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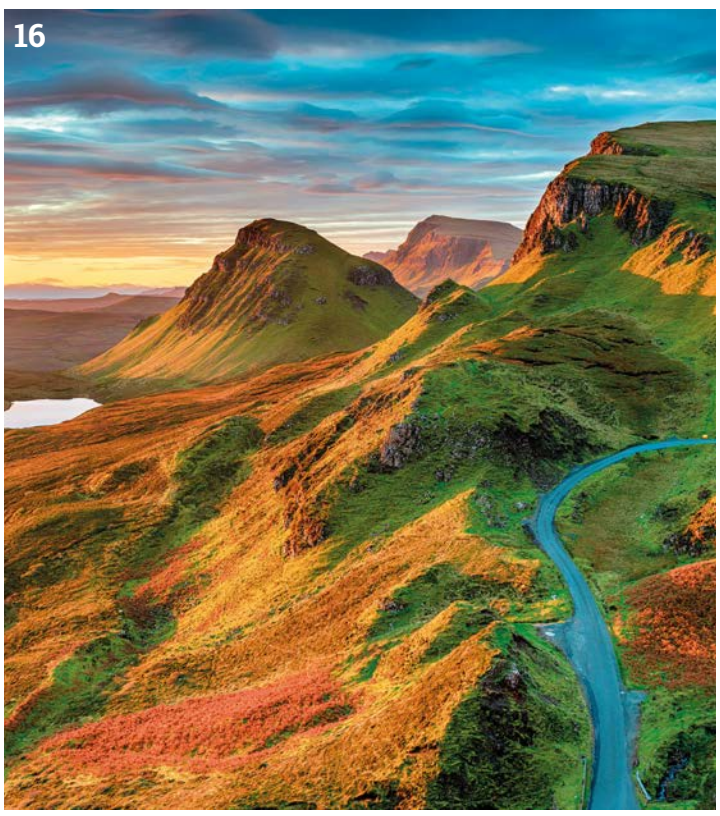
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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the January issue of *Speciality Food* – the first edition of 2022, a year which we all hope will be a smoother ride than the two years that have gone before.

2019 and 2020 were certainly challenging, but they also saw an inspiring amount of innovation, comradery and success for the sector. And while the supply chain issues that haunted the past 12 months are going strong, and nobody can predict precisely what lies in wait for 2022, I hope that the strength the fine food industry as a whole has gained will stand the test of time.

Within these pages you'll find plenty of inspiration to get your cogs whirring for the coming year, from refurbishment and expansion tips to advice on how to cash in on the growing vegan and conscious shopper opportunities.

Plus, alongside this issue you'll find the second edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*: a celebratory rundown of the UK's best-loved cheesemongers, and full of motivation for all.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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2021: looking back at a year in fine food

Speciality Food reflects on how the food and drink sector adapted to the 'new normal'

JANUARY
1st January marked the end of the Brexit transition period, officially kicking off the UK's new relationship with the EU. Increased paperwork and trade delays began causing issues for retailers and producers. Meanwhile, the UK entered its third national lockdown, which would last until a phased reopening in March. Despite these challenges, food campaigns were a point of interest for retailers, as Veganuary attracted 580,000 participants and Dry January estimated 130,000 people took part.

FEBRUARY
The Government unveiled a £20m cash fund for small businesses struggling with post-Brexit import and export rules, but Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira, dismissed the plans as a "sticking plaster" over the "real problems" of Brexit. At the same time, trust in Britain's own food makers was growing. A survey by IGD recorded trust in the food industry for health and ethics was at record levels, with strong support for local suppliers, farmers and communities.

MARCH
In the Spring Budget, chancellor Rishi Sunak announced a £520m Help to Grow scheme in addition to a £5bn rescue plan for hospitality and retail. The Food and Drink Federation said the announcements "struck the right balance", but some hospitality companies said more could have been done to help businesses get back on their feet. March also saw the England begin its phased exit out of lockdown, boosting confidence.

APRIL
In England and Wales, non-essential shops got the green light to open, and although that meant increased competition for food retailers, it also led to higher footfall as high streets and retail destinations filled up and a "forgotten energy" returned. This led to a return to some pre-Covid habits, boosting sectors such as food to go.

MAY
May marked the return of indoor hospitality, with cafés and restaurants reopening in England, Wales and Scotland. Shopper confidence continued to soar and retailers looked forward to a staycation-related rise in sales over the spring and summer.

JUNE
The Government revealed it had reached a free trade agreement with Australia, the first new deal following Brexit. Farmers weren't impressed, with NFU president Minette Batters saying it would have "serious implications for British farming" due to its lack of detail about animal welfare and environmental standards. Later, the first signs that there were problems in the supply chain became clear as a shortfall of HGV drivers threatened a return to lockdown-style food shortages.

JULY
The National Food Strategy was published, which contained a number of recommendations to improve the UK's food system, including introducing the world's first sugar and salt tax to drive reformulations, investing £1bn in innovation and trialling a programme where GPs could prescribe fruit and veg to improve diets. Meanwhile, summer sporting events gave savvy retailers a chance to ramp up sales, and on 'Freedom Day' face covering requirements were dropped in England.

AUGUST
Supply chain issues continued to disrupt food supplies at supermarkets, but indies generally faced fewer shortages and could respond to any stocking issues more quickly than the multiples. At the same time, the removal of Covid restrictions boosted the food to go sector and convenience-led products as consumers dealt with cooking fatigue and shopping habits settled into a 'new normal'.

SEPTEMBER
The food and drink sector celebrated the return of live events with Speciality & Fine Food Fair in London. Meanwhile, the industry called for a Covid Recovery Visa to battle shortages, but the Government's sights were set further afield as it announced an initiative to help more farmers and food businesses export their products. The new scheme involves appointing dedicated 'agri-food attachés' and establishing a Food and Drink Exports Council.

OCTOBER
Throughout October, *Speciality Food,* alongside Too Good To Go, ran Sustainable Food Month to highlight environmental achievements in the fine food sector and illuminate the ways that industry players can take responsibility for making the sector a more sustainable place. Meanwhile, the Autumn Budget was revealed, and it included a decision to temporarily reduce business rates by 50% for shops and restaurants and scrap a planned increase in rates.

NOVEMBER
Sustainability was on the agenda in November too, thanks to the historic climate conference, COP26, being held in Scotland. Food and drink businesses argued that the industry wasn't represented enough in the talks. Some of the decisions made at the event included moving trillions of dollars of private finance towards supporting green technology, a pledge to reverse deforestation and an agreement to cut methane emissions.

DECEMBER
The final month of the year saw the arrival of the Omicron variant in the UK and the reintroduction of Covid-19 restrictions. At the time of writing, research is still being carried out to understand the threat that Omicron poses, but Government precautions have included bringing mask mandates back in, as well as requiring Covid passports in some locations.

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3 trends to know this month

NO AND LOW ALCOHOL



The annual alcohol moderation movement Dry January will kick off on 1st January, and those taking part have never had a tastier selection of no and low drinks to help them through the month-long event. Ensure your alcohol-free beers and botanical gin replacements are centre stage. As well as appealing to the strict zero-alcohol abstainers, these products will also jump out to customers who may have indulged a bit too much over the festive period, and younger generations where the alcohol moderation trend has taken off. Why not also try positioning a few health-focused functional drinks by your no/low selection to tempt shoppers looking for an extra feel-good benefit?



VEGAN FOOD

One in four Brits have cut back on animal products during the pandemic, according to The Vegan Society, and Sainsbury's Future of Food Report says that up to a quarter of the British population will be vegan or vegetarian by 2025. Thanks to the annual plant-based pledge Veganuary, January is the time when vegan products fly off the shelves. Push the boat out with a few new products this year, like seitan-based meat replacements or oat milk-based drinks – and don't forget about your 'accidentally vegan products' (more on this on page 34). Retailers with cafés and restaurants would be remiss not to try out new plant-based menu options this month, too.

REGENERATIVE CREDENTIALS



A couple of years ago, The Ethical Butcher came up with the idea for Regenuary, yet another foodie campaign for the start of the new year, and since then it has taken off. The initiative draws a spotlight onto products sourced from regenerative farms which prioritise soil health and sustainability. That means it is the perfect time to bring eco-friendly products to the fore to attract conscious consumers and give the brands that are giving something back a new-year boost.

Labour shortages send food and drink confidence down

Ongoing labour shortages and supply chain issues have caused confidence among food and drink business to drop, according to a recent report.

The Food and Drink Federation's (FDF) third quarter report on member sentiment found that net business confidence fell by 55% in the third quarter of 2021, marking the lowest rate since the height of the pandemic in 2020. The report revealed that almost all (93%) businesses had experienced delayed or missed outbound deliveries thanks to the supply chain disruption.

The FDF's members aren't optimistic about staff shortages, as half of respondents say they expect the permanent and temporary labour supply to decrease in the fourth quarter of the year. "These results demonstrate that confidence levels across our sector have been hit by continuing supply chain disruption," said Ian Wright, chief executive at the FDF. He warned that the issues could continue into the coming year and beyond. "On top of this, the confection of increasing uncertainty about Omicron, the UK's changing trading relationships, and the re-ignition of inflation, all threaten to undermine resilience across the sector. Many businesses now expect disruption and reduced service levels to continue right through 2022 and into 2023."

Boris Johnson shines light on food sector

The prime minister hosted a food and drink market at Downing Street to highlight the work of British food businesses.

Boris Johnson, alongside a number of cabinet members, supported businesses that are seizing opportunities for growth by exporting their goods internationally. Twelve businesses held market stalls in Downing Street to showcase their products, including Snowdonia Cheese, Loch Fyne Oysters, and Montezuma's chocolate. "It's great to see the best of British food and drink here in Downing Street," Boris Johnson said. "We currently export to 207 countries but this government is supporting British food and drink exporters to sell even more of their brilliant produce abroad."

"We are committed to ensuring that food and drink from all four corners of the UK can be and will continue to be loved across the globe," added international trade secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan. She added that the new agri-food attachés in key markets will help to unlock barriers to trade. "They are one of the many ways we are helping to open up new exporting opportunities around the world and are part of our plans for a truly Global Britain."

High street vouchers boost retailers in Northern Ireland

"The couple of weeks of spending that we have had of the Shop Local High Street Card Scheme really have made an immediate and tangible difference to shopper footfall across Northern Ireland. The over £26.5m which has now been injected into our local economy is reflected in the lift in footfall with Northern Ireland leading pack among the UK nations. Across NI we have seen a lift of over five percentage points with some towns and cities seeing a welcome surge of almost 18 percentage points of a rise in footfall."

Aodhán Connolly, Northern Ireland Retail Consortium director





The Big Question: How can fine food retailers retain and attract staff?



