive farming hasn't worked for the planet or built resilient farm businesses.

Shoppers increasingly know this. Issues like climate change are beginning to be taken seriously and are informing their habits – despite the ongoing challenges associated with the 'cost of living' crisis.

The complexity of these issues can feel overwhelming. If only there was a label to guide them, a farming system taking a joined-up approach.

Enter organic.

Organic farming can be good for the climate, as it cuts emissions by reducing fertiliser and pesticides, which are also hugely damaging for wildlife.

Reducing agrochemicals produces healthier soils, helping to store more carbon from the atmosphere.

Plus, organic farms use less energy on average, and livestock are fed at least 60% grass instead of imported soya from Latin America. The benefits mean organic is increasingly being considered as the most sustainable option for consumers.

The sector is constantly evolving. New software like Growing Good makes ordering a veg box easier. And independent retailers have started signposting the benefits of organic in store, making direct supermarket RRP comparisons – highlighting the relative cheapness of organic whilst improving footfall and spending.

At the same time, we need government investment, robust legislation and standards that encourage innovation. Farmers need access to information, training and support to develop their practices and help the sector grow.

There are no magic bullets to solve the climate crisis – we need long-term thinking, and this is the place to start.



COMMENTATORS



KATE KEHOE
FMCG GURUS



TOBY EDWARDS
FRIDAY STREET FARM SHOP



MILLY BAGOT
BYRUBY



MATT WHELAN
FIELDFARE



THE BIG FREEZE

Sales of frozen food and luxury ready meals are climbing. *Speciality Food* discovers what's behind the upward trend

The landscape of frozen food is changing as savvy consumers switch up their habits. The freezer is no longer a forgotten part of the kitchen used to host languishing tubs of ice cream and the odd pack of chips or peas – it's become a vehicle for eating better, more mindfully, and with an eye on managing and minimising household waste, while saving money.

According to research by FMCG Gurus, four out of 10 global consumers say they've cut down on eating out and takeaways, while increasingly reaching for better quality food to eat at home. "This includes more premium ready meals, which consumers associate with both convenience and good value for money," says FMCG Gurus' Kate Kehoe.

The premium element, she adds, is an important part of the conversation, with 73% of those asked attempting to eat more healthily, paying attention to ingredient lists, and actively looking for meals produced with minimal processing, and fewer additives. 'Protein' and 'fibre' top the list in terms of what they're searching for in the frozen aisle, and 54% said they will pay more for a 'natural' ready meal, "due to its association with health and an absence of artificial ingredients."

In the face of this 'new wave' of interest in the sector, fine food retailers are upping their frozen game, with multiple farm shops, food halls and delis increasing their offering, and seeing positive results.

Putting frozen front and centre

When they were redesigning the layout of their store a few years ago, the team at Friday Street Farm Shop decided to invest heavily in frozen – adding a whopping seven additional freezers to this already extensive part of the shop floor. There are dedicated branded freezers for Cook, Fieldfare and The Original Baker, as well as sections to house the growing range of locally-made frozen goods, including H&J Gelato, and Brick pizzas.

"Frozen is one of our highest selling areas," reveals deli manager Toby Edwards. "It's why a lot of people come our way." The Original Baker is one brand the shop is best known for. "People were calling out for sausage rolls and pies they could take home and cook, so for us, it made sense to bring in more of that as an investment."

Toby believes customers being time-poor is a key driver to the success of frozen at Friday Street. "They're looking for a cooked meal, or some croissants for breakfast, or gratins they can pop in the oven to save time slicing up potatoes. They know we can save them time with what we have."

Ready meals and meal solutions made in-house have seen an increase in poplarity alongside frozen too, says Toby. "I've been in the butchery trade since 2015, and the sales of these kinds of things has increased tenfold at least. I feel the whole area of pre-made has increased massively. Our stir fries sell really well. You just





THRIVING FROZEN FOOD INDUSTRY PREPARES FOR ITS CENTENTARY YEAR



This year not only marks the 75th anniversary of the British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF), but it's 100 years since Clarence Birdseye brought to market the fast-freezing process, which changed world food production forever.

"Our 100-year journey is a reflection of the ever-improving taste, quality and convenience of frozen food, and we hope to continue to support our members and the wider industry for the next century," says Rupert Ashby, chief executive of the BFFF.

The industry continuously demonstrated outstanding performance during 2023, despite challenging economic conditions that impacted the entire frozen food supply chain.

According to new Kantar data growth was seen with a year-on-year increase in value of 15.6%, and of volume by 0.4%.

The most substantial growth was in frozen potato products (up 4.6%), and savoury food (up 5.1%).

A surprise is the spike in ice cream sales, which grew by an impressive 10% in the 12 weeks to November 26. This unusual demand over the autumn season reflects recent impressive innovation in the category, and shoppers opting for cosy nights in rather than costly nights out.

"I am elated to see the exceptional performance of our industry in 2023," says Rupert. "The numbers speak volumes, and are a testament to our members, who have continued to innovate and provide shoppers with value for money foods, despite battling costs and inflation. Frozen food has been embraced by shoppers during what has been an extremely tough year for many."

put the mix straight in a pan and it's ready to eat in minutes. It's that quick to cook element that's really appealing."

Toby says he and the operators of the farm shop see these parts of the business as hugely valuable, and they wouldn't hesitate to tell others this is a good investment if they are thinking of expanding or mixing up their offering this year. "We were sceptical about increasing the area to begin with," he explains. "We thought we'd have loads leftover, but it's actually increased sales more, and we've been able to delve into lots of different things. The demand is very big."

Capitalising on the demand for quality

Milly Bagot, founder of ByRuby, which struck up a distribution partnership with Fieldfare in 2023, says it was her own personal experience of the value of high quality, homely ready meals, that led her to launch the company in 2018.

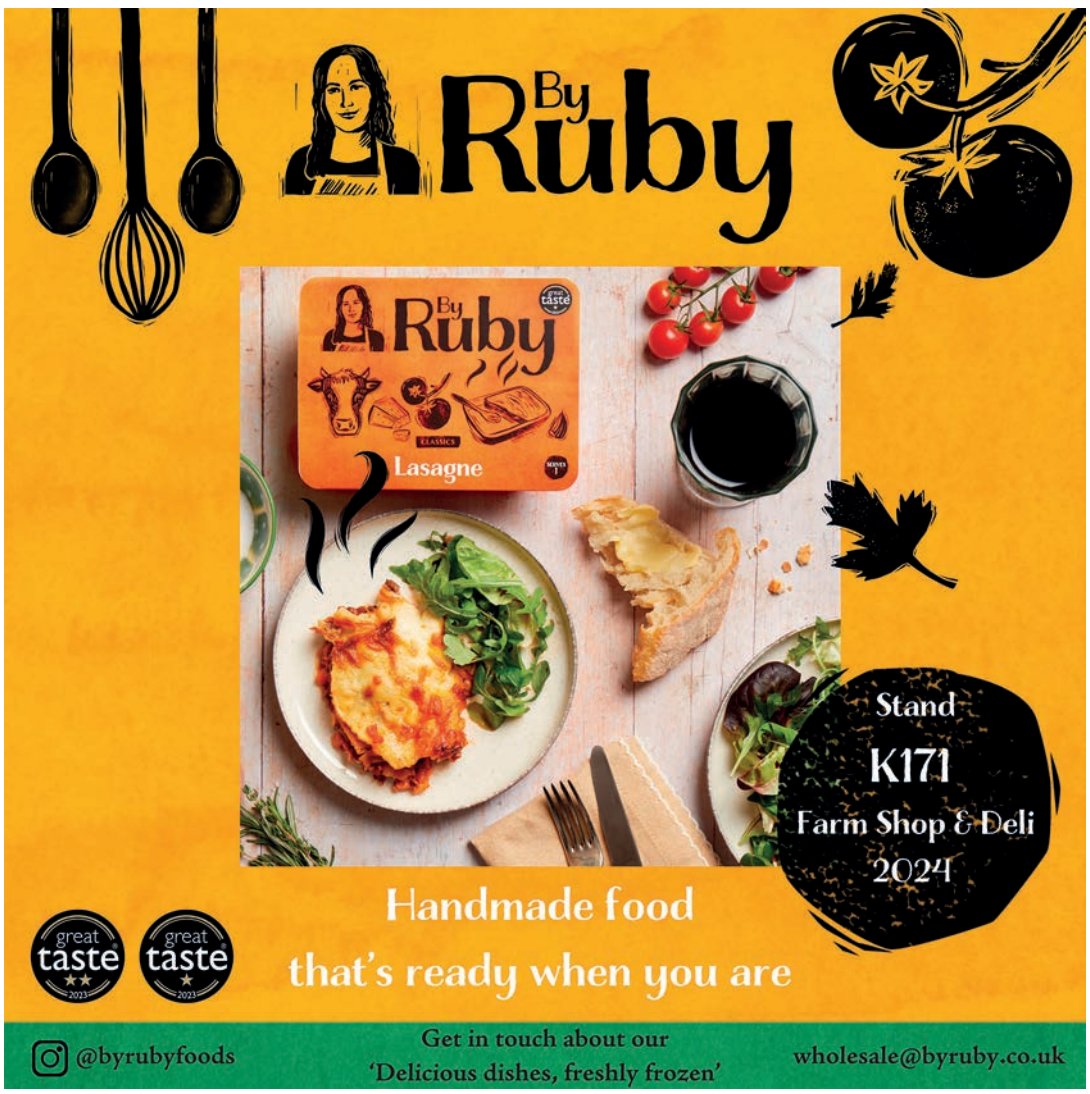
"My granny always used to fill her freezer with casseroles, and my sister made batches for me when I had my child. I thought 'why don't we do this more?'"

Milly was convinced there was a gap in the market for frozen food made with love, just as you'd prepare it in your own kitchen. And she was right. In the last financial year, ByRuby saw sales increase by 50%, with a similar trajectory predicted for 2024, and the brand can now be found in 54 Waitrose stores, as well as a number of independents.

Winding back the clock, Milly says she could see the sector at the time was "a little bit boring". She thought she could revolutionise what a ready meal could be, and her vision was cemented during lockdown when she felt people wanted to have a real treat at home – a more nutritious, instant alternative to a takeaway.

The frozen food market, she says, is changing for the better. "Gone are the days of people thinking about fishfingers and peas. They are now realising the benefits of frozen. From a freshness perspective, it's like pressing pause on something until you're ready to press play again." Consumers, Milly adds, are using premium ready meal options as a way to claw back precious time for themselves and their family. "Our ethos is that we're making handmade food that's ready when you are. You might come home from work, and can't face cooking – and you can put a delicious dinner in the oven straight from the freezer." This convenience

> "The beauty of frozen is you don't have to add preservatives to lengthen the shelf life of a product"
>
> MILLY BAGOT





is, she says, one of the main reasons customers tell her they love her range of products – as are provenance and clean labelling.

ByRuby uses around 97% British ingredients, including Suffolk chicken, and beef from a farm in Yorkshire. The brand, as many other emerging premium makers, has steered away from being ultra-processed, with UPF a concern for shoppers as research continues to show the effect it has on our bodies. "The beauty of frozen is you don't have to add preservatives to lengthen the shelf life of a product," says Milly. "We only use store cupboard ingredients you could buy in your weekly shop. We wouldn't add anything you didn't recognise."

Aligning with other makers, ByRuby's biggest sellers are geared to comfort – lasagne, fish pie and chicken tikka all being big hits, with a new occasion range launching this spring, aimed at feeding four, rather than one or two people. "That will allow us to be able to hit that family market, which will be exciting, not only for families, but for couples having friends round for dinner," Milly says.

Alongside convenience, flavour and quality, Milly believes sustainability is core to people's buying decisions when stocking their freezers. They are looking to businesses that are doing things in a greener way before they spend out on premium products. "There's no waste in our kitchen," Milly says. "We cook exactly the right amount each time. And we don't use plastic trays. Ours use pulp, which will go through the recycling with cardboard and paper. The liner contains a little plastic, but it's less than 5%."

Leading the charge

Operating in the frozen arena for nearly 50 years, Fieldfare can be considered as leading the way in the sector when it comes to value, quality, and sustainability, says managing director Matt Whelan.

Over that time the brand has become a trusted staple in farm shops and food halls across the UK, and the team have seen, certainly in more recent years, a noticeable uptick in the popularity of premium prepared frozen products.

Part of this can be explained by shopping habits and environment. As more and more of us ventured into farm shops and garden centres during the lockdown period, we enjoyed the element of discovery. This is a completely different experience to supermarkets, where customers want to get in and out as quickly as possible. "Browsing really strengthens the offering," Matt says. "It's hard for supermarkets to sell premium frozen because people aren't browsing. Frozen food, for them, is a high-speed aisle."

Another factor Matt believes is affecting our reliance on frozen, is changing family dynamics. "There are more households of one or two people where dependent children have left." Buying loose frozen foods, as offered by Fieldfare, allows those smaller households to pick exactly what they need. This way of shopping appeals to families where members may be on different diets too. "Gone are the days where we all had one meal at the table that tended to accommodate everyone. Frozen can provide choice here, to satisfy a new era of consumption."

Key to growth in the sector is driving home the message that

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mygsn.co.uk



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bighams.co.uk



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BYRUBY CLASSIC BRITISH LASAGNE

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byruby.co.uk



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> Gone are the days where we all had one meal at the table that tended to accommodate everyone. Frozen can provide choice here, to satisfy a new era of consumption

MATT WHELAN

frozen food can be really very good. Matt feels consumers are looking at premium frozen in a more open-minded fashion, due to brands like Fieldfare, which are pushing the boundaries to get the message across that it's the perfect, and best, way to buy certain items. He cites frozen pizza dough as an example of changing perceptions. "You can buy one, two, five – as many as you need. There's no mess. Take it out, defrost it, the yeast comes back to life, and you have perfect pizza, ready for your toppings. That's a product people are buying into and trusting more and more."

That trust, as well as positioning and strong point-of-sale messaging, are essential for fine food retailers. Fieldfare, Matt says, has always helped with branding, from providing freezers and backboards, to signposting visitors on its website to stores that stock its products.

He's noticed some shops are now putting freezers front and centre of their offering, alongside fresh produce. "It's about being confident frozen is a good signpost of quality. We're trying to create a destination around frozen, and we get a lot of positive feedback on branding."

Quality, these days, can be perceived as stretching beyond the taste, texture and provenance of a product – customers want to be assured the businesses they support are doing their bit for the environment, and Fieldfare is constantly looking at ways to be as sustainable as possible, with a low/no waste ethos. Around 90% of its products are sold unwrapped, and the bags on offer at point of sale are compostable. "That's something we've been pioneering," says Matt. "Although, ideally, we want shops to encourage customers to bring in and reuse their own tubs. Sustainability is something that really matters to us."

A growing sense of optimism

With ready meal creators seeing off-the-charts sales, and retailers reporting enhanced interest in frozen food, there is good reason to be optimistic for frozen as a category. "My gut feeling is that we will see more growth in the sector," says Matt. "We're continuing to grow and innovate as a business. We're launching several new products early this year. We've found a new partner to make our popular herby parmentier potatoes, so those will be top of the list. And we have a wonderful new chicken schnitzel, a lovely apple tart with lots of sliced apples and a buttery pastry, a rich fruits of the forest streusel, and an apple fritter. The idea is to keep building on the range, bringing in things that complement each other. Things of quality. Quality and value are what matter most to people."

UK ICE CREAM SALES **INCREASED** BY **10%** IN AUTUMN **2023**

SOURCE: KANTAR



MEET THE PRODUCER

Fishing sustainably in the crystal clear waters of the Mediterranean Sea, Armatore brings heritage, exceptional flavour and quality to the table











Artisanal tinned fish can be heralded as one of the great (and most surprising) success stories of 2023. A social media craze, which swept the globe, breathed new life into the market. And food lovers, from London to LA, have become obsessed with creating grazing platters that put fish front and centre.

The trend spilled over onto the menus of upmarket bars and restaurants, and sees no sign of slowing, with growing consumer curiosity fuelling eateries and retailers to take the world of tinned fish much more seriously. It's no longer an 'emergency' food, relegated to the back of the cupboard. Tins and jars of tuna, anchovies, mussels, octopus and sardines are taking pride of place in the finest of food stores, and on the shelves of the most discerning customers.

