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January/February 2025

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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the January 2025 issue of *Speciality Food* – the first of a brand new year.

Whether you're a fan of making resolutions to mark the new year or not, this time of year offers an opportunity to sit back and reflect. Traditionally a quieter period after the madness of Christmas, I hope January gives you the chance to pause, take stock, and learn from the lessons thrown at you by the year just gone.

You might be looking to refresh your store, in which case I recommend you check out page 28, or aiming to update your product range – you'll find plenty of inspiration throughout these pages.

We also take a closer look at why Scottish food and drink is worth celebrating on page 22, and preview Scotland's Speciality Food & Drink Show 2025 on page 25.

Plus, we highlight the biggest and brightest food and drink trends that are set to shake up the sector over the coming 12 months on page 16. Spoiler: there's plenty to excite your customers' taste buds.

Here's to a proactive, profitable – and delicious – 2025!

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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Farm Retail Association concerned about ‘devastating impact’ of Labour’s budget

The FRA says measures introduced in the Autumn Budget will negatively impact UK farming, food production and food security

Members of the British farming community say they are reeling after Labour’s Budget announcement, with the Farm Retail Association (FRA) issuing a stark warning about the measures introduced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, which it believes could have ‘catastrophic consequences’.

FRA chair Emma Mosey, who also operates Yolk Farm in Boroughbridge, has deep concerns, and said the Budget “sounded a death knell for small-scale food production in the UK’, adding the organisation believes the announcement will “accelerate the decline of family farms and the loss of our rural heritage”.

Farmers will, the FRA said, be affected by several parts of the Budget – the ‘headline’ being changes to Inheritance Tax relief on farms. Under Labour’s plans, IHT will be charged at 20% on farms worth more than £1 million.

This policy change, the FRA explained, could force many family-run farms and farm retail businesses to sell land and assets to meet new IHT demands, leading to a significant loss of agricultural heritage, and a decline in domestic food production.

The National Farmers’ Union (NFU) has echoed the FRA’s concerns, calling for British farmers and growers to lobby MPs to highlight the impact of the recent Budget, including changes to APR (Agricultural Property Relief) and BPR (Business Property Relief), on their farms.

Farming families, the NFU said, are “at breaking point” with many unable to absorb further cost burdens following a long period of upheaval due to record inflation, extreme weather and increased production costs.

NFU president, Tom Bradshaw, said, “Farmers are rightly angry and concerned about their future and the future of their family farms, having been reassured by ministers in the lead up to the Budget that APR and BPR changes were not on the table.

“The Treasury’s figures which claim this will only affect one in four British farms are misleading. The £1 million cap to APR shows how little this government understands the sector. Very few viable farms would be worth under £1m, but lots of smallholdings and houses with a few acres let for grazing might be.” Tom continued, “The asset value of genuine food-producing farms will be high, given the size they need to be to remain viable businesses; but that’s the value of the asset, it doesn’t reflect its profitability which is often, and increasingly so, very low.

“Clearly the government does not understand that family farms are not only small farms, and that just because a farm is an asset, it doesn’t mean those who work it are wealthy. Every penny the Chancellor saves from this will come directly from the next generation having to break up their family farm. It simply mustn’t happen.”

Other areas of concern for farmers are minimum wage increases, reduced business rates relief for retail and hospitality, and the employer’s National Insurance hike, which the FRA said will, combined, directly impact farm shops and other farm-based retail outlets, hindering growth, and increasing costs.

"Our members are facing a perfect storm of increased costs," added Emma. “The combination of rising minimum wages, reduced business rates relief, and higher National Insurance contributions will squeeze profit margins and force businesses to make difficult decisions. This could lead to job cuts, reduced investment, and higher prices for consumers."

Emma said FRA members are committed to paying fair wages and providing good working conditions, but added the rapid increase in costs is making it increasingly difficult to remain competitive, saying industry needs to have a “balanced approach” that supports businesses while ensuring a fair deal for workers.

“Despite running on a platform of supporting small businesses, promoting growth and reducing inflation, the government’s actions could just do the opposite,” Emma continued. “Many farm retail businesses are family-run by hard working people, which calls into question the government’s definition of a working person. These fears cannot be overplayed.”

The FRA, NFU and other farming bodies are urging the government to reconsider its new policies, instead implementing measures that support the agricultural sector.

“A thriving farming industry is essential for the UK’s food security, rural economy, and environmental sustainability,” the FRA added.

> “A thriving farming industry is essential for the UK’s food security, rural economy, and environmental sustainability”



Could Bovaer reaction be a 'big win' for independent dairies?

Shoppers are voting with their feet, choosing milk and dairy from family farms in light of Arla's recent feed additive announcement.

The people have spoken. Just days after it announced a landmark trial with supermarkets Morrisons, Tesco and Aldi, Danish-Swedish-owned dairy giant Arla has been forced to defend ruminant food additive, Bovaer, in light of mass consumer boycotts of Arla-related products.

The public, concerned about links to big industry, animal welfare, and the legacy effect on humans of Bovaer, say they're binning their usual milk, butter and cheese brands (including Cravendale and Lurpak) in favour of supporting smaller producers.

Though Bovaer is being used in just 30 dairy farms out of nearly 9,000 involved with Arla, there are also worries from fellow farmers about the milk produced being 'mixed' with non-trial milk.

Rebecca Mayhew of Old Hall Farm, a calf with cow dairy in South Norfolk, said she's had more than 200 queries since details of the Arla trial emerged. Rebecca hopes the recent news will make more people consider what they're buying, and where they're buying it from, encouraging the public and independent retailers to foster better relations with farmers. "I would not, as a deli or shop, be afraid to bang on that drum now and say, 'our products don't contain Bovaer'. I've contacted all my cheese suppliers to make sure they're not in the programme. There's power in knowledge. Check your supply chain!" "People want to know what it is, if we're using it, and why it's needed."

5 vegan and vegetarian trends for 2025

The experts at Ingredion share their insight into what will dominate the plant-based market over the next 12 months.

Clean labels rule

Ingredion's senior marketing manager, Constantin Drapatz, said clean labels will lead the way in plant-based and vegan food manufacturing in the next two years, making up 70% of what's available to consumers, compared to 52% in 2021.

"The rise supports consumer preference for transparency and simplicity in ingredients," he explained.

"Our research has also found that 99% of European manufacturers see clean label products as essential to their business strategy, with 87% already incorporating these into their products. This reflects the industry's commitment to transparency and simplicity in ingredients."

Gary Allison, technical sales Convenience Food at KaTech by Ingredion, added he thinks mycoprotein (protein derived from fungi) will see a rise in popularity as an ingredient shoppers feel they can trust. "Plant proteins are increasingly being utilised not just for their nutritional value but also for their natural gelling properties," he said.

Reformulation

Manufacturers are reformulating products to 'clean up their act'.

Gary said an ingredient long used in the vegan and plant-based sphere, methylcellulose, is one that's gradually being taken out of production as better alternatives come to the fore.

"It's perceived to be an unnatural ingredient by consumers," he said, adding that methylcellulose-free solutions are now helping businesses to achieve a meat-like texture, using more desirable plant proteins, fibres and starches instead. "Importantly, these developments are scalable and compatible with conventional manufacturing equipment, making them particularly attractive for producers looking to expand their plant-based offerings."

Sustainability

Delivering vegan and vegetarian eating choices that are better for the planet is absolutely essential, said Constantin. "Consumers are increasingly scrutinising sustainability to decide which ingredients they will accept, prompting manufacturers to look for holistic clean label solutions."

Better nutrition

"One enduring trend is the move towards complete protein sources that provide all essential amino acids while maintaining clean label status," said Matthieu. "Manufacturers are trying to attract health-conscious consumers by increasing fibre, whilst simultaneously working to reduce saturated fat content. Another key focus area is the fortification with essential micronutrients like iron, zinc, and vitamin B12, addressing common deficiencies in plant-based diets." maintaining the clean label appeal that consumers demand. Reducing additives also helps to shorten the ingredients list overall, as the very long lists found on some meat alternatives today, deter a growing number of consumers.

Next generation pulses

Pulses and beans are the future, said Matthieu, both in their whole form, and as a natural additive for flavour, bulking, and adding nutrition to recipes.

"Recent technological developments have enabled the creation of plant-based alternatives using recognisable ingredients that support nutritional profile and deliver both functionality and clean label appeal. These ingredients support high protein content while maintaining low saturated fat levels, without the plant flavour, bitter taste or uncontrolled microbial levels inherent in dry-milled pulse products."





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Insight reveals UK remains committed to EU imports

A survey carried out behalf of the European Commission across seven food and drink sectors, showed the majority will continue to import from the EU over the next 12 months.

The EU will remain a key resource for the UK food and beverage industry despite the challenges imposed by Brexit, according to new insight from UK industry supply chain professionals.

A European Commission survey interviewed wholesalers, importers, producers and HORECA professionals to gather data on their future plans, with respondents from the wine and dairy sectors saying they were 100% committed to sourcing additional SKUs from the EU in the coming year, while beer and spirits (80%), charcuterie and meat (80%) and bakery (70%) also showed a clear commitment to working with European partners.

Quality, pricing, authenticity and tradition were voted the most popular general characteristics those surveyed were considering when adding to their product ranges, while authenticity (79%) and tradition (70%) ranked most highly if they were looking to EU producers.

More than two-thirds of respondents agreed the EU's Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and organic labels were either 'very important' or 'somewhat important' when sourcing ingredients.

The research was conducted in April 2024 against the backdrop of the UK Government's Border Trading Operating Model (BTOM) which aims to maintain border security while minimising trade burdens.

"These insights demonstrate that despite the challenges and complexities of new cross-border trade agreements, the EU remains a valued partner and important resource for the UK's food and drink industry and is likely to remain that way", said Andrew Crumpton, founder of AMC Consulting and advisor to the 'More Than Only Food & Drink' campaign.

Veryan Bliss, managing director of Food Intelligence, and fresh produce advisor to the EU's 'More Than Only Food & Drink' campaign supports this view. "It is clear that the relationship between the UK and EU is incredibly important. In 2023 the UK was the number one destination for EU agri-food, accounting for 22% of exports and with a value of €51.3 billion."



Farm Retail Awards shortlist announced

The FRA has revealed its finalists, with the winners to be announced in spring 2025

Some of the very best farm retailers in the UK have been named after being shortlisted for the national Farm Retail Awards, sponsored by Fieldfare.

The finalists, who are from Devon, Kent, Lincolnshire, London, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Scotland, Shropshire, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Surrey, will now go through to the glittering awards ceremony on Wednesday, 12th March at The Eastside Rooms in Birmingham.

The eight award categories include the Rising Star Award which celebrates business development and newcomers to the industry; the Farm Shop Butchery of the Year Award; Large Farm Shop of the Year (turnover over £1.5m); Small Farm Shop of the Year (turnover under £1.5m); Farmers' Market of the Year; Farm Café/Restaurant of the Year; PYO of the Year and Associate Member of the Year.

This has been an exciting year for FRA, which has unveiled a new rebrand as part of ambitious plans to expand the UK-wide membership organization which champions farm shops, PYOs and farmers markets.

Chair of the Farm Retail Association, Emma Mosey, said, "It's wonderful to shine a light and celebrate our farm shops and farmers markets which are often independent, family-run businesses at the heart of communities. The sector is an important bridge between field and fork, sourcing fresh and nutritious produce with low food miles, from passionate and knowledgeable retailers.

"Congratulations to everyone who is shortlisted and good luck. This is your time to shine, and we are looking forward to celebrating your achievements in March at our grand awards ceremony!"

The finalists

LARGE FARM SHOP OF THE YEAR:
Cannon Hall Farm Shop, Darts Farm, Welbeck Farm Shop

SMALL FARM SHOP OF THE YEAR:
Ardross Farm Shop, Castle Farm, Fordhall Farm Shop

FARM CAFE/RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR:
Millets Farm Centre, The Farm Table at Darts Farm, Welbeck Farm Shop (Harley Cafe)

FARM SHOP BUTCHERY OF THE YEAR:
Denstone Hall Farm Shop & Cafe, Fordhall Farm Shop, Millets Farm Butchers

RISING STAR OF THE YEAR:
River Cottage Kitchen & Store, The Farm Table at Darts Farm

PYO OF THE YEAR:
Craigies Farm Ltd, Garson Farm, Manor Farm Fruits

FARMERS' MARKET OF THE YEAR:
Hall Place Bexley Farmers' Market, operated by M Farmers' Market, Lenham Country Market, run by M Farmers' Market

ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE YEAR:
Cress Co, Cotswold Fayre, Hortifeeds



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THE GREEN ISSUE

IN THE ISSUE:
- The Green Report 2025
- Sustainable Champions
- Sustainable Dairy
- Regenerative Farming
- Sustainable Retail

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"Regaining the passion"



EDWARD BERRY
THE FLYING FORK

You had passion, you set out with a plan and made it happen. You should be feeling so proud. However, instead of the joy of retail, your day is a stream of monotonous tasks, your working day is fifteen hours and there are seven of them in a week.

It dawns on you: What am I doing? Should I be doing something else with my life?

Many people lose passion for their work. If you don't love your work, it's going to make it much more difficult to pour your heart into your business. As humans we have ups and downs. If you work for an organisation, you probably have some sort of direction. As a food shop owner, this comes from you.

I am sure that when you gave the project thought, you knew it wouldn't all be just fun, but you wanted to do it, make yours the best, serve great food to satisfied customers.

Before you try to fix any problem, you need to understand the cause.

Setbacks and failure can be demoralising. If you aren't accomplishing your goals, this can make you feel detached from your business. When I opened my first café and deli it was driven by my desire to serve great food and make people happy. It didn't take long to realise that the team I had put together did not all share my passion. At its worst I came to expect nothing and anything above that was a bonus.

Remember what fun it was to think of what you wanted to accomplish and the excitement you felt before launching. Being your own boss gave you the freedom to do things your way and implement your own plans. You got to do what you're interested in.

You liked the idea of being creative. When you considered going it alone, you thought how you would do things your way. Owning your own business gives you the freedom to express yourself and develop your ideas in any way you choose. Yes, it took effort, but after you had planned the business, your ideas involved variety. If you were uninspired by a monotonous job, starting your own business stretched your abilities to the maximum. If you wanted a career where every day is different, then you found it.

You've been doing things the same way from the start, so think about how you can introduce innovation and push your business in new directions.

One of the biggest reasons people lose passion is not because they have lost interest in their work; it's because they're overworked, and their lives lack balance. It's good to find a way to put aside work for a few minutes every day or a few hours every week.

When you start losing that warm feeling for your work, you may start pulling away from the people around you. Relationships should be what will help you feel energised and people who know us can help remind us of our purpose.

Sometimes all it takes is a reason to reignite the passion, and often that reason is that we had blinkers on which stopped us from seeing clearly.

Take the blinkers off and reignite your passion for your business.

Cress Co supports food bank with reverse advent calendar

The fine food distributor counted down to Christmas 2024 with a new initiative in support of Dunfermline Foodbank.



The project ran in partnership with Adamsons Drinks, with an advent calendar from both businesses each day revealing which product from their ranges would be donated to the foodbank. By Christmas Eve, 48 cases of essential and festive foods had been delivered.

Each member of the team was involved, with a name being randomly selected each day and that person, logistics allowing, finding the case in the warehouse and putting it on a pallet for the foodbank.

Joe Wall, managing director at Cress Co, said, "We support Dunfermline Foodbank year-round, but Christmas is a particularly important time to help. It can be difficult for families to put special meals on the table, and we were happy to launch a fun, meaningful initiative that gave back to the community while involving our whole team."

The Cress Co Spring Summer 2025 Ambient Catalogue will be available at the beginning of January in hardcopy and online thecressco.co.uk

New statistics reveal the demand for sustainable products is higher than ever

Data released by Clear Channel UK has shown British consumers are placing greater value than ever on the sustainability claims of food and drink

Key findings included:

- 17% of people check labels for sustainability certifications
- One in five plan to prioritise sustainable brands for future purchases
- 23% rate brands that practice sustainable approaches
- 14% claim they are more likely to purchase a sustainable product after repeated exposure to its advertising.
- 44% worry about the future of the planet
- 25% are doing everything they can to minimise their carbon footprint
- 1% of 18 to 34-year-olds claimed they would be willing to pay more than 80% towards a sustainable product





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"How good food can restore rundown communities"



SUSIE WARREN SMITH MBE
PRODUCED IN KENT

Most towns across the UK have their fair share of out-of-town supermarkets (government figures demonstrate that for every 20 jobs they create, 30 are lost locally). The same research shows that good local food is a force for good, with traders and their suppliers more likely to spend their income in the vicinity, resulting in that money having a greater 'multipling effect'. Other statistics show that well-planned food retailing initiatives can contribute to improvements in the social structure of an area, including greater social cohesion, lower crime rates, enhanced local employment and money flows. The value of retail initiatives, then, seems to be underappreciated when it brings so many benefits.

In March 2024, The Times newspaper pronounced Folkestone "the best place to live in southeast England". It was placed ahead of Hove, Brighton and Winchester. Wow! I remember coming to Folkestone as a DFL (down from London) on camping holidays with my parents in the 70s, which was the start of its long decline into a dilapidated scruffy coastal outpost. Half a century later, I now live near Folkestone and I'm a frequent visitor because of its vibrance and colour. But how did this run-down Kent town become the very model of modern regeneration and stylish living with a booming visitor economy to match?

It was once a fashionable resort town where King Edward VII would bring his mistress, Alice Keppel. Golden-age travellers would step off the Orient Express onto a dedicated platform on the Harbour Arm and on to the boat for the Continent. Then the ferries moved to Dover, cheap air travel took over and tumbleweed blew along the old harbour and its station platform, and local shops fell into disrepair. It was a real knight, Sir Roger De Haan of the Saga Group, that eventually came to the rescue.

Certainly, the initial money he pumped into restoring the harbour and station, and the funding he set up for public art and social facilities was a key factor. But the power of food to regenerate an area and encourage it to be 'owned' by the community has been just as important. We still get DFLs of course, but residents are also very keen to support their own food producers and outlet owners.

The Old High Street, where you'll find independent traders selling art, crafts and quirky gifts, is cobbled and traffic-free. You can stop off at the Steep Street Coffee House for decadent homemade cake or the fabulous Dr. Legumes on Rendezvous Street. Here Jim and Lee have set up a community interest company that serves imaginative plant-based dishes including nori battered banana blossom, green pea pancakes and butternut squash rendang... and they find time to run educational food projects and cooking lessons with local children.