Andrew Burton, retail and catering advisor at Malcolm Scott Consultants and a member of the Farm Retail Association council, offers his tips

"Employee retention is fast becoming a key competitive differentiator for many industries across the world. I am regularly in touch with businesses across the UK, Europe, America and Australia and we've all got the same challenge. A company's ability to hold on to its talent, especially in rural businesses, often has ramifications for its ability to operate at a high level, without the disruptions that employee turnover can bring.

"Working alongside a number of garden centres and farm shops this past year, it is clear that the attention to gaining good quality applicants is in the detail. There are so many benefits to working for independent rural businesses, including the work-life balance, shift patterns, the influence the applicant is allowed to bring and working for an owner who sees you as a person not just a number.

"Amongst other aspects, retention of the staff is often down to culture and commitment. The interviewing stage is essential, and if you get your advert and criteria correct, hopefully this will help to monitor the quality of applicants. When you interview, I would encourage everyone to think about personality more than skills. Ideally the applicant will come with the right criteria for both, but if not, you can train skills, improving personality is another challenge."

5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR RETAILERS TO LEVERAGE IN 2022

Simon Latham, senior manager at 4C Associates



1 IMPROVING ONLINE MARGINS

It is essential that retailers ensure that they are able to run their online business at an acceptable margin over the longer term, especially as competition and consumer expectations increase. To achieve this, retailers must undertake extensive profitability analysis across both products and customers to determine what is suitable for the online channel, and what is not.

2 EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENTS

With in-store retail already being a low-margin operation, the additional costs add more pressure. The key to providing cost-effective e-commerce as a service is operational efficiency, with a relentless focus on cost. Supply chain collaboration and outsourcing may be the key to driving higher efficiency and recruiting reluctant online shoppers could provide an opportunity to further scale operations and efficiency improvements, thereby increasing margins.

3 RIGHT-SIZING BRICKS AND MORTAR

With an increased proportion of grocery sales made via online channels, the consequent reduction of in-store footfall presents an opportunity to minimise and optimise utilisation of bricks-and-mortar premises. There are also good opportunities to optimise existing space, without compromising store accessibility, by forming in-store concession partnerships. This can drive new revenue, while also developing the customer experience and attracting new customers, who would otherwise shop online or with competitors.

4 RETAINING AND ATTRACTING CUSTOMERS

Capturing, analysing and using data to better understand customer needs and create tailored sales and marketing strategies at a hyperlocal level will be key to improving customer service and retaining and attracting shoppers. It is important for fine food grocers to use loyalty schemes in ever smarter and more targeted ways to maximise market share.

5 SUSTAINABILITY

Lockdown created a renewed appreciation for the environment and local community, so if retailers can source food locally to support regional producers and minimise food transport miles, they can meet the growing customer desire to shop more sustainably. This can provide a point of differentiation with competitors and provide opportunities to create higher margin product ranges. By shortening the supply chain, retailers could also benefit from reduced supply chain risk and cost.



THE STORY BEHIND THE STATS

87%

The proportion of top UK supermarkets that have called for an extension of up to six months or more to the current delay on new legislation over high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) food products. The survey by AI nutrition technology company Spoon Guru revealed that a quarter of respondents working at the top 11 supermarkets feel that they are uninformed about what the HFSS legislation will entail.

4/5

The number of SMEs that have faced increased prices from suppliers over the past six months. The rising cost of raw materials has led to inflation across the food and drink sector. Many SMEs are absorbing these costs rather than passing them on to consumers, according to MarketFinance. The majority of SMEs are generating revenue despite the increased costs, and are prepared to accept up to a 20% drop in revenue.

20k

The number of small businesses in Scotland lost during a single year of the Covid crisis, according to official statistics. According to the Business in Scotland statistical release, between March 2020 and March 2021, the estimated number of small businesses fell by 5.4%, or 19,805.

-9

The average level of shopper confidence recorded by market analysts at IGD in November, up from -11 in October. Shopper confidence increased across most demographic groups, particularly those aged 25 and over and lower income households.

93%

How many UK retailers say sustainability is a 'focus' or 'big focus' for the next 12 months. When B2B marketplace business Creoate asked how retailers are making their business more sustainable, the most popular response was by 'choosing products which are more sustainable/eco-friendly' (84%), followed by 'stocking more local products' (68%), and 'reviewing [their] own packaging/bags' (64%).

31%

The no and low drink sector is forecast to grow 31% by volume by 2024, according to IWSR Drinks Market Analysis, after growing 17% to reach a value of $741m in the UK last year. The multiples are betting on growth in alcohol-free drinks, with sales of zero-alcohol spirits at Tesco soaring by 106% in 2021 and by 91% at Sainsbury's. While zero-alcohol spirits currently only make up 0.6% of the market, they are growing fast.



Speciality social enterprise café opens in Mayfair

Fair Shot Café, a social enterprise selling European food and speciality coffee, opened its first flagship venue in Mayfair's South Molton Street, Grosvenor Britain & Ireland said. The café was founded by Bianca Tavella who started the business to address the 94% unemployment levels for young people with learning disabilities.

Amelia Bright, executive director of Grosvenor Britain & Ireland, said, "Workplaces need to embrace all kinds of diversity. With Fair Shot, we aim to make real social impact on how business owners hire, train and support this community of extremely willing, extremely capable individuals."

With more shoppers than ever wearing their values on their sleeves, it's no surprise to see more social enterprises springing up in the fine food sector. There are currently more than 70,000 across the country, and retail and hospitality are among the top sectors in which social enterprises operate.

Fine fresh produce retail experience opens

A new artisan food market has opened on the ground floor of the South Kensington Club in the heart of Kensington and Chelsea.



Fine restaurant, hotel and members club supplier Smith & Brock has opened its debut retail store, The Market by Smith & Brock, which serves hand-selected fresh fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy, charcuterie, wines and more. Founders Joe and Nick Fowler aim to create a retail experience wherein customers will be introduced to new and unique flavours and products they were previously unfamiliar with.







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Q&A: Regenerative farming

WHAT SHOULD RETAILERS KNOW ABOUT SELLING REGENERATIVELY FARMED PRODUCTS?

Bertie Matthews, Matthews Cotswold Flour: "We can no longer produce food in a way that destroys our soils. In the long run this system will fail, our food system will fail. Sourcing food from regenerative sustainable sources helps to increase soil health. Without our six inches of fertile soil we have no food. Let's look after it!

Francis Clarke, Trewithen Dairy: "As producers, we have a responsibility to lead by example when it comes to finding solutions to tackle climate change. To ensure pioneering techniques such as regenerative farming get the recognition they deserve, it is in our interests to talk openly about the work we are doing and take a collective approach with other like-minded producers.

HOW CAN RETAILERS BETTER EDUCATE THEIR CUSTOMERS ABOUT REGENERATIVE PRACTICES?

Bertie: "Come and meet some of our farmers. There are a number of great people to follow online, too, and they can host a 'Future of food' event and campaign celebrating and giving regenerative pioneers a voice."

Francis: "We actively encourage dialogue among farmers to share best practices and learnings, to support the growth of regenerative farming. Projecting a consistent message will appeal to consumers and may ultimately lead to better defining, auditing and certifying of regenerative farming."

Why fine food retailers should champion eco labels

The food and drink industry can lead the way in Britain's net zero strategy, yet one issue that remains at the heart of this strategy is consumer education.

More shoppers than ever before are looking for concrete ways to reduce their carbon footprint, and altering their food and drink habits offers a simple solution, in theory. However, the reality of calculating the environmental impact of food and drink products is not so straightforward "The carbon footprint of food items is very complex, covering lots of different factors like farming methods, transportation, packaging and even cooking," said Anya Doherty, CEO of Foodsteps, a carbon footprint assessment company.

"Synthesising all of this information can be overwhelming for consumers, and leads to a tendency to overly focus on just one area of emissions, most commonly transportation," she told *Speciality Food*. Businesses like Foodsteps are fighting to make carbon labelling the norm in the food industry, which would make these choices easier for consumers. "Having labels can help bring all of this information together into a single score that makes it accessible for everyone, whether or not they have any prior knowledge of the emissions of different foods," she added.

Carbon labels have already had significant support from the public. Two-thirds of consumers support carbon labelling on products, a 2020 survey by YouGov for The Carbon Trust revealed. Two-thirds of consumers also said they are more likely to think positively about a brand that could demonstrate it had lowered the carbon footprint of its products.

Shoppers are willing to put their money where their mouth is: another study in 2013 found that consumers would pay a premium of nearly 5% for a steak that was labelled as producing 20% less carbon.

Government unveils plan to ban single-use plastics

Many retailers have already started weighing up their options for reducing plastic packaging on-site, but with Government regulations potentially getting stricter, now is the time for those who are falling behind to act. Single-use plastics like cutlery and plates could be banned in England, the Government has warned, under proposals in a 12-week public consultation.

"There is growing recognition of the damage that plastics cause to our environment and marine life in particular. We want to reduce the use of plastics in packaging and ban its use in items linked to littering," environment secretary George Eustice said. "We have already banned plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds and now plan to extend the ban to cutlery and balloon sticks where alternative materials, like wood, can be used."

It follows the passage of the Environment Act, which includes powers to place charges on single-use items. The call to evidence will also explore whether a charge could be added to products like single-use cups or sachets.

Marcus Gover, CEO of WRAP, said these steps are "essential if we are to turn the tide on plastic pollution and keep plastic out of the environment." Retailers could get on board with single-use plastic reduction by swapping for reusable or recyclable alternatives where possible, as well as by installing refill stations, discussing how to cut plastic use with suppliers and stocking brands with sustainable packaging.





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"Hello 2022 –bring it on!"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

I know by the time you read this it will be 2022. However, before we face up to the realities of the New Year, I would like to reflect on an element of 2021.

In particular, Thanksgiving. This delightful British export* to America has for about 40 years enlivened sales in the month of November. *(Courtesy of the Pilgrim Fathers – tongue in the vicinity of cheek).

A lot of what we experienced will be important training for the New Year.

We originally stumbled on this great Other Side Of The Pond tradition because a number of expats in Chelsea kept trying to buy turkeys in November. Eventually the penny dropped and our range evolved into selling a number of beloved American products to accompany the precious bird.

In this mission we have been greatly assisted over the years by Damian Curzon Price and his team at Americatessen who saw the gap in the market and developed it along with other wholesalers who later followed suit. I am pleased to report we even launched a Ben & Jerry product at one stage, but that is another story. The net result with Thanksgiving is that November is by far and away our second busiest month of the year, helped by the Halloween afterglow at the beginning and the Black Friday scramble at the end. Throw in a local Christmas lights switch on for good measure and it is the perfect cocktail for stressed-out speciality food retailers.

Yet, of course, 2021 has been a lot more exacting than previous years. It is true to say that import difficulties have arisen before. Storms, bad weather and shipping diversions have disrupted supplies from North America in the past, and ice in the Hudson Bay seemed a perennial problem for Campbell's soups arriving in the UK.