Shoppers are seeking the very very best quality, products that look stunning, and, importantly, fish that has been landed sustainably.

Meeting each of these criteria is Armatore, based in the beautiful village of Cetara on Italy's Amalfi Coast. CEO Luigi Della Monica's family has been fishing Bluefin tuna in the clear waters of the Mediterranean Sea for four generations, and he was at the forefront of the new wave of interest in tinned fish. "Five years ago I saw a gap in the market," Luigi says. "You could never find canned products with Bluefin tuna, so I decided to start a company of my own based on the fishing and production of great produce from our sea, including Bluefin tuna and anchovies, which are a speciality of my hometown of Cetara."

As everything is fished and processed by the Armatore team, the brand has complete control over quality and sustainability. They only take what is needed from the sea, respecting the seasons and timings of each species, and using measures to protect their habitats, biodiversity, and long-term viability. This includes implementing selective techniques such as pesca a circuizione, using gentle netting systems such as MSC-approved purse seines, and sourcing responsibly from stocks that are not overfished.

"I don't like to compare myself to others," says Luigi, "but what I can tell you is that when you choose Armatore, you choose to be part of a large family that believes in sustainability. Sustainable fishing is the only fishing we know."

Due to Italian legislation, with government quotas in place for Bluefin since 2010, just 21 boats across the whole of the country are permitted to fish for the prized 'king of tuna'. Armatore's strong heritage, and understanding of the delicate balance of the sea, have led it to have some of the largest shares in these boats – something Luigi is incredibly proud of.

As well as beautiful fillets of prime Bluefin in olive oil, which bring a touch of magic to any dish, Armatore's range includes two types of white-fleshed tuna – Tonno Palamita (Bonito), and Tonno Alalunga (Albacore), both, like Bluefin, rich with nutritional value, with particularly beneficial levels of Omega 3. Tombarello (Bullet tuna) is more akin to Bluefin, but with a paler flesh.

Armatore's collection doesn't end at tinned fish. The brand has also garnered a reputation for the most exquisite bottarga – also known as Mediterranean caviar. Armatore's bottarga is produced under the directives of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna. Bluefin eggs are pressed, salted, and dried slowly, creating an ingredient that is revered by chefs for its umami flavour.

The very best anchovies are another string to Armatore's bow. "We fish anchovies in spring on the Amalfi Coast," says Luigi. "Only the largest are selected to become fine anchovies in oil. The maturation process takes place in chestnut barrels for a period of more than eight months."

This is a practice handed down from generation to generation. Once ripened, the anchovies are cleaned of salt, pinned, and preserved in jars, ready to be draped over bruschetta, or melted into a puttanesca sauce.

Anchovies are also at the heart of one of Armatore's most precious ingredients - Colatura Di Alici – a liquid essence that takes them to another level. The fish are layered with sea salt in barrels, and matured for 24 to 30 months. "The result is an incredible extract that can be used to add flavour to any kind of dish, from meat tartare to vegetables," says Luigi. "I love it with boiled potatoes, broccoli, and of course pasta. You can basically use it as a replacement for salt with anything, and it's so much healthier as it's rich in Omega 3."

Artisan Italian wholesaler, Just Gourmet Foods, which works solely with distinctive, family-run producers, is proud to bring Armatore's products to the UK market. "We were introduced to Armatore by a couple of brands that we work with who felt that we could also be a great fit to look after them in the UK," says founder Gianfranco Perri. "As we did our due diligence, before sealing the relationship, we came to appreciate just how great a fit they were with our business, due to their artisanal positioning and shared ethos."

Gianfranco says he felt their story had to be heard, and that customers would appreciate Armatore's commitment to sustainability, tradition and quality. "The range is very new to the UK still, and we have work to do to communicate just how wonderful their products are, but we are on a journey together, and looking forward to sharing their story more."



CENTRE



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1 ECO GREEN LIVING
SUSTAINABLE HOME PRODUCTS

Transform your household category with Eco Green Living's eco-friendly essentials, including certified compostable waste and food bags, clingfilm, recycled foil, laundry sheets, and bamboo kitchen towels. Eco Green Living prioritises sustainability with carbon-neutral shipping via Ecologi, partnering with Treesisters for habitat restoration, and supporting environmental projects through Planet.com
ecogreenliving.co.uk

2 ISLAND BAKERY
BISCUIT RANGE

Sustainability is baked into every product crafted by Island Bakery on the Isle of Mull. The biscuits are organic, made with natural ingredients, contain nothing artificial, and promote healthy ecosystems and high animal welfare. The wood for Island Bakery's oven, and its renewable electricity, is all from local, sustainable sources. So nibble with a clear conscience - grab a biscuit and enjoy!
islandbakery.scot

3 SHEPHERD'S PURSE
ORGANIC YORKSHIRE BLUE CHEESE

In collaboration with its friends at Acorn Dairy, Shepherd's Purse is excited to officially launch Organic Yorkshire Blue Cheese this spring. Crafted in the heart of Yorkshire with the finest organic cow's milk, the cheese offers the famous Yorkshire Blue mild and creamy flavour profile. Perfect for cheese boards, recipes, or as an easy sumptuous snack, it's a sustainable choice for the discerning palate.
shepherdspurse.co.uk



4 THE GARLIC FARM
SMOKED GARLIC BUTTER

A bestselling product, The Garlic Farm Smoked Garlic Butter is hand blended in small batches using milk from pasture-fed cows and locally smoked garlic. This product really captures the Garlic Farm ethos of regenerative farming. The versatile butter is gluten free and can be used in a variety of ways including making garlic bread, coating new potatoes, or roasting chicken.
thegarlicfarm.co.uk

5 PRODIGY SNACKS
CHOCOLATE BAR AND BISCUITS

Producing the UK's first plastic-negative chocolate, this purpose-driven brand reinvents British chocolate and biscuit classics into healthier, better, ethical snack versions more fitting for modern day. Using high-quality single origin cacao, Prodigy chocolate is vegan as well as dairy, gluten, refined sugar and palm oil free, with a gut-friendly dose of prebiotic fibre. People and planet friendly AND delicious.
prodigysnacks.com

6 FAIRFIELDS FARM
HANDCOOKED CRISPS

Fairfields Farm produces delicious glute-free and vegan, homegrown and handcooked crisps at its independent farm, using regenerative farming and renewable energy.
The crisps are available in single serve and sharing packs, and seasoned to perfection. The range includes award-winning Sweet Chilli, Sea Salt & Aspall Cyder Vinegar and Cheese and Onion flavours.
fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk

7 SEGGIANO
ANCIENT GRAIN PASTA

Seggiano's producer mills the flour for this pasta using local organic grain. Sicilian ancient wheats maintain biodiversity, so are more resilient to climate change. The wheat's deeper roots need less water and no pesticides, and the pasta's eco credentials are further boosted by the use of 90% energy from solar panels, plus the fact it is packed in 100% paper. This pasta's low gluten index gives it greater digestibility too.
seggiano.com

'Measuring sustainability is key to making improvements'



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

When we first started our sustainability journey I remember an old adage coming home to roost. "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it".

It was one of those omnipresent phrases that would arise when any new business activity was being considered. And how true it is and how very annoying at the same time. Because it meant the dream of new initiative was tempered by degrees of hard calculations to get it off the ground.

My thinking was that being entrepreneurial was supposed to be creative and inspiring, hopefully financially beneficial and, at times dare I say it, fun!

At least that's what it said at the entrepreneur recruitment centre when I signed up.

But as we all know, the measuring process can become the very opposite of all those things – time-consuming, frustrating and even soul-destroying. In fact, the mere mention of "data submission" even to this day is enough for me to start reviewing retirement arrangements.

And it applies to concepts that you wouldn't want to meet in a dark alleyway. Business rates, pensions regulations, service charges, insurance policies, VAT computations, which all conspire to add an industrial language answer to that meaning of business life question.

It would perhaps be easy for sustainability to fall into the dreaded category, especially every January when our thoughts turn again to this vitally important element of our commercial and also personal lives.

But I have been pleased to see that this has not been the case for us. Mainly because some members of the Partridges team are clearly made of stern stuff, and have taken on the sustainability challenge with full throttle enthusiasm and dedication.

So, firstly, it has been very helpful to build on this naturally evolving platform and allow sustainability leaders in the team to come to the fore.

Secondly, sustainability is not an exclusive club open to only highly trained professionals and academics - although their advice and support are invaluable. Everyone in the workforce has an element of control over their jobs, and will keep thinking of more efficient and sustainable ways of improving their working life. It is in their best interests to do so.

Thirdly, by creating goals and achievable targets, and through internal dialogue and communication, there has emerged a common sense of purpose in almost everything we do on a daily level.

This does not mean that we are in any way 'achieving' sustainability, but it does mean we are moving towards that goal in a more unified manner.

This is where the measuring comes into play.

Using the very helpful Planet Mark organisation as our mentors, it took us about eight weeks to measure and collate the data for a one-year period relating to buildings, travel, waste, water and procurement. This would provide us with the basis for reduction targets.

The results once broken down into illustrative examples by Planet Mark make fascinating reading - at least for me.

For example, the current energy we were using in our two food shops could power 209 UK homes for a year.

The waste we produced from the shops per year was the same as the weight of eight London buses, we used 133lts of water for each member of staff per day, and we got through 134 sheets of stationery per day. In terms of company travel we have completed a one-way journey to Carlisle (by my calculations).

Only through the measuring exercise of our consumption has the scale of the challenge come to life.

Our next targets are to reduce annual power emissions to under 200 homes, reduce waste to six London buses, shorten our 'travel' to Blackpool or even Manchester, and cut back on water and stationery in any ways we can. And each year reduce further.

The result of all this may soon be the equivalent to days or even weeks less to pay a year in rent.

And that would be fun for entrepreneurs everywhere.

> "It took us about eight weeks to measure and collate the data for a one-year period relating to buildings, travel, waste, water and procurement. This would provide us with the basis for reduction targets"



'What role do livestock play in feeding the UK?'

Robert Barbour of The Sustainable Food Trust, delves into a controversial topic

Animal-sourced foods (taken here to mean meat, milk and eggs from livestock, but not fish or wild game) are a key component of diets the world over. They supply us with a third of our protein and significant quantities of other essential nutrients that can sometimes be relatively difficult to obtain from plants – just one of the reasons why livestock are particularly vital in parts of the developing world where undernutrition remains a debilitating problem. Livestock can also produce food from grasslands and other resources that humans can't cultivate or eat, while the manure they supply (although amounting to little more than a toxic waste stream in many intensive farming systems) remains a key and sustainable source of fertility across millions of acres of cropland – a positive relationship that could be reinstated across much of the developed world if livestock and cropping systems were to once again become better integrated.

Food-feed competition

At the same time however, the way in which we currently rear much of our livestock represents a major drain upon the global food supply. The reason for this is 'food-feed competition', an often-overlooked trade-off between intensive livestock and crop production, brought about by the increasingly widespread practice of feeding human-edible crops to animals. It's an approach that generally improves the productivity of livestock systems, due to the high energy and protein concentrations of arable crops, and which many would argue also improves their sustainability, as it allows farmers to increase production while using less land and producing fewer methane emissions per kilo of product.

While this has enabled us to keep satisfying our near-insatiable appetite for animal-sourced foods, it comes at a heavy cost. Livestock



are highly inefficient at converting human edible crops into food, and this means we have ended up in a situation where vast quantities of calories and nutrients potentially available for human consumption are instead lost from the food system. The scale of this wastefulness is frightening: 40% of global arable land is now used to produce feed for livestock, an area which, if it were to be used instead for human food cropping, could feed an additional four billion people.

This isn't to say that giving any human edible crops to livestock automatically constitutes a crime against food security. Livestock can still make a positive contribution to our food supply when they are being fed a very limited quantity of human edible ingredients, as is the case as a global average with cattle, the majority of which obtain much of their feed from grass. Pigs and poultry, on the other hand, represent a net drain on the world's protein supply, as they are much more reliant upon arable crops for feed. This holds true, of course, for intensive beef systems as well.

The value of grazing livestock

Some argue that we should stop eating animal-sourced foods altogether. But while eradicating livestock altogether would clearly resolve the problem of food-feed competition, this argument fails to account for the ability of grazing livestock such as cattle and sheep, to produce nutrient-dense foods from grass and other feedstuffs, such as crop by-products and food waste, that we can't or don't want to eat. Well-managed livestock provide other benefits too. Probably the clearest example of this comes with the vital role grazing livestock play in the management of many important wildlife habitats, including grassland, heathland and coastal marshes. When integrated with crop production, livestock can also play a hugely beneficial role in the restoration of degraded arable soils, and in reducing nitrogen fertiliser and other agrochemical use, by enabling systems that generate and recycle much of their own fertility through rotations designed to break weed, pest and disease cycles naturally.

The arguments around the role of livestock in sustainable global food systems are complex, and many other significant factors including food quality, culture, health and accessibility, need to be considered. Determining the value of livestock to food security is also partly a question of resilience, especially in the face of climate change and the slew of problems it will inevitably exacerbate. Rising undernutrition, increased barriers to trade, steadily degrading arable soils and declining crop yields: all of these are likely outcomes over the coming century that point strongly towards a continued need for livestock – providing, of course, the animals are reared in ways that augment, and therefore relieve the pressure upon, what will be an increasingly stressed supply of plant foods. Achieving this positive vision of livestock production won't be easy. Quite apart from anything else, it will require a major reduction in the consumption of intensively produced animal-sourced foods in a society hooked upon cheap meat. If we succeed, however, then we will have taken a major step towards building a food secure and sustainable future.







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‘We need to act now on regenerative agriculture’

William Kendall tells *Speciality Food* farming in a way that’s better for people, wildlife and soil health is critical to the future of our edible landscape



“Had I known that regenerative agriculture was going to come along, I would have said ‘I’m going to be regenerative, aiming to be organic’ rather than full organic,” says William Kendall.

This is certainly an interesting perspective from someone who has been involved in the organic movement for nearly three decades.

William, who has a broad take on Britain’s food and drink industry, being both a farmer, and a key player in businesses such as Cawston Press, is not alone in his thoughts though. As Penny Fagle, founder of the new Organic Cheesemakers Network recently said, consumers are questioning the value of organic, which is leading producers (especially those in dairy) to consider whether it’s worth certifying, or putting their efforts into working in a different way.

William and his wife Miranda decided to dedicate their land at Maple Farm to organic methods when they set roots 25 years ago. It was something they felt (and still feel) very passionate about. At the time, William had just bought Green & Black’s with colleagues, and there was an element of having to ‘practice what you preach’.

“Organic was really taking off the UK at the time. I was slightly embarrassed that I wasn’t organic farming,” he admits. “The only evidence back then that it was better was that it was good for biodiversity, and there were quick response times when you stopped using inorganic fertiliser. You got the bird life back, and the wildlife back. We like selling things, and felt the organic seal of approval gave us an opportunity to talk about what we were doing, and to not just be commodity farmers. Organic is the gold standard of farming. It doesn’t have all the answers, but it definitely does have a few of them.”

Times they are a changing

The organic movement has, says William, grown from a tiny niche to a significant minority within mainstream food and drink offerings. Though organic products are still not, he believes, as widely available as they should be, largely due to consumer perception, fuelled by supermarkets – which are, of course, where the majority of the British public load up their trollies.

“Often organic is seen as a way of charging a premium to affluent shoppers, and the expectation is organic is expensive. It doesn’t need to be. There is more organic food available now than there was a generation ago,” William says.

There are lots of brands he says, such as Green & Black’s, Yeo Valley and Godminster, that have built their entire business around being organic, but the ‘sustainable message’ has in many ways overtaken the conversation – all while manufacturers, buyers, retailers and consumers try to really pin down what ‘sustainable’ means today.

And this is an area where he’s seen the biggest shift in the multiples driving change. “Cawston Press are a big supplier to supermarkets, and we are incredibly under pressure to reduce carbon emissions and to explain how we are doing more and more to benefit the planet rather than damage it. I know supermarkets are driving this across the supply base. Some argue it’s not fast enough, but they are doing it!”