But it's the rejuvenated Harbour Arm that draws the most visitors during its open season between Easter and October. You'll find dozens of affordable restaurants, street food outlets, cafés and bars, and all with the backdrop of sea views out to France and the White Cliffs. There is always a buzz of excitement, almost as if the locals can't quite believe their luck that this is on their doorstep. The epitome of the confidence and joy of food leading the regeneration of a place, and giving us a sense of place, is SheSells SeaShells. They are proud to be a family business and are located in a beautifully preserved train carriage that emphasises the railway link of the harbour arm, where the metal rail tracks can still be seen. The fish and shellfish are sourced from local boats and include moules mariniere, crevettes, crab, and reasonably priced half lobsters cooked in garlic and parsley, all served with Kentish wine and fruit juices from local farms.

From their small family business, it's a short walk up to the end of the arm where you'll find The Lighthouse Champagne Bar, a renovated and still functioning lighthouse, with its dramatic location and striking architectural setting. It's a great way to spend the late afternoon, sipping their fine English sparkling wines from the numerous Kentish vineyards with gentle music drifting on the breeze.

So, those of us who live in the area are very grateful for the kick start given to us by Sir Roger de Haan, but the key to it being sustainable is the feeling of ownership it has engendered in the local community. Folkestone is probably the best example of food being the thread which runs through the council's regeneration efforts and all of us who believe in the power of local food should be lobbying our councils and local charities to use this as a model for our own area. Get them to come along to Folkestone and see how it can be done.

> "The power of food to regenerate an area is hugely important"

New guidelines to help food manufacturers prevent allergen-related recalls

The Food & Drink Federation (FDF) has issued guidance to help businesses prevent, manage and investigate allergen-related incidents.



According to a study by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) around 6% of the UK population (2.4 million people) are living with a confirmed food allergy.

Awareness of, and planning around, food allergens (primarily the 'big 14') is of paramount importance within industry, with clear, robust processes needed at every stage of manufacturing to prevent allergy-causing ingredients finding their way into 'free-from' products.

In a bid to help primarily smaller producers navigate the practicalities around allergen-containing foods, the Food & Drink Federation (FDF) has just released new guidance in a document, Allergen Recall Prevention.

It's been developed alongside experts from the FDF's membership, in collaboration with the Food Standards Agency (FSA), and sets out key considerations for businesses to follow in order to stop, manage and investigate food allergy incidents as efficiently and safely as possible.

Though each stage of allergen management requires thorough inspection and risk assessments, the new guidance simplifies these steps so they can be integrated into existing procedures, with processes to be followed for each of the four main courses of allergen incidents.

These are:

Incorrect declaration of ingredients: When an allergen ingredient is not declared or is incorrectly declared (for example during translation between English and another language).

Mismatch in product and packaging: When the packaging doesn't represent the product inside – such as a product in the wrong packaging or with the wrong label.

Incorrect 'free-from' allergen claims: When a 'free-from' product contains an allergen as an ingredient or contaminant.

Not declaring unintentional allergen presence: Where 'may contain' hasn't been printed on the label.



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ARDROSS FARM SHOP

Family values and serving their community is at the heart of this retail destination

After 20 years of loyally serving its community – and, in turn, growing a dedicated customer base – the seeds of Ardross Farm Shop seems a world away from what it has become, and yet the family-run team behind it and its key ethos remains unchanged.

"Back in 2005, with three daughters at university, my father decided that he wanted to make more money from the family farm," begins Nikki Storrar, who runs the business with her sister Claire Sloan and mother Fiona. "The decision was made that we needed to diversify, and we tried a couple of ideas including selling stone troughs – and at one point our kitchen was packed with compressed bales of straw to sell as logs – before we settled on selling what we were already producing, just to a different buyer." Cutting out the middleman and selling direct to consumers turned out to be a smart move.

"We didn't really do any planning or market research, and started off very small," says Nikki. "We had a shed we'd been selling potatoes from for years, so we painted it and put in one freezer and some beef from the farm. People started asking for vegetables such as cabbages, carrots and broccoli, which we were already growing for supermarkets on a large scale, so we added those."

While the family's approach was borne out of necessity rather than thorough planning, and with no key retail skills across things like EPOS and wholesale systems, they succeeded by listening to their customers. "We were really lucky that we started at a point when people were becoming really interested in local food and connecting with producers. Every time a customer came in looking for something we'd listen to what they wanted and shaped the business around that. We're very, very much customer-led."

A food-rich region

Making sure that Ardross Farm Shop offers convenience on a par with its local supermarkets has been key to the shop's appeal. "We wanted to make sure that it was convenient to buy local produce. People are so busy now and we want them to have access to really great food, and if there is a local or Scottish variety of something that tastes excellent, we'll stock it."

Based on the East Neuk of Fife, Ardross thankfully boasts a number of food-producing neighbours. "It's almost like a food island," explains Nikki. "We have an amazing ecosystem here, with lots of raw materials on the back of which amazing companies have started producing all sorts of different things. We work with 400 local producers, and whether that's food or paper bags, we try to support the local economy as much as possible."

With a breathtaking sea view and plenty of delicious produce to-hand, it's no wonder that Ardross is a popular spot with tourists. "This means that when we're busy we're extremely busy, but when we're quiet we really do rely on locals," says Nikki. "We have a very supportive network and support a lot of businesses based in the area, for example by hosting tasting sessions to connect them with our customers. The fact that people visit us on holiday and bring Fife produce back home with them is the cream on top."

Sustainable, naturally

"Opening the shop made us change everything you do on the farm," says Nikki. "When you're supplying supermarkets they demand perfection, and when standing across the till from our customers we realised that's not what they want."

Taking a step back from supermarkets' demands shed new light on the potential of what the family was doing. "Everything we do is to create a business that people trust. All of our animals are now Pasture For Life-certified and 100% grass fed. We work with the RSPB and plant beds of wild bird seeds around our fields." As all good practices should be, this is mutually beneficial, with the beds attracting insects and birds to pollinate the plants as well as looking beautiful, with sunflowers and clovers filling the beds each spring and summer.

"It's a case of doing the little things consistently," says Nikki. "For example, we're currently trying to get rid of as much plastic as humanly possible. We all have a responsibility, and we want our business to be sustainable in every way – financially for future generations, but also environmentally."

A big year ahead

In true Ardross style, the local community is key to plans to celebrate their 20 years of service in 2025. "We're hoping to run a series of events to thank people for their support," says Nikki, "including a big barn dance that we'll invite customers and suppliers to celebrate with us."

This year is looking bright for other reasons, too – malted barley from the farm is being transformed into beer by a local brewery, and excess fat from the farm's animals is being used to make tallow soap.

With its focus on supporting local ecosystems – both in terms of community and environment – Ardross is a perfect example of independent rural retail done right.





> We all have a responsibility, and we want our business to be sustainable in every way

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Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Forest Feast releases indulgent new treat

The premium snacking brand has launched Peppermint Cream Dark Chocolate Almonds in a move to satisfy the growing demand for indulgent snacks.



For this new product, oven-roasted almonds are coated in a peppermint-infused white chocolate before being topped with crunchy sugar crystals and covered in Belgian dark chocolate.

As with the other items in the Forest Feast range, each batch of Peppermint Cream Dark Chocolate Almonds are handcrafted in Co. Armagh.

Bronagh Clarke, marketing director at Forest Feast, said, "Mint chocolate has seen a real resurgence in the last year and now we have paired this with our oven roasted almond for a unique delicious snack."

forestfeast.co

'Breakfast with purpose' hits UK shelves

The Good Grain x PerfectTed have joined forces to launch ready to eat Matcha Latte Overnight Oats – a first for the British market.

The new breakfast product combines natural plant-based, nutrient-rich and fibre and protein-packed Overnight Oats from The Good Grain with clean caffeine, calming L-theanine and a natural energy boost from Perfect Ted's ceremonial-grade matcha.

The result is an on-the-go breakfast or snack that provides long-lasting energy, calming focus and nutrition with no refined sugars.



Jubilee Fox, founder of The Good Grain, and Marisa Poster, co-founder of PerfectTed, said, "As female founders, we're so proud to bring something completely new to the market. This isn't just about oats or matcha – it's about creating a product that supports health, energy, and convenience without ever compromising on taste. We've combined the best of what both brands offer to create a product that's innovative, healthy and in a convenient format. We've poured our passion into this collaboration, and we know consumers are going to love it."

Website address to come



Foodie partnership creates ultimate 'sweet heat' snack

Tracklements and Joe & Sephs have partnered up to produce Fresh Chilli Jam Gourmet Popcorn – a perfectly balanced blend of sweetness and chilli heat in delicious snack form.

The new product brings together Tracklements' Fresh Chilli Jam's notes of chilli, garlic, onions and the piquancy of cider vinegar and lemon juice with Joe & Seph's crunchy air-popped popcorn coated in smooth caramel for a moreish treat.

Guy Tullberg, managing director of Tracklements, said, "We're delighted to be working with Joe & Seph's who represent the pinnacle of popcorn excellence. Tracklements has perfected the art of making the UK's tastiest condiments over the last 50 years – it's a skill which can't be hurried and we're all in favour of taking the time to create the best flavour, something Joe & Seph's understand."

Adam Sopher, co-founder of Joe & Seph's, said, "We've always sought partners who share our passion for quality and craftsmanship, and Tracklements' commitment to traditional recipes, natural ingredients, and environmental responsibility perfectly aligns with our own values. Together, we've created something truly special, combining their award-winning fresh chilli jam with our handcrafted gourmet popcorn to deliver a unique, bold flavour experience. This partnership feels like a natural extension of both our stories, and we can't wait for our customers to enjoy this delicious fusion!"

joeandsephs.co.uk

Nirvana take on British best bitter

Dedicated low/no brewery Nirvana has released Nirvana Best – a 0.5% ABV amber ale – its take on a classic British best bitter.



The new beer is available in 500ml bottles and kegs, and is a full-bodied, rich and malty beer made using Maris Otter and Amber malts.

Oats and English Goldings hops provide earthy, spicy and floral notes, so that the end product promises a complex yet refreshing bitterness with subtle caramel understones.

Becky Kean, founder and brand ambassador, said, "Since we started back in 2016, we've had requests from customers for a 'real ale' or traditional best bitter. Now, as we approach our 10-year anniversary, we've brewed one that ticks all the right boxes – an outstanding homegrown beer, featuring classic ale malts and hops."

nirvanabrewery.com





Cambrook releases chocolate-coated nuts

Nut specialists Cambrook have added two new products to its range of luxury nuts: Chocolate Almonds and Salted Caramel Chocolate Hazelnuts.

The Chocolate Almonds, available in 90g bags, are made by coating baked Californian almonds with a salted dark, creamy milk and rich white chocolate in traditional chocolate coating pans for a sweet treat that celebrates the taste of both the nut and chocolates.

The Salted Caramel Chocolate Hazelnuts, available in 90g bags, are created by caramelising hazelnuts in Italian copper pans before adding the optimum amount of salt and coating them with smooth dark chocolate using traditional methods.

Deborah Bradfield, sales and marketing manager at Cambrook, said, "We are so excited to be launching our brand new packets of chocolate coated nuts. This range will be the perfect addition to our award winning range of both savoury and caramelised nuts. We will leave you to decide whether you start with the dark, milk or white chocolate almonds!"

cambrookfoods.co.uk



Nice Rice ticks sustainable, flavour and convenience boxes

B Corp-certified rice brand Nice Rice has added to its repertoire with the launch of Our Coconut Recipe.

The new product combines pure basmati rice with the flavours of coconut, lemongrass and lime leaf for a delicious and convenient meal solution that doesn't compromise on sustainability.

Nice Rice ensures premium quality by using solely a single heritage variety of basmati rice which has been grown using sustainable farming methods in its products, never lessening the quality of its range by mixing in cheaper grains of rice. This focus on quality guarantees an optimum taste, texture and aroma.

Fergus O'Sullivan, founder, said, "We're excited to be launching new and improved products, starting with Our Coconut Recipe this year. It's the perfect example of what Nice Rice is all about – making rice that's big on flavour and small on climate footprint."

wearenicerice.com



Luscombe enters canned drink sector



Premium soft drinks producer Luscombe has released its popular range in a new canned format in response to the growing demand for sustainable and convenient canned drinks.

Now available from selected wholesalers, the canned range includes Sicilian Lemonade, Sicilian Citrus Crush, Rhubarb Crush, Elderflower Bubbly and Ginger Beer.

Scott Cooper, chief executive officer at Luscombe, said, "Moving into cans allows us to open up new routes to market and meet the increasing demand for premium soft drinks in convenient packaging. This expansion will enable us to reach additional customers and offer our existing loyal fans more flexibility in how they enjoy Luscombe's signature flavours, whether at home, on-the-go, or in hospitality settings."

luscombe.co.uk





Invest Northern Ireland

A TASTE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Meet just a few of the brands *Speciality Food* caught up with at the Invest NI Showcase

DEVIL'S CHURN



Only the best Irish ingredients are stirred together to conjure Devil's Churn's award-winning caramel sauces – from premium butter, to salt from the North Coast Smokehouse (featured in the delectable Campfire Salted Caramel Sauce), and top shelf Bushmills Black Bush Irish Whiskey.

"The feedback from the food industry and judges is it's a really good caramel sauce. We do use expensive ingredients, but it's absolutely worth it," says Eoin McConnell, part of the Seasons of the Glen charity which founded the brand to help support its hyper local food and drink markets, and NI producers.

With the organisation holding charity status, you know every jar bought has a part to play in helping small artisan markers thrive.

Standout products include the award-winning Butterscotch and Irish Cream Caramel sauces.



JUST LIVE A LITTLE

Kestrel Foods prides itself on shaking up the speciality sector. Through its Forest Feast brand it's brought a contemporary feel to the flavoured, coated premium fruit and nut market. It's also making waves at the breakfast table with Just Live A Little – granola for the modern consumer seeking out all-natural gluten free, refined sugar free options. "In the last year or two it's really taken off," says Kestrel Foods' Damien McCrory. "Utilising our manufacturing capability and refreshing the brand has helped it continue to grow." Speaking of growth, Damien says they've noticed a rise in interest in gluten free products. "We're finding we over index in the UK and it's not just because people are coeliacs. Many see our products as a healthier option compared to standard granola. We've taken time to develop the recipes to be full of flavour, with much less sugar."

Flavours include Raspberry, Coconut & Cashew, and Maple & Toasted Pecan. Just Live A Little has recently added to its line with brand new porridge pots, with all the same high fibre, low sugar, gluten free claims as its granola. "The insights are telling us grab and go porridge is a growing market," says Damien. "These are fresh out the door and people are really enjoying them." The launch flavours are Maple Syrup and Apple & Cinnamon.

STEEPER CULTURE



Kombucha and other tea-based drinks are starting to take off in Northern Ireland, and Steeper Culture is delighted to have been at the cusp of this new wave drinks revolution. Founded by Pete Barrett six years ago, the business has grown exponentially, encompassing both kombucha and sparkling teas, livening up the category with delicious twists.

The bestseller by far, says Steeper Culture's Erin Bell, is Lightning McGreen - a refreshing, light kombucha brew made purely with green tea.

"The others use a blend of green and black teas, and have infusions like turmeric and orange, or ginger and lemon. One of my favourites has peach, grapefruit and hops – it's very much like an IPA style flavour so hits the spot if you're not drinking alcohol. There's layers to it – a real depth and complexity."

Sparkling tea infusions launched in 2023 and are, says Erin, a good entry point for those unsure about kombucha, coming in fresh, bright flavours such as Cherry Lime and Strawberry Lime, joined soon by a seasonal edition made with fresh pressed apples, picked by the Steeper Culture team.



'Northern Irish food and drink have a story to tell'

Speciality Food spent time with Invest NI, discovering the passion and people behind some of the region's best-loved artisan products

BURREN BALSAMICS

Vinegar is a category retailers should be taking more seriously, says Bob McDonald of Burren Balsamics which was founded by his business partner Susie Hamilton Stubber 10 years ago, initially as a way to raise money for Marie Curie.

The brand's USP is the "amazing flavour" of its products, he adds. "And the fact we don't go on age, we go on density. It's unique. We work with one family company in Modena to source our vinegars. There are usually two ages – 12-years-old or 25-years-old. If you see a 10-year-old balsamic it will have a percentage of vinegar that old, but it's no guarantee of quality!"

Starting at a density of 1.09 (weighing 1.09kg for every litre) to 1.35, Burren Balsamics guarantees a rich, luscious flavour and texture across the range, with no added caramel (as often seen in supermarket varieties). "Because we focus purely on quality, our customers are incredibly loyal to us," Bob adds.



Quality extends to infusions. PGI Armagh Bramley Apples, produced just down the road from the kitchen, flavour one variety. "And we work with one of the best soft berry growers in the country, producing strawberries, raspberries, blackcurrants and blackberries. We could buy cheaper, but they wouldn't have the flavour. When the site auditor for SALSA came to visit in the middle of production, they couldn't believe the quality of fruit we use!"

Alongside pure balsamic and infused vinegars, are vinegar spheres, relishes, chocolates, biscuits and more, with the Proper Digestive Biscuits winning a Great British Food Award, judged by Raymond Blanc MBE as some of the best he tried. "It doesn't get much better than that," says Bob.

CLANDEBOYE ESTATE YOGHURT

Yoghurt is a category experiencing a lot of traction right now as shoppers prioritise products that are high in protein, and low in additives. At Clandeboye there's no cutting corners in producing excellent quality dairy, says Patrick Black.

Based in a former schoolhouse, the team use whole milk from Jersey and Holstein Friesian cows grazed on the estate's pastures, supplemented by milk from nearby farms sharing their values.

"We are very fortunate in that our facility is powered by renewable energy," adds Patrick. "Three hundred



WHAT IS INVEST NI?

Invest NI is the main economic development agency in Northern Ireland, its parent department being the Department for the Economy. The organisation works with more than 3,500 businesses, with a focus around exporting outside of Northern Ireland, and helping to drive growth through investment in equipment, people, training, energy efficiency, and sustainability initiatives.

Something that binds the people of Northern Ireland is generosity. The people radiate an openness and warmth which trickles through into every part of daily life – but is especially felt throughout its food and drink industry.

Northern Irish folk are rightly passionate about their long heritage of growing, making, churning, brewing and distilling, and burst with the enthusiasm to share their bounty. As a population of nearly two million, with the capability to feed 10 million, they've been actively extending the invitation to mainland GB, Europe – the world – to sample, and enjoy what they have to offer for many years.