But this year Brexit, haulage issues and red tape have slowed goods across Europe. For example, Pepperidge Farm Stuffing, a firm favourite, languished in Rotterdam for four weeks while awaiting containers of other goods to board. There was also a poorer pumpkin crop and similar supply issues in the US, apparently.

There were other factors at play as well. On the aggravating side of the spectrum were a projected turkey shortage, bad weather in Thanksgiving week, a tube strike and the travel corridor reopening between the UK and the US which probably lured potential customers away.

On the mitigating side there had been good weather until the last week of November, we were able to swap 'fungible foods' on a like for like basis, American customers are very good at improvising in order to maintain the spirit of Thanksgiving and finally, a number of our lines also sell well in the run-up to Christmas, so there will be little wastage on the stocks we have held.

For the final trading result of Thanksgiving 2021, sales ended up about 2.4% down on 2020 and 3.5% up on 2019. I feared it was going to be a lot worse than this.

However, we expect the November trading micro climate to continue into the New Year. Covid-19 variant dodging, price increases, supply problems and staff recruitment headaches are all likely to be aggravating prospects. But as in November there will be mitigating factors. Spring and the sap rising, vaccination rates increasing, Platinum Jubilee street parties developing and hopefully a realisation that, all going well, we have survived the worst retail recession since World War II.

So it is probably a good time to give thanks to Thanksgiving and the great American customers it brings with it, and the fact that the concept of speciality foods has yet again proved resilient throughout a singularly challenging period.

Hello 2022 – bring it on!

> "Covid-19 variant dodging, price increases, supply problems and staff recruitment headaches are all likely to be aggravating prospects. But as in November there will be mitigating factors. Spring and the sap rising, vaccination rates increasing, Platinum Jubilee street parties developing and hopefully a realisation that, all going well, we have survived the worst retail recession since World War II"

10 buzzwords to watch in 2022

As the food industry dives into a new year, experts have predicted the food trends that will be on consumers' lips over the next 12 months.

1 FLEXITARIAN FOOD
Retailers take note: the flexitarian movement is going strong. In Whole Foods Market's latest Trends Council report, 'reducetarianism' was dubbed a top trend to watch for 2022, perfect for "plant-curious eaters" who aren't ready to give up meat entirely. The plant-based food sector is certainly growing – online food platform ShelfNow said between 2020 and 2021 sales of vegetarian food products increased by 156% and vegan product sales jumped 150% and products like dairy and meat alternatives are a growing market.

2 BIGGER, BETTER BREAKFAST
The home working boom caused a shift in consumers' grocery buying habits – and with many still yet to return full-time to the office, cutting out the commute means more consumers have time for a leisurely breakfast. In fact, during the first lockdown, one survey found that Brits ate eggs for breakfast 68% more times than in the previous year, while bacon sales were up 21% and pastries were up 25%, according to Waitrose.

3 MUSHROOMS
Versatile mushrooms are not brand new to the superfood category, but their cult-like status is now reaching the masses. Not only is the consumption of ordinary mushrooms on the rise, but they're being found in more and more unexpected places, from mushroom powder adding punchy flavour to alternative meats to varieties like Lion's Mane adding functional benefits to beverages.

4 BOTTLED COCKTAILS
Convenient, cost-effective and tasty – there's nothing not to love about the premium pre-batched bottled cocktails on the market today. Whether sold in ready-to-drink cans or in larger bottles that consumers can return to for an evening tipple, pre-mixed cocktails have shed their less than sparkling reputation as speciality drink industry brands revamp the category to ride the wave of premiumisation in drinks. Waitrose expects pre-batched bottled cocktails to be one of the top future trends in food and drink.

5 NOSTALGIC DESSERTS
The novelty of retro foods has not worn off on British consumers, who are still returning to nostalgic recipes for a dose of comfort food. Younger generations are getting involved too, with one video of a school-dinner-style traybake receiving more than 100,000 views on TikTok. On Waitrose's website, searches of knickerbocker glory were up 171%, the retailer said.

6 JAPANESE FLAVOURS
Dishes inspired by foreign countries have flourished in Britain since the pandemic hit, and experts have tracked a particular interest in Japanese flavours in the build-up to and following the Tokyo Olympics. At Waitrose, sales of the retailer's own-brand umami paste were up 17% compared with 2019, while sushi sales saw a 54% increase. Consumers were also keen to try their hand at creating their own sushi, with sales of sushi mats up 57% and nori sales up 56% compared to the same period last year.

7 LEVANTINE FOOD
Consumers are also inspired by the food of the Levant, which comprises a large area in the Eastern Mediterranean. Searches for Levantine on Waitrose's website rose by more than 2,500%, the retailer said, with products like pomegranate molasses, Turkish Urfa chilli flakes and Feta parcels flying off the shelves.

8 CBD
The CBD market has seen an explosion of interest in recent years, thanks to the growing demand for healthy foods and CBD's claimed benefits for mental health and wellness. Increasingly, however, CBD products are moving away from the health food shops and into drinks and food products, so it is certainly an area worth exploring for fine food retailers. ShelfNow has noted that alongside a growing interest for CBD, products like Cannasa, a premium CBD-infused drink, are increasingly in demand.

9 POTATO MILK
Could potato milk be the next big thing to disrupt the vegan milk alternatives sector? The innovative brand DUG has caught the eye of experts, from Waitrose's buyers to food consultant Heather Morris of SHFoodie, who are excited by its sustainable credentials as well as its creamy flavour. With alternative-milks like oat milk and almond milk continuing to penetrate the diary market, there is good reason to believe the hype that plant-based milk will continue to grow in popularity.

10 SPICY FOODS
From traditional spices like garam masala and cardamom to South East Asian flavours like gochujang or American-style barbecue rubs, Waitrose says Brits are showing a growing interest in adding a pop of flavour to their dishes. In fact, sales of herbs and spices at the retailer are up 41% last year after a strong 2020. Top performers in this category include Middle Eastern spices, tying in with the trend for Levantine food, and speciality salts.





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PHILIPPA CHRISTER
IFE

Wow, here we are, 2022! What a rollercoaster it has been for our industry. As I reflect on the past two years, it's amazing to think of the resilience, innovation and inspiration that's come from both speciality food and drink businesses and independent retailers across the UK.

The IFE, International Food & Drink Event, team have naturally been keeping our fingers on the pulse of industry trends, and, as always, consumer attitudes and behaviours have been hugely influential in how retailers and food and drink businesses have approached the challenges of the past year. For those unfamiliar with our event, for over 40 years IFE has been a centre of industry innovation and new product discovery in the world of food and drink, welcoming over 30,000 key industry buyers and showcasing 1,500 exciting suppliers. It's an unmissable sourcing opportunity for retailers and wholesalers looking to get ahead of the latest trends and grow their businesses.

When the event returns on 21-23 March 2022 at ExCeL London this will be no different, despite and (even because of) the challenges of the past two years. The value of trade exhibitions – of face-to-face networking, hearing first-hand the story of a business and being able to taste a wide range of products – has become clearer than ever and we can't wait for you to experience everything we have in store. Wholesalers operating in the food and drink sector are an important audience for IFE and we're thrilled to be one of the newest members of the Federation of Wholesale Distributors. As Louis Tsaparelli of Davin Foods told us, it's vital for wholesalers to build close relationships with suppliers, see the development of new trends first-hand and discover and sample innovative products. We're excited to be showcasing a huge variety of popular product categories in March, and to be providing opportunities for our buyers to discover the next big thing.

VEGAN & PLANT-BASED

Across the board, from consumer buying habits to new product launches to investment and venture capital trends, vegan & plant-based is booming. Matthew Glover, MD of Veg Capital and Co-Founder of Veganuary and VFC (Vegan Fried Chicken), one of our speakers at IFE 2022, has commented that as an investor in the vegan food market his focus is squarely on removing animals from the food system. This means the vast majority of investments are in innovative companies aiming to directly replace products such as meat, fish, egg and dairy.

In response to growing interest from retailers, from specialist supermarkets to large multiples, and to the explosion of new products and businesses, IFE is introducing a dedicated Vegan & Plant Based Section, in partnership with the Vegan Society, for 2022. We're excited to be joined at the show by big players in the vegan and plant-based sector such as The Meatless Farm and Beyond Meat, companies that have been leading the way when it comes to innovation in the sector, and exciting new businesses like Plant Alternative, which delivers authentic Asian chef-inspired restaurant quality meals nationwide.

INTERNATIONAL INNOVATION

As the name might suggest, in addition to being the world's largest showcase of UK food & drink businesses, IFE is a vital hub for the import and exports market and an invaluable chance for UK retailers and wholesalers to meet and build relationships with innovative international suppliers. Partnerships such as our recently announced collaboration with Pakistan Britain Business Council, alongside exhibiting bodies such as the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, provide unrivalled access to international suppliers new to the UK food and drink market, with advice and guidance on hand from partners such as the Food & Drink Exporters Association. More than 100 countries will be represented at the event, including a number of national and regional pavilions from Turkey, Brazil, Switzerland, France, Netherlands, the US, Portugal and more.

THE FUTURE OF FOOD

The Future Food Stage at IFE will be partnering with some of the industry's leading agencies and retail leaders to look ahead to the trends of tomorrow. Expect insightful consumer behaviour analysis from IGD, sustainability trends from thefoodpeople's Charles Banks, vital market research from FMCG Gurus and guidance from Euromonitor on meeting the needs of the health-focused customer.

New for 2022, IFE will be partnering with sister events Hotel, Restaurant & Catering (HRC), The Pub Show, London Produce Show and IFE Manufacturing, which we're excited to be launching as the UK's dedicated showcase of end-to-end food and drink manufacturing and product development. Focussing on everything from packaging solutions and technologies to manufacturing to ingredients, along with a jam-packed seminar programme on the Innovation Platform, this show is a perfect extension of IFE's offering to the food and drink community.

Consumers go all out, despite inflation

Inflation is causing prices to rise, with data from Kantar revealing that the average cost of a roast dinner for four reached £27.48, up 3.4% compared with last year. But consumers weren't deterred by higher prices. The market researcher revealed that shoppers still purchased finer products in December.

Shoppers still wanted to "have some fun and make this Christmas extra special," said Fraser McKevitt, head of retail and consumer insight, Kantar Worldpanel Division, UK. "Price inflation doesn't seem to be denting their desire to treat themselves and loved ones," Fraser said. In fact, supermarket premium own-label ranges were the fastest-growing ranges in store. "Last December, we saw sales of premium own-label lines hit more than £587 million, and the figure could be even bigger this year," he said.

Further research from Kantar revealed that spending was expected to rise across the board as more consumers look to enjoy bigger celebrations, but the rate of those expecting to spend more on food and drink (23%) was higher than gifts (16%), home goods and furnishings (12%) and travel (11%).