It’s going to take more than encouraging business to work greener, to get shoppers to vote with their feet though.

More people than ever before are aware of the need to be environmentally mindful, but William’s experience is that end consumers don’t tend to put all their eggs into one basket in this regard. “They buy stuff because it’s delicious and it’s good for their families. Thinking about nutrient density and potential chemical contamination –this is much more where consumer interest is going to come from.”

People worry about what they’re eating, he says. “The fact something was produced with renewable energy has to be a good thing, but for some, that won’t be enough.”

The challenge, William adds, for SMEs trying to do the right thing, is it can be difficult to achieve everything you want to unless you have the backing of investors, or it was part of your mandate when you started your company, as was the case with Green & Black’s. “It was all around buying organic cocoa and cacao. The raw material is one of the most sprayed agricultural crops in the world. Setting up as organic, we were specifically dealing with that. It was niche, and a high-risk niche, but one that others have copied now.”

Industry moves too slowly, he says. “We need to act now on things like regenerative agriculture. It has a baseline that has to be better for the planet – but this has to be driven by the consumer.”

A new lens

Although there are no legally prescribed rules or regulations around regenerative farming, and the debate continues as to whether







there should be, William truly says he believes this way of working is the future. "People like Wildfarmed are creating a framework," he adds. "What's happening is a tighter definition of regenerative farming is emerging." But it needs to happen at a faster pace. "What organic people like Helen Browning say, is it took 40 years before organic farming had a formal definition and standards. A lot of debate took place – but that was 40 years of casting around!"

William sees regenerative as a way of involving more and more farmers in a movement that drives the industry to collectively work better. "The other thing I like about it, is that regenerative refers to the soil, and that's the bit it's all about. If we can get everybody focused on having living, functioning, vital, fertile soil, that's great."

Britain, he continues, has some tremendous soil and a decent amount of rainfall – everything we need to make a start...to grow our own fantastic produce. And without intervention now to continually nurture and improve it, we could find ourselves in hot water. "I'm pretty certain in 10 years the average consumer will be able to tell the difference in quality. That if you go into a supermarket and see a bag of carrots, you'll be able to scan them and see one bag contains no nutrients, and a bag grown differently is more expensive but, considering what you're buying, you're getting way more for your money."

As an analogy, William points out we're comfortable, for example, asking why one car is worth more than another. "But we think a carrot is a carrot. They are clearly not."

For all the good going on, as farmers start to move to regenerative methods, William does think a benchmark or standard is required, largely to stamp out spurious practices, such as those who claim to be regenerative by abandoning ploughing for direct drilling...while still spraying and adding fungicides to the soil.

> "There are always things that can be done to make sure that every year that goes by we produce in an environmentally sensitive way"

"What we know is healthy soil has fungal pathways that make nutrients available to the plants and that ensure food is nutrient dense, which it isn't at the moment. We're eating veg that looks like the veg our grandparents ate but has a fraction of the nutrients. If we're putting fungicides on the soil we're going in the wrong direction."

Feeding the nation

Of considerable concern, especially as farmers leave the industry, driven out largely by the low pricing strategies and unreliability of supermarkets, is food security. Something else William says needs addressing now. "We should be reading Henry Dimbleby's report (National Food Strategy) again and again and again in government."

Britain needs, he adds, more production of green vegetables and pulses, but these vital crops are largely being ignored in favour of wheat and biofuel. "It's controversial, but we do grow too much wheat. And it's modern wheat, which quite a large section of the country is intolerant to. That's bonkers considering how reliant our ancestors were on it for their diets.

"We don't look at the great nutritional value of wheat from the 18th and 19th centuries," William says, revealing he is growing heritage grains on his farm, looking at its attributes compared to modern wheat.

The travesty is, he continues, that farmers were told to maximise their yields, yet they don't get paid a great deal per tonne. "Those tonnes involve fossil fuel, fungicides and insecticides, and 8% goes to bioethanol. A huge amount also goes to animals that haven't evolved to eat wheat!"

There has to be a balance, William says, of feeding people, while fostering wildlife and soil, which has become as important to farming as research into the gut microbiome has been to understanding human health.

Being 'off balance' is what has been going so badly wrong in our food system.

"If you look back in history, land was used to build churches, or houses, or to grow vegetables. Everything else on the maps was marked as 'waste'. But those spaces were full of wildlife and carbon and potential flood water. It turns out that it's not waste. It provides an important function, it's now that regulators are saying how important land is nationally. There's a need regarding retaining that land in a state that produces abundant biodiversity as much as food."

William is a fan of rewilding and says seeing it in action is rewarding, and encouraging. "It's fantastic for creating jobs, and there's amazing science showing you can restore biodiversity, even at a garden scale. We've been doing agroforestry for 10 years on our farm to improve the quality of crops and soil. And it was announced recently we will be paid for agroforestry, which is marvellous."

There's more work to be done

As he's already stated, William thinks measures to support regenerative farming and to understand exactly what it means, are coming down the line too slowly. However, when they do land, they are making a positive impact. We must continue, he says, to give farmers alternatives that are sustainable for both the planet, and their bottom line.

"It will mean, for many of us, producing food is an alternative. We can do it or not do it," which might prove controversial. "We can say we're going to rewild a whole piece of land because it's good for carbon sequestration, or we can produce some food as well, and that's what we chose to do here, leaving space for nature, while growing lots of food.

"We're no longer under the straightjacket of the Common Agricultural Policy," William adds. "Let's have consistent strategy now, and encourage farmers to produce high quality food when they want to, and for as long as they can afford to.

"Farmers do amazing work and have to put up with awful things, like terrible weather. They have got used to farming in a certain way because they were told to farm that way. Now they're being told once again to do it differently....but there is some amazing stuff going on."

His advice? "Go and see farmers who are doing the right thing."



SUSTAINABLE CHAMPIONS

SUMMERDOWN

'Producers need to listen to and integrate with nature'

At the height of harvest season, the fields of mint and lavender at Summerdown (producer of fine chocolate mints and teas) come alive. Butterflies and bees drift through the crops. Tiny mammals forage in the undergrowth. And birds, including the Red Listed Stone-curlew, take shelter.

The Hampshire farm was one of the first in the UK to participate in the RSPB's Fair to Nature programme, which supports producers to grow in a way that's mutually beneficial for wildlife, and their businesses.

B Corp certified Summerdown's 'master of mint' Ian is a founder member of the initiative and, says head of sales and marketing, and grandson of Summerdown creator Sir Michael Colman, its principles really do underpin the brand's approach to sustainability.

"Caring for the environment is a deeply held passion of Ian's," Jo says. "It's fully integrated into our farming system." But working this way isn't a new thing here. "From the beginning it's been our family approach," Jo adds. "As we built the brand and the business on the farm, sustainability was key. We very much see ourselves as temporary stewards of the land. It was here long before us. There's mention of the farm in the Domesday Book, and we know as long as we look after the land and care for it, it will live on long after us."

How nature will be impacted underpins every decision the team makes, with Jo pointing out Fair to Nature's strapline as something that sticks with him: 'without nature there is no food'.

The main focus of Fair to Nature is to maintain a variety of habitats. At Summerdown there are 5-metre wildflower and wild grass margins on all fields, enabling invertebrates, pollinators and small creatures to have a place to live and feed. And Jo is proud of the amount of woodland they manage. "We're making sure that's maintained as much as possible as a corridor for nature to move. We see the farm as part of an ecosystem."

All the habitat-preserving measures undertaken at Summerdown are having a huge impact not only on bird and insect life, but Jo says they have noticed rare wildflowers thriving, and they're excited to have their next plant life survey done (the last was a decade ago).

One of the things he appreciates about the scheme is "that it is rooted in rigorous and verifiable scientific research and evidence, and not trying to force outcomes. How we work as a farm is being measured, not the outcome. We know that by creating habitats and protecting nature the outcomes are all positive."

Indoors, Jo reveals a big piece of work is continuing into rescoping the entire sustainability strategy within the business – in particular around packaging, which he says can be frustrating. "We want to move away from plastic trays, but we haven't yet found a viable alternative that was value for money, had environmental benefits, and ease of use for the consumer." The materials they currently use are 100% pre-recycled, and the tea range is plastic free, using wood pulp-based compounds. However Jo says they are transparent that they are not suitable for home composting and must go through a commercial composting process. More solutions, he adds, are needed within the food and drink industry to support businesses, like Summerdown, which are driven to do the right thing. "We have a wonderful opportunity in the fine food sector to inspire change," Jo says. "The joy of being in this space is we can anticipate an alternative and are flexible enough to be able to operate in a way that can inspire customers and fellow producers." Policy and technology just needs to catch up.



BY **SEPTEMBER 2023** THE NUMBER OF **BUSINESSES** THAT BECAME **B CORP** DOUBLED TO **1,500**
B CORPORATION



ROGER KERR

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ORGANIC FARMERS & GROWERS

Time to take a firm and positive stance on organic

We're seeing a seismic shift in attitudes towards sustainability as awareness of food production's contribution to our planetary problems grows. Importantly, many working across the sector, including artisan food retailers, are striving to be part of the solution.

Debate about production efficiencies and the environmental impact of different farming systems can at times feel polarised. Constructive debate about how we can best feed the population healthily and sustainably is frequently lacking.

OF&G's recent white paper evidences how increasing organic land use in England to 10% (a three-fold increase from current levels) would deliver significant environmental benefits. Total agriculture-related greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced to a level equal to the carbon sequestered by third of million acres of broadleaved woodland.

In this scenario, synthetic fertiliser use would be reduced by a figure equivalent to 179,000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate. Additionally, over a million kilos of pesticide active ingredients would not be applied each year. By removing artificial inputs, our white paper also highlights multiple biodiversity improvements, such as farmland bird species increased by 35%, pollinators up by 23% and earthworm species increased by 78%. At the same time as addressing agricultural inputs, many scientists also acknowledge a pressing need for change in our patterns of consumption. However, will big changes in diet be impossible to implement?

More sustainable organic diets would involve consumption of more vegetables, more pulses, and less but better-quality meat (grass-fed and high animal welfare, for example). This would require a reduction in intensive non-ruminant (monogastric) livestock that currently are competing directly with human food sources.

When coupled with organic food processing standards, which severely restrict the scope for preparing highly processed food, the evidence suggests that we could feed society well with organic farming. Our national food security also depends on reducing the enormous levels of food waste that currently exist.

When it comes to achieving food security, we must have a food system that is environmentally, nutritionally and economically sustainable. Our farm shops and speciality retailers can make a valuable contribution by promoting these important messages to consumers and encouraging them to make positive changes to their shopping and consumption habits.

We know that organic farming is a standard practice that already operates within planetary boundaries. There's clear scientific evidence gathered over many years of its clear direction of travel towards a low carbon, and nature and people positive food production system.



PLASTIC PACKAGING IN THE **UK** ACCOUNTS FOR NEARLY **70%** OF PLASTIC **WASTE**

WRAP

CLAWSON

'We really stand by what we say'

Placed side by side, the hedgerows planted across Clawson's 33 member farms would stretch 290 miles, from the dairy all the way to Glasgow. Now that's impressive.

This isn't a throwaway statistic from the cheesemaker, which has seven 'pillars' of sustainability in place to ensure it's being as kind to the environment as it can be, both at the diary, and across its farmer co-operative. These include reducing carbon, looking after animal welfare, biodiversity, water stewardship, reducing plastic, HFSS and community.

"As a business we've mapped our Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, and have now done Scope 3, from farm to fork. By doing this we know 74% of our business emissions come from the farm, and that's where we can make the biggest impact," says technical and sustainability director Annabel McLelland.

In addition to these pillars, Clawson has its 'big four' objectives around feed, fertiliser, future, and fuel. Areas of the business that are being constantly monitored.

"We truly care about what we do," Annabel adds, revealing the emission factor of member farms is 13% below the UK average, and half the global average, with an aim to reduce CO2 emissions by 30% per kilo of cheese by 2032, while also seeking to reduce plastic and carbon from the supply chain. In 2022 alone the business managed to remove 40 tonnes of plastic and card from its processes, something Annabel believes they need to keep pushing on.

Key to minimising carbon output at Clawson is ensuring the cows have an effective diet, and not overfeeding the herds. Grass measurements are taken on-farm to calculate how much is in each field, and how much each animal needs to consume each day to produce just the right amount of milk. Annabel says they are also assessing whether they have "the most efficient cows for our systems."

With regards to the second 'F', Clawson only fertilises land when it needs it, not because slurry pits are full. "We think a lot about soil health, and understand soil and what it needs," Annabel explains.

Fuel-wise many member farms generate energy using wind or anaerobic digestors.

And as for the future?

"At the moment a lot of people are talking about being net zero by 2050, but nobody truly understands what that looks like without having



to offset. We are keeping up with the technology available and legislation changes, and we will review our targets. If we achieve that, we will put in another target. It's evolutionary."

But it is the right thing to do. "We have to show we care, and we really do. Every calf born has a purpose. It does make Clawson more attractive to work for because we really stand by what we say."

> "We have to show we care, and we really do. Every calf born has a purpose. It does make Clawson more attractive to work for"



CUSTOMER CONCERNS

Kate Kehoe of FMCG Gurus highlights data demonstrating three key areas consumers are thinking about

THE ENVIRONMENT

FMCG Gurus' consumer insights reveal that 74% of global consumers say they are concerned with the state of the environment. Additionally, our findings suggest a large proportion of consumers feel that food, drink, and supplement brands should be doing more to protect the planet. This must be transparently implemented across supply chains, especially during a time in which consumers have become increasingly attentive to the environmental credentials of brands, as a result of greenwashing scandals associated with big corporations.

WASTE

Consumers identify waste as a major problem from an ethical, environmental, and cost perspective. FMCG Gurus' market research highlights that 68% of global consumers are concerned about food wastage. A large number of them consider the biggest contributor to waste as short shelf-life. As a result, the food and drink industry must consider various steps to address this problem.

FOOD SHORTAGES

Factors such as war, erratic weather patterns, and population growth have led to disrupted food supply chains. Due to this, the food industry must seek out alternative food sources that could help combat these issues.

Our findings have revealed a large number of global consumers deem multiple alternative protein sources appealing. For instance, 60% of global consumers stated they are interested in nut protein. While our findings highlight an openness around non-animal protein sources, brands should work to provide reassurance around protein source attributes, such as taste, affordability, and nutrient density.

FLOWER & WHITE

'Brands have a responsibility to do the right thing'

Luxury confectioner Flower & White says working in an eco-friendly way makes the team's job that little bit sweeter.

"In every decision that we make there is always a fundamental principle of embracing sustainability," says the brand's marketing executive Imogen Smith.

This extends from packaging, through to having an electric-run company car. Being sustainable isn't just 'for show' at Flower & White. "It's something we want to do for the planet, and to empower our customers," Imogen adds.

The brand's meringue bars and bites are sold in recyclable paper packaging. "We've saved an awful lot of plastic from going into landfill," says Imogen, who reveals Flower & White offers a flavour of the month to online shoppers, which arrives in biodegradable packaging that's fooled many customers. "We get a lot of them writing in. They can't believe it's made from plants!"

Being plastic free in these product lines is just one of the ways the business is reducing its carbon footprint. In manufacturing, renewable sources are used for electric and gas, and LED movement sensor lights are fitted in every room.

When it comes to sourcing, the brand only uses British sugar and free-range egg whites, and (for products including chocolate) has partnered with Barry Callebaut's Forever Chocolate project. "It's a huge thing," says Imogen. "They focus on helping their farmers, human rights,



nature, and ensuring they are using sustainable ingredients as well. The project is aiming to lift 500,000 farmers out of poverty by 2025."

Taking steps to source only high-quality raw ingredients, and to minimise environmental impact is essential for food producers, Imogen says. "As a brand you have a lot of power in how people think and feel. You're not just selling a product. You're selling a lifestyle. We have a responsibility to do the right thing. We have that culture within our team."

Last year Flower & White started to take strides towards B Corp certification. "And that's something that's driving us and all the decisions we make along the way," Imogen says proudly. "It's exciting, and something we really want to accomplish. It's a bold statement that declares our commitment to the planet."