A demonstration of this, and a highlight of the calendar, is Invest NI's Showcase, held in 2024 at Clandeboye Lodge Hotel in Bangor. At the event more than 100 of Northern Ireland's most revered food and drink businesses had the opportunity to meet buyers from across Ireland, GB, South and North America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

Northern Ireland's food and drink industry is one of its crowning glories, worth approximately £8 billion annually, and employing an incredible 24,000 people. It has, says Invest NI interim director, Grainne Moody, grown at a pace recently as demand for produce from the country, in both local and global markets, increases. One of the most noticeable sectors of interest on the world stage is alcoholic beverages. "If we go back to the 1980s, we really only had two distilleries in Northern Ireland," Grainne explains. "Over the last decade that's grown. We now have around 20 distillers and craft brewers."

Bakery is very important too. "We are obsessed with baked goods," Grainne smiles. "You will see things here you wouldn't see anywhere else across the UK or Ireland, like Fifteens."

If you're coming into the New Year with a vision to explore and discover new products, Northern Ireland is ripe for the picking, Grainne adds, saying GB is the country's biggest market, with strong, well-trodden trade routes, and distributors in England and Scotland poised to help you import products that will intrigue and delight your customers.

The advantages of working with Northern Ireland's artisans are passion and adaptability, Grainne continues. "There is a real passion for food and drink in Northern Ireland. I feel like we've hidden it under a bushel for so many years – now's the time we need to shout about it. Also, I think that our businesses are very good at pivoting and working with buyers to deliver what they want. So they can be adaptive and try to produce something that's slightly different. We're good at developing relationships which I think is really important."

BROUGHGAMMON FARM



Husband and wife team Becky and Charlie Cole are on a mission to demonstrate the ethical, sustainable side of farming. The couple joined Charlie's parents on their smallholding in Ballycastle in 2011. "They'd retired to enjoy 'the good life'," Becky says, adding when Charlie (who'd studied agriculture) couldn't find a job that suited him, he decided to set up a farm on his parents' land. "Before we knew it we were raising a few kid goats from the dairy industry. The boys get put down at birth, there's no use for them usually, so we decided to bring them on for meat. Slowly we built it up with bull calves from the dairy industry." Today the pair sell goat meat boxes and operate a small farm shop while producing excellent quality charcuterie.

"We're all about showing customers what farm to fork means, the impact of their choices, and the importance of closed loop, regenerative farming," Becky continues.

Broughgammon Farm charcuterie is made using rose veal, with free-range pork fat to create a creamy, soft mouthfeel. "The flavour and texture are wonderful," says Becky. "My favourite is the classic peppercorn, and Charlie's is our sujac – it's like a spicy, Turkish-style chorizo that's great for cooking."

TWO STACKS



This County-Down-based bonder/blender has been exciting the Irish whiskey market by looking to the techniques and traditions of the past, and folding them into bold new formats.

"We've gone back to the old ways of Irish whiskey being marketed and sold," explains Liam Brogan. "Distilleries were really production facilities, and bonders, grocers and merchants would have matured what they made in their warehouses."

Two Stacks works with 15 Irish distilleries to produce its range of expressions. "Working like this allows us to continue to expand, and lets us create a library of different flavours and styles." This includes the 'dram in a can' concept, delivering single whiskey serves. "Those have been incredibly popular for us," Liam says. "They're lightweight and efficient to ship – we can get 30% more product on a pallet versus glass."

A hero product (available in canned format) is the super smooth Double Irish Cream Liqueur. "This is our first year doing it and it's gone behind all expectations. It's got a blend of four types of whisky and whey spirit, a byproduct of the cheesemaking process. That helps to stabilise it. Our version contains eight times more whiskey than our competitors. It's very rich with a butterscotch, toffee taste."

ARMAGH CIDER COMPANY



'From blossom to bottle' is the strapline for the Armagh Cider Company, which encompasses an array of award-winning products, including Armagh Cider Company cider, Doyles flavoured ciders, Winter Warmers, Orchard Twist (sparkling apple juice), and Troughtons premium soft drinks, tonics and mixers.

Founded in 2006, it's Northern Ireland's first commercial cider producer, the fifth generation Troughton family squeezing the best out of their 80 acres of orchard – which grows, amongst other varieties, the PGI Armagh Bramley Apple, used throughout its ranges.

"We have something for everyone," says Esther Paul. "Our Maddens and Carsons ciders are very popular. Cafes love our Orchard Twist drinks and range of lemonades. And our Honeyhill spiced apple, served warm, is a hug in a mug."

Two things taking off for the company right now are the zero per cent cider, and premium tonics, appealing to consumers who are increasingly moderating their alcohol intake. "The quinine levels in our tonics are lower," Esther says. "They've been designed so they can be enjoyed as a standalone drink. They're so refreshing."

acres is used to grow crops that feed into an anaerobic digestor. We built the facility two years ago. It's accredited to BRC AA standards, and it's given us a massive increase in capacity and capability."

Key to Clandeboye's success is its array of Greek-style yoghurts. "We've seen an explosion of interest in those, particularly as people are looking for healthier breakfast options," Patrick continues. "It's a very very clean recipe. We don't add any powders, thickeners or stabilisers. It's just whole milk and cultures. We've been using the traditional Greek technique of straining for over an hour. The whey runs off and gives us that thicker, richer texture which is a real USP for us."



Plain and Madagascan Vanilla remain the hero flavours, with Honey also performing well. New launches are snacking pots – Apple & Cinnamon Crumble, and Raspberry & White Chocolate. "They're really indulgent for that after dinner occasion, or as an alternative to a chocolate bar or cereal bar at lunch time."

LECALE HARVEST

Award-winning Lecale Harvest's Gallic-inspired range ticks a lot of boxes. The products (including pates, tapenades, hummus and confits) are all ambient, contain nothing artificial, and are crafted using Irish ingredients. It's a family affair at the helm, led by French founder Patrice Bonnargent, his wife and daughter. Every pack, jar and pot is a love letter to Patrice's childhood, bringing a modern feel to classics such as chicken liver pate, duck liver pate, and confit duck.

"We use traditional methods," says Patrice's daughter Perrine. "The confits are very popular. They're salted overnight with herbs and garlic, before being slowly cooked and packaged. You can heat them at home in 15 minutes. Each pack serves two and we think they make a nice easy option for Sunday lunch!"



21 FOOD AND DRINK TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2025

Experts and analysts from across the food and drink industry share the trends they think will resonate most with consumers over the next 12 months



As retailers, buyers and producers dip their toes into a new year, one of the big questions on the tips of their tongues will be 'what do shoppers want?'.

Consumer buying patterns, desires, wants and needs are changing at a faster pace than ever before when it comes to food and drink, driven largely by social media.

From the comfort of their own kitchens, shoppers have access to a phenomenal stream of delicious content every day. Content that's taking them across the world, introducing them to recipes, flavours, ingredients and concepts they've never seen before.

And they want to see these experiences reflected on the aisles of their local supermarkets and specialist food stores. Read on to find out what experts predict will be the biggest food and trends of 2025.

1 NATURAL HONEY

Shoppers were shocked recently when it was revealed last year that around 90% of British honey contains added sugar. The Honey Authenticity Network sent 30 samples for testing in November 2024, with 24 out of 25 jars considered to be 'suspicious'.

This, in turn, is making consumers think more carefully about the honey that lands on their breakfast tables. They'll be looking for jars from smaller, more ethically-minded producers, and for claims of 100% authenticity, with no added sugar.

2 SPANISH FOOD

It will be music to speciality retailers' ears that Spanish food and ingredients have piqued consumer interest. Bidfood's 2025 trends report expresses they want to dive in deeper than the typical paella, exploring cooking more regional, specialist cuisine, and taking the time to try a bit of Spanish baking.

Skyscanner picks out San Sebastian in Northern Spain as driving this trend, with more people than ever wanting to try the classic burnish-topped Basque cheesecake and pintxos – small tapas-like bar snacks. Many pintxos are easy to recreate using what you have in the deli counter.

3 ASIAN FLAVOURS

Asian condiment makers such as Yep, NOJO and White Mausu are all reporting strong sales and growth, backed by retailers who say products such as chilli crisp are becoming regular bestsellers. This is a trend that shouldn't be ignored. "Prepare for a surge of Southeast Asian flavours with Filipino and Vietnamese dishes leading the way," says Tim Dela Cruz, head chef at Smiths of Smithfield. Pavel Baranovs, head chef at UBA, agrees. "Pan-Asian flavours have become popular with home cooks over the years, but I expect 2025 will see adventurous flavours really being championed. I'm excited for people to experiment with zesty yuzu, spicy Sichuan pepper, and sweet char siu sauce. These flavours are unique, versatile and exciting to use."

4 PISTACHIO

This is going to be one of the 'it' ingredients of 2025. Bakeries and confectioners are already upping their game here, having expanded out their existing ranges to include pistachio in 2024. Think pistachio croissants and Danishes, pistachio-filled bon bons, pistachio cakes, pistachio creams, and pistachio ice creams. This has largely been driven by the enormous online interest in the 'Dubai chocolate bar' filled with pistachio paste and crisp knafeh pastry. Even chocolate giant Lindt has tapped into the trend – with more surely to follow.

5 AUTHENTIC WORLD FLAVOURS

Bidfood cites 'flavours less travelled' as a major food and drink trend for 2025, saying 55% of consumers are looking for new food experiences. There are leanings towards the soul food of America's Southern states – especially Creole and Cajun. Turkish, Greek, Argentinian, Portuguese and Swiss food are all resonating with food lovers too.

6 IMPULSE TREATS

Indulging in 'treat me' moments was a theme throughout 2024, and it's not going anywhere. According to FMCG Gurus there's been a shift towards 'permissible indulgence', with consumers seeking gratifying flavours and textures free of guilt. "This has led to a rise in premium and artisanal products promoting balance and moderation. Brands are focusing on providing sensory-rich experiences that deliver pure enjoyment, reshaping the narrative around guilt-free indulgence."











"We're seeing a growing trend of shoppers treating themselves to small indulgences that feel both luxurious and justifiable," agrees Imogen Smith of Flower & White. "Products that balance indulgence with quality ingredients or align with values like sustainability or health-consciousness, are becoming the go-to choice for consumers looking to make their everyday moments a little bit more special." Treats coming in under 100 calories per serving continue to gain popularity Imogen adds, as are options that create a sense of comfort and joy. "There's a clear shift towards mindful indulgence – where the treat not only satisfies, but also resonates with their personal values, from ethical sourcing to reduced waste."

Mandy Saven from Stylus thinks 'little treat' culture will thrive in 2025, saying it's "anchored in desire for flavour and ingredient exploration".

Treats to consider include premium single serve cakes, baked goods and miniature chocolate bars – but also hot drinks. Hot chocolate is especially being championed as 'one to watch' in 2025. Bidfood's trends report revealed 38% of those asked considered hot chocolate as a cost-effective way to indulge, while cafes and retailers anecdotally say they've seen a rise in sales of both at-home and in-store hot chocolate purchases.

Tap into this trend, Bidfood says, by investing in super luxury products, and offering customisation using flavoured syrups, gourmet artisan marshmallows and other toppings. Also consider expanding your range of single origin hot chocolates.

7 TEA

The popularity of functional products should not be underestimated. More of us are trying to squeeze every bit of goodness out of what we're consuming. Tea has become an easy way to bump up our nutrition, and varieties infused with vitamins, minerals and health or wellbeing-boosting additions are booming. Holland & Barrett's 2025 trends report reveals the functional tea market could be worth a whopping £12.2 billion by 2032.

The health store says the market is being driven towards function, coupled with exciting flavour profiles, backed by modern science. "The audience are also bringing coffee shop culture to tea drinking, meaning they place more emphasis on it also being an experience and an activity in itself. Another development is the rise again in popularity of loose-leaf tea."

Whole Foods Market is seeing growth in tea-flavoured products (such as chai and Earl Grey) alongside a demand for new steeping formats, including tea strips, cold-brew bags and powders.

8 SUSTAINABLE

According to Euromonitor more than 60% of consumers say they're trying to adopt more planet positive habits, while FMCG Gurus says 32% of consumers want to avoid ingredients harmful to the environment. Brands are increasingly adopting more sustainable practices in response, they say, looking more closely at ethical sourcing, mitigating carbon footprint, and championing social and environmental causes.

"Spending on sustainable products remains a conscious decision based on personal values," says Inga Klebanskaja, senior research consultant at Euromonitor. "But consumers also pay close attention to the key benefits these products deliver. Sustainability claims require tangible evidence."

The trend, she continues, "Challenges businesses to create the right claims on the right products for the right audience. Sustainability is no longer brand-enhancing, but a prerequisite for innovation that drives growth."

9 INTERNATIONAL SNACKING

It's not just mealtimes consumers want to pep up with global flavours – they're looking for something different in the snacking aisle as well. Whole Foods Market says this sector of retail is a "perfect place for disruption" with emerging British and established international brands taking on salty snacks like popcorn and crisps, giving them a twist to create "fusion foods that have mass appeal". "On packaging brands can tell their snack story by sharing their cultural roots and nostalgic childhood food memories." The retailer points to interesting options including mango sticky rice chips, and chilli crunch oil edamame and nut mix.

10 'CLEAN' LABELS

UPFs (ultra processed foods) were a hot topic in 2024, with The Tape Agency saying the conversation is largely being fuelled by Gen Z and social media who are "increasingly concerned" about what's going into their food and drink. They want natural, organic and minimally processed products, the agency adds.

"2025 will see consumers move away from buying food with additives to cooking more with natural ingredients, in addition to eating more seasonal vegetables and only eating meat and fish on weekends or special occasions," agrees chef Theo Randall.

11 PROTEIN

The protein trend will be around for a long while yet with consumers valuing it as an addition to a catalogue of foods and drinks. Holland & Barrett believes in 2025 protein will grow further in the wellbeing space (outside of its traditional place for the bodybuilding market) being used as an ingredient that promotes 'beauty from within' in products such as snacking bars and bone broths.

There's an emphasis on ramping up protein consumption at mealtimes and in snacking, adds Whole Foods Market. "Recipes incorporating cottage cheese may have kick-started customers' desires to seek out protein in whole food sources, with consumers now prioritising animal protein." Shoppers, the retailer continues, are looking for blends of muscle meat such as ground beef, combined with offal to gain its nutritional benefits without having to learn how to prepare liver, kidney or heart.

Organ meats are being touted as a superfood, providing significant protein, vitamins and minerals, leading shoppers to seek meat blends that combine traditional muscle meat like ground beef with organ meats and making it easier to enjoy the nutritional benefits without having to learn how to prepare liver, kidney or heart.

12 NIGHTS IN

The 'Big Night In' trend gained popularity in 2024 as more of us decided we preferred entertaining at home, rather than incurring the expense of eating out. A recent OnePoll survey found 38% of participants favoured small socials at home. Around 35% said it was because of the cost-of-living crisis, 48% liked the intimate atmosphere they could create, and 58% liked the fact their home was quieter, so they could hold more meaningful conversations. The average adult hosted two house parties in 2024, attending three or more at others' homes, and half of those polled would like to go to more parties. The crux is this – party snacks, drinks and meal solutions are key in fine food retail as we get stuck into 2025.

13 FIBRE

Food and drink with added health benefits really are stealing the show in the industry right now.

And fibre is king, says Bidfood, which reveals in its 2025 trends report that 73% of those asked said they knew it was good for their gut health, inspiring them to include more whole foods in their diets. Now's the time, the wholesaler says, to elevate recipes and formulations to include added fruit and vegetables, pulses, grains and whole cereals in response.



TRENDSETTERS

Speciality Food brings you
The Trendsetter edition

This special issue will reveal the very latest 'on the pulse' trends across multiple categories, featuring insight, inspiration, and the products to watch. Coming in May 2025

For more info on how you can be featured, contact...
louise.barnes@artichokehq.com 01206 508629

"Fibre's getting a glow up in 2025," adds Holland & Barrett, explaining its analysts say the nutrient is beginning to follow in the footsteps of protein. Trending products include fibre-added or fibre-rich flours, and fortified sodas such as Dalston Soda's Prebiotic Soda and Hip Pop.

14 NOSTALGIA

"The topic of nostalgia has been hot for a few years now," says Caroline. "One potential tangent is 'Fully-Loaded Nostalgia' - a doubling down on childhood cravings within single products.

"In hospitality I look to Medlock Canteen in Manchester with its deep-fried rhubarb pie with custard and edible glitter, its cinnamon crunch cereal with homemade pink marshmallows and chocolate milk, and its Eton Mess with BBQ strawberries."

Another interesting angle, she adds, comes from the intersection of Italian-American comfort food. "The likes of spag bol and garlic bread are nostalgic to Brits, regardless of origin, with a broader influx of NYC-driven cuisine coming into UK hospitality. Dishes such as baked ziti and chicken parm, recognised from nostalgic US movies and TV shows are now entering the UK food spotlight."

Caroline says she certainly sees an opportunity for speciality brands in retail here, particularly in terms of sauces and condiments.

FMCG Gurus says its research shows 18% of global consumers want to see nostalgic flavours when they're choosing food, with one of the prevailing aspects of the trend based around a resurgence in a retro mindset, and deeper appreciation for timeless traditions.

"Consumers are finding solace in the familiar, placing importance on tradition, heritage and nostalgia in their decision-making. This trend reflects a yearning for clarity, authenticity, and straightforward decision-making amidst the overwhelming abundance of information and choices available today."

15 LUXURY COMFORT

This trend has been gathering momentum for a while, says Caroline Chapman, menu creative manager at Egg Soldiers.

"By 'luxury comfort' I mean accessible, 'fast' food given indulgently higher end spins. Think lobster crumpets, fried chicken and caviar – decadent pairings that just work," she explains. In retail the concept is being flipped on its head, giving speciality products indulgently comforting spins. I look to products like Crispy Chicken Skin Sambal from Edinburgh producer Mirin, to King of Feast's Funky Burger Sauce, made with sun-dried tomatoes and molasses, and the Barrel-Aged Buffalo Hot Sauce from Big Jim's Kitchen.

16 BEANS AND PULSES

Packed full of fibre and great for the gut microbiome, beans and pulses are being hailed as one of the 'superfoods' of the moment. The fact celebrity chefs and health podcasters have been singing their praises, against the backdrop of 'noise' around UPFs, hasn't done them any harm at all. For the team at Sous Chef, the ultimate hero of this trend is Spanish Judion butter beans. "The 'Rolls Royce' of beans have an incredibly silky texture with





a mild, mineral taste. These come from Navarra in Northern Spain and are popular either on their own as a pinxtos dish, or eaten in stews and part of a main meal."

Jarred beans and pulses, favoured for their creamier texture and fuller taste, are worth investing in this year, as are organic varieties.