> "While there are some global issues at play, there are levers that the Government can pull to improve current business conditions, for example, the introduction of an energy price cap for SMEs and providing more temporary visas in the hardest hit sectors through expansion of the Shortage Occupation List"
>
> **SHEVAUN HAVILAND, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE BRITISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE**

Taste for global cuisine accelerates

Britain's appetite for travel-inspired flavours rocketed during the pandemic – but trend has long been on the rise. "You only have to look at the nation's favourite takeaways to realise that Britain has been inspired by global cuisines for quite some time," said Jyoti Patel, CEO and founder of Red Rickshaw, the largest world ingredient supplier in the UK, and FeastBox, a world food recipe box. "With social media opening various windows into different cultures, people in Britain are now on the hunt for authentic flavours and high-quality ingredients that often cannot be found in their regular UK supermarkets. As difficult as lockdown was, many also used that time at home to be more adventurous in the kitchen, trying new worldly foods and cooking methods," Jyoti continued. "This hasn't gone away." According to market researcher Mintel, with many people saying they improved their cooking skills during the lockdowns, world cuisine offers an opportunity to tap into the increased interest in cooking from scratch through home meal kits.



SMALL BUSINESSES BUILDING COMMUNITIES

We discover the important role small businesses are playing in their local areas

"My online farmer's market enables my customer to purchase from small producers that champion regenerative farming, providing seasonal local food and alternatives to a mass produced ultra-processed diet. We work to reduce food miles and food waste, ordering only what is needed and having one delivery, not many from each producer. Being able to offer this service to my community is something I'm extremely passionate about, and to see my customers stopping and chatting to each other when they collect their orders is a joy to behold, especially when they are swapping hints and tips with someone they have only just met. New friendships have been made, something I remember from years ago when visiting the local shops with my mom."
Ruth Redgate, founder of Mercia Food Hub

"Being a small business, my community means everything. Starting up as a team of one can be quite lonely, but being able to connect with my local community and online small business community makes me feel like I am part of a bigger team. I use other small businesses as suppliers, where possible, as we all support each other and hope to grow together. Community gives me a sense of camaraderie and often the motivation to ensure my small business thrives."
Tamsin Robinson, Bakester Box

"Small businesses work incredibly hard to serve their customers, staff and communities. They don't ask for recognition, but they deserve it hugely, particularly for the way they go above and beyond to help people, particularly throughout this pandemic."
Michelle Ovens CBE, director of Small Business Saturday UK

"Food and drink is a delicious way to bring family and friends together and that's something we very much enjoy. Evviva la dolce vita!"
Maurizio and Sweet D'Appollino, Maurizio Dining & Co

> "Historically, shoppers had barriers to buying fresh online, but it's now clear the British shopper is more confident buying it online. Above all, UK consumers are following a global movement and shifting their shopping habits towards an omnichannel experience"
>
> **MIKE WATKINS, HEAD OF RETAIL AND BUSINESS INSIGHTS AT NIELSENIQ**





Bellavita acquires European Pizza & Pasta Show

Bellavita Expo will launch the UK's largest specialised food and drink trade show for the hotel, restaurant and café sector following its acquisition of European Pizza & Pasta Show (EPPS), the company has said.

For the eighth edition of Bellavita Expo London on 22nd and 23rd June 2022 at Olympia London, the leading European pizza and pasta industry event will join the show to create an "unmissable" event for foodservice and retail buyers.

Aldo Mazzocco, CEO of Bellavita Expo Ltd, said the move was an important and strategic acquisition that secures Bellavita's leadership in the food and beverage market. "Together with the management of Fiere di Parma and Veronafiere and with the support of our European foodservice stakeholders, we will unite and relaunch the industry. Over the next three years, EPPS aims to become the largest specialised event in Europe, effectively servicing the F&B sector," he added.

Organised with the support of Vinitaly and Cibus, and in association with The Pizza, Pasta & Italian Food Association (PAPA), the two events will complement each other to create the largest trade show dedicated to food, drinks, and specialised equipment. Stanislava Blagoeva-Duschell, MD of EPPS, said the show was happy to join a larger family of events. "This will give us an unprecedented opportunity to develop new content, to add new industries and enhance the offer to our visitors and buyers," he said.

"We look forward to creating a new and exciting omnichannel platform for all our clients year after year, growing with the industry and for the industry. We are stronger together!"

In addition to producers of pasta, pizza, flour, kitchen equipment, charcuterie and cheeses, plant-based and free-from products, as well as wine and beverages, the exhibition will expand its sectors to include artisan bakery equipment and suppliers and shop and restaurant tech services. In addition to the Bellavita Wine Stage and the European Pizza Championship, Bellavita will also launch the inaugural License To Bake – Artisan Bakery Cup competition.



Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Hunter & Gather launch new mayos



Hunter & Gather has extended its range of 'clean condiments' with the launch of three new 100% olive oil mayonnaises.

There are three variants within the new mayonnaise range: Classic, Olive & Lemon and Horseradish, each of which is made using 100% light olive oil, British free-range egg yolks, apple cider vinegar and pink Himalayan salt.

The creamy mayonnaises are free from milk, sugar, grains, and seed oils, making them suitable for diabetics as well as those following a keto, low-carbohydrate, gluten-free or dairy-free diet.

Amy Moring, co-founder of Hunter & Gather, said, "As pioneers of 'clean' condiments (sugar, grain and seed oil-free mayonnaise, dressings, and sauces), our new 100% Olive Oil mayonnaise is a natural move for us. Free-from inflammatory seed oils commonly found in other brands, ours is made with 100% light tasting olive oil from ancient groves in the Cordoba region of Spain, which are pressed in the traditional way, meaning absolutely no chemical hexanes or solvents are used. The result is a product that's pure, light and delicious, packed with healthful monosaturated fats and polyphenols, and with absolutely no added nasties."

hunterandgatherfoods.com

Pistachio milk hits market



Nut product-specialists Borna Foods have released a new product into the nut 'milk' category: Pistachio Drink.

Available in 500ml cartons in both unsweetened and slightly sweetened options, and containing added calcium and vitamin B12 from natural sources, the new launches are high in fibre and low in calories – ideal for the growing milk alternative market.

Behnam Heydaripour, director of Borna Foods, said, "I found myself becoming frustrated with the lack of 'real' nut milk innovation taking place in the UK, which has allowed oat and soy milks to bed in, but believe pistachio milk will be a discerning game-changer!"

bornafoods.com



Pinkster unveils new 'naked' gin

Cambridgeshire-based Pinkster Gin has released its triple juniper base gin – usually macerated with fresh raspberries –as Naked Pinkster.

Stephen Marsh, managing director at Pinkster, said, "The truth is, we've been hiding our light under a bushel for far too long. Unlike many of our pink peers, Pinkster has long been acknowledged as a dry gin and that's because we refused to cut corners on the quality of our core spirit.

"With its subtle notes and hint of pepper, this juniper-forward gin provided the perfect foil for the fresh fruit that we've built our reputation on. Eight years later, it's now time to bare all and introduce Naked Pinkster as a quality gin in its own right."

pinkstergin.com



New snacks celebrate the lupin bean

A new brand has emerged into the fine food sector with a mission to highlight the lupin bean.

Tarwi has launched with two products – Lummus and Marinated Lupin Beans – which are available in a range of flavours. Lummus, a hummus-inspired dip, is available in Original, Herbs, Sundried Tomatoes and Beetroot flavours. The Marinated Lupin Beans are available in three flavours: Sea Salt; Basil; and Chilli.

A Tarwi spokesperson said, "Our mission is to normalise the access to healthier foods by creating simple, tasty and convenient products, that customers can appreciate and understand."

tarwi.co.uk

Clearspring launches non-soya miso made from chickpeas

Japanese and organic fine food specialist Clearspring has added a new miso variant to its range.

The Organic Unpasteurised Japanese Chickpea Miso is made from whole organic chickpeas, mixed with rice and koji culture.

Maria Dawson, director at Clearspring, said, "We have finally mastered the perfect non-soya recipe miso which delivers on quality and flavour. There has been huge demand for us to launch this miso, and it is on-target to be amongst our most successful launches ever."

clearspring.co.uk





Saicho offers a rare taste of the East



Saicho, the premium sparkling tea brand, has launched its new Rare Tea Collection to offer tea connoisseurs a chance to experience some of the world's rarest teas.

First to launch is Eight Immortals: a Chinese Oolong tea which has been named after one of China's best-known myths and is a rare Dan Cong tea cultivar.

Designed to be served chilled in a Champagne glass and with cheese or lightly spiced dishes, the sparkling tea offers aromas of ginger and nectarine, and flavours of mango, tangerine and melon with a subtle savouriness and bitterness and slightly tannic finish.

Charlie Winkworth-Smith, founder of Saicho, said, "With our new Rare Tea Collection, we want to showcase some of the finest teas in the world. Inspired by the Asian tradition of tea gifting, we hope that the Rare Tea Collection will be a new way to carry this tradition forward."

saichodrinks.com



Superfoodio makes peanut butter to-go

Husband and wife team Nirali and Jagir Mankodi have created an on-the-go snack for peanut butter lovers.

Superfoodio peanut butter buttons are available in four flavours: Original, Original Plus, Coco Crunch and PBJ, and are made using a maximum of five ingredients including peanuts, coconut blossom sugar and sea salt.

High in fibre and containing no refined sugar or palm oil, each pack contains up to 6g of protein and less than 4g of sugar, so are suited to on-the-go, health-conscious consumers.

Nirali and Jagir Mankodi, founders of Superfoodio, said, "We wanted a simpler way to enjoy peanut buttery goodness on-the-go. The problem with a jar (or a squeezy pack) is that you always end up with sticky fingers and an oily mess! That's why we created our Peanut Butter Buttons that you can hold in your hand. They are the perfect snack to satisfy that peanut butter craving anywhere, anytime. No jars, no mess, no fuss!"

superfoodio.com

Berczy releases Winter Cola



Berczy, producer of hard seltzers for the UK market, has launched a Winter Cola variant into its range.

Available until March, the new flavour brings together flavours of the kola nut and lime into their blend of four times-distilled spirit and British sparkling water.

The new launch is designed to show that hard seltzer is not just a refreshing drink for hot weather, and that it can be enjoyed throughout the year.

Nick Graham, co-founder of Berczy, said, "We are bringing together a number of flavour trends into our first limited edition flavour, with natural cola becoming increasingly prevalent in soft drinks. After six months of research, development and taste testing, we have delicately balanced the flavours of kola nut and lime into an all-natural, refreshing and light alcoholic drink for the colder months."

"Hard seltzer is often seen as a summer-focused drink, but we are looking to change that perception with the British public. We are also really excited to launch our new flavour into exclusive four-pack multi-packs, a format that is becoming increasingly popular."

berczydrinks.com

"Online shopping: the new retail environment"



LAWRENCE BARNETT
WONDERLAND DESIGN

Before the days of online shopping, the most influential designers claimed that packaging design was easy. All you needed to make the case to consumers was a brutally simple idea that drew upon the brand's visual strengths. And, hey presto, a beautifully simple pack design that presented the brand and its product benefits to brilliant effect.