2024 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE STOCK CHECK



SUMA
ORGANIC BROWN LENTILS

Ready to eat organic lentils. Ideal for using in soups, salads and stews. Filled with gut-friendly fibre.

wholesale.suma.coop



GUNNA DRINKS
TWISTED LEMONADE

Bright with natural lemon, lime and mint, this sparkling drink also contains just 66 calories per can, and has added Vitamin C and zinc.

gunnadrinks.com



PADDY & SCOTT'S
CHIT CHAT

The sustainable coffee brand's signature blend, designed for sharing with friends. Smooth, with chocolate and caramel flavours.

paddyandscotts.shop



BIO ORTO
PUTTANESCA TOMATO SAUCE

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

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A creamy alternative to cheese spreads. Full of flavour, with a velvety texture. Perfect in sandwiches or stirred into sauces.

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OCELOT
BUCKWHEAT CHOCOLATE

Dark-milk chocolate made with rare Amelonado cocoa beans grown by a women's co-operative, with toasted buckwheat for a nutty taste. In plastic-free packaging.

ocelotchocolate.com



FIRETREE
SOLOMON ISLANDS MAKIRA ISLAND 75%

A gorgeously dark bar made with cacao sourced from the remote Solomon island of Makira. With hints of grapefruit, raisin and caramel.

firetreechocolate.com



MR ORGANIC
CHICKPEA & TOMATO ANTIPASTI DIP

New to the brand. Part of a range of organic jars ideal for dipping and spreading. Made in Italy with all-natural ingredients.

mr-organic.com

SEGGIANO

'Sustainability has always been high on our list'



Seggiano founders David Harrison and Peri Eagleton recently handed the reigns of their business over to Certified Origins. And the duo are confident the brand will retain its ethos of quality and sustainability – something that has naturally been the essence of the business for three decades.

"There are so many buzz words at the moment," says David. "Sustainable, vegan, vegetarian, organic, local. That's always been at the heart of everything we've done. People are talking about something that's always been high on our list."

Sustainability, he adds, starts with choosing great ingredients, grown in a clean way, by people who really do care.

All of Seggiano's producers work on a small scale. "There's nothing industrial about it. It's all artisans, and they are constantly looking at ways to produce energy," David explains. "The olive mills Seggiano works with will be using waste from the olive stones for heat. Everybody's using waste for fertiliser or for energy. Seggiano's roast artichoke producer is just up the road from me. I jump on a tractor and trailer and collect the artichoke leaves and spread them around my olive groves. All food producers will have a byproduct, and most of that byproduct has a secondary purpose."

Organic is something else David feels is important, with Seggiano choosing organic ingredients wherever possible. "We all know we are what we eat. There are certain products I think should be organic. Take wheat. There's so much fertiliser involved in growing wheat, and so much pesticide used storing flour. Using organic wheat, for us, is a no-brainer."

Seggiano's slow-dried pasta is made in Sicily using biodiverse ancient organic wheat grains, which are not only more resistant to climate change, but grow deeper roots, requiring less water. The factory takes 90% of its energy from solar panels, and the end product is packaged in paper. This is just one of dozens of success stories for the brand, built on David and Peri's conviction and tenacity to source only the very best.

"As a brand for nearly 30 years, we've been obsessed with provenance," David says. "You just have to understand every ingredient and sub ingredient. Our ethos was very simple. Would we feed it to our children? If your obsession is to create clean, tasty food, it means you're also concerned about the world they are growing up in."



RENIERA O'DONNELL
FOOD INITIATIVE LEAD, THE ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

'Retailers have the power to make nature-positive food the norm'

Our food system is broken. One-third of all food produced is wasted, whilst 10% of the world's population goes hungry; and for every dollar spent, society pays two back in health, environmental, and economic costs.

It is a system which fundamentally does not work for farmers, retailers, and consumers alike. But it doesn't have to stay that way.

Brands, retailers, and leading fast-moving consumer goods have an incredible impact on the food we eat every single day, and the food systems from which ingredients are sourced.

Take the European and UK markets, for example, where a staggering 40% of agricultural land is influenced by the top 10 companies within this group. Rather than being viewed as part of the problem, these companies have the power to be the drivers of the solution. By leveraging their size, scope, and influence to rethink and redesign their approach, food which allows nature to thrive can become the norm in our society.

Applying circular design strategies, such as using diverse, lower impact or upcycled ingredients to how food products are designed gives brands, retailers, supermarkets, and all those involved in the supply chain the opportunity to harness regenerative processes and create products which encourage nature to thrive.

Seen through to its full potential, it is estimated that redesigning food to be nature-positive can reduce GHG emissions by 70% and halve the impact on biodiversity compared to business as usual – all whilst actually increasing food production and improving profits for farmers. With such a strong case, it is time to change the way we design our food to allow nature to thrive.

Many key players within the food industry are beginning to take this journey and rethink their ingredient selection and sourcing choices. Through The Big Food Redesign Challenge, participants have been tasked with designing new food products – or redesigning existing ones – using circular design principles.

From farm to fork, this is the start of the food sector embracing the circular economy.

Redesigning our food system to be regenerative has the power to be a game-changing tool in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss.

Brands and retailers now have the power to join this journey and bring regenerative products to supermarket shelves.





TWO FARMERS

'We're proud of our innovation in packaging'

Sustainability runs right through the core of Two Farmers – whose crisps are made with the brand's own potatoes (grown two miles from the factory) using green energy, before being sealed in fully compostable packaging.

Founders Sean Mason and Mark Green have a great deal of pride when it comes to their environmental mission, which began before they even sliced and fried their first spuds.

A key USP for Two Farmers is the brand's crisp packet, with around four years dedicated to developing a non-plastic option that would keep the products in top condition. Fully recyclable sharing tins (a nice vehicle for homemade bakes after they've been used) are also part of the packaging family.

Sean and Mark were adamant they needed to come up with something better than plastic, having spent a serious amount of time managing waste blown onto the farm from car windows. "That plastic will obviously never break down. We wanted to try and do something to change this," says Sean. The pair were also mindful of consumers being ever more conscious of their use of plastics. The process, Sean admits, moved very slowly, and costs were spiralling out of control a year before they launched.

"We never stopped to think they could be too expensive. But then Blue Planet came out about eight months before we launched, and the world perception of what we needed to do changed overnight. We said 'OK, we've got to get this to market now'. We almost had an obligation to do it - although the costs were incredibly high."

The Two Farmers range consists of Herefordshire-inspired flavours, from Salt & Cider Vinegar (made with their own vinegar), to Hereford Sausage & Mustard, using local rare breed pork.

As far as Sean is aware, they're the first crisps in compostable packaging, made using 100% sustainable cellulose from wood pulp, printed with biodegradable ink, and sealed with biodegradable glue.

The packets, unlike other eco plastics which will only decompose in a commercial composter, take "between 25 and 30 weeks to break down, depending on the environment they're in. And the same if they go into the water and into the sea. They'll break down into biomass, water and C02."

On the farm Sean and Mark are working towards being carbon neutral in the right way. The most transparent way.

This includes generating their own renewable energy on-site using solar panels and high-spec technology to increase efficiency, and green cropping to enrich soil.

"We don't want to offset anything," says Sean. "We think offsetting carbon is hiding behind what you're doing yourselves. We are green cropping and planting trees, and we hope to offset our footprint by the end of this year."

Greenwashing is something Sean thinks is one of the biggest issues in the sustainability arena. "We feel an awful lot of greenwashing is going on at the moment, and people are hiding behind statements. We found this from day one. We thought some of that might change, but even in the very recent past we have tendered with companies making huge sustainability comments, but didn't get shortlisted because of cost.

"The government needs to crack down on these companies that are making big sustainability claims but not doing very much really – just ticking boxes!"



ISLAND BAKERY

'We want our products to be the very best'



Dawn and Joe Reade, founders of Island Bakery, never set out to be food producers. In fact, says Dawn, it was a huge sidestep from their uni days, studying geography. But something about 'organic' just 'clicked' for both of them. "At the time, in the late 90s and early 2000s, organic was very much in ascendency. It's something we were interested in." The couple set up a traditional bakery. But with trade booming in summer and slowing in winter, decided to create a product they could sell year-round – landing on biscuits. They noticed a gap in the market for artisanal, organic products in this category, and set about sourcing ingredients from organic suppliers, going on to craft completely natural, additive and preservative-free luxury biscuits. Of course, the premise took off, and biscuit manufacturing outgrew their bakery, with that arm of their business sold in 2007. At the point of serious growth, with new premises on the cards, Dawn says they had an opportunity to think carefully about energy, fuel and their eco credentials. "Rather than plugging into our existing energy provider we decided to design the factory around sustainable energy. We use woodchip to heat our ovens, our water, and our house. The wood is all from the island. There's a lot of forestry here, so we can buy it all locally."

Island Bakery has also been able to tap into energy from both hydro-electric and wind turbines at neighbouring Isle of Mull Cheese, owned by Joe's brothers.

The brand is hoping to go B Corp in the near future, with strides being made not just in energy sourcing, but packaging too, with Dawn saying they are as eco-friendly as they can be at the moment in this regard...but that industry technology needs to catch up. "At first we used plastic trays, but we replaced those with little paper boats. Although they cost more and are heavier and more difficult to store, they trump plastic. We still have a plastic flow wrap. We looked at compostable alternatives, but for biscuits that needs to be completely airtight, and the film doesn't perform as well.

"We feel compostable films on the market at the moment are a bit 'greenwashy' for a number of reasons. The main one being the huge amount of energy used to produce them, which may not be green energy. And unless you industrially compost them, these films don't break down. They rely on perfect recycling from the consumer. More improvements in technology are needed. "People are," Dawn thinks, "too easily fooled into thinking all plastic free is good, but they don't look behind the actual story."

Island Bakery continues on its environmental journey, and it's one Dawn says is very important for all artisans. "Unless you've been in a dark cave for 20 years, I think it's something everyone is aware of. And because people are more interested, it's in business's interests as much as anything to try to be sustainable. We're proud of what we do here. This is a beautiful place. People come to watch wildlife and go on outdoor adventures. We wouldn't want to be choking it up with waste."

TRACKLEMENTS

'Artisan manufacturing needs to be protected and sustained'

For Tracklements MD Guy Tullberg (pictured) sustainability factors into almost every decision-making process.

"It's one of the reasons we set out on our B Corp journey three years ago," says marketing director Becky Vale. "We felt we needed to be tested. We need a standard to aspire to, to be sure we are doing all the right things. That runs quite deep at Tracklements. We really believe that you have to be authentic, and do what you're saying."

To date, the chutney, relish and preserves brand has put in 10,000sqft of solar panels, generating electricity. The site cleans its own waste water. All its jars are 30% recycled glass, with recyclable paper labels and recyclable ink.

Tracklements is zero to landfill, with 50% of waste recycled and the other 50% repurposed or incinerated and turned into electricity. "And we have a plan to improve on that," Becky explains. "So that we're much more recycled and less repurposed. It's a journey we're all on together, and it's about learning and improving as we go."

One of the brand's most important views on sustainability, says Becky, extends to farmers and growers. "As a business, we can be really sustainable," she explains. "But if we don't have a sustainable source of, say, freshly grown British horseradish, or if we don't keep paying the person who pulls vegetables out of the ground a fair price, we lose that great quality. We have a very clear strategy in that we are very honest with everyone. We source locally first, then regionally, then nationally and internationally. But it's always the best.

"We see it as a self-supporting cycle. If we don't support the environment, and growers and people, what will we have in the end? We always used to talk about Fairtrade, but it's this idea that you need to protect your supply chain, so their business is also sustainable, which makes your business sustainable, which is good for the end consumer."

A product that couldn't be more local if it tried is Tracklements' English Crabapple Jelly. School children near the HQ pick up windfalls and pass them on to the preserve maker in return for money. Then 25p from the sale of each jar goes back into the school. The fruits are all picked within a five-mile radius of Tracklements. "It's a wonderful way to be part of the community, trying to teach the next generation where food comes from and how an artisan manufacturer turns it into something delicious," says Becky, adding, "One of the other things Tracklements is trying to do is create this idea that artisan manufacturing needs to be protected and sustained. We need keep teaching people how to make things, and to make them really well."



Being sustainable "just makes good business sense" according to Becky. "It's moving up the agenda for a lot of producers and it should go without saying that any artisan business should be sustainable. I was listening to someone recently who said 'if you're not sustainable, you won't be around, it's the future'."

THREE **QUARTERS** OF **GENERATION Z** CONSUMERS CLAIMED TO **PURCHASE** SUSTAINABLE **FOOD** AND **BEVERAGES** IN 2023, **72%** OF THEM WERE **MILLENNIALS**

STATISTA GLOBAL CONSUMER SURVEY

COTTAGE DELIGHT

'Consumers expect more from artisan brands'



"I think there's an onus on every brand and business to ensure they have sustainability plans," says Sarah Williams, marketing director at Cottage Delight. "I think it's very easy for people to say it's down to the government or organisations to put in regulations, and sort out environmental issues but, actually, businesses and brands are so integrated in people's lifestyles now that they have to own their sense of purpose...to take ownership of how they are operating to ensure it's in a sustainable way."

Like so many others in the artisan sphere, Sarah says Cottage Delight is seeing growing interest from consumers around the environment. It really is impacting buying decisions – especially in food halls and farm shops. "These are the types of consumer who are probably more knowledgeable about food, and want to know more about what they're buying, who produced it and how they produced it. They expect more from artisan brands. Being sustainable is almost an expectation,"

This year is Cottage Delight's 50th anniversary, and as part of the celebrations big sustainable changes are already underway.

These have included dramatically altering Cottage Delight's recognisable packaging, replacing the mop top and elastic band worn by jars for 30 years with a printed lid. "That's had a significant impact in terms of waste. It's prevented 4.8 tonnes of rubber bands from going to landfill in a 12-month period," says Sarah.

"Another thing is we're trying to get rid of shrink wrap in our business when we deliver stock to the trade. Our glass products now arrive in shelf ready boxes. Retailers can just tear the top off and put them out straight away." Working with a printer, the brand has managed to reduce the virgin plastic in its labels by 30%, with a view to move to a completely recycled label in future.

Cottage Delight is also zero waste to landfill, with any waste it does generate sent to be converted to fuel.

All the measures put in place are really beginning to stack up. At the end of 2023 Cottage Delight baselined its carbon emissions to give the team a point to progress from. "We are now in the process of working to a plan to reduce our carbon footprint. We've set ourselves a target for the coming 12 to 24 months, with the aim that 100% of our electricity comes from renewable sources," says Sarah.

Cottage Delight is also sifting through its supplier list. "We're very conscious as a food manufacturer that we're one of the industries where a lot of ingredients come from a lot of different places. Often ingredients come from underdeveloped countries, and that's big on our radar. We always ensure with our suppliers there's a modern slavery policy in place. That's our first step to making sure we're working with ethical suppliers and is part of a bigger piece of work going into the supply chain to really understand the credibility further down that chain. That really is important to us," says Sarah.

SEGGIANO



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INNOVATION IS HEATING UP IN THE THERMAL PACKAGING SECTOR

Consumers don't just have an eye on the sustainability of the food and drink they buy – they're seeking better solutions from the packaging it arrives in too

COMMENTATORS



SIMON MORRIS
ICERTECH



MICHELLE OTTOLINI
SORBAFREEZE



REBECCA HAILSTONE
HYDROPAC

The thermal packaging sector is heating up. With consumer interest in frozen food and premium prepared meals soaring, comes the demand for cost-effective solutions that will keep these products at their very best, while being mindful of the environment.

Fast-paced work is going on behind the scenes, with industry leaders investing in the very latest technology when it comes to materials, their efficacy, and their sustainability – through NPD that focusses on reducing the use of virgin plastics, while innovating with recyclable materials such as card.

Three experts in this field are Sorbafreeze, Hydropac, and Icertech.

Sorbafreeze is the temperature-controlled division of Pitreavie Packaging, providing insulated boxes, ice packs and shipping solutions.

Hydropac is renowned for its temperature-controlled packaging, and for super strong ice packs that will withstand up to 200kg without bursting. It's also expert in seal through liquid techology, which allows for more accurate filling and less leakage, while using less material.