17 FRUIT AND NUTS

Fitting in with both the permissible snack and protein trends, there's been clear growth in the snacking nut (and fruit) categories, with consumers viewing these products as a more natural, healthier way to boost energy when they hit the 3pm slump. Premium chocolate-covered dates and nuts are taking off, as are nuts in delicious, inspirational seasonings – particularly those with a kick of heat.

18 HIGH QUALITY MEAT

"Following a plethora of plant-based product development across just about every product category, from dairy and confectionery to seafood, meat makes a robust comeback in 2025," says Mandy Saven of Stylus. "This is in part thanks to the proliferation of evolved diet trends – TikTok is awash with influencers promoting the wellbeing benefits of The Carnivore Diet. However, this is also about consuming meat for its wide-ranging health benefits, which include everything from supporting healthy hair growth to promoting vibrant skin. Ethical and sustainable meat producers can benefit from this heightened interest by offering curated selections of high-quality bites at accessible price points."

19 BRITISH

Bidfood's latest report shows consumers are looking for food and drink made closer to home, taking comfort in the quality and assurance of British produce. The most appealing Scottish foods were Aberdeen Angus beef, salmon and stovies. From Wales, consumers apparently crave rarebit, Welsh cakes and oggies. And they were most interested in farls, soda bread and coddle from Ireland.

20 BRAVE FLAVOUR PROFILES IN DRINKS

Three Cents co-founder, George Bagos, expects drinks menus to be dominated by bold choices in 2025 – think fat-washed spirits, and the addition of fermented and pickled ingredients. "They don't all have to be daring savoury flavours though," he explains. "Instead it's tastes and ingredients that consumers are familiar with already but perhaps haven't had in a drink before that are really making it in the mainstream." Fig leaf, he thinks, will be a strong contender in 2025. "It is sweet and fruity, yet balanced by a subtle and earthy undertone."

21 PREMIUM SPIRITS

Gin sales continue to dwindle, but other premium spirits are rising up to take the drink's place, says WSET spirits educator Charlie McCarthy, who explains that discerning British drinkers are turning further towards rum and agave products. "Across the board the concept of 'super-premium spirits' no longer simply equates to displays of luxury. These days, spirits with authenticity and sustainability at the heart of their story resonate more with consumers. Adventurous spirits enthusiasts are keen to engage with producer stories and unique flavour profiles, whether that be Piscos, Artisanal Mezcals, Haitian Clairins, or Japanese Shochus. These spirits convey a real sense of place, along with depth and complexity of flavour."

Single malt Scotch remains enduringly popular, Charlie adds, saying enthusiasts are exploring varieties from the US, Germany, France, Australia and England.





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COOL BEANS

The ultimate nutritional powerhouse, beans are setting tills – and social media – alight

WHY ARE BEANS TRENDING NOW?

"Beans are the new star of sustainable, plant-based dining, celebrated for their rich flavour, nutrition, and eco-friendly profile, plus they're affordable and packed with protein," says Nicole Compen, founder of raye the store. "As the bean trend gains traction, it's shaping a tastier, more sustainable future in food." Amelia Christie-Miller, founder of Bold Bean Co agrees. "People are only just cottoning onto the fact that they are the world's closest thing to a perfect food – full of natural protein and fibre, and fundamental to regenerative systems that look after our soil and so the answer to many health and sustainability challenges."

WHO WILL BUY THEM?

The great news is that everyone is bound to find a bean recipe to love, and many shoppers will be keen to try them as a quick and healthy dish-booster. Comforting and the ultimate reinventor, beans can add nutrition and sustenance to pretty much any dish from around the world. "Beans have become a comforting food, with each culture having its own version – from Brazilian dishes to Iraqi stews to classic baked beans in the UK," says Eran Tibi, executive chef at Kapara and Bala Baya.

HOW GOOD FOR ME ARE THEY, REALLY?

Packed to the brim with protein and fibre, beans are super filling and great for your gut too – a tick for the growing number of consumers keen to improve their gut health. "Beans are one of the highest sources of fibre you can get," says Amelia. "9 out of 10 people don't get enough fibre so there's quite a bit of room for improvement," say Dave and Steve Flynn of The Happy Pear.

HOW ABOUT THE PLANET?

It's widely known that vegetables are better for the health of the planet than animal meat, but a lesser known fact is that they fix nitrogen in the soil as they grow – they even improve the overall soil condition according to Elliot and Sam Day, co-founders of FieldGoods.

WHAT TO STOCK?

"We have seen them in various formats from snacks such as ChicP and The Honest Bean Co. appealing to health-conscious and eco-minded customers alike as well as recently healthier ready to serve baked beans by Bold Bean Co." says Nicole. The Happy Pear recommend Hodemedod's range of UK-grown beans.

WILL ANY OLD TIN DO?

Beans are a great value store cupboard ingredient, but if you're looking for optimum health credentials and flavour it's well worth spending a little more. "All beans are not made equal!" say Elliot and Sam. "Quality beans have existed for a long time, it's just hardly anyone was buying them," explains Amelia. "I think we have played a part in that we've shown people just how easy it is to cook with quality beans as well as galvanising the food writing community to use them more in their cooking."

HOW VERSATILE ARE THEY?

Very! Fans of the humble legume are full of ideas around how to make these nutritional powerhouses as delicious as possible. "They are silky little pearls of flavour that add real body to a meal", say Elliot and Sam. They use beans in their Cauliflower Butter Masala and Spanish Chicken & Chorizo dishes, among many others. Meanwhile, Bold Bean Co. "show people that beans aren't just for chilli con carne," says Amelia. "Instead, we encourage them to lean into flavour combinations that they're familiar with – for example, mushroom and parmesan beanotto (where you use beans instead of rice), or butter bean puttanesca." As well as ideal for adding bolster to meals, they make great dips. "Butter beans make a wonderful base for houmous," say Dave and Steve.

WHAT'S CHANGED?

Innovations in the bean category are at the root of their catapult into trendiness. Bold Bean Co cook the beans in the jar, imbuing a moreish texture and flavour. "This makes cooking with them so much easier than soaking beans overnight and cooking them the next day," says Theo Randall, chef patron of Theo Randall at The InterContinental. "There as so many interesting varieties of beans now so you can do so much with them."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BEANS?

Thanks their natural versatility and health credentials – not to mention their affordable-to-all price point – the sky's the limit for quality beans. "We're just scratching the surface of what beans can be," says Amelia. With shoppers' budgets being stretched and appetites on the look out for delicious, flavour-packed dishes that will benefit our bodies, it's a simple case of educating customers on the plus points of beans. Add them into your cafe menus, represent the varied range now available on your shelves, and produce simple recipe cards to inspire purchases.



9 OUT OF 10 UK CONSUMERS DON'T EAT ENOUGH FIBRE

SOURCE: DAVE AND STEVE FLYNN, THE HAPPY PEAR

> "Beans have become a comforting food, with each culture having its own version"



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lostsheepcoffee.com

3 TURTLE CEREALS

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cotswold-fayre.co.uk

4 MALIK'S HONEY

Start your day with the pure, golden taste of Malik's Honey, crafted with care from the UKs finest blossoms to bring nature's sweetness to your breakfast table. Perfectly balanced and bursting with flavour, it's ideal drizzled over warm toast, swirled into yogurt, or as a natural sweetener for your morning tea. Taste the difference that true quality honey makes with Malik's Honey.
malikshoney.com



5 RORA DAIRY
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roradairy.co.uk

6 JUST LIVE A LITTLE
GLUTEN-FREE GRANOLAS

Wholesome gluten-free oats, baked with nature's rich and juicy nuts, fruits and seeds for a taste to be enjoyed by the spoonful, bowlful, or even by the handful. The range has four flavours – each available in 360g resealable, recyclable packaging. They include Maple & Toasted Pecan Granola, Raspberry, Coconut & Cashew Granola, Cocoa & Hazelnut Granola, and Peanut Butter & Apple Granola.
justlivealittle.com

7 CASTLE DAIRIES
BUTTER

Based in the heart of Caerphilly, Castle Dairies has been producing quality butter since 1966. Family-run and committed to British, all-natural ingredients, Castle Dairies butter is a staple in kitchens nationwide. Castle Dairies is preparing for its exciting rebrand, launching May 2025. Stay tuned for the fresh new look, same great taste.
castledairies.co.uk

8 NATURYA
SUPERFOOD PORRIDGE

Elevate your breakfast with Naturya's new Superfood Porridge. Crafted from a unique blend of natural, nutrient-dense ingredients, this porridge supports energy levels, gut health, and immunity. The wholesome mix of oats, flax, and chia seeds provides your body with the goodness of nature and powerful health benefits. Available in three irresistible flavours: Golden Syrup & Chia, Mixed Berry, and Apple & Cinnamon.
naturya.com

COMMENTATORS



NIKKI STORRAR
ARDROSS FARM SHOP



WILL DOCKER
BALGROVE LARDER



COLIN CAMPBELL
BONNIE & WILD



HILARY BARNEY
THE CHEESERY



IAIN BAXTER
SCOTLAND FOOD & DRINK



LAND OF **PLENTY**

Scotland's atmospheric landscapes are home to some of the world's best produce deserving of celebration

It's not for nothing that some of Scotland's most famous exports are food and drink products. Haggis and whisky, to name just two, are not only revered in their domestic market but around the world too – and with good reason. Scottish producers take their roles seriously, at once showcasing time-honoured techniques and skills and respectfully innovating for the modern food sector.

Of course, the country's iconic landscape has a part to play too – it is home to raw ingredients of naturally superb quality, farmed and raised with expertise and passion. "We're an island so we have amazing fish, and incredible farmland and grass hills for miles so we have great meat, barley and vegetables. The food our primary producers are creating is fantastic," begins Nikki Storrar of Ardross Farm Shop, located on the East Neuk of Fife.

"The classics are few and obvious. Scottish produce has long been enjoyed globally with the romantic view of misty glens and mountains adding to its international appeal," says Will Docker, co-owner of Balgrove Larder, a retail site based on a working farm just outside St Andrews. "However, these products stand high and alone – they're incredible and really do stand up to scrutiny."

"I could point to the rising stars of soft fruit and market garden production here alongside the obvious longstanding winners of traditional breed, extensively farmed livestock. The seashores remain abundant and there's plenty of wild land that produces incredible foraged ingredients like mushrooms. Importantly there's also a thriving cottage industry that is still able to harvest and harness this outstanding produce."

Scottish producers' support of traditional breeds and practices is key to its success. "Scottish produce is world renowned and when you drill into it, we really do have the best ingredients in the world, supported by traditional breeds and practices," continues Will. "We simply invigorate these at Balgrove Larder: from old-fashioned (now called organic and regenerative) farming to showcasing the traditional breeds that thrive in the areas in which they were designed to live."

At both Ardross and Balgrove Larder, stocking in line with the seasons is a no-brainer. "Seasonality brings huge interest and exciting challenges to our kitchens and customers where we celebrate the advent of new crops and harvests – as opposed to the monotony of year-round availability," says Will. "In Scotland our shorter seasons and hardier crops really focus our attention on seasonality more than you might find elsewhere."

For Colin Campbell, communications director at Bonnie & Wild, a food hall based in Edinburgh, Scottish food and drink boils down to three key elements that have driven its success: "commitment to quality, rooted in our landscape, and rich in story".

The team behind Bonnie & Wild is proud and excited to be a hub for Scottish food and drink. "Its quality and diversity, and the people behind it, are what excites me about our food scene," says Colin. "We've such a mix of food cultures and that's led to a very wholesome marriage of innovation and tradition.

"Stocking Scottish produce is at the core of what we do and who we are. We believe in championing Scottish produce, products and culture, and are passionate about working closely with our suppliers. All the kitchens and retailers are independent operators, all small Scottish businesses. Most of the products (more than 90%) sold from our bars, shops and kitchens is grown, farmed, harvested, caught, baked, pickled, smoked, produced, roasted, bottled, cured, distilled, brewed and made in Scotland."

It goes further, with the site also a popular hub for wider Scottish culture. "We also host a regular monthly ceilidh showcasing traditional Scottish music and dancing, as well as regular events with key partners and local businesses and organisations and of course regular whisky tastings and so on," he says.

An ever-changing menu

Hilary Barney, co-owner of The Cheesery in Dundee, is feeling positive about the growth and innovation she's seeing from new-to-market businesses. "It's so exciting to see more brands developing and evolving. I love to see food and drink events from tastings to days out in the countryside enjoying, for example, Scottish seafood, our range of whiskeys or meat cooked over a fire combining our landscape with tasting experiences," she says.

"We feel that the standard of Scottish produce is so high, and we are proud to stock it. We are always asked about our most local cheeses in the counter and a lot of the time, customers want to focus on a Scottish themed cheeseboard." It's not only cheese that the local area serves up





in abundance. "Accompaniments from close by are always a hit with customers too. They are supporting local by coming to our shop, so the feeling that they are then supporting another small business is important to a lot of people, I think. We stock local honey, Sarah Gray chutneys and chill jam which is so popular, East Neuk oatcakes and local butter from the Strathearn Cheese Company – amongst others. Our bread supplier, GH Barnett, based in Fife is also really popular with our customers as are the local craft breweries such as Law Brewing and 71 – both based in Dundee and Abernyte Brewery who come up with new and exciting beers frequently. In terms of stocking products close to us, there is less distance for them to travel, making them more sustainable and better for the environment."

The future of Scottish food and drink

It may be renowned around the world, but some corners of Scotland's domestic market have been slow to appreciate the incredible food and drink on their doorstep... But this is changing. "People in Scotland are starting to take their own cuisine seriously. People are becoming more invested, more interested in enjoying high quality food and drink," says Colin. Provenance is a key aspect of this. "They want to understand where it came from, who made it. That growing awareness has helped to create a demand for it, which Scotland's food and drink producers have been all too willing, and capable, to rise to."

Since opening The Cheesery nine years ago, Hilary and her partner Steve have witnessed the evolution of the cheese sector. "In that time, we have seen more Scottish cheeses come to market and more notably, soft, washed rind cheese," she says. "Continuing creativity and ideas for products" are her hopes for the future. "We already have a good few cook schools and foodie events, but I hope there will be more experiential events for the public to enjoy in cities and rural areas – combining the fresh and sustainable products we have here in Scotland."

The Scottish food and drink industry has evolved beyond just meeting demand for smoked salmon and whisky, says Balgrove's Will. "There are so many opportunities with the produce we have access to, coupled with demand from our domestic and international customers. With this in mind, there's a huge amount of scope to develop how we grow and how we deliver produce to our customer – whether that's in the home, restaurant or hotel. In our region, Fife is punching above its weight and we (alongside others in the region) have had a wonderful response to this. We hope to continue to grow this and continue to thrive."

> "It's hugely important to us that we're championing what is seasonal and grown/produced in Scotland to every single customer who walks through our doors"

RETAILER INSIGHT



Rosie Jack, business development manager at Bowhouse and the Balcaskie Estate

WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND THE BUSINESS?

Bowhouse was built upon the aim of replacing the missing link in our food chain. It has created a rural food and drink community by bringing together complementary producers who use the specially built spaces to grow and make their products using the land and resources on the estate. It acts as a hub for both these like-minded businesses and for the local community, while allowing everyone to enjoy the best of Scotland's food and drink.

WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT SCOTTISH FOOD AND DRINK?

It's always so exciting to see new businesses enter the Scottish food and drink scene, that really care about sourcing high-quality, local raw ingredients, which we're so lucky have right on our doorsteps here in Scotland. Supporting local businesses in your area is key to food security, and I love that we're able to see so much of this through the businesses here at Bowhouse.

ARE YOU PROUD TO STOCK SCOTTISH PRODUCE?

Yes, we're so proud to showcase Scottish produce through Bowhouse. Our monthly Market Weekends are entirely populated by Scottish businesses, and it's hugely important to us that we're championing what is seasonal and grown/produced in Scotland to every single customer who walks through our doors.

AND WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?

Less red tape for small producers. Primary food producers like cheese or charcuterie have to jump through so many hoops before they are allowed to produce and sell any product. This stifles development and the production of good quality food and drink.

Speciality Food & Drink Show

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walkershortbread.com

SWEET FA

With the festivities of Christmas and New Year behind us, January is a time when we prefer to have a more virtuous nibble. Sweet FA Gluten Free, don't think this should mean missing out on enjoyable eating. Their cookies are free from gluten, dairy, and palm oil and have been formulated to ensure that everyone can enjoy them. Every variety has won a Free From Food Award, and there is also a clutch of Great Taste and Great British Food Awards endorsing them. Choose from Peanut Butter, Double Choc Chip, Oat & Raisin, or Cranberry & Orange.



sweetfa-glutenfree.com

STAG BAKERIES

Stag Bakeries Ltd are proud to introduce the Hebridean Baker biscuit range, a collaboration between the Hebridean Baker himself, Coinneach MacLeod, and Stag Bakeries. Due to Coinneach's family links to the Outer Hebrides, there was a natural affinity between the Hebridean Baker and Stag Bakeries brands. The result is six varieties of sweet biscuits, inspired by the Hebridean way of life that offer homely comfort at any time of year, made in the picturesque Scottish Outer Hebrides.



stagbakeries.co.uk

BLACK ISLE BREWING CO

Made by expert brewers in the Highlands, this organic session IPA is bursting with tropical fruit flavour and a citrus zing and balanced with a deep and complex five-malt base. As with every item in the Black Isle range, this gluten-free beer is made using sustainable brewing techniques and a foundation of compassion for the environment – for example, spent grains from the brewing process are used to feed lifestock on the farm. It's naturally brewed and and unfiltered for optimum taste and enjoyment.



blackislebrewery.com

A FLOURISHING **SECTOR**



We caught up with Iain Baxter, CEO of Scotland Food & Drink, for his take on the future of the country's food scene

Scotland's food and drink scene is a natural expression of what Scots, and Scotland, are all about. It encapsulates our passion, pride and personality. From iconic produce such as whisky, salmon or beef through to rising stars like confectionery, cheese or vegetables, the provenance of Scottish produce brings together innovation with traditions that have been handed down through generations.

Despite our rich history and heritage, Scotland is also a country of modernity. We see the importance of embracing innovation to create new products that consumers across the world want to taste and we use technology to improve and enhance the way we work, market our products and speak to our customers and consumers. Our produce and products have a reputation for uncompromising quality which goes hand-in-hand with our commitment to sustainability. All this considered, the industry is definitely evolving and is showing encouraging signs of growth.

Scottish produce is celebrated for its premium quality, rich heritage, and natural origin. Our pristine environment and traditional craftsmanship create products with distinctive flavours consumers can trust, and enjoy. With a focus on authenticity, sustainability, and natural ingredients, Scottish food and drink offer something truly special.