In the years since, we've seen so much change. Not least, a revolution in food; huge shifts in consumer lifestyles; tighter regulation; ever increasing environmental issues and less dependence on advertising as a main broadcast medium. All of which has heaped greater pressure on the pack to do and say more.

And as the food revolution grew, there has been even more to highlight – vegan, less salt, no added sugar, organic, gluten-free, yeast-free, added vitamins, no preservatives, natural ingredients etc... and that's before you get to the humble product descriptor.

Consequently, designers have adapted to the demands of the pack using ever more creative ideas to protect the integrity of the brand and keep messaging hierarchies as clear as possible. However, there's no denying that packs on our shelves today contain a huge amount of visual and verbal communication.

But the explosion in online shopping – so vital to smaller and medium-sized brands in particular – has made packaging design even more challenging.

Standing out, presenting the brand and product offer on the physical shelf has always been the challenge. Now, packs have to work on a screen roughly the size of your palm. Not only brand and product information but also size, weight and pack format need to be integral part of the design so shoppers can easily choose the right product.

So, packaging designers have to adapt once more and embed another discipline into their skills armoury – the art of online packaging design. Or do they?

That pack design simplicity from a few years ago, before the food revolution took hold, is a useful steer for how to be brutally simple with the use of branding and product information for online packaging design.

We are doing a lot of this kind of work. And it's not just a case of enlarging everything. Consider your message hierarchy for online presentation so that you only work with what's essential. Look at 'short-handing' any graphics or imagery that can clutter up valuable space – the pack still needs some clear space! And perhaps your brand needs or should make use of navigation graphics to highlight key product functionality. Then there is the incorporation of size/weight and pack format into the design so shoppers don't end up with a conditioner rather than a shampoo or a snack pack rather than a sharing pack.

Whilst it might seem daunting to get your physical pack to translate easily online, it can be quite a liberating exercise to explore how your pack can be optimised to work effectively on a mobile device.

It might even give you some great ideas about how to improve your physical pack too.

> "It can be quite a liberating exercise to explore how your pack can be optimised"



COMMENTATORS



JAMES WITHERS
SCOTLAND FOOD & DRINK



CHRIS GREENWOOD
VISITSCOTLAND



ROSIE JACK
BOWHOUSE



IAIN STIRLING
ARBIKIE DISTILLERY



PETER DIGNAN
LOST LOCH SPIRITS



ROBERT THAIN
HOUSE OF BRUAR

SCOTLAND
LAND OF PLENTY

The country's breathtaking scenery is home to some of the world's most renowned and inventive produce, ideal for discerning independents



Rugged landscapes, awe-inspiring views and hearty fare; Scotland has a lot going for it, not least its fantastic array of food and drink. While its traditional fare is revered around the world – Scotland's whisky exports are estimated to currently stand at £3.8 billion – that's not to say that the country's producers are stuck in the past. On the contrary, its food and drink makers are combining heritage with innovation in a truly unique way, making Scottish produce one of the best investments independents across the UK can make for their shelf space.

Food plays a vital role in the country's domestic and tourism market. According to research from Visit Scotland, 20% of visitors' expenditure (pre-pandemic) was spent on food and drink – a contribution of around £1 billion to the Scottish economy. And according to James Withers, chief executive of Scotland Food & Drink, it is the country's natural attributes that make it a powerhouse of great quality produce. "Scotland is increasingly renowned globally as a land of food and drink," he says. "We're blessed with a strong agricultural tradition and one of the longest coastlines in Europe, all fertile ground for producing some of the best quality products and ingredients." While there is a handful of food and drink products for which Scotland is most famed – think whisky, smoked salmon and shortbread – they're far from the whole menu. "We are fortunate that for a relatively small country we have an incredible diversity of products," he says. "Alongside a rich tradition of farming, fishing, food and drink production there is an increasing amount of innovation too as producers aim to lead the way on the big trends, not least sustainability and health-enhancing foods." This sustainability-minded approach should reap rewards for Scotland over the coming years, with Scottish companies "leading the way" in climate-friendly food production.

The tourist pound

Brand Scotland is internationally revered, having "strengthened hugely over the last decade, both overseas and within our own shores and has become synonymous with excellence and high quality produce," according to James. VisitScotland states that two thirds of Scotland's visitors think quality food is an important factor when deciding where to go on holiday and are prepared to pay up to 15% more for produce of Scottish or regional origin.

Chris Greenwood, VisitScotland's senior tourism insight manager, told *Speciality Food*, "Scotland's food and drink has long been a jewel in our tourism crown, and our coasts and waters play a key role in shaping the country's incredible larder. Our Themed Year – the Year of Coasts and Waters 20/21 has encouraged visitors to dive into the amazing food and drinks experiences on offer and celebrate them through exciting virtual and now in-person events. And the journey of Scottish food and drink will also be highlighted in the next Themed Year – the Year of Stories 2022."

The role of food-loving consumers and retailers in supporting the food and drink sector is more apparent now than ever. "There has never been a more important time to support local food and drink producers and businesses – to support traditional skills and food heritage, lessen the food miles, and help boost the economies of the local communities in which these businesses are based," says Chris. "In the wake of Covid-19, it is important that people support local businesses, and Scotland is ready to welcome visitors, serving stunning scenery, mouth-watering food and drink or a totally new experience."

"Like so many other industries, Scotland's food and drink sector is still in the process of recovering from Covid and adapting to enormous challenges brought about Brexit," says Scotland Food & Drink's James. Thankfully, help is at hand: "Fortunately, we have industry and government working hand in hand through the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership with a recovery plan delivering a whole suite of business support and market development measures." The best is yet to come, says James: "I genuinely think we'll bounce back stronger than ever."

For Rosie Jack, manager of Bowhouse in Fife, Scottish produce – with a local focus – is the heart and soul of the work she does. "Our focus has been on strengthening the local food market," she explains, "creating an environment where raw ingredients from the surrounding fields and coast is transformed into something exceptional and made available locally." Supporting local supply chains and small businesses is key to Bowhouse, and "to supporting a vibrant community in this area," says Rosie.

There are a number of exceptional producers based at Bowhouse which have increased its visibility to the wider fine food industry – and food-loving consumers – across the UK. These products, from organic brewer Futtle to BBC Food & Farming Award-winning flour producer, Scotland the Bread. The site also hosts monthly Market Weekends, welcoming visitors from near and far to sample the wares of the best independent producers from across Fife and Scotland.

A valuable landscape to respect

The breathtaking landscapes of Scotland certainly have international appeal and feed directly into the country's reputation for fine food and drink, and for a lot of the country's food producers it's vital that they maintain the sanctity of the land. "Scotland has a global reputation for producing top-quality produce in a pristine natural environment," says Rosie. "Certainly here at Bowhouse our focus is on supporting regenerative agriculture and farming organically. We're surrounded by productive coast and farmland and, when we look after it in this way, the variety of food and

> "HMRC have become a lot more open to smaller producers, and has been the biggest change for hundreds of years and it has transformed the spirits industry in Scotland"





drink we're able to produce here is vast. The business we work with are selected because they're working with the kind of ethos that supports this."

As well as working hard to maintain the environmental landscape, the team at Bowhouse aims to strengthen supply chain ecosystems across the sector. "From the outset, the concept of Bowhouse was devised in response to a gap in supply chains. We aim to create a habitat for food and drink makers here at Bowhouse that encourages them to create exceptional produce using local ingredients, and this in turn supports a wider food and drink landscape and stronger local sourcing here. This has brought a number of producers to the fore who wouldn't otherwise have found a place in established supply chains," she continues. The business's monthly market weekends play a role, and have helped to pique consumer interest and allow for what Rosie describes as "an open, transparent approach to producing something delicious with integrity, which is really what people want. The regular rhythm of the producers based here at Bowhouse connects the local community to the produce and the markets showcase the wider Scottish scene."

This sustainable approach is shared by Arbikie Distillery, launched on the Arbikie Highland Estate in November 2014 with a focus on field-to-bottle distilling. The Stirling family have been farming for over 400 years and the brothers are the latest custodians of their family lands with their focus on building a long-term, legacy business. "Arbikie grows, distils, matures and bottles its family of sustainable spirits at Lunan Bay on Scotland' sunny east coast," explains Iain Stirling, director. "Sustainability is at the core of the business – for every decision made, Arbikie always considers the environmental impact and how they can do better, with their distilling from start to finish using negligible miles for its production," he continues.

Within the Arbikie Distillery range of gins, vodkas and whiskies is their world-first climate positive spirit, Nàdar, distilled from peas which removes the need for artificial fertiliser use, resulting in a carbon saving of >1.53kg per bottle. "This innovation also creates the opportunity for gin brands to consider buying pea-based instead of wheat-based white spirit with a vastly reduced environmental impact," explains Iain. Arbikie grows all that it needs to distil, including chillies, lemongrass, juniper and limes, as well as the traditional farm crops of barley, peas, potatoes and wheat. The business's sustainable mission doesn't end there. "Our



PRIDE OF SCOTLAND

Wow your customers with our pick of Scotland's food greats

STAG BAKERIES



1 Based in the Scottish Outer Hebrides, Stag Bakeries is a family-run bakery with a heritage dating back to 1885. Traditional recipes and time-honoured methods remain at the heart of every product its team of skilled craft bakers create. The result is a product range trusted on quality and provenance.

Stag's signature Seaweed Water Biscuits were named Best Scottish Speciality Product in 2013. Pairing a classic water biscuit recipe with a blend of three seaweeds, it provides a truly unique flavour full of character.

stagbakeries.co.uk

MILLBROOK DAIRY COMPANY



2 Hard on the heels of the 2021 launch of its prestigious 1057 Scottish Cheddar, Millbrook has launched its new 1057 Scottish Gin. Named after the auspicious date when King MacBeth was slain on the Aberdeenshire battlefield near Lumphanan in 1057, it has dedicated the gin to MacBeth, and the people and landscape he governed. It is slowly handmade for a complex bouquet and smooth mouth feel, and gently spiced with bright citrus and delicate florals, making it a beautifully balanced and complex drop of Scottish gin – encapsulating the best of Scotland in one glass. Why not try a wee dram with Millbrook's 1057 Scottish Cheddar – the perfect Scottish pairing.

millbrookdairy.com

ISLAND BAKERY

3 Island Bakery has been baking organic biscuits on the Isle of Mull for 20 years. Recently it has introduced new ranges of savoury biscuits to its long-standing collection of sweet varieties. Their very moreish Isle of Mull Cheese Biscuits use the gold medal-winning cheese made on the Reade family farm just next door to the factory. Two of the Organic Oatcakes varieties have been awarded 2021 Great Taste Awards.

Sweet FA Gluten Free is another new launch from the bakery. There are four varieties of organic, vegan and gluten-free cookies which everyone can truly enjoy. Like all Island Bakery biscuits, they are made in the business's renewable energy-powered bakery.

islandbakery.scot



> What people really want is an open, transparent approach to producing something delicious with integrity

latest projects include intercropping, growing peas and barley together in the same field, and growing heritage barleys with a focus on flavour, rather than yield," says Iain. "It is this collaboration and innovation that makes Arbikie stand out – challenging norms and pushing the boundaries, leading to revolutionary and exciting new products."