And family-run Icertech shifted its focus in 2012 from purely pharmaceutical solutions, to the food market, offering a high level of bespoke service with its ice packs and insulated boxes.

A growing demand

Each of these three companies say they experienced strong growth during Covid, which has continued beyond the height of the pandemic, where the demand for at-home dining options boomed.

"We saw a huge increase in business because of Covid," says Alex Jackson of Icertech. "There was a mass of people ordering food online. That period was very busy for us and we picked up a lot of customers. But we've managed to retain them all. It's a thriving industry, with lots of enquiries."

During the pandemic "many businesses came to Sorbafreeze for guidance on not just chilled packaging, but the logistics and practicalities of setting up an online food delivery business," says business unit director Michelle Ottolini.

"Although the Covid pandemic presented a lot of challenges, it was incredibly encouraging to see so many food and drink businesses diversify and make the leap to ecommerce," Michelle adds. "Even more encouraging was the number of businesses across the UK and internationally reaching out to us, a Scottish-based manufacturer, and seeking our support during a pivotal time in their trading. During the Covid pandemic we saw revenue double from insulative packaging solutions."



Trusting the experts

It might be tempting, especially if you're a start-up, to cut corners when it comes to packaging. But this could prove a false economy. Without the support and expertise of professionals, can you really be assured your products will arrive undamaged, and still frozen or chilled?

Packaging is "not a complicated thing", says Alex. "But if you're new, there's lot of things to think about. When customers come to us we can run through different scenarios with them, give them the right information, and recommend the best solutions."

"That consultancy period matters," adds her colleague Simon Morris. "We've spoken to thousands and thousands of customers about their needs, so there's a good chance new customers will be looking for an





application we've seen before. This saves them time, and gives them the most suitable solution."

"Most of ours are quite cost effective when you break them down with the customers. Often they find we're not as expensive as they think we might be," says Alex.

The value of using a professional company directly cannot be underestimated, agrees Rebecca Hailstone of Hydropac, which has the facilities to simulate extreme conditions, to fully test the capabilities of all its products. "We have seen weather around 40C in the UK, and we have the systems to test against that," she explains. "We've tested all our packaging and ice packs, and we can prove that they work!"

Choosing the right packaging for your product is as important as selecting your ingredients, says Michelle. "Consumers have come to expect the convenience of a doorstep delivery option from their favourite meal kit producers, farm shops, delis, butchers and fishmongers. Temperature-controlled packaging allows businesses to offer the same quality of food traditionally purchased in a restaurant or retail environment direct to consumer. With the revenue of meal kits in the UK expected to grow by over 47% by 2027, the insulative packaging sector will also anticipate growth."

The performance of packaging has a direct impact on the quality of goods received by consumers says Michelle, adding that "while producers remain uncertain in the courier network, it's important that shipping solutions maintain product integrity, prevent spoilage, and ensure temperature-sensitive goods arrive with your customer in pristine condition."

The technology implemented by specialist packaging businesses can reassure producers the longevity of their food will not be compromised, says Rebecca. "It means at the end the product will still be the correct temperature, and will still be able to be used and consumed." Professional packaging companies, she expands, are also looking to "use the correct amount for shipping" which can help to reduce costs.

Driving innovation in sustainability

There's a lot of talk in retail and food production about industry having to 'catch up' to enable producers to provide sustainable packaging solutions to their customers. These changes and innovations are rapidly happening across the landscape.

Sorbafreeze, for instance, has been working with environmental consultants, Mabbet, to develop a 10-year sustainability strategy, taking into account the sourcing of materials, reducing waste, and reducing carbon footprint. "The strategy aligns people, product and planet, and aims to work with employers, customers and supply chain to deliver a positive environmental impact," Michelle explains.

"Producers," she says, "are under increasing pressure and UK government legislation to minimise their impact." The Sorbafreeze team has developed a temperature-controlled packaging range that can be fully kerbside recycled, helping businesses to reduce their waste, and helping the end consumer to recycle the packaging at home with ease.

"As a team, we're passionate about creating a positive environmental contribution. We've always listened to our customers' challenges, needs and desires to help shape our product range over the years," Michelle continues. "With the impact of global warming so prevalent, we're seeing a genuine interest and growing demand for fully kerbside recyclable packaging. We've recognised the need to take action now to minimise waste and increase recycling."

Rebecca says Hydropac has listened to its customer base and is "always thinking of new ways to reduce the amount of non-recyclable materials we use."

The brand's most eco-friendly shipping system is EnviroCool, which is made of up to 30% recycled material, and is fully recyclable by all local council collections. The moisture-resistant box, with a Kraft paper outer, is made with FSC paper, and is biodegradable and compostable too. "It's a cardboard liner and box," Rebecca explains. "It's a great product for anyone looking for something fully sustainable and strong. It works wonderfully. We've got a video of two men standing on the box, and it didn't collapse at all. It's more robust, so it's great for heavy items, but also for protecting things that are fragile."

Icertech's innovation has led to more lightweight solutions, also using FSC sourced card. Both the Eco-Box and Corr-Box consist of a double cardboard outer, with two padded paper liners. The Eco-Box will hold its contents from 0-8C for up to 48 hours while, with coolants, the Corr-Box will hold for up to 65 hours. Both boxes are fully kerbside recyclable, and perform incredibly well, say the team. "They're something we're very proud of," admits Alex, who says although polystyrene is thought to be the leading material for shipping chilled and frozen goods, most producers

> "Temperature-controlled packaging allows businesses to offer the same quality of food traditionally purchased in a restaurant or retail environment direct to consumer"
>
> MICHELLE OTTOLINI



don't realise that it 'outperforms' for their purpose. "Most of our customers don't need chilled items held for 72 hours, unless they are sending them to a different country."

"Polystyrene, for a long time, has been the benchmark for performance," Simon agrees. "But obviously there are questions around its sustainability. Most people need a 24-hour to 48-hour window, and our products offer that without 'over speccing'."

Icertech is currently working towards being B Corp by 2025 due to customer demand but also because it matters to the business internally. Sustainability is "in our mission statement, and discussed every single day within the office," Simon says. "The focus is that, yes, the customer demands this, but also, as a family business, we want to do right by the environment as well. Everyone is behind that mission in the company. Our new products offer performance while being fully recyclable."

Simon adds that they'd like to see less plastic being used within the business, while Alex counters that at the moment there isn't a viable alternative material for, for example, their ice packs. And while they can look at streamlining the amount of plastic used here, or can use recycled plastic materials, technology in this part of the process needs to catch up to what industry and consumers expect.

Something the business is actively doing to 'offset' the use of plastics in making its coolants, is controlling its footprint across the manufacturing process. "We have solar energy, and we're currently doubling the amount of solar capacity," says Simon. "We're looking at raw materials, and how we can make them more efficient,



and whether we can make the plastic thinner. We're trying to find efficiencies within the energy we use to lower our carbon footprint and carbon cost."

In the past year the business has decreased the amount of electricity it draws from the mains by 47%, while increasing production hours on site, and waste has been cut down by 32%.



Icertech has also carried out product lifecycle assessments across its ranges, which will be translated to the customer over the coming months, so they have access to data for reporting purposes. "It's about informing customer choice," Simon explains. "As much as sustainability is a buzzword, we also need to give them something imperial and numerical to go by."

What does the future hold?

Michelle says consumers will continue to dictate movement in the thermal packaging sector. She's seeing growing demand for fully recyclable options, vegan-friendly solutions, and BRCGS accreditation – something Sorbafreeze holds. "It's a recognised symbol of quality assurance, legal compliance, and high standards in packaging manufacture." BRCGS accredited businesses must uphold rigorous standards throughout the manufacturing process, demonstrate complete traceability of materials, carry out strict quality checks, and assure packaging is food safe.



PARTNER CONTENT



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COMMENTATORS



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RESPIRITED



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ADNAMS



CHRIS JAUME
COOPER KING DISTILLERY



PRITESH MODY
WORLD OF ZING



MALCOLM WAUGH
FRUGALPAC



THE SPIRIT OF SUSTAINABILITY

Big changes are afoot across the drinks industry, with a push to create products that meet consumer demand for eco-friendly options

'Clean'. It's THE buzzword making headway in the drinks industry. Consumers are no longer satisfied simply by great taste. They want lower ABVs, naturally-sweetened lower sugar options, and spirits that show provenance, heritage, and a commitment to lessening their impact on the environment.

This consumer-led desire has driven huge overhauls in existing businesses, while new drinks manufacturers put sustainability at the centre of their operations from the outset.

Innovation in the UK is proving strong. We've got vodkas made using whey (a waste product from the cheesemaking process) from the likes of Isle of Mull and Ewenique. B Corp certified Nc'Nean produces net zero organic whisky, delivered in 100% recycled glass. And Pod Pea Vodka is using British-grown, nitrogen fixing peas to create a unique spirit that's distilled using steam, lowering emissions, while waste pulp from the process provides protein for the pet food industry.

Miranda Hayman, co-owner of Hayman Distillers, creator of what's claimed to be the world's first sustainable vodka (Respirited) says the business has become increasingly aware of the number of conscious consumers seeking out sustainable brands. "Not only do they expect sustainable packaging, but also innovation. The perception of premium is changing, and is becoming more values-based. The consumer today is wanting more transparency in how products are made and we, the spirits sector, need to reflect this," she adds.

Shamara Hammonds, sustainability advisor at Adnams, agrees. "I think there are plenty of moral and ethical reasons why sustainability should be important to us all," she says, citing using less resource (therefore reducing cost), and customer expectations as two reasons why spirits businesses need to up their game environmentally. "This is even more important to younger generations, so even if you don't think it's important to your customer right now, it absolutely is to your customer tomorrow!"

There are ways traditional businesses can adapt and move towards more sustainable practices, as Adnams (a brewing company with a long heritage) can attest. It's one of very few distilleries to have a brewery on site, which has brought many efficiencies, says head of production Fergus Fitzgerald – particularly when it comes to saving water. "Often the challenge isn't how to recover energy or water, but what to do with it once you have it," he explains. "Having a brewery and distillery on the same site gives us opportunities for saving energy and water across a variety of areas. So, we use the cooling system in the brewery to recover cooling water in the distillery and keep it cool so it can be re-used. Most distilleries don't have that option."

Adnams has also been committed for many years to buying 100% renewable energy. And "we work with barley growers locally, not just to have that connection with where the raw material comes from, but also so we can agree directly what the best varieties are to trial for the grower, maltster and the distiller," adds Fergus. Sustainability runs a thread here too, with the team considering drought tolerance, low fertiliser inputs and better yields.

Producers need to act now

For Chris Jaume, co-founder of Yorkshire-based zero waste, carbon negative distillery Cooper King, there is no Plan B, and spirit producers who don't already have the environment on their agenda are on a backfoot.

The architect, and his scientist wife and co-founder Abbie, saw first-hand the devastating effects of climate change while living in Australia, learning their trade from a master whisky maker.

Their experience informs every part of Cooper King. "Sustainability underpins everything we do," Chris explains, revealing the terror he and Abbie felt witnessing fires that ripped through Tasmania. "They came quite close to us. It was scary to see the damage. We also lived alongside the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland. Seeing the damage there too was eye-opening. The idea was if we were going to come back and build a business, it had to be one where we'd be able to give back and protect the environment."

There's no part of the distillery that hasn't been assessed for impact, though Chris admits he's sure he'll find more to improve along the way. Around 26 tonnes of water per year are saved by using vacuum rather than copper stills. Wheat is grown 50 to 60 miles away. Honey comes from beehives on site. Fruits are Yorkshire grown. And the team grow their own botanicals, from lemongrass, to juniper, using homemade compost as fertiliser.

Additionally spent botanicals go to a local bakery for glazes and breads, cardboard waste from suppliers is shredded for packing the lightweight bottles (made from 55% recycled glass), shrink wrap over the stoppers is home compostable cellulose, and the distillery operates an onsite refill scheme, which has grown by 20% since launching.

Chris is proud that, since day one, for every bottle of gin sold the business has pledged to plant 1sqm of woodland in the Yorkshire Dales. And this isn't just lip service. Having partnered with a local charity, the team head out between November and February to directly help with planting. It's imperative, he says, to be transparent, adding that greenwashing is one of the biggest challenges in the sector, and being clear with consumers is a moral obligation – especially as more of the public are showing an interest in the planet. "It's the only way we would do this," he reveals. "It's a wholesome way to run a business. As with anything, when you start it can seem daunting to go on this journey, but by making small changes you can make a big difference."

Don't bottle it

While producers take strides to reduce their carbon footprint, manufacturers in the packing industry are also waking up to consumer demand for better practices.

World of Zing, a premium RTD cocktail brand, pays attention to sustainability across the chain, from limiting the use of high carbon footprint citrus fruits, to

JUST THE **TONIC**

"We are very much aware of sustainability and environmental concerns not only in the UK, but globally as a company," says Dave Morton of Fitch & Leedes, a Cape Town-based producer of premium tonics, now available in the UK via distributor Bespoke Beverages.

"We have focussed on our plastic overwraps, which make use of 70% recycled material. And we're very proud to be in a can format. Cans are very fast replacing glass worldwide. They're infinitely recyclable and can be back on shelves within 60 days!"

The brand's tonics, which are already exported very successfully across Australia, New Zealand and Africa, are produced using quadruple filtered water, in a 200ml format, which, Dave says, is the ideal pour. "We've done a lot of tasting exercises against 150ml cans, and from consumers we understand 200ml really is perfect, whether you're having a single or double tot of spirit." Eleven flavours are available – the bestsellers currently being the Pink Tonic (cucumber and rose), Grapefruit Tonic, and Blue Tonic (blueberry and cardamom) And, mindful of UK HFSS rules, the majority of the range comes in well under 5g of sugar per 100ml. "We've listened to the market, and reformulated," says Dave, who adds that customers adore Fitch & Leedes' products, which have a fizz and texture more akin to prosecco. Buyers and retailers can sample the tonics at a series of trade shows across the UK this year, including at IFE, where it will be represented by Bespoke Beverages on stand 4633.

using sustainable spirit brands. The business also uses card bottles, with founder Pritesh Mody saying it was one of the most visible and impactful things he could have done. "These bottles are lighter, safer, and better for the environment than glass, whilst creating huge on-shelf impact and positive conversations amongst consumers."

It's essential, he says, "for the drinks industry to meet the rising consumer demand for eco-friendly products."

Market disruptor Frugalpac is at the forefront of innovation in this sector, with hopes the Frugal Bottle represents the future for the drinks industry. With the ability to be flatpacked for transportation (requiring five times less space per lorry than glass bottles), Frugal Bottles comprise a strong recycled (94%) paper outer layer, that's folded into shape, and lined with a travel safe, recyclable PET inner layer.

Malcolm Waugh, of Frugalpac, says the product deals with "the problem in the drinks industry, which is carbon. A lot of people don't realise glass carries a huge carbon load due to the energy required to make it and, frankly, recycle it."

Paper bottles, he adds, use six times less carbon to produce, are five times lighter, and require four times less water in manufacturing compared to glass.

The brand has customers across 25 countries, and grew 150% last year – 900% the year before - with machines also being sold so that bottles can be manufactured on site at distilleries, using local materials.

"This is the kind of innovation that really resonates with consumers. We need more of this," Malcolm adds.

WHAT'S TRENDING IN SPIRITS?

CELEBRITY-BACKED BOTTLES
There's huge growth in celebrity owned or backed spirits, with tequila being the frontrunner, followed by gin, vodka and whisky. "Having a celebrity owner with a huge fanbase certainly helps to create immediate awareness of the brand, but authenticity is as important as ever," says Michael Vachon of Maverick Drinks.

SUSTAINABILITY
Brands are having to balance a line between sustainability and price to hit the sweet spot with consumers who are "looking for authentic sustainability claims. Clearly stated. No greenwashing," says Mark Harvey of The Oxford Artisan Distillery. "Those brands making a clear and demonstrable positive impact are winning.

WHISKY DRINKERS ARE DIVERSIFYING:
Whisky lovers are trying other aged spirits, largely driven by price. Armagnac sales, for example, have woken up, with a 25-year-old bottle being on average 90% cheaper than a single estate malt. Rum is also stepping up as an alternative choice for whisky fans, with vintages, age statements, single cask, single estate and premium rums coming to the fore. "We have seen massive 53% volume and 43% value growth in rum over £100," says Lisa Halstead of Master of Malt. This is, she says, in stark contrast to whisky, with a move from consumers towards more affordable brands.