Independent retailers can enhance Scotland's reputation by showcasing local, authentic products, promoting sustainability, collaborating with regional producers, and sharing the stories behind these exceptional products. Outlets can also get involved in our food and drink sector brand, Naturally Scottish. The brand reflects the people and passion behind Scotland's food and drink sector, whilst bringing a strategic edge to our industry as we take our incredible larder to the global stage.

In return, these outlets stand to benefit significantly. They can attract food enthusiasts willing to pay a premium for quality and authenticity. Tourists eager to immerse themselves in local flavours often gravitate toward delis and farm shops. By offering distinctive Scottish products, these outlets can set themselves apart from competitors and create a memorable experience for their customers.

The future for Scottish food and drink is bright, driven by innovation, sustainability, and global recognition of its premium quality. With a growth in sustainable practices, growing international demand, and a continued focus on premium and authentic products, I am confident the sector will continue to flourish.

Scotland Food & Drink as an organisation empowers these businesses to achieve their full potential to drive our economy, alongside sustaining our environment and supporting our communities. Our ambition is that we want Scotland to be the best place in the world to own, operate, and work for a food and drink business, and to be known as a world leader in sustainable production and responsible growth.

> "We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to own, operate, and work for a food and drink business, and to be known as a world leader in sustainable production and responsible growths"



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SCOTLAND'S

SPECIALITY FOOD & DRINK SHOW 2025

The 2025 show, held at SEC, Glasgow from 19th-21st January, celebrates the quality of Scottish produce



Offering your customers the finest produce requires careful sourcing and an innovative selection of products. But where better to find that than at Scotland's Speciality Food & Drink Show? Set to take place at the SEC in Glasgow from 19th-21st January 2025, the event will highlight the innovation, quality, and exceptional flavours that define Scotland's food and drink sector.

With exhibitor stands filling up quickly, both established and emerging producers are eager to capitalise on the growing demand from delis, farm shops, tourist outlets, cafés, and restaurants looking to source the very best of Scottish produce. Known for its commitment to quality and provenance, Scotland's food and drink industry is ready to shine once again at this exciting showcase.

Regional food groups are a highlight of the Show with Orkney and Food from Argyll both taking large, multi-producer stands. Look out for Isle of Mull Coffee, Slainte Sauces, Isle of Mull Cheese and Annie's Herb Kitchen, all from Argyll and rum, seafood, oatcakes, whisky and ice cream from Orkney. New to the Show is Appetite for Angus with producers from this fertile area of Scotland.



Of the 100 plus exhibitors, about a third are new to the Show. In the Launch Gallery for new young companies, visit Foreva Farmers tonics and mixers, 8 Doors Distillery from John O'Groats, Bealach Gin from Invernesshire, Goat Rodeo Goods condiments, Sour Power Vinegars and The Third Sin chocolatier. Beyond these newcomers, producers such as Rise & Grind Roastery, North Uist Distillery, Stylish Whisky and The TeaShed are first time exhibitors.

Existing producers will be launching new ranges and re-connecting with customers – take a look and a taste at Great Glen Charcuterie, Island Larder, Stewart Tower Dairy, Kilted Fudge Co, Angels Dare Cocktails and The Cress Co distributors.

A valuable show, in more ways than one

This year's Show is more than just discovering new products; it's an opportunity to learn, grow, and gain valuable insights. Attendees can look forward to an exciting programme of panel discussions, workshops, and masterclasses, including::

- Net Zero Nation on sustainability
- The power of provenance in Scottish Food & Drink
- Keynote discussion run by the Scottish Tourism Alliance and VisitScotland
- A special 1-to-1 interview on the success of a farm shop with Emma Niven of Loch Leven's Larder
- Practical retailing tips, including masterclasses on AI in retail and designing with Canva
- Understanding your customer

Whether you're looking to sharpen your business skills or discover the latest trends in food retail, the Scotland's Speciality Food & Drink Show offers a wealth of opportunities for industry professionals.

Geraldine Bruce, Sainsbury's Scottish buyer said, "I attend Scotland's Speciality Food & Drink show most years as it is a great, well organised event. I use this as a good time to catch up with suppliers, see new products and meet potential new suppliers who may catch my eye with their products."

Sponsored by The Giftware Association, the Best Product Awards will take on a new format this year with a dazzling display of winners in the centre of the Show and a high profile ceremony at the end of the first day of the Show. Judged by industry experts this is the place to find what's 'hot' in the world of food and drink.

The 2025 Show is being organised in partnership with Scotland Food & Drink who will bring some of their members, as well as key buyers. On Tues 21 Jan they will host a lively session in the Talking Shop on the power of provenance in Scottish food and drink.

Mark Saunders, show director, said, "We recognise how key this show is for fine food and drink outlets across not just Scotland but the rest of the UK and overseas. Attendees will leave equipped with the knowledge and stock to stay ahead of their competitors. Register now and join us for a memorable and fruitful show."

> "Attendees will leave equipped with the knowledge and stock to stay ahead of their competitors"

NEED TO KNOW

WHERE: SEC, Glasgow
WHEN: 19th-21st January 2025
WEB: scotlandstradefairs.com







COMMENTATORS



JENNIFER EARLE
CONSULTANT



JONATHAN TILSTON
TOSIER CHOCOLATEMAKERS



CLAIRE BURNETT
CHOCOCO



LOUISE COLLINS
BOOJA-BOOJA



MIKE LONGMAN
CHOCOLARDER



MIKE NAVARRO
GNAW



KATHRYN HAGUE
WORLD OF SWEETS

A NEW ERA FOR CHOCOLATE

In the midst of a challenging climate, true artisan chocolate is paving the way towards a brighter future

Fine food shoppers are well versed in the language of chocolate. Descriptions of taste and terroir, discussion of ethics, and sustainability claims abound, but slowly but surely consumers are learning to see through the marketing mist to discover products that truly are high quality – and are willing to pay the right price for them.

"I think more and more people are understanding that quality and ethics cost money and accept that more expensive foods, less often, is better. But we still have a way to go," says Jennifer Earle, consultant and chocolate expert. Indeed, while the audience for chocolate with real sustainability and artisan credentials is growing, mainstream chocolate brands still rule the roost in most households. Chocolate giants using similar language to the small-scale businesses making a tangible difference muddies the waters, but *Speciality Food* readers can play an important role here. "I think little pop up cards near the chocolate section explaining why craft chocolate costs at least double Tony's and supermarket chocolate might help people understand it's about a combination of doing right by the farmers, the environment and creating a much better flavour," says Jennifer. "Perhaps hosting more tasting events with regular customers where they learn about the process, too."

Making meaningful change

Of course, creating a product which truly stands out from the mainstream requires exceptional attention to detail and a very different approach.



"We create award-winning bean-to-bar chocolate made from fully traceable single origin cocoa beans," begins Jonathan Tilston, marketing manager at Suffolk-based family-run Tosier Chocolatemaker. "We use fine flavoured speciality beans with a direct trade model that ensures sustainability and positive outcomes for the small holder farmers and cooperatives we buy from." Tosier's products are minimally processed and manufactured entirely from scratch in sixty-four kilo micro-batches. Maintaining the innate quality of the chocolate is vital to Tosier's work, and working within nature's means translates into a built-in respect for this natural resource. "The natural goodness of the cocoa is retained by creating individual roasting profiles for each bean and its harvest. We only make a limited number of bars from each harvest as availability of these beans is finite and each harvest unique," says Jonathan.

Education is a key part of Tosier's work, and they also run a chocolate café and shop plus chocolate making workshops to help guide visitors towards making meaningful change when it comes to their chocolate consumption. "Chocolate is a finite food and it's important that it's enjoyed as such. The supply chain is completely misunderstood and many consumers don't know how or where cocoa is grown, that it's fermented and dried and they roasted," he says.

Large-scale chocolate brands are household names, indeed some have been so for generations, which means that it's often a question of nostalgia when customers pick mainstream bars off the shelves. "Once consumers taste real chocolate as opposed to mainstream ultra-processed confectionery they can become really interested," says Jonathan. "A good analogy is wine – currently consumers are sold a brand of chocolate with no reference to the origin of the bean, not even the county is mentioned let alone the farm of region – or the bean varietal. Imagine buying wine in the same way! The marketing of heritage brands has been so effective that consumers don't even realise that this is a question they can ask. The more makers contextualise their chocolate the more interest there is."

A future-proof approach

Inspired by chocolatiers in Brussels to make chocolates fresh, and by hand, Claire Burnet of Chococo is a pioneer in doing things differently. The Chococo team works with local products and makers such as Dorset Blue Vinny, Black Cow Vodka and The Watercress Company to produce fresh chocolates to be enjoyed within days of purchase, made using real ingredients and no additives, no preservatives, and no unnatural colours.

"The industry has long been fixated on chocolate from Belgium and Switzerland, and everybody seemed to have forgotten that cocoa doesn't grow in those countries. In fact, it is made using beans from multiple places including West Africa which comes with its own issues, and I didn't want to work that way – I wanted to produce chocolate where we know the farmers are being paid a fair price and we can tell the story of the quality of the varietal of the cocoa where the beans were growing. We work with companies that are producing a finished product in the country of origin. They've added the value in their country, keeping more of the value chain in their country and supporting their local cocoa growing communities – they have a vested interest in being sustainable. We have direct relationships with these growers, without middle men." Claire hopes this model – far from what we have come to accept as the norm – is the future for the chocolate sector.

Doing the right thing

Innovative and regularly award-winning producer of organic chocolate truffles and ice creams, Booja-Booja, is making certain that free-from and vegan chocolate is in no way inferior to conventional alternatives. In 2025 it may be a household name amongst discerning chocolate lovers, but it's dedicated to doing things properly. "We are meticulous in sourcing our



TREND **SPOTLIGHT**



Kathryn Hague, head of marketing at World of Sweets, talks us through the products predicted to sell well in 2025

A current trend in chocolate confectionery is the growing demand for premium chocolate boxes. When shoppers are buying chocolates as a gift to someone else, they're more likely to spend a little bit extra for beautiful packaging, quality products and innovative flavours. Anthon Berg chocolates are an excellent option for shoppers who love premium chocolate and a tipple.

While traditional chocolates remain a staple for many customers, attracting younger demographics and new audiences requires embracing innovation and trends. With its diverse range of offerings, Anthon Berg caters to every chocolate lover, blending tradition with modern appeal to stand out on the shelves.

The iconic Anthon Berg Chocolate Liqueurs are perfect for shoppers who are looking for a more classic option. They're bottle-shaped dark chocolates filled with famous spirit brands from across the globe. Among the tasty tipples are Cointreau, Famous Grouse, Drambuie, Remy Martin and Grand Marnier and more recently Southern Comfort.

Anthon Berg's team of chocolatiers have tapped into the cocktails trend with their Chocolate Cocktails. Cocktails are trending among the younger demographic which makes this line perfect for attracting new customers. The high-quality Chocolate Cocktails are delicious dark chocolate bottles filled with smooth liquid fillings inspired by popular cocktails. They have worked with expert mixologists to develop delicious cocktail recipes including Cosmopolitan, Mojito, Espresso Martini, Vodka Mule, Pina Colada and Lemon Drop.

Several chocolate confectionery brands have also started to introduce new formats and flavour innovations to their traditional chocolate ranges to drive sales. In 2024 Anthon Berg celebrated 100 years of liquor filled chocolates by expanding their product range with Baileys Irish cream and releasing new Baileys-infused marzipan products, coated in milk chocolate and decorated with a swirl of dark chocolate. The new Anthon Berg Baileys Treats come with seven individually wrapped chocolates in a 175g beautifully designed dual-branded gift box.

ingredients and only use the finest organic, natural products in our delicious treats. Our ingredients lists are short and easy to understand because we don't use any artificial flavourings, preservatives or colours," says Louise Collins, marketing co-ordinator.

"We put respect and kindness at the heart of everything we do and build relationships with our suppliers and customers founded on trust and cooperation. Every day, with every chocolate truffle we make, we show that it's possible to create absolutely mouth-watering, delicious treats without the need for animal-derived ingredients such as dairy. There are lots of benefits to vegan production, both environmentally and in terms of animal welfare."

More and more consumers are reading labels, checking ingredients and wanting to understand the health and environmental benefits of what they are eating, explains Louise. "This is especially true for consumers shopping in independent retailers; these shoppers are already making a conscious decision to shop with care, so they're more likely to want to know the story behind their food or to choose products that are locally produced or organic or with other noteworthy characteristics."

Meanwhile, bean-to-bar chocolatier based in Cornwall, Chocolarder, is bringing together the worlds of slow-crafted chocolate and food waste to provide vibrant bars that highlight the greatest challenges the food sector faces today – including food waste, as the range is flavoured using ingredients that would otherwise would have gone to waste such as hotel buffet croissants from The Watergate Bay Hotel, coffee grounds from Monmouth Coffee and fruit from Natoora. "Our process begins with sourcing rare, flavourful cacao varieties, often from agroforestry systems that support biodiversity," begins Mike Longman, founder. "The current global chocolate industry faces critical issues: unsustainable farming practices, deforestation, exploitative labour conditions, and environmental degradation. Adopting ethical and sustainable practices isn't just about doing the right thing – it's about safeguarding the future of cacao farming and the planet."

Bringing eco options to life

Norfolk-based chocolate makers Gnaw demonstrate that high quality, sustainably-produced chocolate products can be as fun as they are delicious and good for the planet. "The founders of Gnaw built the company in 2011 on the premise of there being one planet and it being incumbent on all of us to leave it in a better shape for our kids," says managing director Mike Navarro. "Our factory is solar-powered and we're converting that energy into making fantastic quality chocolate – and that's where our flavour profiles and everything we're trying to do to bring it to life comes into play." With modern flavours such as Raspberry Mojito and New York Cheesecake in the vibrant (and freshly rebranded) bars, and the likes of Creme Brulee Hot Chocolate Soft Centre Hot Chocolate Spoon in the non-bar range, play is a key word here. Gnaw's ethics might be serious, but their imagination makes the range anything but dull with indulgently nostalgic flavours transporting chocolate fans back to their childhoods.

Sustainability is thoroughly embedded in the Gnaw range and this is instantly recognisable in their packaging, which proudly states it is compostable plus is made using vegetable inks. 70% of the business's energy comes from its solar panelled roof, which means that production is somewhat seasonal as production slows during the darker months. "Ultimately we're trying to draw less power from the grid," says Mike. While 'transparency' is a bit of a buzzword in 2025, Gnaw makes a point of being genuinely, verifiably traceable: "We can tell you which farmers grew each bag of cocoa we use," says Mike, an all-too-rare occurrence in today's chocolate marketplace.

With a number of chocolate makers passionate about producing ranges that are better for people and planet, there are plenty of quality options for *Speciality Food* readers to tuck into and for their customers to relish.

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FLOWER & WHITE CHOCOLATE CRUNCH MERINGUE BAR

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lowerandwhite.co.uk



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FIRETREE SOLOMAN ISLANDS, MAKIRA ISLAND, 75%

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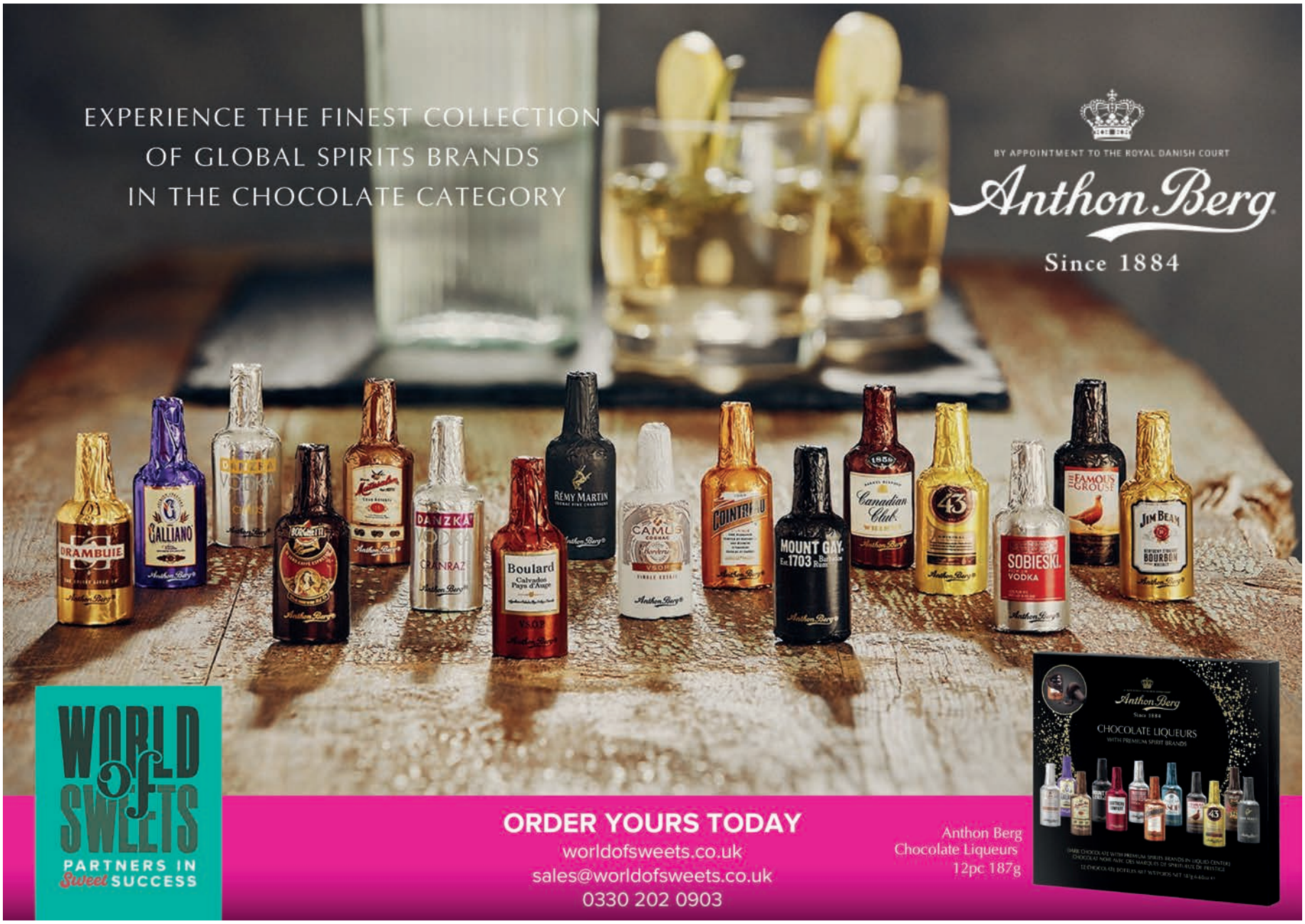
firetreechocolate.co.uk



FATSO SWEET TART

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sofatso.com



REFRESHING RETAIL

Smart planning, outsourcing expertise and thinking sustainably are the name of the refurb game – but you don't have to go big to make a sizeable impact


CAFE AT FLOURISH AT GLENAVON FARM

In 2025, the role of the independent fine food retailer goes far beyond simply selling the best products on the market to consumers. These days, shoppers are looking for more than ever: an inspiring experience, a connection to the food and drink they're purchasing, and somewhere to while away some quality time while filling their baskets with perfectly curated food and drink.