Scotland's distilling heritage is incredibly important to Arbikie and reviving the distilling of Rye Scotch Whisky, which was grown in Scotland over 200 years ago, illustrates how heritage and innovation can be combined. "There was a distillery at Arbikie in 1794, so the Arbikie Estate has a rich heritage of growing and distilling," says Iain. "Being a young distillery, Arbikie has the opportunity to build on the centuries of distilling expertise in Scotland by returning to a focus on growing and on being sustainable as was the tradition on farms across Scotland." Arbikie recently announced that it is planning to power its distillery with Green Hydrogen, combining wind and solar power and also focusing on removing single-use glass bottles from its supply chain.

History as inspiration

Arkibie is just one of an exciting new generation of distillers are looking to complement this history with an invigorating blend of innovation and experimentation. "HMRC have become a lot more open to smaller producers and this has opened the market up distilleries like ourselves," explains Peter Dignan, co-founder of Lost Loch Spirits. "I think this has been the biggest change for hundreds of years and it has transformed the spirits industry in Scotland. Looking at the history of spirits and their production is a massive part of what Lost Loch stands for." Indeed, the business's ethos is: "To be inventive in our thinking, to look at history for inspiration and to produce a range of unique spirits using the very best local ingredients." A boon for spirit lovers across borders, certainly, as is the business's range which spans Scotland's first absinthe, Haroosh (a whisky liqueur) and eeNoo gin.

Lost Loch Spirits' inventive streak runs throughout the company. "We get some very interesting requests from customers and we are always designing new ways of production and new ways of imparting flavours into what we produce," Peter explains. "With our own brands we also like to do things a little differently and that's why we produced Scotland's first absinthe. We have since aged absinthe in a whisky cask and this was released under our Singular Series range. We launched the Singular Series range so we could get our experiments to market. Another release under the Singular Series was Rucolino, this was based on the recipe of an Italian liqueur that we found in an old book." Innovation and sustainability abound; the future of Scotland's food and drink scene is here.

THE FUTURE OF **SCOTTISH FOOD AND DRINK**

ROSIE JACK,
MANAGER OF BOWHOUSE IN FIFE



Demand for locally sourced produce with exceptional quality continues to grow and consumers continue to be interested in the story behind the product. This was heightened during lockdown but we still see it continuing and are keen to ensure this focus on quality seasonal produce remains.

I also feel that innovation from small producers continues to grow – and is really inspiring – both in terms of the products they're developing and the ways they're doing it. This environment of creativity linked to local food and drink is exactly what Bowhouse looks to support.

PETER DIGNAN
CO-FOUNDER OF LOST LOCH SPIRITS



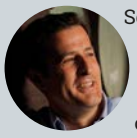
It's hard to comment on the entirety of Scotland, but in the north east of Scotland there is huge investment of time, skills and capital in food and drink businesses. Opportunity One North East (ONE) has been spearheading this. ONE was started by Sir Ian Wood as an enterprise to get the north east ready for life after oil and they have played a big part In many food and drink start-ups over the last few years. Scotland has always had globally recognised food and drink offerings and with further investment this will only grow.

ROBERT THAIN, FOODHALL BUYING MANAGER AT HOUSE OF BRUAR



The future of Scottish food and drink like a lot of things at the moment remains uncertain. We are yet to see the full implications of the Covid-19 pandemic and it will take some time to sort out all the implications of Brexit. One of the positives of both of these is that more people are interested to find out where there food comes from and are prepared to shop more locally for quality products. Therefore, we as a business and indeed as a country cannot afford to rely on things staying the same, we have to be sure we are promoting Scottish food and drink in all that we do.

IAIN STIRLING
DIRECTOR OF ARBIKIE SPIRITS

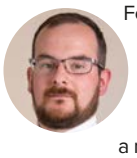


Scotland should have a very bright future as we produce some of the world's best food and drink, with our products in demand by discerning consumers across the world. Our whisky and gin are recognised as being world-leading and reflected in Scotland exporting over £14 billion of food and drink. The key to continued growth will be ensuring competitive trading access to the world's key markets, our food and drink businesses continuing to innovate and collaborate, and the industry continuing to upskill their staff.

> Scotland is ready to welcome visitors, serving stunning scenery, mouth-watering food and drink or a totally new experience

RETAILER INSIGHT

Robert Thain, foodhall buying manager at House of Bruar, explains the value of Scottish produce to the retail destination



Food and drink in Scotland, like most countries, plays a huge role. Most places have a national food or drink and often it is what they are known for. In Scotland we are very lucky to have so many food and drink icons from Irn-Bru and Whisky to Stornoway Black Pudding and Scottish Salmon. All of these icons bring visitors which in turn boosts the local economies and often is what some areas become dependent on to survive.

In my view Scottish food and drink holds an extremely high value across Britain and is known for being of the highest quality. The whisky market alone accounts for a large proportion of trade within the economy.

Scotland has so many iconic food and drink products which are sought after all across Britain and indeed the world. As well as being iconic, this is the reason Scottish food and drink brands and products are famous right around the world.

Retailers looking to stock Scottish produce elsewhere in the UK would have to try Scottish classics such as Stornoway Black Pudding, Arbroath Smokies and Scottish smoked salmon. We also have countless delicious Scottish cheeses like Strathdon Blue, Caboc or St Andrews Farmhouse Cheddar.

Being a family run business, relationships are extremely important to us at House of Bruar, whether that be the relationships with our suppliers, staff or customers.

We are very proud of the fact that we are able to deal directly with 90% of our food and drink suppliers which allows us to foster a more meaningful and profitable relationship for both sides.

We may not have the same buying power as the supermarkets but the advantage we have over them is our ability to showcase brands to our 1.9 million visitors who visit us annually.

We always strive to give our customers the very best experience when they visit us and leave them with a lasting impression.



Rosemary Water Biscuits
Award-winning biscuits for cheese made in Stornoway
www.stagbakeries.co.uk

SCOTLAND'S SPECIALITY FOOD SHOW 2022

Scotland is in the spotlight at this January show, held at Glasgow's SEC

Producers from all corners of Scotland and beyond are filling up the stands at Scotland's only food and drink trade Show for 2022. Held at the Scottish Exhibition Campus (SEC), Glasgow from 23 – 25th January, this Show promises to be a celebration of fine food and drink, as well as a much needed re-connecting event for the speciality food market.

With about 120 exhibitors in the food and drink sector, the 2022 Show has attracted many new producers, as well as various regional food groups, showcasing regional specialities from Orkney, Lanarkshire and Fife.

New!

In the centre of the Show is the Launch Gallery for new young companies which includes Nuisance Drinks, Ellon Spirit Company, Woodmill Game, Isle of Mull Seaweed and NEST Selected Greek products. In the main Show the new exhibitors to check out include Beet This Food Sauce, Yaldi Sweets, Dark Sky Spirits, Valentian Vermouth, Highland Boundary, Ecobean Coffee Roasters, The Bottled Baking Co, Ramsay of Carluke, Ochil Fudge and Slainte Spirits.

Regional specialities

A particular feature for this Show is the regional stands. Orkney, a show stalwart, has taken more space than ever before, housing about seven small companies such as Deerness Distilling, Orkney Creamery, Stockans Oatcakes and many more. New for this year is Lanarkshire Larder incorporating Biggar Gin, Bella Chocolate and Scottish Tea House, among others. Around 12 Fife companies will showcase products from this rich agricultural area, such as Rumburra, East Neuk Salt Company, Bplasticfree and Almaz Foods. Ann Camus, Enterprise and Business Development Manager at Fife Council, commented: "Brand awareness, product presentation and taste tests are an important way of selling for the food and drink sector, making Scotland's Speciality Food Show a valuable event for Fife businesses."

It's also good to welcome back long-standing producers such as Scotia Spice, Stewart Tower Dairy, Summerhouse Drinks, Summer Harvest Oils and Sarah Gray preserves.

Mark Saunders, show director, said, "The aim of this food show is to ensure we are a one-stop show for all independent retailers, both food and gifts, in Scotland and northern England. Here they can be inspired, place orders and ensure they are ahead of the game for the coming season.

"We have been encouraged by the number of new starts during the pandemic, especially where producers are maximising the natural resources from their region."

Beyond the buying

The Show's Talking Shop zone will provide visitors with insight into current topics such as Targeting Influencers, an Instagram Masterclass, How to do your own PR, Gaining retail listings, results from retail research, Attracting Tourists Back and Sustainability. There will be a range of informal talks, panel discussions and workshops.

Nessie's Den is also returning and is where emerging producers will showcase their products to the 'Nessies' – James Lamont, a Tesco buyer, Andrew Firth from Herbies deli and Catriona Farquharson from Finzean Farm Shop - in the mode of the BBC's Dragon's Den in an entertaining and exciting session.







Best Product Awards will be judged on the opening day with the resulting winners' products on display in the centre of the Show.

The Show is pleased to announce that EcoBags are the official supplier of carrier bags to Scotland's Trade Fair and are providing bags made from recycled plastic bottles, which are themselves recyclable.

Why attend?

Scotland's Speciality Food Show is run in conjunction with Scotland's Trade Fair, which has evolved over the decades to become a 'must attend' event in the calendar of all retailers, farm shops, tourist destinations and department stores. Although online has supplemented the buying process over the last 18 months, retailers are keen to return and actually re-connect with suppliers. Many of the exhibitors only exhibit at this Show so it is key to come and see and taste their products and place orders ahead of the competition.

Robert Thain, Food Buyer from House of Bruar said, "Scotland's Speciality Food Show gets better and better with a great variety of producers. This is also a perfect networking show as you get to meet up with existing suppliers and taste and see their new ranges."

NEED TO KNOW

WHERE: SECC, Glasgow
WHEN: 23rd–25th January 2022
WEB: scotlandstradefairs.com





Cheese Talk

"Creating a bond between customers and their cheese"



EDWARD HANCOCK
CHEESEGEEK

Within the food and drink industry, a subscription model has long been viewed as a successful addition or alternative to a transactional, or one-off purchase, model. In fact, the British spend £2 billion annually on subscription services and the market is growing across all industries.

One of the main benefits of having a subscription offering is having a predictable, recurring revenue stream that enables business planning, budgeting and of course provides financial security. Secondly, having a captive, regular customer base facilitates the creation of a community, and as you learn more about that customer and their behaviour, you're able to curate and personalise their experiences, improving their experience, and in doing so build loyalty.

Ultimately, this creates a journey for your customer that includes your brand or product and significantly increases their lifetime value. It becomes as much a partnership as a transaction.