VODKA FINDS ITS ROOTS
Vodka is being considered a 'dark horse' in spirits for 2024, says Master of Malts' Adam O'Connell - with consumers seeking authentic flavours and provenance. "There is a growing appreciation for vodka because people are recognising its deep cultural and historical associations, and because a wave of modern producers are creating spirits with flavour and personality that use unique methods or ingredients," he says.

MEXICAN DRINKS CONTINUE TO APPEAL
While global spirits sales are predicted to rise by 3% by 2026, Mexican spirits are tipped to see category growth of 7% in the same period. "Mexico has come a more popular destination, and celebrity endorsed agave spirits have made tequila a sophisticated tipple of choice," says industry insider Fenella Taylor.

> "The consumer today is wanting more transparency in how products are made and we, the spirits sector, need to reflect this"
>
> **MIRANDA HAYMAN**



STOCK CHECK



LIMONCELLO DI CAPRI CREMA
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limoncello.com



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respirited.com



BUTTERFLY CANNON TEQUILA BLUE
A 100% agave tequila with a natural violet blue colour. Infused with clementine and prickly pear for a tropical, refreshing flavour.
butterflycannontequila.com



ISLE OF MULL SPIRIT CHEESEMAKERS STRENGTH
A 60% full-bodied vodka made with whey from the cheesemaking process. With hints of vanilla and chocolate, and a luscious creaminess.
isleofmullcheese.co.uk



VIVIR TEQUILA CAFE VS
Award-winning Vivir Tequila Blanco, flavoured with Mexican coffee beans, sourced locally to the distillery and sweetened with natural Mexican cane sugar.
vivirtequila.com



WORLD OF ZING KAFFIR LIME PICANTE MARGARITA
A gently spiced cocktail made with premium gold and silver tequila. One of the only British drinks brands available in a recycled paper bottle.
worldofzing.com



HIVE MIND SPICED HONEY RUM
The mead producer's first rum, made in small batches in Wales using honey and molasses brewed at the meadery. Sweet, with floral notes.
hivemindmead.com



COOPER KING DISTILLERY DRY GIN
The UK's first carbon negative gin. Made using a vacuum still and incorporating honey and botanicals produced on site.
cooperkingdistillery.co.uk



NINE TINES
Multi award-winning small-batch Yorkshire vodka, using the farm's own potatoes. Silky and exquisitely clean in taste.
ninetines.co.uk



FAIR CAFE LIQUEUR
A premium spirit for those espresso martinis. Made in Cognac using slow roasted, 100% Fairtrade Arabica coffee beans from Mexico.
fair-drinks.com

CHEESE FROM THE GREENER SIDE OF THE FENCE

Artisan cheesemakers are increasingly transforming the way they work to minimise their impact on the environment while making a difference to the landscape around them. *Speciality Food* reports



As he slices into a chunk of Ivy's Reserve, the world's first carbon neutral cheese, Richard Clothier, managing director of Wyke Farms, can't help but feel a sense of pride. Named for his grandmother, who had a deep love for the countryside, the cheese, and the way it is made, in many ways sets the benchmark for how British dairy could look in the future.

"My grandparents didn't waste anything," Richard says. "They believed if you look after nature, nature will look after you. We very much follow those guidelines." Wyke Farms is just one of many cheesemaking businesses refusing to rest on its laurels where the environment is concerned.

It was the first national food brand to use 100% sustainable energy, and the first dairy in the UK to achieve the Carbon Trust's triple standard.

Richard, who calls himself a modern practical environmentalist, hopes what they've achieved will inspire others. "Renewable energy, farming regeneratively, planting more trees, creating wildlife corridors – all these things are scalable. There are always things that can be done to make sure that every year that goes by we produce in an environmentally sensitive way. It's like food safety, and health and safety – this just has to be a given," he says.

It's not just ethical credentials and a strong moral compass that have pushed the business in this direction – it's consumers. Richard says he's seeing rising interest – particularly from the Asian market - around sustainability and scope one and two emissions, as has Jane Quicke at Quicke's, who says she has certainly noticed an uptick in conversations around the topic with customers.

Quicke's is similarly committed to doing things the right way throughout the chain. "What we do is very much connected, and part of our story," Jane explains, agreeing with Richard that now is the time to act in dairy, particularly with regards to managing and monitoring soil health, which is central to the narrative in modern farming.

"If you are farming over a long time – maybe 100 years," Jane explains, "there will be an environmental cost if you're not using sustainable practices. You can only do that for so long before you get into a situation where you have to put so much back into the soil artifically."

While there are no hard and fast regulations currently for regenerative farming, it's certainly become a buzzword in the industry, and Quicke's is committed to following its guidelines as closely as possible, with Jane adding that working this way is for the commercially-minded, as well as for those who care about the land. "It makes sense, especially as input costs are high for fertiliser and feed. You want to be as low input as possible on your farm, using nature in balance with your farming practice."

Working in harmony with the land is second nature for the Temple family in Norfolk, makers of Copy's Cloud and Binham Blue. Catherine Temple says she and her husband have invested every penny they own into measures that protect the environment, and they're keen to link up with other farmers who want to change for the better.

For them, working in a more sustainable way became a necessity when they inherited the farm 20 years ago. "We were in an economy where every time wool, grain and soya prices changed, farming was devastated. We wanted to make ourselves into a homegrown, circular economy because it protected our staff, and us, from global fluctuations in prices."

Soil health and grass are things Catherine spends an enormous amount of time thinking about, but she says she's not alone. "Across the industry people are recognising the threat of climate change and the benefits of regenerative farming." The climate of Britain, she adds, is perfectly suited to growing grass, "and grassland is a very carbon sequestering system."

We need to get more fungus and bacteria back into the soil, Catherine continues. "This permanent grassland is like the forest floor. It is a hive of biodiversity, and grazing animals on pasture is a recognised tool in carbon sequestration and climate mitigation. Research is showing that it's good, and people are moving to it because it is helping them to play their part."

> "There are always things that can be done to make sure that every year that goes by we produce in an environmentally sensitive way"
>
> **RICHARD CLOTHIER**





JANE QUICKE

A new way of working

Moving away from monoculture, and enriching fields with a multitude of flowers, grasses and herbs, is one of the ways farmers can make a positive environmental contribution, says Jane. At Quicke's, beans and oats are companion cropped, and the results speak for themselves. "The cool thing is beans, as a legume, help fix nitrogen in the soil, and they do that at the point in the growth of the oats when they need nitrogen. It means







we're not depleting the soil in that timeline," she adds proudly.

Quicke's has permanent pasture across a lot of the farm and that's "great for developing a really healthy root base in our fields, preventing wash off, and increasing the soil's organic matter." In summer months there's typically more grass on the fields than the cows can eat. This is gathered for sileage, reducing feed costs during the cooler months. "There's a lot of interest in the kinds of cheese you can make with sileage-fed cows," says Jane. "What they eat has a huge impact on flavour, and you can notice the difference when cows gain on grass versus hay versus sileage. Having that control across everything means you know exactly what they've eaten and can say 'this is how we need to make the cheese'."

> "We're reverting to ways where we are encouraging the soil microbiome to give us a share of what it's got, without stripping it down. Diversity is very important"
>
> CATHERINE TEMPLE

Cows are rotated every 12 hours in the fields at Quicke's. This has the dually positive effect of ensuring maximum nutrition for the animals, while leaving enough time for the land to recover and flourish once again.

Other sustainability highlights include that half the farm is woodland (with 84% of carbon sequestered here), and that a field's worth of solar panels have been put in.

The Quicke family's hope is to reach net zero, through the initiatives already in place, and future investment, with investigation going on currently into Bennamann's methane-capture system.

Homegrown food and lower inputs are high on Catherine Temple's list – but she too is looking to the next phase of her environmental mission. At Copy's Green Farm cover crops, such as low intervention lucerne and field beans, fix nitrogen in the soil, while providing nutrition for the cows. "A new thing we're doing," she says, "is we're maybe going to start roasting the beans. Someone has done experiments that showed if you roast them, it makes them more nutritious. It's a win-win. If the cattle can get more out of the beans, they will need to eat less."

Also, while an anaerobic digestor on the farm helps manage waste and generate energy, Catherine is researching using leftover whey from cheesemaking to make a spirit – as others (including Isle of Mull Cheese) have done. Not only is it a more profitable way of processing whey, but the waste product from the distilling process makes great fertiliser, she says.

"We're just trying to get the best use out of the farm, and to give back to the land. Since World War II we've thrown fertiliser at everything to get as much as possible out of the land. Now we're reverting to ways where we are encouraging the soil microbiome to give us a share of what it's got, without stripping it down. Diversity is very important."

David and Wilma Finlay of The Ethical Dairy say it took 10 years for them to notice the benefits of going organic and using agroecological practices. But it was worth it to see the marked difference a decade on – particularly regarding soil health and productivity. "It was responding to the lack of pesticides and fertilisers, and we began getting the kind of yields we'd experienced with fertilisers and pesticides previously," David explains.

Their measures are, David says, stacking up. A recent audit found diversity had increased by 50% on the farm, from 150 to more than 230 species – including the discovery of a rare five-eyed medicinal leech, which caused a stir amongst entomologists. "We've got about 88 species of pond life, bugs and beasties, which is quite remarkable," he adds.

One of the most critical revivals is of dung beetles, which David calls the 'unsung heroes' of regenerative agriculture. "They came back here because we stopped treatments for parasites in livestock management. We managed the parasites out of the system by understanding lifecycles and working with nature."

In addition to a gentler way of farming, The Ethical Dairy has an anaerobic digestor, which processes organic farm waste to produce energy (as well as effective natural fertilisers and soil conditioners), 95% of the cows' diet is grown on-farm, and over the past two and a half decades the family have planted around 35,000 mixed broadleaf trees, which contribute to Rainton Farm being recognised as carbon positive.

Wyke Farms is also a net positive business, says Richard. All of the 150 farmers it works with are footprinted and incentivised to produce milk in a more sustainable way and, "some of them have the lowest carbon footprint farms in the world producing milk!"

Creating Ivy's Reserve was, he adds, very much about laying down the gauntlet in the industry. A lot of time was spent working with the Carbon Trust on the product. "We learnt just so much from them about emissions, and what we can do to manage them."



DAVID AND WILMA FINLAY



STOCK CHECK

2024 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE



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goldenhooves.co.uk



PERL LAS CAWS CENARTH

A creamy, lightly golden paste, with delicate blue veining throughout. This organic cheese is smooth, soft and gentle on the palate.

cawscenarth.co.uk

Wyke Farms' first demonstratable move into upping its game where sustainability is concerned, was a decade ago, when it committed to producing all its own energy. "All our products are made and packed using 100% energy we produce through anaerobic digestion, and surplus green gas we clean up and put back into the grid," says Richard.

"We focus wherever we can on minimising waste," he adds, revealing the business takes in and processes waste apple pomace from cider farms, and bread waste from supermarkets, as well as recycling and recovering 90% of water used in its manufacturing process.

Leading where others can follow

Cheesemakers who've made the shift to using more sustainable methods are vocal about wanting to share their learnings with others, to help the UK travel further in the right direction.

Though it's difficult to change your style of farming overnight, says Jane, the industry is "great because people share ideas very freely. There's lots of working groups you can join, and farm walks are fantastic. A lot of farmers are doing amazing things behind the scenes. They are always looking at what they are doing, trying to find the best ideas, and new ideas to work in more sustainable ways, and more commercially viable ways."

Agrotech and digital transformation are of ever-increasing interest. "If you can't measure it, you can't change it," Jane adds, saying this is a particular field where collaboration and information sharing is key. "We're using technology to augment what we do and improve the way we understand our own farm. That is going to be essential for improvement going forward."

> "You want to be as low input as possible on your farm, using nature in balance with your farming practice"
>
> **JANE QUICKE**

Catherine encourages other farmers to use their land to diversify as much as possible, seeking out cover crops that enrich the soil, encourage nature, and even help reduce fuel costs. "Our drivers tell me when they are sitting on the tractors they can feel them using less fuel because the soil has been opened up by the roots of the crop that's grown over winter. For someone to tell me, without prompting, that the soil feels better, is a big move. They have been very cynical about what we're doing, but are acknowledging the way we do things is better!"

It takes patience, though, adds David, saying, "I think I would have given up in the early years. You will make mistakes, and it will take time for your soil to recover without losing productivity. In the old days you'd put on fertiliser, and a week later the fields would be green – you could see the impact. Now it can take months and years before you see the benefits of the system trying to work." Your team have to be fully behind your vision, David says, but, "we wouldn't do this any other way now."

Changes desperately needed in policy

For cheesemaking to continue to make inroads where sustainability is concerned, support and guidance is desperately needed from government and policy makers – especially assurances for businesses that have already cemented their eco vision.

Jane says she's seen a big focus on environmental programmes from government, but that it can be difficult for early adopters, such as Quicke's, to access initiatives, many of which appear to be aimed at land conversion. "It feels like you're only being rewarded for new things you're doing. Almost like a punishment for people who've been doing things for good for a long time." Jane would also like to see more ready access to scientific papers for farmers and cheesemakers. "I wish they weren't behind a paywall. It's difficult, often, to see the outcomes from some research, or sometimes only other people in research can access the information." She is frustrated by what she feels is an assumption that farmers don't want to be engaged in cutting-edge science. "A lot of farmers have come back to farming after other things, or have grown up in farming, gone off to do a degree, and brought it back with them. I have a degree in biology, and I'm really interested in the science that underpins farming."

Catherine is concerned food security isn't being taken seriously enough in the UK, saying she thinks ELMS (the Environmental Land Management scheme) lacks understanding of farmers' commitment to feeding the nation. "A lot of farmers view themselves as food producers. There's lots of things we would like to adopt, but we're waiting to make investment when the government tells us what they want us to invest in."

She says she feels farmers like herself are 'hanging on' and getting on with the business of rewilding. "We want the government to get on and commit to something. We have so many arguments here about the green agenda, and spending money on it, but then, next year there might be a grant for certain things, we just don't know." Waiting on policy decisions has, Catherine added, created a lot of unhappiness amongst the farming community, who are, she says, dedicated to and ready to grow food in ever more sustainable ways.

Food security is something both Richard and Jane also feel incredibly strongly about. "It might not be palatable for people to see food production happening in the UK," Jane says. "Reforesting is very wonderful, but we should have the ability to say we want food to be produced here with good sustainable practices. We, as a country, don't get that choice. We need to be realistic about that means."

"We need government support for the environmental mission to help farmers produce food in a net zero, carbon neutral way," adds Richard. "The conservation plans we adopt should be integrated into the growing systems because we're going to need more food over the next 20 years than we've ever produced."

These systems, he says, should reach beyond being carbon neutral, taking into account clean water, slow water, managing run-off and flooding, and soil health. More incentives are required across the board to boost both food security and energy security, Richard says passionately, adding that it's better for everyone. "Farming more regeneratively, with less input, has the potential to make dairy farms more financially robust. It's an exciting part of sustainability. Wherever we lower carbon, we lower the cost for everyone."





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WHY IT'S TIME TO CHAMPION LOCAL CHEESE

Looking closer to home when you're stocking your counter could be a better choice for you, the economy, and the environment

According to Statista, around 411,000 metric tonnes of cheese was imported to the UK in 2022. As much as we love our Continental classics in Britain, this weighty dairy influx undoubtedly has an impact on the environment, and (factoring in the shipping/importing costs inevitably added on) the cheesemonger's bottom line.

Add newly imposed post-Brexit import rules into the mix, which introduce further costly paperwork and physical checks on milk, dairy, meat and meat products, and sourcing local cheese and charcuterie for the counter becomes a more obvious choice. Potentially, a more affordable one too.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation says the circular economy is one of the most important processes for addressing climate change. And the cheese counter can factor into that circular vision. Whether that is supporting cheesemakers in the local area, region, or simply choosing British. With more than 700 (and growing) varieties of cheese being made here, and quality and technology having grown exponentially in the last two decades, British cheese is, after all, no longer a poor relation to what's being produced in the dairies of France, Switzerland and Italy.