For Michael Boyle, managing director of Fresh Retail, a 'fresh eye survey' is the first port of call for any refurb or revamp task. "We start at the car park and follow the journey that the customer does so we can see what they see. Very often there are things like dead plants outside, and out-of-date signage." The goal is to inspire shopping from the customer's first moments in your establishment, so if a scruffy exterior leads to an interior that is dusty and full of boxes you're unlikely to get shoppers into the fine food spirit. "It doesn't cost a lot to clean up and make things look right, but it's often not prioritised," says Michael. "It's all about the customer journey, and making shopping an adventure rather than a chore, but that doesn't mean it can't be efficient too," he says.

Bring the whole team together for an idea-generating session before signing any contracts with external consultants and contractors, he suggests. The butcher will be able to advise on how his section should be laid out for optimum practicality, and shop floor staff could well have ideas around the customer journey and the shop's flow – potentially based on feedback they've had directly from customers.

It's also worth travelling to see other retailers you can gain inspiration from; for example Neal's Yard for your cheese counter, and even Marks & Spencer and Aldi for their fresh produce displays and efficiency respectively.

> "It's very, very easy for projects to run away from you, and it's important to create a shop that is aligned with what your customers want rather than what you want"



Learn from experience

When it comes to larger scale projects, Michael recommends running feasibility studies before starting any work. "It's very, very easy for projects to run away from you, and it's important to create a shop that is aligned with what your customers want rather than what you want." If your customers just want a convenient way to buy excellent food, focus on that before spending thousands of pounds on, for example, an events space or kids play area that will remain unused.

Creating a positive experience

Key to successful revamps is planning, says Michael, and this is true for every element of the customer journey. As much as you plan your product range and store layout, plan your signage and marketing ahead of time – when done thoroughly and well it can really lift the visuals and selling success of an area in your store, and when rushed it can run the risk of looking scruffy and unhelpful.

In terms of display, make sure that each section is considered on its own merits. For example, during the festive season an attractively packaged panettone will sell well as a gift, but year-round customers want to know why they should buy, say, a pork pie from your bakery counter rather than a smartly packaged supermarket one that was made days if not weeks before. The answer is to think of what customers want from each product. In the pork pie's case, people want a freshly-baked smell and to know that they can trust its quality – a given if it's made on-site and the butcher is there to answer queries – you don't need smart packaging; a paper bag will suffice once the connection has been made. "This is something that supermarkets can't do, so independents should make the most of the opportunity," says Michael.

"The biggest advantage that independent retailers have is that we're not chains," says Paul Hargreaves, CEO of Cotswold Fayre and two Flourish foodhall sites in the Bath and Bristol area. "Make your store look beautiful and different. We have the opportunity to go beyond the mechanistic operations of supermarkets and be creative."

Before writing things like self-serve orange juice machines off as gimmicks, consider their strengths in terms of what you want to achieve. If connecting your customers with the food you sell, increasing dwell time and tapping into the experiential retail trend is what you're after, you're onto a winner. "I've just finished a refit where a bakery added in a machine where customers could slice their own bread," says Michael. "Customers of all ages love it as we're helping them create a memory. We can't beat supermarkets in terms of price, but we can give our customers experiences they'll come back for."

Decisions around fixtures and fittings, decor and other elements is up to each individual business, but the key point is to do it differently to the food retailers around you. "Get clear messaging out to make your point of differences clear, too," suggests Paul.

Maximise your assets

If you're adding a cafe to your site, it pays to pay attention to the finer details – and make sure to allow it ample space – as it's likely to provide more profit than you might expect. "We've found that it works to have your cafe take up at least half of the total space," says Paul. This may seem excessive, but the number of covers quite often determines whether a site is to be profitable or not. Paul explains, "At Flourish, the profit split is about 60:40 in terms of restaurant versus retail space." Give the kitchen plenty of room to

> "We can't beat supermarkets in terms of price, but we can give our customers experiences they'll come back for"

AT A GLANCE

Paul Hargreaves shares his top tips for refurbishing successfully

- Gender neutral toilets may be divisive, but they make a lot of sense if your site is tight on space
- Future-proof the building – it is best to do more at the beginning which will cost more money, but it is three times more expensive to retro-fit
- Check there is enough electric power to the site for future requirements
- Don't forget the acoustics – if you're dealing with high ceilings, put in lots of soft furnishings and consider bringing in an expert to make sure everyone can hear each other
- Go for the most expensive option you can afford to make it less likely to break down





FLOURISH AT GLENAVON FARM

breathe, too, and ideally keep it open so that customers gain a sense of connection with the chefs preparing their food.

Car parks are often low on the priority list but are an important consideration with new builds and full refurbishments. "A lot of rural retailers' car parks aren't big enough, but there are formulas you can use to determine how large your car park should be based on the number of covers in your restaurant," says Paul. "Make sure you consider dwell time – a lot of local authorities don't – as if people are sitting down to a meal before or after having a browse and buying a few items, their car is taking up space for a lot longer than you might originally plan for."

Bring in the experts

Once you've got a plan together and are clear on what you need to get out of it, that's the time to bring in the external experts. Michael doesn't recommend bringing them into the project too soon as they can wow with innovative designs and ideas that might not work for you day-to-day; and make sure that there are clear parameters for everyone's role. Once the experts are in place, it's time to step back and focus on your product range and the customers' experience. "What happens a lot is that shop owners get sucked into a build because it's exciting, then these things are a mad rush at the end of the process," says Michael. "They worry about the roof rather than how to get people through the till."

Paul says that when it comes to building work it's important to give builders a strict timescale to work to. "If there's no set deadline, the work will never get done," he says. "The reality is that by that date the work is probably not going to be completely finished, but you're more than likely to be in a position to be able to open." This is why Paul suggests bringing in a quantity surveyor and a project manager, too – it will cost a chunk of money, but you'll make up for that with the funds that you'll save by topping the builders over-spending and will help keep them to timescales.

PLAN FOR **EFFICIENCY**

Once you've finalised your product range and are confident that it will sell, simple things like having deeper shelves or under-shelf storage, so you can keep more products on-shelf rather than having staff going backwards and forwards between the shelf and the stock room, is a great move.

Creating a flow through the store so that customers can't exit straight away is more than a case of increasing dwell time and opportunities to sell – it can also help to avoid all-too-common problem of theft.

THINK **SUSTAINABILITY**

"If you're refurbishing, put in as many sustainable elements as possible," Paul recommends. As well as being a positive step for the business, it'll comfort and attract eco-minded shoppers. "Consumers are looking for things like solar panels on the roof, and something small like a box that displays carbon savings and so on, visible to your customers, doesn't cost much money at all but has a lot of value in terms of communicating your ethos."

Packaging that speaks volumes

Did you know that the fastest way to grow your brand in 2025 is to personalise your merchandise? In fact, make it really clever and you may even set a trend!

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THE GROWTH OF KIDS' FOOD

Premium children's food options are on the up, with a number of new players entering the market. Speciality Food finds out what's driving this family-friendly trend

A quiet revolution has been bubbling under the surface of the British food and drink scene. One propelled by mission-driven investors, businesspeople and parents, as they seek to enact change in a sector that has been stagnating for quite some time – kids' meals.

As a speciality retailer, passionately advocating for artisan cheeses, preserves, spirits and the like, you might not have given much thought to younger consumers. The ones who trundle into store wrapped warmly in a blanket in their buggy, or twisting and fidgeting alongside a parent or grandparent.

But noticing these youthful palates, engaging with them, and catering to their needs, could unlock a whole new stream of revenue for your business, say the new generation of children's meal producers coming along the line.

This is especially true of farm shops and garden centres, which have become more than the sum of their parts – experiences to be enjoyed by the entire family (children included) at weekends.

According to Statista, revenue within the baby and children's food sector in the UK is due to grow from £1.4 billion in 2020, to £1.7 billion by 2025. While Mintel points to the trend amongst parents to be pickier in this category, searching for organic, natural, and nutritious options for their offspring.

What's behind the new kids' food scene in the UK?

The enduring story from founders of new brands is that they've carved out their own place in the market due to necessity, and their own experience. They've recognised the sparsity in the sector... but also the desire (for people like themselves) for higher quality products.

Cherrelle Beckitt, for example, set up The Family Food Co and is CEO of Pots for Tots. Her mission began with her own feeding journey while weaning her first child, and noticing a gap for guilt-free, nutritious options for her baby. "I found the choice of convenience food for children pretty disappointing," Cherelle says. "Hidden nasties, mush-like consistency – it just didn't ever feel like real food."

Cherelle was also keenly aware of the omnipresence of childhood obesity in the UK, which has become a significant public health concern, leading to heightened scrutiny of the nutritional content of what they eat.

"This has led to an increasing emphasis on providing balanced, nutrient-dense options for children in the last few years."

More Toddler Meals founder Edward Van Der Lande's story will chime with many working parents. Being placed overseas with the Army, he spent a great deal of time away from his pregnant wife and young son. "I think 2022, while I was in Somalia, was one of my most formative experiences," Edward explains. "My wife was working full time, but we were conscious about doing weaning properly, introducing textures and tastes as per the guidance, batch cooking what we ate and freezing it." There was so much to it, he says, and he felt guilty about the strain weaning was putting on his wife while he was away. Surely there could be a better solution?

"Looking at the toddler food market, it's broadly split into two areas," Edward continues. "One side is fresh options, with a lot coming up that's good quality, but not necessarily very convenient as you have to take it out of the freezer and put it in the microwave. You can't take it with you.

"The other side is pouches and sachets, which are super convenient, but they aren't all high quality." Edward developed a series of freeze-dried meals for children. Crafted with the guidance of a nutritionist, weighing only 40g, low in salt, but high in plants and protein, all parents have to do is "add water, and they're ready to go. They're designed to alleviate those pain points for parents."

He sees the products as being part of an exciting new movement, amongst a number of challenger brands who are "appreciating the value of feedings kids actual food, rather than rusks, or something out of a jar."

Freeze drying to retain nutrient value is exactly what Eva and Darren Joseph have done while bringing to market their own kids' food brand – Eden's Bloom – a range of powdered plant-based baby purees, made from whole fruits, vegetables and grains from sustainable sources.

Eva resonates with her fellow founders. "As a new mum starting to wean my six-month-old, I wanted to feed my daughter natural meals without compromising on quality," she says. "I didn't want to resort to shop-bought pouches and jars, so I spent hours in the kitchen batch cooking food in the evenings, which would then be mashed or pureed and frozen for the week ahead."

When she lost her eyesight and was later diagnosed with a brain tumour, Eva knew something had to give. "This was the lightbulb moment that made me decide to set my sights on creating a product for children that would offer natural convenience feeding without the nasties."

Through her research, and using protein and powdered nutrition supplements herself, she wondered why this approach couldn't work for children too – and Eden's Bloom was born.

Why does kids' food matter?

It's all about health - educating children in healthy eating and making healthy choices. And that starts at an early age.

"There's so much in the media at the moment about unethical packaging and ultra-processed foods aimed at children," agrees Cherrelle. "I think it's about time it was highlighted and addressed. I know first-hand how busy parents can be, and we need to be able to fall back on convenient food sometimes. We want parents to be able to do so without being misled by packaging or compromising on their children's health."

Cherrelle thinks the industry faces many challenges in this respect, but also holds significant opportunities for innovation and improvement in delivering more sustainable, better food options for children. Though "healthier foods are not enough on their own. We need the bigger brands to take accountability and be more transparent with their food labelling. This also comes with a greater need for stricter regulations, advertising and marketing when it comes to children's food."

Parents are more concerned than ever before about what they give their children, adds Annabel Karmel, a heavyweight in the kids' food sector. It matters to them. And it should matter to the NHS and government, with a pressing need to halt our obesity crisis, and in turn preventable disease. This is against a backdrop, though, Annabel says, of parents "juggling work, school, appointments, after school clubs, and the endless piles of laundry" which "doesn't leave much time in the day for making healthy, homecooked family meals".

Why should speciality retailers consider stocking premium kids' meals?

"There's a huge demand in the retail space for healthier children's meals," says Cherelle.

> "If you can pretty much guarantee your child is going to enjoy a meal with minimum wastage, you'll invest in that product and brand"

"Retailers need to show they value the health of children by providing little ones with the real food they deserve," she continues, "and parents the convenience they so desperately need, without the guilt of ultra-processed ready meals and pouches."

Shopping these days is about whole family nutrition, Edward agrees. "Gone are the days when we'll feed the kids whatever they have at 5pm, while we have 'proper food' later. Kids are growing, and they need good quality food. It makes sense for farm shops to sell options for them as well. If we can raise the category, offering kids' food in that setting, a family may very well buy more of their weekly shop there, knowing they can get everything in the same place." Adding children's meals is a good way to add value for customers, Edward exerts.

Annabel says retailers taking their first tentative steps into this arena would do well to 'play it safe' with tried and tested flavours before offering anything too exotic. "If you can pretty much guarantee your child is going to enjoy a meal with minimum wastage, you'll invest in that product and brand," she says. "Children are famously finicky eaters, so once a customer finds a product that their child enjoys, they will buy from those brands time and time again."

With curries and lasagne the bestsellers in premium ready meals, and plenty of 'child-friendly' versions of these products emerging, the opportunity to 'bridge' meals across generations in a convenient way has never been stronger.

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STORING CHEESE

Here's how to care for your cheese for optimum results

For foodies, visiting a cheese counter and buying artisan cheese from a specialist is pure pleasure. The sheer, vast array of epicurean delights. The opportunity to sample and taste varieties they might not have heard of before, guided by staff who know what they're talking about. The satisfaction of unwrapping each piece carefully from its paper or wax packaging.

Speciality cheeses have been made with the utmost care and detail, by folk who source the very best quality milk (sometimes they even know the names of the cows), maturing each and every piece to the peak of perfection so it can pride of place on cheeseboards or become the beating heart of a meal.

Consumers, who are increasingly choosing at-home dining experiences and 'treat moments' over dining out, are finding their feet in delis, farm shops and food halls, and they expect guidance and knowledge from the expert at the counter. Can cheese be frozen? How long does cheese last in the fridge? What are the best ways to store cheese? These are all burning questions they want to know the answers to before parting with their hard-earned cash.

As a fine food retailer, these moments are your time to shine. To build engagement and trust with shoppers, ensuring they'll return time and time again. Train your staff in all aspects of cheese care beyond the counter. You might even want to print cards or leaflets for customers, detailing the very best ways to care for and appreciate their edible treasures.

Does cheese go off?

In a word, yes. Cheese does go bad. But shoppers should be encouraged to use their senses to guide their decision over whether or not to consume suspect cheese, rather than relying on best before or sell by dates.

Visually, furry white mould might put some off, especially when handling soft cheeses such as Brie or Camembert-types, but this is to be expected as the cheeses age, and can be cut away, with the resulting cheese perfectly fine to eat.

White or even green-blue patches on hard cheeses can be cut away, leaving the rest of the cheese to enjoy. If fuzzy mould of other colours is noticed, that's probably a sign the cheese has gone off.

In terms of smell, milder cheeses that take a stronger turn, giving off hints of 'blue', could well be past their best. And if blue or mould-ripened cheeses unleash overwhelming whiffs of ammonia, these too might be beyond the point of no return and no longer safe to eat.

In terms of taste, some cheeses become much more pungent as they age (which is appealing to connoisseurs) but if they present with a bitter, acrid, unpleasant flavour profile, it's probably best to steer clear.

How long will cheese last in the fridge?

Cheese can last a long time in the fridge depending on the way it's wrapped, the temperature, conditions, and also the type (hard, blue, washed-rind, soft). Hard cheeses such as Cheddar and Parmigiano Reggiano have had much of their moisture removed, and often a good deal of salt added to aid their preservation. They will quite happily sit in the fridge, stored correctly, for weeks if not months. Just keep an eye on them, rewrapping at regular intervals, looking for signs of spoilage, and cutting away any obvious mould.

Softer cheeses, like goats' cheese, cottage cheese, Brie, blue cheese, and those with a washed rind, contain much greater amounts of moisture and can be breeding grounds for bacteria. Once opened, a good guide is three days to use cottage cheese and very fresh soft cheeses, and a week for other soft cheeses.

What's the best temperature for storing cheese?

Aim for between 4-5°C, which is the average temperature of a domestic fridge. If you have a cool space around this temperature in your home (for example a clean cellar) you could also store harder cheeses such as Cheddar and Le Gruyère AOP here for up to a week domestically, turning and checking them regularly to keep an eye on their condition.

What is the best way to wrap cheese?

Many people store cheese in clingfilm, which is fine in the short term, but left longer than a couple of days and it actually causes the cheese (which is a living, breathing thing) to sweat, which can, in turn, encourage mould growth. The best way to wrap and care for your cheese is by sourcing breathable, professional waxed cheese paper, which has been designed to keep it fresh for as long as possible. If this isn't affordable, good old kitchen foil is fine – just make sure it's pressed neatly against all surfaces of the cheese to create a seal.

How to store smelly cheeses

Wrap blue, washed rind and mould-ripened cheeses in waxed paper or foil, and store in the fridge in a tub that is completely airtight. It's worth investing in a good quality version, as some cheaper ones (usually bought at supermarkets or discounters) don't have a tight enough seal to prevent the smell drifting around the fridge. Adding a sugar cube to the container, some say, absorbs a bit of the stinkiness.

How can you prevent hard cheese from cracking?

A rapid loss of moisture is usually to blame for hard cheeses cracking. They'll often appear darker at the edges too. As a quick fix, you could add some damp kitchen towels to a tub with the cheese (they shouldn't touch it), and pop in the fridge for a few days to encourage some humidity, preventing the rest of the cheese from drying out. Rubbing the surface in butter or oil could also stop the dry spread. Don't waste dried hard cheese – you can grate it and use it in cooking.

Can you freeze cheese?