When cheesegeek first launched in late 2017, we knew we wanted to include a subscription-based offering alongside our core range of products, but we succeeded with launching it in January 2019. You can opt for a subscription-based model for yourself or gift a subscription, which we've found to be a really popular option, with 39% of our annual revenue attributed to subscriptions.

Rolling subscribers can get their artisan cheese every one, two or three months while we offer gift subscriptions for every three, six, nine or 12 months. We also offer the option to bespoke your box for that extra personal touch.

Within the cheese industry though, there are some very specific reasons why I wanted to make the subscription model central to what we do, and this can be applied to any seasonal business.

First of all, there is a huge choice within the cheese industry, and artisan cheese itself is as seasonal as fruit and vegetables. The reality, therefore, is that if you only eat cheese at Christmas (which most of us do) you are missing out on these seasonal cycles and batch variations. For example, goat's milk cheese is particularly fantastic in the spring, but equally, in the case of many of our specific cheeses, we find they are far better at certain times of the year. Having a subscription is a fantastic way to explore seasonal cheese all-year-round, and experience batch variety too.

> "Given cheese is a genuinely seasonal product, building a successful subscription model not only provides the consumer with a better experience but also makes a whole lot of commercial sense"

Secondly, there is exploration. Given the choice we are blessed with in our industry, sometimes a cheese counter can be daunting, and choice paralysis often leads to 'sticking with what we know.' I would say the majority of cheese enthusiasts I come across tend to stick within their universe of 10-15 cheeses (maximum!). It might explain why we have nearly 1,000 varieties of British cheese, but most of us could probably name only 1% of those. I have also lost count of the times I have heard someone say "I don't like blue cheese" or "I don't like goat's milk cheese" and across many other categories.

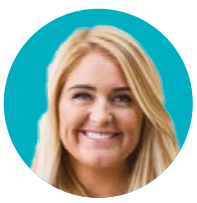
By curating new cheeses every month for our subscribers and ensuring every subscriber journey is unique to them we can genuinely broaden cheese lovers' horizons, no matter their level of knowledge. Crucially, we provide information on each cheese within their delivery, as well as pairing tips and even the recommended order they should eat the cheeses in. It is a completely unique customer experience, and so important in creating a bond between the customer and their cheese, rather than just a one-off, isolated moment.

Most of us will immediately recollect that time they tried a great cheese and now can't remember its name. This is something we are determined to eliminate, and the routine and experience of our subscription offerings work to achieve this.

The third is freshness and wastage. These are two further, interlinked and wonderful benefits to the subscription model. It means we have fantastic, and predictable visibility, in advance, of much of our demand. By having this ability to accurately forecast, it means we can confidently commit to larger orders from our cheesemakers, and, crucially, the cheese comes in whole, is cut, and goes out almost immediately. This enables a level of freshness that is very hard to match but also results in a very low level of wastage. There is something quite extraordinary about eating a cheese that was only cut for the first time less than 48 hours ago. When customers taste the quality and appreciate the experience, they'll keep coming back for more.

Finally, there is a huge commercial benefit to the subscription model within the cheese industry. Despite the cheese industry being so established and historic, the majority of mongers will still do 60-70% of their business for the entire year in the few weeks leading up to Christmas. This puts huge pressure on the monger, but also the cheesemaker as a result. To achieve the capacity to handle this demand, it means you have significantly spare capacity for the rest of the year.

Given cheese is a genuinely seasonal product, building a successful subscription model not only provides the consumer with a better experience but also makes a whole lot of commercial sense as well all the way down the supply chain. In the future, I expect to see many more businesses take up this model as we fight to hold onto loyal customers in a competitive market.



MORGAN MCGLYNN
CHEESES OF MUSWELL HILL

After 15 years of having the cheese shop, many of my customers have been visiting our little Aladdin's cave of cheese on a weekly basis for years, so the importance of keeping the selection of cheese fresh is more crucial than ever, making sure we have the best new cheeses from the UK and across the globe.

Another way of making sure our customers' cheeseboards are always interesting when plating for guests is pairings. Selling fantastic accompaniments for cheese, whether this is a fresh chilli jam, fig cake, fantastic chutney or fudge. A good cheese pairing can take your cheese selection to a flavour sensation like no other.

This is also a great way to up sell products that work perfectly together; as a cheesemonger customers are looking for our wealth of knowledge and experience to guide them toward the best cheese selection. Not only that, from a business point of view, as a retailer, upselling items doesn't only help with the end of day taking but offers customers an additional reason to return and look for further pairing advice.

It almost becomes a habit that once our customers have got to the till, without thought the next sentence out of our mouth is, "would you like any biscuits or accompaniments with that". Sparking the idea in the customer's head and offering the chance to showcase our range of incredible chutney, fruit pastes, pickles etc.

We have now taken this one step further and have started a monthly cheeseboard pairing class, where customers come to learn how to pair cheeses perfectly over a glass of bubbly.

One of the reasons why we are so frequently asked about what works well on a cheeseboard is because cheese pairing can sometimes seem like a daunting task, but a few simple rules can help to pair your way to the perfect cheeseboard. Some of the most common questions we get from budding cheese enthusiasts at our shop are about cheese pairing, so here are some top tips to help customers navigate their way through the world of pairing.

The only rule of cheese pairing is that there are no rules. Your taste buds are truly your best guide and even the most unlikely pairings will delight some cheese lovers. I adore a strong blue cheese like Picon with rich dark chocolate but I am aware this isn't everyone's cup of tea.

With that said, we have some basic cheese pairing guidelines to help you when indecision strikes. When you match the strengths, you get to experience a blend of flavours rather than an intensity of just one. One of the first questions to ask when pairing cheese with chutneys, pickles, fruit or veg, or really anything is: "do the strengths of the flavours match?"

A tongue tingling blue is going to require an equally assertive pairing – lest your pairing gets overwhelmed by the cheese. Similarly, if you have a light pear paste, you'll want a delicate cheese to match, such as a sweet, light ewes' milk cheese like Ossau Iraty.

Bridges can help connect two otherwise contrasting flavours. These are ingredients you can use to create a stronger connection between cheese and accompaniments of your choice. For example, one of our favourite flavour bridges that work with a variety of cheeses is honey. Honey is a perfect flavour bridge between a salty, briny cheese like Feta and sweet port wine. Honey and cheese happens to be one of my favourite pairings. Honey can elevate the flavour of salty cheese and the result is sensational.

In its many forms, honey works so well on a cheese board, and it pairs much like with wine or fruit – the key is matching the intensity; a strong cheese needs a full-flavoured honey

Opposites attract, and sometimes the best pairings are the ones that draw distinctly different flavours. I love pairing a creamy, salty, and tart blue cheese with a cherry compote. Partner these and you've got a perfect pairing.

As a cheesemonger, we are not only the go-to expert behind the counter at your local cheese shop, we can also be the ultimate resource to help you discover your next favourite cheese pairing. Assuring that the customer gets the best possible cheeseboard, and in turn keeping them wanting to come back for more.

> "Upselling items doesn't only help with the end of day taking but offers customers an additional reason to return and look for further pairing advice. Cheesemongers are not only the go-to expert behind the counter, we can also be the ultimate resource for favourite cheese pairings"



INSPIRING STAFF: TOP TIPS

Investing in your staff will pay dividends in the year ahead. Discover fresh ideas for boosting knowledge, confidence and passion in your team members

When is the last time you checked in with your staff? January – after the Christmas rush is done and dusted and the shop floor goes quiet – offers a great opportunity to catch up with members of staff. Whether you have one part-timer or a bustling staff room, ensuring they are happy and fulfilled in their roles is key to running a successful shop.

Recently, the news headlines have been filled with the challenges arising from labour shortages all the way through the food and drink supply chain – from the workers picking produce on farms to manufacturers keeping factories flowing to the HGV drivers delivering stock to shops. Retail establishments are not exempt from these shortages either, as shop owners no doubt have experienced. Cheesemakers and mongers have felt the impact of labour pools drying up, with numerous cheese retailers telling *Speciality Food* that they struggled to hire staff during the festive season, and that they had to work longer hours and more shifts to fill the gaps in the rota.

Cheese-loving foodies are certainly out there waiting to be found, but while the search continues, keeping your existing staff satisfied over the coming months, especially after a tiring Christmas period, will be key to maintaining your business's high standards in 2022.

> “The best way I find to inspire others at the shop is quite simply through positivity and passion in what you do”

Refresh and recharge

Searching for ways to boost sales and keep busy in the January lull is an admirable and necessary task, but before you dive in with a new to-do list, give your staff – and yourself – a breather. “We're starting 2022 with the majority of our retail team having worked right through the pandemic,” said Candice Fonseca, proprietor of Delifonseca. This will be the case for many deli and cheesemonger staff at the start of 2022, as their classification as an essential business thankfully kept doors open and fewer staff furloughed over 2020 and 2021. Instead, staff members worked hard through the darkest days of the pandemic. They toiled through lockdowns, the mask-clad Christmas of 2020 and the cautious reopening in 2021. They also worked hard through supply chain breakdowns and labour shortages that marked 2021, and another busy Christmas period just last month.

January is the perfect time to regroup and reward your staff. “For us, it's about giving our deli staff a much-needed break where possible, and that could mean giving them shorter shifts as part of their working week and longer weekends off,” Candice said. Offering time to recharge will not go unnoticed.

Upskilling opportunities

As well as relaxing working hours, the slower months offer an opportunity to boost your team's skills. Upskilling can form a new part of a fresh training plan for 2022, which will allow staff to feel more invested in the business while also becoming a more valuable asset to you as they grow their confidence and knowledge. “We tend to do quite a bit of training at the beginning of a year as it can be a quieter period after the festive season,” Candice says, “so as a business, we look to get individuals involved in fun and innovative ways of learning about new stock. These can include teambuilding activities and challenges, maybe even based around healthy produce and stock.”

As well as challenging staff to learning about new stock, why not take them off for a big dose of inspiration at a local cheesemaker? Not only will visits to your suppliers remind them why their work in the artisan cheese sector is so important, but they'll also build their skills by gaining valuable tips from some of the country's premier sources of cheese knowledge. Win-win.

Bring the passion

Keeping shop workers engaged throughout the year should be a top priority for independent cheesemongers, and the best way to do this is by running a business that they are proud to be a part of. “The best way I find to inspire others at the shop is quite simply through positivity and passion in what you do,” explains Izaak Edge of The CheeseWorks Cheltenham. “Personally, I always try to create a positive working environment, and convey my love for what I do across to others. I really do love my job, and I get excited about all aspects of it.”

This foodie passion is undeniably what makes the fine food sector tick – and it's infectious. “The others can see this, and this in turn excites them. So, when it comes time to open up and serve our customers, they come into a place of overwhelming positivity from everyone inside, where people really taking pride int their work,” Izaak says. “Our job is such a personal one, and you build up relationships with so many people that you see you need to be full of passion about your work. I think that this is the most effective way to inspire people, just being genuine and happy.”