"It's very much my belief that cheesemongers should do what they can to support their local cheesemakers and celebrate the seasonality of cheese," says Mark Kacary of The Norfolk Deli. "I think, from a sustainability point of view, nothing makes more sense to me than a local cheesemonger that is selling locally made cheese, made with milk from the herd that's on the farm, and not shipped in using huge container lorries."

Working in this way not only keeps money in the local economy, but it also, "encourages greater levels of co-operation between local small businesses. It reduces the number of road miles and, in turn, means that cheese comes from animals that are looked after. It should also be pointed out that small farms that produce their cheese are also usually the most innovative from a green perspective."

Georgonzola in Lancashire is 100% British, apart from its wine. "That's been the shop since we opened," says owner George Hammond. "If we make it here, why would we need to buy from elsewhere?"

Though it can be tricky to track down a full counter of British options, depending on where you're based, George says it's worth exploring, and he does his best to replicate European favourites with homegrown swaps which he says are "just as good, if not better."

"People are used to big chain supermarkets selling continental cheese. They don't know how good British cheese can be. Beauvale, for example, I've found better than most supermarket Gorgonzolas, so it's an easy one to convert people on."

If you're seeking an alternative to a young Gouda, George says, "Mayfield is just fabulous. It's a slightly fudgier, buttery cheese that ticks all the boxes. Fen Farm are just pushing it out of the park with their Brie. And Old Winchester is a pretty good hard cooking cheese. But if customers are willing to spend a bit more, Yorkshire Pecorino is wonderful."

George encourages other cheesemongers to give British a bit more love in 2024. "Speak to other retailers and see what works for them. And put British in the counter as a comparison to show customers what their options are."

This, he says, opens up those cherished counterside conversations. "I've found, certainly with my customers, that they want to learn. They trust what I stock because they realise I know what I'm talking about, and they want to know more."

Health and biology have a part to play in sourcing local too, says The Cheese Lady, Svetlana Kukharchuk. "I think when people grow up somewhere, they get used to that particular food, and it agrees with their biology better. That very much works in cheese. It is part of the local microbiome that is very good and friendly for the people who live in the area where it is made."

> "From a sustainability point of view nothing makes more sense to me than a local cheesemonger that is selling locally made cheese"

Svetlana isn't an advocate for going 100% British, saying cheesemongers still need to offer good variety, while being mindful of sourcing the very very best when they do venture overseas. "There are so many European cheeses we don't make here. I particularly think things like Gruyere and Comte must come from where they come from."

That said, around 30% of The Cheese Lady's counter is British, with a slant towards Scotland, where she says some fantastic products are being made, such as, she recommends, Lanark Blue – styled on a Roquefort. "It's made in a completely different terroir, which plays into the taste. Even though Lanark Blue is made to a Roquefort recipe, and the milk is the same breed of sheep, they end up being quite different. Both are great for their own reasons."

Svetlana would like to see more innovation in British cheese, rather than producers trying to emulate the big, bold, traditional French varieties, which she believes could make a big impact. "If people started to think about creating something unique that doesn't exist here, that would be even better. But the most important thing for me is it has to have terroir. It needs to show the traditional microbiome of the place where it is made. To ooze the culture of that region. Cheese with a story."



CHEESE UNCUT

New retail perspectives from industry experts

"We are human, we are soil"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

At No2 it is our goal to champion great cheese and produce. Back in 2010, when the doors opened for the first time, it was our vision to give exemplary service with the best food and wine. We genuinely thought that we could trust suppliers to deliver food and beverages from sustainable and ethical producers. Packaging and stories can paint pretty pictures of cows bouncing and kicking their hooves in luscious grass, but pictures like that are often fabricated to draw you in.

Over the years we have learnt there are wholesalers and producers which carry some seriously bad food and drink. These types of items are mostly found in supermarkets and not in delicatessens. But beware. These businesses are quite happy to sell you a lie that does not tick any ethical and sustainable boxes and only brings them big bucks. Talk to your wholesalers and do check up on your produce. Most reputable companies will have a lot of information about their stock, and should really be able to answer any questions or concerns.

I was watching a programme recently about one of the largest high street chains - Greggs - which has far more outlets than McDonalds. It beggared belief to see how much food that they are producing. It naturally made me think on so many levels of where and how they turn things around so fast.

When it comes to sustainability is this much-loved bakery chain actually helping? On many levels yes – but mainly due to its affordability for the people. Are the sausage rolls healthy? Not really, but as a Greggs chief executive said: "We sell millions every day and they make people happy". Do they really? Health against happiness? This is a controversial topic as we find our economy in turmoil because of incredibly bad decision making from governments over the ages. It is their short-sighted so-called wisdom that has contributed to the poisoning of our landscapes. Much land is only capable of producing crops that require a plethora of chemicals to help grow through the lifeless soil.

During the Industrial Revolution, cities and towns grew larger to house workers settling into new areas as they were attracted by higher wages and better living conditions. The way we produced our food was unknowingly and dramatically damaging soil health with the heavy use of fertiliser amongst other factors. Our earth today needs to build back its organic profile, with many farms only having 1% to 2% organic matter. The Soil Association suggests that we should be aiming for 20%. Encouraging a rich organic soil is beneficial on so many levels.

One simple example of poor soil health is land erosion via water run off because the soil has little or no substance or organic matter. Extensive deforestation and ploughing have destroyed the deep-rooted micellular network so important to the health of the land. Water that runs off heavily farmed soil is often contaminated with faeces and finds its way into rivers and streams containing other man-made pollutants. This in turn poisons our waterway eco systems.

The future is in our hands – we need to stop and think about our food choices. When it comes to cheese there should only be one choice. That choice for me is the knowledge that the producer is doing all they can to protect the agrodiversity of their land.

You can help today by only buying what is produced in this way. Buying only as much as needed. By supporting these brilliant farmers and shops that actually give a damn you are making a choice to save our soil that gives us life. We are human we are soil.

> "Talk to your wholesalers and do check up on your produce. Most reputable companies will have a lot of information about their stock, and should really be able to answer any questions or concerns"

New network for organic cheesemakers

The founders of Feltham's Farm (makers of Renegade Monk and Rebel Nun) have established a new Organic Cheesemaker's Network in a bid to bring together producers across the UK to protect and preserve this sector of the industry.



Penny Nagle and Marcus Fergusson started making cheese eight years ago and were adamant organic would be central to their plans, despite, they say, organic milk prices in their Somerset base being a third higher than average.

"We felt the quality of the milk was essential, and organic certification, if you're an organic dairy farmer, is just that extra layer of auditing and welfare and security you can pass onto the consumer," says Penny.

"The thing about cheesemakers," she adds, "is we don't talk to each other a lot, except at festivals. We noticed, from speaking to others at Christmas markets and events, that some people who were organic were going to different systems. They say there's no value perceived at the customer end for organic, and we just wondered what is going wrong?"

Penny says she and Marcus have spoken to numerous makers who are using organic milk, but don't certify, either due to the cost, or because customers aren't willing to pay extra for their products.

The Organic Cheesemaker's Network, she adds, "is to pull these people together. Most organic cheesemakers are interested in the best quality milk and making the best quality cheese. We thought, 'how can we pull through the barriers?' If it's not organic certification, what is it that people want?"

Elmo Neath Baker, who has been working on the project, says, "A lot of people I've spoken to really care about organic as a way of farming, but they are struggling to find a reason to certify. People using organic milk and not certifying, we see as a failure of the organic system."

Via the network, the team hope to explore these issues, finding a way to move forward collectively as makers. "We want to talk to certifiers about what's happening. They are very much in that conversation," says Penny. "Are they putting up too many barriers? Or focusing on things people don't feel are important?

When we talk about organic, we really believe in it but, at the same time, farmers can't be charged hand over fist because they want to do the right thing."

Penny and Marcus are currently reaching out to organic cheesemakers, and are in the process of setting up a social media presence for the Organic Cheesemaker's Network. Get in touch with them at Feltham Farm to find out more.

Bath & West Food and Drink Festival is offering all members of the new network reduced price stands at the event on March 23 and 24.





New coffee cheese comes to market

RAVE Coffee and Paxton & Whitfield have teamed up to create Kaldi – a limited edition coffee-matured goats' cheese.

Named for the young goat herder who, legend has it, first discovered coffee, Kaldi is an innovative washed-rind variety, balancing the fruity and floral notes of RAVE's responsibly sourced beans with the fresh, clean and nutty profile of the cheese.

RAVE's David Webb and Paxton & Whitfield's James Rutter explored different milks and cheese styles before landing on Kaldi's final format – using young, unrinded goats' cheese from the Somerset Cheese Company. It's aged at the cheesemonger's state-of-the-art maturation rooms in the Cotswolds, where it goes through a process of brine-washing and coffee coating before maturing over 10 weeks.

James says, "Aside from cheese, coffee is the product that intrigues me the most, so it was a real pleasure to work on the Kaldi collaboration with RAVE. Since we opened our maturation rooms and increased our focus on affinage, coffee has been on our minds, but we knew the process would only work if we used the highest quality beans.

"We're very lucky to have RAVE on our doorstep, ready to help us find a coffee that complemented the goats' cheese and let it sing, rather than dominating it altogether."

Cornish dairy celebrates sustainability award

Lynher Dairies, maker of Cornish Yarg and Cornish Kern, has been awarded Most Sustainable Organisation for a medium-sized business at the Cornwall Sustainability Awards.

Emily Rodda says, "Lynher Dairies lives and breathes to produce outstanding cheese. Today, our definition of 'outstanding' goes beyond the array of national and international awards that we receive to hold our environment and social performance as integral to the business.

"Our interventions are centered around three main pillars that align with the triple bottom line approach: reducing our environmental impact through improving resource efficiency; supporting our farming, cheesemaking and local communities for the good of all; and exceeding our role as employers to improve the wellbeing and social equity of our team."

Sustainability measures at the dairy that contributed to its award win include reducing electricity consumption by 47% since 2018, installing solar panels in 2023, changing processes to reduce plastic cheese cloth consumption, and using 'wonky' cheeses in cooking demonstrations at local events. Wild garlic and nettle foragers are trained to ensure they don't deplete natural stocks, and, says Emma, the dairy has collaborated with Working Woodlands Cornwall to launch a woodland management plan.

"Our projects going into 2024 include making our packaging 100% biodegradable, recyclable and reusable, exploring ways to convert our pasteuriser boiler to renewable energy sources, and developing our own farm standard for our herd which reflects the social, environmental, and animal welfare standards that we deem essential," Emily adds.



New ethically-made goats' cheeses to be available this summer

A range of ethically-produced goats' cheeses, which launched successfully at the end of 2023, will once again become available to retail for summer 2024.

Danni Rees and Oli Harris founded Mossy Oaks in the Shropshire Hills in 2022, following their shared ambition to live from the land and produce high-quality, sustainable food.

British Saddleback pigs, rescued laying hens, and a herd of hardy rare breed Guernsey Gold goats are part of team Mossy Oaks, where the duo is aiming to return to a fully traditional wood pasture system. Having made cheese as a hobby since 2017, and being passionate about craft cheese, they have invested in producing a 'full board' with milk from their "happy goats" which live out on pasture year-round. The entire process, from milking to packaging, takes place on site.

"We operate as low input as possible," says Danni. "Our herd is fed mainly from the pasture, supplemented with spent grain from a local brewery. We rotationally graze our pasture with herd so they benefit the land as well as producing food for us. And we work with the rhythm of nature and keep all our processes in sync with this."

Milking takes place only from April to October, and the farm operates a nanny-with-kid system, keeping kids with their mums, and only taking surplus milk for cheesemaking.

The next batches will be available from this summer, and include the signature Mossy Oaks Gold (a semi-soft washed-rind cheese), Nanny Hold (a hard cheese), Hill Billy Blue, and bloomy-rinded Golden Goatling. Soft fresh cream cheese and feta and halloumi-style cheeses are also available."

Yorkshire producer launches Mexican-style cheese range

Mexican food and drink is hot property in retail right now, with trendsetters and analysts predicting the British appetite for everything from tequila to tacos will only strengthen in 2024.

A family-run cheesemaking business in Yorkshire has got ahead of the game, tapping into the trend to produce a brand-new Oaxaca-style cheese for retail, alongside a range of soft Mexican-type cheeses that are being snapped up by restaurants and foodservice.

Razan Alsous of Yorkshire Dama (known for its Squeaky Cheese made using Yorkshire milk), started investigating Mexican dairy as part of her degree in food manufacturing. "It's very similar to the cheeses in the Middle East," says the Syrian native, "because we do a lot of fresh cheese and cheese curds, which is what they are doing as well. I had some customers ask 'do you make queso fresco?' and I started to read about it. By coincidence, we do make it but under a different name in Arabic, so I thought, 'why not?'" Especially, she thought, as Mexican cheese cannot be imported into the UK.

Razan began researching the technical aspects of Oaxaca cheese, spending a year on market research and formulation, and says she has seen a lot of interest since the product became available for sale.

"It's very similar to mozzarella, but it has a slightly different technique of how you work on the acidity and moisture level of the cheese, and there is a slightly different texture as well, but it's from the same family of cheeses," says Razan. "This is what we need at the moment in the UK."

Also available, largely to chefs but potentially to retail in future, are queso Latino, and the queso fresco, with Razan working on a Chihuahua-style cheese and a Mexican spiced version of her Squeaky Cheese. "As an SME we have got the flexibility to anticipate gaps in the market and respond to them. It's all now about business growth, and going to the next level," she adds.





‘Managing the land and animals in harmony is an investment in our future’

As part of our series delving into some of the UK’s most fascinating diversification projects, *Speciality Food* speaks to a scientist who gave up her career to focus on farming

“I was one of those consumers who became enlightened,” says Dr Radka Gromnicova from her farm shop, Nature Way Farm at Old Park Farm in Northamptonshire. “I wasn’t happy with how food was produced…how meat was produced.”

Radka leads a dramatically different life today from the one she had six years ago, in the field of medical research, using gold nanoparticles to help treat brain disorders.

Her journey has taken her from the lab to the land. From the study of cells to the study of soil. Radka’s lab coat has been replaced, as we chat, by a thick, insulating winter coat – essential for frosty mornings checking on livestock, or keeping track of produce in the farm shop chillers.



Radka’s story, she says, probably began when she tried to be a vegetarian. It didn’t work for her. But, equally, the kind of meat available in supermarkets didn’t align with her values. “There’s a policy in farming of cheap food, low wages and overworking,” she says. “That doesn’t sit well with me. I’ve always thought we need to tackle that. People need to be prepared to pay more for food. Then, I believe, they will value it more, and less will be wasted.”

At the same time Radka discovered regenerative farming. “It’s a way farmers and land managers can not only produce good quality meat that is nutrient dense, but using certain principles, can in fact help to restore the land and restore biodiversity. When I discovered all of this, I wanted to be a part of it!”

There was a lot of discussion with her partner. Could they change their lives and become country folk? If they could source excellent quality meat, produced in a more sustainable way, would other people want to buy it?

A radical change of pace

For a couple of years Radka immersed herself in research, finding and visiting pockets of the farming community where regenerative methods had been adopted. She worked alongside them, buying their meat, and creating the Nature Way Farm meat box delivery scheme, which continues to this day.

In many ways, the turning point for the business was Covid, which had a dramatic impact on supply chains. “There was no food on the shelves, and I wanted some chicken,” says Radka. “Really good quality chicken. I couldn’t find any.” Not one to do anything by halves, she bought in 30 chicks and went about rearing them on pasture. “Then I thought, how much more work could it be to process the chickens and sell them to the public?”

Radka and her partner worked with the EHO to come up with a plan, using a mobile slaughter unit, adding a flock of ducks to the mix. Her poultry problems were sorted.

Finding excellent quality beef to deliver to customers, on the other hand, proved tricky. “Abattoirs were struggling to fulfil orders, but then I found the farmer John Tims at Old Farm Park.”