There are lots of urban myths and housewives tales around freezing cheese, with plenty of people saying it spoils the end product. But we say yes, you can safely freeze cheese. In fact, if you don't think you'll be able to eat it in time, and can't use it in cooking, we actively encourage freezing cheese to prevent wastage. You should be prepared, though, for the taste and texture of some cheeses to change, particularly if you're freezing soft, creamy cheeses, which contain lots of moisture.

In these cheeses, ice crystals form in the freezer, melting as the product thaws, leaving you with something that no longer has that creamy, unctuous mouthfeel. We recommend only freezing soft cheeses if you plan to use them in cooking later on, such as in a sauce, or over a pizza or lasagne.

Well wrapped hard cheeses, or even grated hard cheeses, fare much better but, again, we recommend using these for cooking, as all cheese tastes best direct from the deli.

The best cheeses to freeze: Cheddar, Mozzarella, Stilton, hard goats' cheese

How long will cheese last in the freezer?

As freezing stops bacterial growth, cheese can be frozen for quite a long time – but we recommend using within six months. Beyond this the cheese's taste and texture can be very significantly altered.

> "Train your staff in all aspects of cheese care beyond the counter"

PETER'S YARD

NEW OREGANO & OLIVE OIL SOURDOUGH CRACKERS

EXCLUSIVE TO SPECIALITY & FOODSERVICE



"A new year, a new beginning"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

2024 was quite a year in cheese, certainly a good one for real handmade artisan British artisan cheese.

We saw the launch of The Real Cheese Project. The project supports independent cheesemakers and cheesemongers and helps bring awareness to the masses about the importance of handmade wholesome cheese. They are also engaged in research programmes to support all those involved in the real artisan cheese sector.

In 2024 the Courtyard Dairy helped make three traditional Wensleydale recipes part of a project. They worked with three local Dales cheesemakers. From the experiment we could see and taste how the aspect, soil, grazing and breed all play an important role, including the biome in which the cheese is stored to age. Much like wine regionality there truly is cheese regionality; who knows perhaps a Grand Cru Wensleydale in 2025 – go Andy!

The Academy of Cheese saw its first Fellows pass their level 3 certifications, a step closer to the first Master Of Cheese. This is such an important time for cheese professionals in the UK and only helping the consumer understand the immensity and importance of this very special food.

Prior to the World Wars we had over 3,000 cheesemakers in the UK. After WWII we were down to circa 150. 2024 has been exceptionally hard for cheese farmers (those that also own livestock) and cheesemakers who buy in their milk. Farming and dairy running costs have been increasing exponentially. Also, our new Government's bright idea to change agricultural property relief has been a massive blow for farmers. Some are about to throw in the towel.

To be a proper cheesemaker you have got to be brave. One that doesn't mind working all hours and most days. You must be connected to your soil and livestock. I have had the good fortune to meet many of these kind souls. These are the cheesemakers that are not only passionate about their work but are truly connected to nature. They are also happy to take time to show you their farm and livestock.

This year as retailers we really do need to champion these people and their cheese. It is not just the product we are talking about, it is about the greater good that it brings when buying that more wholesome piece of cheese. What? I hear you say... Well it is simple, wholesome is the new buzzword. It means food that has not been messed about with and overly processed. Wholesome means cheese that contains minerals, calcium and nutrients that help maintain a balanced diet, whilst keeping your gut bacteria happy. What is more important is that we need to look after Mother Nature. If you invest in wholesome cheese for your cheese counters you are investing in the healthy future of our planet, people and local economy.

Whilst I read about industrial dairy giants poisoning rivers and causing risk to humans it is clear that we need to do something, and it needs to happen now.

Is an agrarian lifestyle possible? Can we rely on our local economy to provide food that nourishes and sustains? In my opinion yes this can happen, but we all need to consider what we are selling and why. In recent years I have made a commitment to knowing everything about what I sell. I need to be sure that my produce is tasty, wholesome, good for the planet, ethical and sustainable. I want the money I spend to go to people that truly deserve it and need it to help maintain their healthy in harmony with nature business model.

In 2025 let the independents champion those brilliant local producers. Let us put our money back into the local economy. Try and avoid the need to shop at massive wholesalers, shop direct, shop small, shop wholesome! Wholesome is good for you; as a result you will only need buy half as much when comparted to the cheaper highly processed alternatives. Wholesome cheese will sustain your diet and health as it is full of goodness. Let your customers know!

> "To be a proper cheesemaker you have got to be brave. One that doesn't mind working all hours and most days. You must be connected to your soil and lifestock"

Fen Farm Dairy unveils new cheese



More than a decade since launching the now globally revered Brie-style cheese, Baron Bigod, Fen Farm Dairy in Suffolk has unveiled a new seasonal cheese.

Raedwald (named for the Anglo-Saxon king of East Anglia) has been a year in the making. It's crafted to mimic Reblochon, and arrives on the British cheese scene as consumer interest in melting and cooking cheeses continues to soar.

Available to order from mid-January, Jonny Crickmore, founder of Fen Farm Dairy, says the beauty of Raedwald is its seasonality.

"The purpose of making this cheese," he said, "is we have surplus milk during two periods of the year – one being around Christmas, January, February and March, and the other May, June and July. We want to bring in seasonal cheeses during those times, starting with this one, this year. Seasonality is something I think we should celebrate more... getting excited about the next thing coming up, like asparagus or strawberry season. We want to replicate that in our cheesemaking."

Raedwald's profile is aromatic and warm, with a hint of hazelnut at the rind, leading to a "cellar, winey flavour in the paste".

Led by the classic Reblochon format, the cheese is printed with the national flag on pack (alongside king Raedwald's helmet, famously uncovered at Sutton Hoo), and layered with a wooden disc to control moisture levels, keeping it in optimum condition.

"I like the story of Reblochon," Jonny adds. "Apparently, when the tax man came around, French farmers would only half milk their cows. They'd pay their taxes, then after the tax man had gone, they'd finish milking and turn that milk into cheese. If you translate Reblochon into English it means something like 'high fat milk'. That really resonated with me because we have the highest fat content in our milk from December through to when the cows go out."

Stocks of Raedwald will be strictly limited in its first year. "I'm really excited," Jonny added. "And a little bit nervous. Baron Bigod means so much to us as a business and it's not going to be neglected – it will always be our main focus. But we can't wait to put out this seasonal cheese."

Younger shoppers support artisan cheesemakers, finds new survey

Research conducted by Vypr on behalf of The Real Cheese Project has uncovered positive news for the artisan cheese community.

The survey found that Millennials and Generation Z shoppers are the most likely to purchase high quality cheese made locally or by small-scale producers – 35.2% of respondents aged 25-34 claimed to purchase artisan cheese on a weekly basis, the average figure dropping to 17.61% across the survey's 1,000+ respondents.

The research also looked into what aspects of cheese shoppers are willing to pay more money for: 'better taste' was the most popular response at 85.14%, 'higher standards of animal welfare' was the second most impactful at 79.23% and was followed by 'support for family farms and local economies' (78.05%), 'more sustainable production' (75.89%) and 'handmade' (72.93%).

Men aged 18-44 were revealed to hold the highest levels of interest in artisan cheese, with 42.86% of men aged 25-34 stating that they purchased artisan cheese on a weekly basis followed by men aged 18-24 at 34.48%, men aged 35-44 at 30.38%. 27.78% of female respondents aged 25-34 reported interest in the hallmarks of artisan cheese.

A sobering find was that respondents did not recognise the scale of the UK's artisan cheese industry; 23.38% of respondents believed that over 50% of total annual cheese sales could be attributed to the artisan sector and 81.16% guessed over 10%, while industry estimates state it stands at around 2-3%.

Sam Brice, co-founder of The Real Cheese Project, said, "Now is a great time to think about why we should be getting behind our small scale makers and independent retailers throughout the rest of the year.

"Big support among Millennials and Gen Z bodes well for the future, but perhaps most encouragingly of all, we're seeing the vast majority of respondents saying they're willing to pay more for sustainably farmed, higher welfare, handmade cheese produced by family-run farms using local milk.

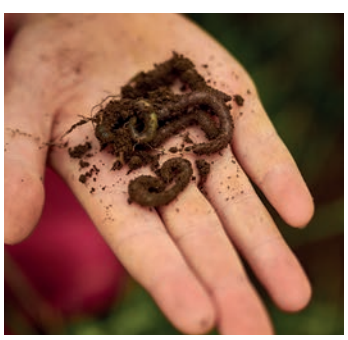
"The problem is, most people don't have any idea how many amazing artisan cheeses we have in the UK, let alone the incredible things that our farmers and makers are doing for both people and planet.

"Alongside the rest of the real cheese community, we're working to change that, so the rich tapestry of British cheese can remain intact for next Christmas and far beyond."

> "Big support among Millennials and Gen Z bodes well for the future, and we're seeing the vast majority of respondents saying they're willing to pay more for better"

Golden Hooves launches AR farm







Award-winning Regenerative dairy brand Golden Hooves is inviting cheese sellers and fans to Regeneration Farm, their brand new Augmented Reality (AR) farm experience, which is going live at the end of January.

Young and old alike can hop over the farm gate and explore this fun, innovative and interactive experience that was created by the Golden Hooves team to celebrate the work that First Milk farmers are doing to put nature, animals and people first, and to help everyone learn about regenerative dairy farming and where their food comes from. We've all heard of the term 'regen' by now, but do we really know what it means? Now there is a fun way to find out. Simply scan the on-pack code and you will be taken to 'Regeneration Farm' via any modern smartphone, tablet or computer.

"We'd love to give everyone the chance to visit one of our regenerative farms, but it just isn't possible, so we decided to bring the farm to people's homes in a fun and less muddy way!' says First Milk's Leona McDonald. The AR experience will do just that, providing a tour of the farmyard and fields, guided by farmers, Emma and Steve. This will include time with grazing cows, who are naturally fertilising the soil with every cow pat, a closer look at trees and hedgerows, which are buzzing with plant and wildlife, and a trip underground to see worms tunnelling, as well as microbes, fungi and dung beetles hard at work making sure all that magical cow poo gets put to good use. "We'll be getting up close with cowpats, wriggling around with worms, and putting the right kind of bugs on your computers and phones!" explains Leona with an emphasis on 'fun' being 'the key to education and engagement'.

First Milk, the source of all the milk that goes into the Deliciously Regenerative Golden Hooves products, is a certified B-Corporation and was awarded the King's Award for Enterprise for Sustainable Development in 2023. United by a shared commitment to healthy soil, healthy cows and healthy humans, the co-op's 700 family-run farms are delivering



better outcomes for the planet on a huge scale, supported by regular engagement, research and reporting to ensure that continual improvements can be achieved.

With the launch coinciding with the final phase of the Big Food Redesign Challenge ran by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in partnership with the Sustainable Food Trust (Golden Hooves have successfully made it through to the final stage) the AR experience delves into the regenerative story behind Golden Hooves' products just in time for some "hugely exciting retail launches", Leona hints.

> "We'd love to give everyone the chance to visit one of our regenerative farms"





THE ART OF CHEESE PAIRING

Whether you stick to the classics or carve delicious new paths, the world of cheese pairing is ripe for exploration

COMMENTATORS



VICKIE ROGERSON
HOMAGE2FROMAGE



RUTH RASKIN
THE FINE CHEESE CO.



PERRY WAKEMAN
RENNET & RIND



JACK ELKINS
PETER'S YARD



MORGAN MCGLYNN-CARR
CHEESES OF MUSWELL HILL

When it comes to the ultimate cheese pairings opinions abound – it is a subjective topic, after all – but there are a few guidelines which should stand the fine food retailer in good stead. For example, a good partner to cheese should complement it and not overwhelm, and that goes for texture as much as it does for taste.

Speaking of overwhelm, try to avoid offering too many options for your customers to choose from. A small, carefully curated range of perfect partners for different types of cheese will serve you well; consider selling a cracker, drink, chutney, pickle or preserve that will go well with each Cheddars, blues and softs, as well as a couple of suggestions that your customer might not turn to without approval from your trained palate. Stilton and dark chocolate, and Cheddar and kimchi are two deliciously out there examples.

If you're looking for inspiration, as well as a revenue-booster, consider running cheese tasting events. Bring in a cheesemaker to discuss their favourite pairings or set out your own – plus a few wildcards to get tongues wagging and customers formulating their own.

"Traditionally, we tend to smother cheese with a sweet onion chutney, Branston pickle or a chilli jam and be done with it," says Vickie Rogerson, co-founder of Homage2Fromage. "But this is doing cheese a disservice as there are far more delicious pairings which make the cheese you buy truly sing. Cheese is utterly delicious in its unadorned state but it is also incredibly versatile."

It's all a question of bringing out the best of the cheese, says Vickie. "Tease out the complexity of your chosen cheese by pairing it with something unusual and intriguing; honey, dark chocolate, coffee, pineapple, cider, beer, raspberries, pears, walnuts and even wasbi all work well with different types of cheese. I believe you should make your own rules when it comes to eating cheese and go with what makes you happy."

Think outside the box

"People are becoming much more curious about potential combinations and are more playful and less constrained by tradition," says Ruth Raskin, cheese care and quality manager at The Fine Cheese Co. "They often look for inspiration online and social media thrives on innovation, so there is more experimentation with new ideas. They want sitting down to a plate of cheese to be an experience and the joy of an unexpected pairing can be a real conversation starter. Our own Toast for Cheese range has been a storming success, with people embracing the combination of crisp, toasted nuts and seeds and sweet, dried fruit over the humble cream cracker."

When it comes to cheese pairings, it's less about 'under the radar' and more about a playful approach to uncovering flavours, says Perry Wakeman, CEO of Rennet & Rind. "Here's one trick we've used in affinage that's as fun as it is unexpected: fizzy cola bottles paired with a youthful, sharp goat cheese. I know it sounds bizarre, but hear me out. We stumbled upon this while profiling Sinodun Hill, a delicious goat cheese from the Fraser family. At a younger age, its acidity can dominate, making those delicate secondary flavours harder to pinpoint. Enter the fizzy cola bottle chaser: take a bite of the cola bottle to give your palate a sharp, sweet jolt, then follow with the goat cheese. Suddenly, the cheese transforms – floral, hay-like, farmyard notes become far more pronounced. It's a helpful tool for understanding complex flavour development during maturation."

> "I believe you should make your own rules when it comes to eating cheese and go with what makes you happy"

Respect the art of pairing

While discovering new pairings is a culinary joy, "you've got to respect the classics," continues Perry. "As much as we love pushing boundaries, the traditional pairings are timeless for a reason. Take Cheddar and piccalilli – it's acid paired with acid, which might not make sense on paper, but it works. Tradition often trumps logic, and if your customers are used to buying cheese and piccalilli together, you've got a captive audience to introduce to new experiences." Perry's advice? "Build on their favourites, then gently nudge them towards more adventurous pairings."

Ultimately, it's all about balance. "Perfect pairings are all about a balance of different flavours and taste profiles. If you're choosing a strong and creamy mature cheese, you want something light and refreshing to counteract the richness. Our sourdough crackers are often more complimentary than contrasting to cheese, providing subtle earthy flavours that enhance the flavour of cheese," says Jack Elkins, senior brand manager at Peter's Yard. For guidance, check out the pairing wheel that Peter's Yard have created in collaboration with The Academy of Cheese.

"We all know the joy of sparks that fly when opposites attract," says Ruth. "I am looking for an ideal marriage. The pleasure of salty tempered by sweet, savoury balanced by fruity or fatty richness cut through by bright acidity. But it's not just flavour that's important. Texture plays its part too. After all, the interplay of crunchy cracker with voluptuous oozing cheese is surely the most classic combination of all. Sometimes, simplicity is king. But



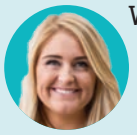
contrast isn't the only way to go. A harmonious partnership can be just as joyful as a more tempestuous union."

Finding the ultimate base

A great foundation for whatever cheese and chutney you choose is a must. "Whether you enjoy a crumbly aged Cheddar or a tangy Taleggio, one thing is certain and that it all rests on a great cracker... so make sure you pick a cracker that lives up to your cheese," says Jack.

The development of The Fine Cheese Co's range of perfect partners for cheese began over 20 years ago when founder Ann-Marie Dyas was disappointed by the quality of the products available to serve with her carefully sourced cheese. "Our range was born because, as she said, 'We love cheese, and we don't want it to be lonely'. That attention to detail still rings true in 2025. "The fact that we own our own bakery means we can be incredibly exacting in our search for the perfect cracker," Ruth continues. "Each new flavour goes through many iterations before we are satisfied. Our job is to enhance the cheese, to bring out the best and never to overwhelm. We hope our dedication to craftsmanship, our insistence on only the best ingredients and our finesse with flavour combinations sets us apart."

RETAILER INSIGHT



We catch up with Morgan McGlynn-Carr, owner of Cheeses of Muswell Hill, to find out how she approaches finding perfect partners for cheese

HOW DO YOU ADVISE RETAILERS PROMOTE CHEESE PAIRINGS?

Tasting is always the best way. No matter how skilled you are at describing flavours or breaking down the taste profile, there's nothing quite like letting customers try the pairing themselves. It's a surefire way to make the pairing more memorable and enticing.

ARE THERE ANY UNDER-THE-RADAR OPTIONS THAT SPECIALITY FOOD READERS SHOULD TRY?

Absolutely! I'd recommend exploring hyper-local pairings. For example, we offer honey made just a mile away, quince paste produced two streets over from our shop, and a beautiful homemade fruitcake from a neighbouring bakery, which pairs wonderfully with Kirkham's Lancashire. Supporting local producers brings something unique to the table and creates a real connection for customers.

HAVE YOU EVER SWAYED A BLUE OR GOAT'S CHEESE NAYSAYER WITH A GOOD PAIRING?

Yes, honey! Pairing honey with blue cheese can convert even the most sceptical of blue cheese fans. There's something magical about the sweet, floral notes of honey cutting through the saltiness of a blue. It's a must-try combination.

ARE YOU PLANNING ON TRYING ANYTHING NEW IN 2025?

Yes! We've already sold out of our seasonal cheese pairings for next year. We'll be offering curated selections for occasions like January detox, Valentine's Day, and more. I'm excited to see how these resonate with customers.