The rest, as they say, is history. Enthused by the former dairy farmer’s commitment to managing his 300 acres in a more sustainable, and nature-friendly way, Radka formed a partnership with John, and around 80% of the meat in her monthly subscription boxes is now produced at Old Farm Park, where









Nature Way Farm Shop (opened two years ago) is also based.

The offering includes chicken, duck, woodland-reared pork, and beef, with lamb brought in from other farms that share her vision.

The chicken and duck produced at Nature Way taste incomparable to anything available on the mass market, says Radka, and the flocks are very important to her.

"When I first started this, I loved the books of Joel Salatin [a regenerative farmer in the USA]. I hated how horribly chickens could be reared. I really wanted to put them to pasture in a system that works for their welfare, but is also economically viable."

Rearing chickens in this way for the box scheme and farm shop has proven very successful, both for the welfare of the birds, and improving the land they feed on. The chickens are kept in pasture pens (moved daily) while they are small, and moved out of these once they've established more feathers and are therefore more resistant to the changeable British weather. Electric netting protects them from predators.

This free-range system, allowing the birds to peck naturally at the ground has, says Radka, had a big impact on soil health. "We're noticing how deep the grass is rooting where the chickens have been, and how many more earthworms there are. The pasture is responding by faster recovery towards its natural self."

The only downside, she admits, is the seasonality of farming in this way. With a diet led by grass and clover, pasture raising is limited to late spring up until mid-autumn, making Nature Way's home-reared chicken a seasonal product. But Radka doesn't seem to take issue with this, saying she'd rather do things the right way...the most natural way. "You can notice the difference so much," she says. "They have bigger legs because they are running and walking rather than sitting on their bellies. And in terms of flavour, it's more chickeny."

Ducks are also raised across pasture, with constant access to water for paddling and splashing about. "They are very messy so moving them every day is key," Radka says. "And giving them a large space is important, because they do act as a flock – not like chickens, which tend to scatter. Ducks are very clever."

> "Using certain principles can in fact help to restore the land and restore biodiversity. When I discovered all of this, I wanted to be a part of it"

The beauty of grazing

A huge part of the Nature Way Farm operation is raising cattle across the grassland at Old Park Farm. Farmer John kept on some of his best dairy cows, with a mix of both Hereford and Aberdeen Angus crosses.

The land is organic certified and part of the Countryside Stewardship scheme, both John and Radka are passionate about improving and encouraging nature across its fields and woodlands.

"We manage the pastures in a way called holistic plant grazing," says Radka. "It's similar to modern grazing, but with a bit more of a specific plan. So the animals are where we need them to be for the right reason, at the right time."

Farming using this method means that at any one point, 90% of the land is animal-free - a natural playground for wildlife. Herds are moved every day, and won't return to the same area for two months, allowing grass to recover, setting deep roots.

"If you imagine how things used to be, there were huge herds of herbivores that would move across the landscape and graze. They wouldn't come back to the same area for quite a long time. That's how grassland evolved. This process builds topsoil and increases the amount of nutrients in the soil. It's a very efficient way of removing carbon from the atmosphere," Radka explains, adding that, as a scientist, the microbiology of the soil, and the increasing research into its importance, fascinates her.

"We've seen a dramatic increase in grass height. It was really poor before. This farm was inherited by John's wife and was in a long-term tenancy as a sheep farm. The sheep decimated the grass and there was a lot of standing water in places. We have seen so much improvement in that."

John and Radka have noticed a shift in biodiversity too. Birds of prey can be seen regularly hovering over the fields in pursuit of lunch. There's a resident group of deer. Lots of hares. Butterflies. "John loves wildlife, so when he goes to mow a field for hay, sometimes he'll say 'no, I couldn't do it today because it was full of butterflies'," Radka laughs.

Managing woodland has its part to play in balancing nature too, with piglets from smallholders raised in amongst the trees. "It harks back to medieval times when pigs would have been free roaming around the farm, and would eat acorns in the autumn and fatten up. It would have taken two years to rear them. In this day and age that's not economically viable, and we can't let them go everywhere, but they have five acres to roam, and we train them to electric fences, and move them every two to three weeks."

The farm focusses on rare British breeds such as Large Blacks, Sandy and Blacks and a cross of Saddleback and White Lop. "You can notice the difference in flavour from woodland pork so much," says Radka. "It has a much more buttery, pure taste." They've had exceptional success rearing pigs this way. "Before, the woodland was just brambles and nettles, and now there are so many diverse plants and grasses, forget-me-nots and bluebells. The pigs disturb the seed bank in the soil and eat the roots of the brambles and nettles, which gives other plants space to grow and set seed. It's a continuous cycle."

It's important, says Radka, to show customers the work that goes into producing their meat in this way, and to talk to them about all the things they're doing to make a marked, tangible difference. This is, she adds, their key responsibility. "We like to take people on little private tours around the farm, to see the animals and where they live."

> "Before, the woodland was just brambles and nettles. And now there are so many diverse plants and grasses, forget-me-nots and bluebells"

The growing demand for better food

Nature Way Farm Shop opened largely due to customer demand. Alongside meat, there are vegetables in season from Radka's own garden and allotment, her organic eggs, 100% organic milk from grass-fed cows, and seasonal fish from Brixham.

They process their own chickens and ducks on site, while their pigs and cows are processed at an abattoir before going through their own butchery room, where they have a dry ageing chiller. "We had to take control of this side of things," Radka explains, saying they were keen to ensure quality runs through every part of the cycle, from growing the crops that feed the flocks and herds, to delivering the most perfect, matured beef to the end customer.

Despite being smaller than most and open just two days a week, Nature Way Farm has quite the following, showing an increased appetite by consumers for better quality food. "We have one lady who comes from Surrey because she really wants our eggs – she buys them in bulk," says Radka. "And someone else from Cambridge drives to us for their eggs and meat!"

Radka and John are keen they don't respond to all the positivity around sales by stretching themselves too far. Letting the business grow organically remains hugely important. "It's the way I want to run it," Radka explains. "We want to be ethical, to pay people well, and to work collaboratively."

For now, it's a bit of a dream come true. And far removed from the sterile environment of her former working life. "I never thought I would have my own butchery and shop," she laughs. "I didn't think we would be where are now, but I can see where we are heading to, and it's very exciting to be a part of it."

Her advice to other farmers or farm shops seeking to work in better harmony with nature? "If they are farmers, they already know it's hard work! But it's great if they want to change. Because we need to change. If we continue to farm conventionally, exploiting our resources, we're heading into more trouble. But if we can work with the land and animals, it's an investment in the future."



FINAL CALL

There is no doubt that sustainability is becoming increasingly important to shoppers and that, with the food industry being the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the industry must embrace innovation to address climate change. That's why we've dedicated the majority of this issue to the green businesses and solutions that are making waves in the industry.

The problems of climate change and pollution may be complex and globe-spanning, but there are so many ways for independent retailers to improve their environmental credentials, and they don't need to break the bank. As part of your regular review of the products on your shelves, take the time to research producers to check out their sustainability credentials, and opt for locally made products like meat, cheese, fruit and vegetables where you can.

Seek out producers who are making an effort to package their products more sustainably too, whether they use compostable packaging or recyclable cardboard, aluminium or plastic.

People are becoming more interested in where the food they eat comes from and how it is made, so it's important that retailers are well-versed in methods like organic or regenerative farming. Retailers can also play a role in helping customers eat more seasonally simply by passing on their knowledge about what's in season and where different products come from.

Look at your physical environment, too. Can you make any updates in your shop to improve your carbon footprint? For example, making your building more energy efficient, using renewable energy or installing electric vehicle charging points. Why not try using refill stations for products like dried pastas and cereals or other home goods?

You don't need to try to solve all the world's problems in your shop, but if you can find one or two causes that are close to your heart and make it your mission to improve these, you'll already be leaps and bounds beyond many of your competitors. We hope you find plenty more inspiration and actionable insights in the pages of our Green Issue.

Did we miss any topics that you're interested in learning more about? Do you have a story to share or expertise to pass on? Please get in touch with courtney.goldsmith@artichokehq.com

5 MINUTES WITH
TOM REDWOOD, FOUNDER OF FU:DI



WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Having an impact, doing things that disrupt and have a material change. I feel blessed that I have worked with my partner on all ventures, which has been an amazing experience as we are as ying and yang as you can get.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
The feedback loop is pretty rewarding - having customers tell you they have been missing food items they love or that they are going without, until they find our products and taste them for the first time. The overwhelmingly positive comments remind us daily of why we get out of bed and do what we do. That's pretty special.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
Airport food and generally eating on the go is pretty tough, especially when you are trying to manage your blood sugar like I am. Food on the go needs improvement!

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I think the food system as it stands is fairly broken. Commercial messaging and production is misleading and contributing to a global pandemic in metabolic health. We are seeing rises in health issues that I believe are in the most part avoidable.
As an industry, we have to take responsibility for the part we play in people's overall wellbeing.

TEA OR COFFEE?
Coffee, always. I am on the eternal search to find the best roast yet! We so far seem to attract coffee lovers, so have a fabulous drip coffee machine in the office that's perfect for sampling the small batch speciality coffee we can find locally.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
There is a quote by Simon Sinek: "Most of us live our lives by accident, we live it as it happens. Fulfilment comes when we live our lives on purpose." My purpose has always been to push the boundaries of food and good quality ingredients. As a chef, taste and the emotional enjoyment of food are super important, and that's where I get my fulfilment.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
Udder...and it was udderly revolting (sorry for the dad joke).

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Being heavily dyslexic means I was never a big reader.
However, when I discovered cookbooks, this all changed. Kitchen Confidential was pretty influential for me and rang true on so many levels.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Always savoury, give me cheese over a dessert any day!

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Inside the next issue of Speciality Food

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- Ice Cream & Desserts
- Cold Brews
- Pet Supplies
- BBQs & Accompaniments
- StoreCupboard centrespread
- Natural Products Show Preview







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The final word on fine food

TRIED & TESTED

COCOA AND HAZELNUT SPREAD, ISLANDS CHOCOLATE



A 300g jar of pure chocolatey joy. This is, quite honestly, one of the very best chocolate spreads we've ever smothered on our toast (or eaten by the spoonful). Free from palm oil, and with a silky smooth texture, it is incredibly rich with the aromatic flavour of roasted Piedmont hazelnuts, which take up a whopping 55% on the ingredients list. These are ground to perfection and combined with Islands Chocolate's rich, full-flavoured cocoa, grown in its own plantations in St Vincent, or on trusted partner farms in the right way. That means no slavery, living wages, zero deforestation, and a commitment to regenerative farming.
islandschocolate.com

MAPLE & TOASTED PECAN GRANOLA, JUST LIVE A LITTLE



This granola is more than a little tasty. From the folk at Kestral Foods (behind Forest Feast), it's part of a new range of gluten-free, no added refined sugar products. A dollop of almond butter and sprinkle of cinnamon bring warmth and moreish-ness to this blend, made up of wholegrain oats, date juice, raisins, rapeseed oil, pecans, crisped rice cereal and salt. It's crunchy, sweet without being cloying, and has a really delicious toasty flavour that's a little bit addictive. Ideal for snacking and baking, or with fruit, milk or yoghurt.
justlivealittle.com

PROSECCO, SEA CHANGE WINE

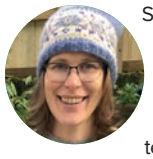


A multi award-winning bottle, from a family who want to send out a strong eco message with their products. Produced in the Veneto region, using the Glera grape variety, this is a light, but complex, effervescent wine that hits with a crisp acidity, before delivering a burst of stone fruit, and erring into Champagne territory, with a malty, biscuity, warm finish.

Sea Change is 100% plastic free. The brand only uses natural corks, the paper for its labels is from sustainable forests, and uses waste from the wine-making process, and each bottle is lighter than average too, to minimise its weight in transport. Sea Change's mission is to help clean up our oceans, therefore a portion of profits is split between charities whose work matches these aspirations.
seachangewine.com

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Gemma Parker, Earsham Street Cafe



My husband and I, along with a fantastic team, run Earsham Street Café in the centre of the market town of Bungay – open during the day, and a couple of evenings a month for special taster events.

We pride ourselves on making everything from scratch, even down to the jams and chutneys. I work in the kitchen with our team of chefs, designing menus based on the seasons and local ingredients - this also includes the indulgent cakes on the counter. We are lucky to be located on Earsham Street, a real 'foodie' destination in Bungay, with a plethora of food and drink shops offering a fantastic shopping and eating experience for visitors.

Living and working on the Norfolk/Suffolk border gives us access to so many amazing producers and growers. You can't beat really good produce that's only travelled a few miles, in terms of the carbon footprint, supporting the local economy, and quality. There is such a variety in terms of scale, from the hobby gardeners right up to the world-famous Fen Farm Dairy. I was recently involved with developing a paper (and digital) guide to bring all these people together, to really show off what the town and nearby area have to offer when it comes to food and drink. We've run the café now for over a decade. Throughout that time we've always been on the lookout for new people to add to our list of suppliers and I always get excited when discovering that a new food business has started nearby. My favourite is someone we have been working with for so many years that I can't remember not working with him! Peter at Kitchen Gardens is a smallholder and mainly does veg boxes to domestic customers as well as supplying us with seasonal vegetables. I love his salad leaves in the winter. They are deep green in colour with lots of different shaped leaves, and have a spicy taste that is both surprising and unusual. The veg we order is dug up that morning, before being delivered a few hours later, so it's super fresh and still sporting the dirt that it's been nestling in.

A pioneering business that began in Bungay, and whose products we have enjoyed using since the start is Hodmedod's; championing British grown grains, pulses, flours and seeds. We use a lot of their YQ flour (a stoneground wholemeal flour), and also their quinoa. Over the years it's been great to see them grow from strength to strength, in the beginning starting with just dried fava beans, which we tried and tested, to now having loads of products under their belt along with winning numerous awards.

> "We are lucky to be located on Earsham Street - a real 'foodie' destination in Bungay"

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo

THE GRAGNANO EFFECT

The homeland of fine, bronze die pasta, plays host to some of the very best makers in the world



As we've already discussed in this column, not all pasta is created equal. Around 400 shapes, from slender linguine and pasta, to capacious conchiglioni, can be found on shelves across the world.

Approximately 200 of these are cast from the teeth of bronze dies in the verdant, hilly town of Gragnano, nearly 20 miles south of Naples in Italy's foodie powerhouse region, Campania.

It is here, washed by the breeze rushing off the Amalfi coast, and shadowed by the Lattari mountainscapes, that some of the finest pasta on the planet is created. So revered is Gragnano that it's colloquially known as the 'city of pasta' - its products referred to as 'gold'.

Pasta made in Gragnano, to strictly upheld criteria, was granted IGP/PGI status by the EU in 2003. So seriously do artisans take their craft here, that the Gregnano Citta della Pasta Consortium was founded, in a bid to guard the heritage, quality and principles of Gragnano's most revered export.

What on earth, then, makes Gragnano's offering so special?

For starters, there's the cooler climate, ideal for the low, slow drying process this kind of pasta requires. Couple this with the town's low chlorine water supply (leading to a purer taste), and craftsmanship stretching back at least five centuries (though some put it at 1,000 years), and you have the ingredients for something truly special.

To meet stringent EU criteria, Gragnano IGP/PGI pasta must be made with the finest quality high-protein durum semolina wheat, chosen for its superior flavour. This is combined with just one other ingredient – water from Gragnano. That's it. Nothing more. Nothing less. Each batch of dough has to pass through bronze dies. And it is then dried at low temperatures (between 40C and 80C) to preserve the flavour of the wheat and ensure a robust, less brittle finish. This is a true labour of love.

There is nothing, say the craftspeople behind Gragnano's most famous ingredient, like bronze die pasta. It is utterly incomparable to the silky fresh filled pastas of Northern Italy, or off-the-shelf typical supermarket varieties.

The combination of higher protein/gluten dough, and bronze die pressing, gives each strand or intricately contorted shape a porous, abrasive surface texture, which siphons up sauces, allowing them to cling more closely, and for diners to derive more flavour and pleasure from their meal. This is pasta is body and bite, to be heralded as the centrepiece of a meal.

Garofalo, based in Gragnano, produces multiple IGP/PGI pastas. Now's the time to tell your customers what the real difference is between this, the good stuff, and what they can buy at the multiples.





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