> "I recommend exploring hyper-local pairings"

STOCK CHECK

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE · 2025



THE LONDON HONEY COMPANY SHROPSHIRE HONEY

An old-fashioned unpasteurised creamed British Spring honey from the clover pastures and wildflower hedgerows of Shropshire.

thelondonhoneycompany.co.uk



COOKS & CO FIG SPREAD

An all-natural, thick, sweet, rich spread, made purely with figs. Wonderful alongside strong Cheddars and blue cheese, or stirred into gravies and stews.

cooksandco.co.uk



THE GARLIC FARM FIG, APPLE AND GARLIC CHUTNEY

This tempting (and gluten-free) chutney partners beautifully with cheese.

thegarlicfarm.co.uk



OLINA'S SEEDED SNACKERS ROASTED BEETROOT

Gluten-free, keto-friendly and suitable for vegans, the seedy texture makes for an intriguing partner for cheese.

gourmetfood.au/uk

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19 FARMS 12
MASTER CHEESEMAKERS

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BATH & WEST BRITISH CHEESE AWARDS 2024 CHAMPION

TASTE DIRECT ★ 2025 ★

Your chance to sample new and exciting products for free! Simply fill in the form and samples will be sent directly to your store



Baboo Gelato

MIXED SAMPLE BOX
FIRST 50!

Popular Dorset gelato maker Baboo Gelato is expanding outside its West Country home to bring its multi award-winning gelato to independent retailers across the rest of the UK. Baboo Gelato uses real, seasonal ingredients, bought direct from farms and orchards, to produce small batches of great ice cream. Baboo uses no chemical emulsifiers, gum stabilisers, artificial colours or flavours. Baboo has won 42 Great Taste Stars including a coveted 2024 Three Star Award for Double Chocolate Gelato made with Valrhona chocolate. Other very popular flavours include Salted Caramel Gelato, Strawberry Gelato and Sicilian Blood Orange Sorbet. Baboo keeps its offering fresh with a regularly changing range of seasonal and limited edition flavours. Retailers love Baboo's iconic branding, great point of sale, limited edition flavours, and personal customer support.



Churchill Confectionery

RETAIL PACKS
FIRST 100!

Churchill's Confectionery is a privately-owned family business founded in 1989 and based in Hertfordshire. They specialise in producing distinctive high-quality products that are very detailed, creatively embossed pieces of artistic design in tin boxes that contain delicious sweets and biscuits. With more than 35 years' experience in the confectionery business, Churchill's has grown from a small independent firm into an award-winning global company. Notwithstanding their success on the international sphere, they remain an iconic British brand serving the UK and over 30 countries worldwide. Churchill's Confectionery is perhaps best known for its delightful souvenir tins, many of which feature London at its most recognisable, but the team has worked hard to expand the company's product range over recent years to include a fabulous Art Deco collection and Victorian Fun Fair theme.

Walkers Shortbread

TASTING SAMPLE PACKS
FIRST 100!

Founded in 1898, Walker's Shortbread is a family-owned company with a rich heritage that has remained true to Joseph Walker's original recipes across five generations. Every piece is still proudly crafted on Speyside in the Scottish Highlands, using only the finest all-butter ingredients—no artificial flavourings, colourings, or additives. The newest addition, the 35g Giant Shortbread Finger, is perfect for an indulgent afternoon snack, providing the same beloved flavour in a convenient, larger portion. For something a bit playful, try our all-butter Scottie Dog Shortbread—a delightful gift or treat for any age. And for those who enjoy snacking on the go, Walker's Shortbread's sharing bag of mini shortbread fingers is ideal for easy sharing. With Walker's, every bite brings the taste of Scotland at its finest.



Delamere Dairy

RETAIL SAMPLES
FIRST 100!

Delamere's new flavoured milk duo is based on the brand's award-winning glass bottle recipe its consumers know and love, in a new 235ml CartoCan™ format – a carton that's shaped like a can. 100% recyclable, the CartoCan™ offers an alternative pack format to Delamere's well known glass bottle product, can be stored at ambient temperatures, and is best enjoyed chilled. It offers all the goodness and nutrients of normal milk, is a great source of protein, calcium and vitamin D and is available in Delamere's two best-selling flavours – Strawberry and Chocolate – with more flavours to follow later in 2025. Appealing to adults and children alike, Delamere's CartoCan™ duo is ideal for 'on the go' sales in independent retail, convenience stores, delis, farm shops, hospitality outlets and many more.





DISCOVERY BOX
FIRST 50!

Fairfields Farm

Fairfields Farm not only grows its own potatoes for its delicious thick-cut, skin-on crisps, but also cooks and packs them on-site – helping to make the low food miles nibbles carbon neutral. The brand specialises in making gluten-free and vegan crisps which win awards as well as loyal customers. Its products are perfect for ensuring everyone gets to enjoy a premium version of the nation's favourite snack, no matter their dietary requirements. Because of its short supply chain and abundant source of potatoes, Fairfields Farm can offer exceptional availability to stockists, and plenty of shelf life. The team is also extraordinarily proud of its sustainability-focused approach to biodiversity in its beautiful corner of the world.



SAMPLE BOX
FIRST 100!

Cakehead

Cakehead has the recipe for more customers! The team hand craft and hand finish award-winning bakes at their cakery based in Oakham, Rutland. They have a real passion for creating irresistible treats, using only the best ingredients – from fine Belgian cocoa to their very own luxurious caramel (made to a secret recipe). Attention to detail is paramount. The Cakehead team even freshly squeeze their lemons. Another key to success is supporting local suppliers, with as many ingredients as possible being farm fresh. Each bake is beautifully packaged and delivered on time. It's an all-in commitment to quality cake that they call 'Beyond Baking'. Cakehead even has a wide range of vegan and gluten-free options, so none of your customers have to miss out. Try a sample box and sample their gorgeous cakes for yourself.

A Little Bit

3 JAR SAMPLE PACK
FIRST 50!



A Little Bit produces award-winning sauces, dips, dressings and condiments with a little bit of fresh herbs in every jar. They appreciate that life is busy and there's not always time to whip up a sauce or dressing from scratch, so their aim is to make it easy for their customers to create dishes that taste homemade with that fresh herb flavour but without the hassle. A Little Bit's range is 100% free from preservatives, entirely gluten-free and suitable for vegans, making it a hit with all the family.



TRIO DISCOVERY BOX
FIRST 100!

Aagrah Foods

With over 45 years of expertise in Indian cuisine, Aagrah Foods brings the vibrant dining experience of its award-winning restaurants to your shelves. From rich Tarka Sauces to aromatic spice blends, chutneys, poppadoms and naans, Aagrah Foods' range embodies the heritage and bold flavours of Indian cooking. Each product is crafted with recipes perfected by seasoned chefs, ensuring authenticity and exceptional quality. Aagrah is more than just food – it's a celebration of tradition, ideal for customers seeking artisanal products with a story. Let your customers discover the joy of Indian cuisine, brought to life with care, passion, and decades of expertise.

7ate9

SAMPLE BOX
FIRST 100!

7ate9 brings the essence of Greek gastronomy to your table with products crafted from the finest ingredients and inspired by traditional recipes. Their Sourdough Pita Bread offers a soft, flavorful base, perfect for wraps or dips, while the Corn Pita Bread adds a wholesome twist to any meal.
For a satisfying snack, the Honey Sesame Bars deliver a classic balance of sweetness and crunch. Variations like the Apple & Cinnamon bars bring a warm, fruity touch, while the Pistachio & Cranberry bars offer a sophisticated blend of nutty and tangy flavors. For those craving indulgence, the chocolate bars provide a rich and decadent option. At 7ate9, authenticity meets innovation, ensuring quality and care in every bite.





Foreva Farmers

SAMPLE BOX
FIRST 50!

Founded by three generations of farmers on a small farm in Herefordshire, Foreva Farmers is pioneering sustainability in luxury tonics and mixers. Crafted from the finest local ingredients, each of their eight flavours are produced using renewable energy generated on their farm through anaerobic digestion, a world first. This green energy powers the farm's canning facility and creates the renewable, fossil-fuel-free CO_2 that goes into every drink, making them one of the most sustainable drinks in the UK. Foreva Farmers offers a genuine, and delicious, solution for those looking for a sophisticated drink that can be enjoyed both with or without alcohol. As a result, they have become one of the fastest growing tonics and mixers brands in the UK.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF ALL OFFERS

● Offers are only open to potential stockists of the products and are fulfilled at the producer's discretion ● One order per customer ● Offers may only be available to new customers, however this is at the producer's discretion ● There are no cash or credit alternatives to any ofthe offers ● The producers reserve the right to withdraw the offers at any time ● All orders and offers are fulfilled and dispatched by the producers, therefore *Speciality Food Magazine* is not responsible for any disputes over delivery, eligibility etc ● Offers available until 31st January 2025

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Business Type (Deli, Café etc)?

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- **Baboo Gelato** ☐
- **Churchill Confectionery** ☐
- **Walkers Shortbread** ☐
- **Delamere Dairy** ☐
- **Fairfields Farm** ☐
- **Cakehead** ☐
- **A Little Bit** ☐
- **Aagrah Foods** ☐
- **7ate9** ☐
- **Foreva Farmers** ☐

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FINAL CALL

Welcome to the new year.

We've had a blast feasting over the Christmas holidays, but now it's time to firmly get our teeth stuck into 2025.

There's so much to look forward to this year. We'll be filling you in on all the must-visit trade shows throughout the calendar. They're excellent touch points for retailers and buyers, filled with so much inspiration. We think they're an invaluable way (apart from your copy of this magazine, of course) to meet the people behind the products, explore new tastes, and to hear from experts on a wide-ranging array of topics.

You'll find us at both Farm Shop & Deli Show and Speciality & Fine Food Fair in 2025 – don't forget to come and say hello.

We've got our finger on the pulse when it comes to new products, so expect to find lots of goodies within these pages throughout the year, ready to fill your shelves and counters.

We're very proud to be constantly working with analysts, experts and insight agencies to make sure you know all about the most current trends. What consumers want changes constantly, informed by what they've heard on the radio and podcasts, what they've read in the news, magazines and online, and increasingly by social media. We're here to make sure you don't miss a trick.

Speaking of social media – it's had a vital role over the past year in attracting a whole new audience into the speciality food and drink arena. We're hearing that more and more Gen Z and Millennial shoppers are venturing into delis, farm shops, garden centres and food halls, trying to make a connection to what they're buying, and keen to learn about the processes and people behind what they put in their baskets. This is encouraging stuff, and something everyone in the sector should considering as we slide into the beginning of 2025. How can you further attract, excite and retain younger fine food lovers?

A final bit of food for thought, if you're not already receiving our digital newsletter (sent out every weekday afternoon) head to the Speciality Food website and sign up for even more news, views and need-to-know information.

We look forward to another year with you.

We love hearing from our readers. Do you have a story to share or expertise to pass on? Please get in touch with charlotte.smith-jarvis@artichokehq.com

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5 MINUTES WITH
HUIB VAN BOCKEL, TENZING



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I'd probably still be doing something adventurous and outdoorsy. I believe in using business as a force for good, so whatever I'd be doing, it would have to align with that ethos.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
My first job was actually a newspaper delivery boy. In the Netherlands, it was one of the only jobs you could get at 15, so it was a rite of passage.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Nature, 100%. There's something about the raw power and beauty of the outdoors that really fuels me.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
Well to be honest the delivering newspapers wasn't that great (at all).

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
Working with a team that's just as passionate about sustainability, natural ingredients, and creating a positive impact is incredibly rewarding.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
Admin stuff. It's not exciting, but it's necessary. I'd much rather be out there on a mountain or brainstorming the next big idea, but like any business, there's always a bit of paperwork involved.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
The shift towards more natural and plant-based options. There's an increasing awareness of sustainability, which is crucial, but there's still a lot of work to be done.

TEA OR COFFEE?
Both!

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
Honestly, I wouldn't care so much about what the food was, but more about who I'd be sharing it with.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
"To experience, to travel, and to learn – that is to live." This quote from Sherpa Tenzing really resonates with me. It's about embracing adventure, seeking new perspectives, and continually learning.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
I once tried fried insects in Southeast Asia. I'm all for exploring different cultures and food traditions.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer. It's an inspiring and cautionary tale about seeking adventure and living life on your own terms.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Savoury, for sure. I love foods that are rich in flavour and spice, and that leave you feeling satisfied and energized.

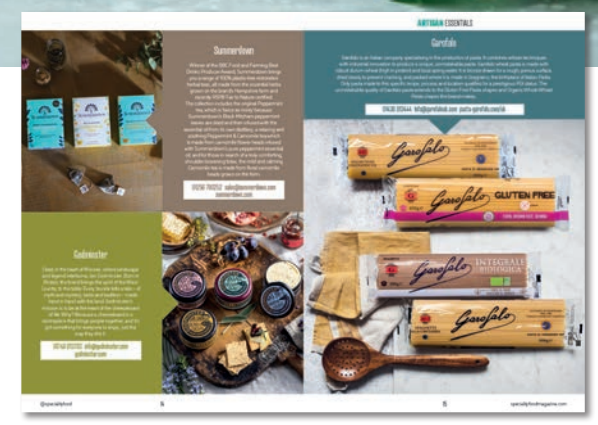
SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE

Inside the next issue of Speciality Food:

- The Green Report 2025
- Sustainable Champions
- Regenerative Farming
- Sustainable Dairy
- Frozen Food & Ready Meals
- IFE 2025 Show Preview
- Temperature Controlled Packaging

THE GREEN ISSUE





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TRIED & TESTED



CHIMMY'S SMOKY BBQ CHIMICHURRI

Anything that offers a shortcut to extraordinary flavour swiftly becomes a go-to in my kitchen, and this sauce has truly become a storecupboard staple. Chimichurri is probably best known as a punchy sauce for steak, but since discovering this – my first foray into pre-prepared chimichurris – I've found it has a lot of other uses, as well. It's super tasty simply added to great quality olive oil for a dressing for all sorts of salads, and partnered with grilled halloumi it's a real eye (and taste bud) opener.

chimmys.com



BEMUSE POMONA MEAD

Mead has a reputation for being heavy in terms of both flavour and alcohol content, not to mention a bit 'rustic', but Bemuse knocks all of these stereotypes on the head. Elegant, refreshing and a novel alternative to sparkling wine, everything in Bemuse's range of effervescent honey wines is well worth experiencing, but the Pomona variety, with its warming notes of ginger, cardamom and orange peel, is my personal favourite.

bemusedrinks.com



BE TRUFFLE TRUFFLE PONZU SAUCE

We've been drizzling this sauce over everything with glorious abandon since the bottle landed in our kitchen. Riffing off a classic Asian ponzu dipping sauce, it's citrussy without being too sharp, and lingers with the aromatic, luxurious earthiness of truffle. There are so many ways to use it. As a classic dip for snacks such as spring rolls or sweetcorn fritters, as a drizzle over bowls of ramen, and sprinkled over sushi rice to bring added interest to poke and buddha bowls. We thought it was absolutely delicious as a dressing for smoked salmon and trout, finished with a few toasted sesame seeds.

betruffle.com

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Matthew Mallia, owner of Hobz Bakery



Hobz is right at the foot of Leith Walk in Edinburgh, a spot that's quickly becoming the most exciting spot for food in the city. Our baking takes a classic approach to bread and viennoiserie, but adds in lots of inspiration from southern Europe and the Mediterranean, where I was raised, and is also inspired by the marvellous simplicity of Danish baking.

At our heart however we are still a Scottish bakery, in that we try to source as much as possible from the Lothians and the rest of Scotland. All our flour is made from British wheat grown through regenerative or organic methods, and we especially love to use Scotland the Bread grain from the Balcaskie Estate in Fife, which we mill in house. Beef and pork is not often used in bakeries, but we love to occasionally source the best produce from the Butchery at Bowhouse, also on the Balcaskie Estate. We've recently started getting in chickens for our sandwiches from St. Bride's Poultry, who have also be a pleasure to work with.

Hobz's mantra has always been about simplicity in our bakes. We haven't always held true to this, and sometimes we overcomplicate pastries. It's not so easy to remove elements we've worked on, subtraction is vital if we're to remain relevant. All our fruit and veg comes from the incredible folk at Phantassie farm in East Lothian. We take advantage of berry season in summer and use a lot of strawberries, blackberries, raspberries and cherries. We usually use them as is, without any manipulation, in our pastries. We currently have a danish on the menu that's caramelised with a bit of demerara sugar, baked with some custard, and then topped with a cherry compote and a dollop of whipped cream from Mossgiel Farm in Ayrshire. We use their whole milk in our coffees, and the difference between their dairy products and the run of the mill stuff is extraordinary.

Most bakeries struggle with waste. If you want to get perfect laminated pastries, you have to trim away at the edges. A lot of bakeries, including ourselves, add some of this trim to the next day's croissant dough for flavour. We also use some of the off cuts from our final shaping to make our Panela Sugar Bun, which is basically croissant dough bits mixed with Panela Cane Sugar and baked in a tin. The outside is super crunchy and caramelised, and the inside is almost like a soft, sweet brioche.

Our current goal is to forge more relationships with local farmers who would be willing to trade grain directly with us that we can mill in house. In the future, we'd love to be in a position where we can purchase a larger mill and mill all the flour we use in-house. The smallholder grain network in Scotland isn't as strong as elsewhere in the UK, I think, and forging these connections is proving a bit difficult. If any of you reading this have some spare grain, give us a shout! We'd love to get it off your hands!

> "We try to source as much as possible from the Lothians and the rest of Scotland"

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo



THINK REGIONAL

Treat provenance-seeking shoppers to a taste of true Italy

Reel off the desires of fine food consumers and provenance is sure to one of the first words mentioned. From the connection to the land that hyper local products offer to the associations shoppers have with certain regions of the country, provenance is a tool that all fine food retailers are all well versed in using.

By now we can all comfortably and comfortably reel off the attributes of, say, the cheeses hailing from a certain area of Britain and why they're worth spending more money on than generic alternatives with no discernable heritage, but how well can we replicate this when it comes to Italian food and drink?

As much as Italian food has a reputation and traditions that spell out tradition and great taste, not all food and drink is made equally – even in a country as food-centric as Italy – so it's important to know what to look out for.

Of course, items with Protected Designation of Origin and other certifications are an invaluable guide. If you're looking for the best of any given item, look for the PDO/PGI sticker and you can be confident that you're stocking the version that is truest to type and tradition. Prosciutto di Parma PDO, Gorgonzola PDO and Parmigiano Reggiano PDO are probably the best-known examples, but look further afield to the likes of Pane di Altamura – an all-too-rare PDO bread from Puglia – and Salama da Sugo – a spiced sausage from Emilia Romagna – to intrigue more adventurous palates.

Storytelling is a key skill of the fine food seller, so whenever you bring in a product from Italy be sure to paint a picture to whet the appetites of your customers. The country revels in foods that have been expertly produced by generations of the same family, and that's exactly the kind of tale that fine food shoppers are seeking, so look for the products with gourmet tales to tell and you have a built-in selling tool to add to your arsenal.



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