PAIRING IDEAS



IZAAK EDGE
THE CHEESEWORKS, CHELTENHAM

WHAT'S ON YOUR DREAM CHEESEBOARD?
Schlossberger, Beauvale, Ticklemore, Wigmore, and Lincolnshire Poacher. It hits a lot of different milk types, flavours and textures, and lots are amazing British cheeses.

WHAT'S YOUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE CHEESE PAIRING?
It takes a lot to beat a pairing of Colston Bassett Stilton and Sauternes! I'm also a big fan of an aged Comté and a Fleurie.

ANY UNUSUAL PAIRINGS YOU'D RECOMMEND?
If you have never tried a hard goat's milk cheese with truffle honey, try it. You will not regret it. Also, Gjetost with a strong black coffee.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE TO DRINK WITH CHEESE?
If any of my other answers haven't made it painfully clear, you can't beat a good glass of wine! Cheese and wine just go together like strawberries and cream – they're iconic.

WHAT MUST-HAVE CHEESE KIT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?
A must-have for a cheese fan is a slicer. It's really useful if you want just a small snack! Ned Palmer's *A Cheesemonger's History of the British Isles* is also a very interesting read. Very informative, and it casts a much-needed light on great British cheese.



How to celebrate a cheesy Valentine's

Think the cheese rush is over as soon as the Christmas carols are taken off the radio? Think again. Organic Cheddar maker Godminster says sales of its Valentine's Day heart-shaped cheeses provide a "second Christmas" for the business.

A second peak in trading arrives in January and February as consumers look for alternatives to traditional chocolates to give their loved ones. "Retailers who don't think about Valentine's cheese are missing out on a huge potential to achieve a second peak during a time when sales can be scarce," says Jessica Kimber-Holloway, commercial and operations director for Godminster.

"Make it a 'cheesy' Valentine's and look at diversifying away from chocolates and wine," Jessica suggests. "Put together Valentine's 'cheeseboard at home' selection packs featuring British cheeses. Offer an upgrade option that includes a wine that pairs well with the cheeses." At a time where Veganuary is causing dairy sales to slump in January, Valentine's cheeseboards offer retailers a new opportunity for supporting British cheesemakers, as well as encouraging Brits to enjoy cheese once again after a vegan trial-run in January.

This year, Godminster is predicting that sales of its 200g hearts will be up 41% globally compared to 2021. Exports have become a hot market for the heart-shaped cheeses too, with Australia, Canada, France and Japan gobbling up the Cheddar truckles. This year, the cheesemaker will also debut its Daredevil Chilli Heart.

> People are still really interested in where their food comes from. They're still wanting to know more about the stories behind the cheese and to know that they've made good choices. The fear was that this would really fall away once people got back to their busy lives, and that they would go back to how they used to shop before, but it seems that people have retained that real interest in treating themselves to smaller quantities of really good food rather than shopping in the way they used to
>
> **RUTH RASKIN, THE FINE CHEESE CO, ON CHANGING CONSUMER HABITS**

The Cornish Cheese Co launches its first farmhouse Brie

The Cornish Cheese Company, which is known for its award-winning Cornish Blue, has produced its first ever white cheese, a soft-ripened farmhouse Brie. The full-flavoured soft cheese is full of creaminess and is handmade on Phillip and Carol Stansfield's farm in Cornwall.

The pair have been producing Cornish Blue on Bodmin Moor since 2001, and in the summer of 2021, they finished expanding their dairy. This allowed them to extend their range into soft white cheeses in a completely separate environment from their blue cheese, a project that was partly funded by the Rural Development Programme for England. After perfecting their recipe and maturity, the team developed their Brie-style cheese, which is on sale now to local shops and delis. Although it only launched in November, the cheese has already won a Bronze at the World Cheese Awards.



THE **NUMBER** OF **FARMHOUSE** CHEESEMAKERS **FELL** FROM MORE THAN **3,500** BEFORE **WWI** TO **LESS** THAN **100** BY THE END OF **WW2**

SOURCE: BBC REPORT, THE UK VILLAGE THAT LOST ITS CHEESE



NEWS IN BRIEF

SHROPSHIRE MAN CREATES FIRST ULTRA-LOW CHOLESTEROL CHEESE

A coronary heart disease sufferer has created an ultra-low cholesterol Cheddar because he missed eating cheese. John Goddard, who is also a senior food industry executive, invented Fit Cheese for those watching what they eat after he began to suffer from heart disease. Fit Cheese is made with vegetable oil and is "virtually cholesterol free" but has "all the taste" he told the *Shropshire Star*. "It took well into 2019 before we perfected it, and in the process, we had to write off thousands of kilos of stock that didn't make the grade. But we got there. We developed a process that allowed us to make the cheese in the same way as Cheddar."

VEGAN ALT-CHEESE BRAND CREATES CAMEMBERT FLAVOUR

Violife has launched Le Rond Camembert Flavour cheese alternative, diversifying its range of vegan dairy substitutes. The cheese alternative can be eaten hot or cold and can be oven-baked, fried or microwaved. As well as being free from dairy, the product includes no soya, gluten, lactose, nuts, preservatives or emulsifiers. "Having recently ventured into plant-based butter and cream, we're committed to continue innovating the dairy alternatives category, and new flavours like the Le Rond Camembert prove our mission to provide customers with 100% vegan alternatives that can be enjoyed by everyone," said Bianca Harris, senior marketing manager at Violife.

'Enormous' opportunities for British cheese in Asia

The export opportunity for British cheesemakers was highlighted in recent research by Kite Consulting and National Milk Records. Dairy demand from 90 importing countries with a population of almost 5 billion people, or two-thirds of the world's population, increased 17.8% between 2011 and 2019.

Countries including China, Indonesia and Mexico could be poised to increase their consumption of dairy, but if British brands are to become successes in these markets, it will take innovation in the processing sector and political support, according to the report.

The NFU has revealed plans to double UK dairy exports over the next decade, and cheese is high on the list. Indeed, prime minister Boris Johnson held a food and drink market at Downing Street in November to showcase British businesses who are "making the most of our international trade policy". Among the brands highlighted were Snowdonia Cheese and Ballylisk Dairies.

"We currently export to 207 countries but this government is supporting British food and drink exporters to sell even more of their brilliant produce abroad," the prime minister said. The government has announced that a new network of agri-food and drink attachés will be used in key markets, including China and the Asia-Pacific region, to unlock barriers to trade. "They are one of the many ways we are helping to open up new exporting opportunities around the world and are part of our plans for a truly Global Britain," said Anne-Marie Trevelyan, international trade secretary.

Feltham's Farm's 'lovely' new cheese



The maker of award-winning Renegade Monk and La Fresca Margarita, has added a bloomy white-rinded organic cheese to its repertoire. Feltham's Farm's Gert Lush is covered with a white, downy rind, similar to a Camembert or Brie. "Gert Lush is a sophisticated, nuanced take on the classic white-rinded cheese," said Penny Nagle, director of Feltham's Farm. "The rind is not chewy, nor is it too thick," she added. The development of the fungus geotrichum candidum also means the paste is fully broken down, which makes it "very unlike other British bloomy rinds".

The name Gert Lush is taken from the West Country dialect for 'very lovely', with gert, from Middle English, translating to great and lush meaning lovely or attractive. The new cheese is available to stock now.



"Where it all began"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

Way back before the industrial age and supermarket food, there was a real understanding of food.

After stone age man gathered together and became familiar with the land, an agrarian lifestyle began. Now food was not only for the fittest but became the backbone of communities.

People worked together for the common good of their communities. Over the years, trades were created to help sustain the lifestyle born through these agricultural lifestyles. All was aimed at improving and being able to produce food efficiently.

In certain areas of the world you can still find those farmers that are at one with the land and their livestock. Recently, after visiting the Asturias for The World Cheese Awards, I was delighted to be able to spend some time exploring this fabulous region.

For those of you that have followed my column over the last year you will be aware that I do not speak highly of mass production and supermarket foods. The artisan way of life is a different approach to food and beverage and has its roots in the Fertile Crescent some 10-12 thousand years ago. It was not really artisan, it was just how things were done. The work required to produce a good harvest needed a community to pull together. It was simply a way of life.

In Northern Spain, in the Asturias, you can find small villages that still embrace this theory; communities living and working harmoniously together. One such cheesemaker is Marta from Queseria Ca Sanchu in the town of Ambás, part of the Municipality of Grau, who produces fine artisan cheese. The cheese she makes is D'Afuega'l Pitu, a lactic curd cheese that has many styles. A soft cow's curd cheese served within 48 hours, another that is six weeks old, and a third that is aged for two-and-a-half months and a rounded chestnut-shaped cheese. In Marta's town of Ambás and throughout the Asturias you will also find Hórreos: these structures have been in the Asturias since the 13th century and are mainly used as a granary. In the Asturias they are built in squares and balanced on four to six pegoyos (stone pillars) with a muelas on top of each (flat square or round stone/slate) to prevent rodents from entering. These structures are still used today by the village to store and dry food. Marta ages some of her D'Afuega'l Pitu here. The Hórreos are sectioned into areas for each family to store their foods.

The milk that Marta uses is from her neighbour's farm, also near Ambás. She embraces the community by supporting and offering work to those within the area. Her cheese is only sold at local markets and feeds the village. Marta lives a real artisan way of life. Her family does this by embracing the landscape and what it has to offer. The communities are tight in this area and the people seem relaxed and happy. When I asked how could I get this cheese in the UK, she said that it was not for export. The production is limited to the needs of her town and the markets that she regularly attends.

What I love about this area is that there is a real understanding of the land. What it gives is through the sheer hard work of the people. If you work hard and embrace the elements for all they give, you will be rewarded. Sometimes the year's rewards may be smaller and others years larger. It is about subsistence for Marta and the majority of the agricultural community in The Asturias.

When I stood outside of this lovely old dairy I breathed deeply and allowed the scenery to engulf me. I then felt immediately at ease. If only we could take more time with our produce and consider the environment. We should only take from the earth what is needed. On the back of COP26 the way we build our businesses needs to be carefully considered. There is enough for us to work with in our communities. We really do not need to mass produce, and an artisan lifestyle is not a new hip idea, it is how we began. It is about taking from and giving back to our community. As the lovely food author Jenny Linford said, "time is the missing ingredient" and should be embraced with the respect it deserves.

> "There is enough for us to work with in our communities. We really do not need to mass produce, and an artisan lifestyle is not a new hip idea, it is how we began. It is about taking from and giving back to our community"

BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO DISPLAYS

Cheese sellers can bring their in-store experience to life by sparking customers' imaginations with dazzling displays



From towering stacks of clothbound Cheddar rounds to oozing wedges of truffled Brie, there's something undeniably eye-catching about artisan cheese. But displays can quickly go from enticing, sales-boosting tools to distracting labyrinths for customers if mongers aren't careful.

Less is more

When fitting out your cheese counter, there can be a temptation to throw everything you have at customers in the hopes of pleasing every taste bud, but cheese experts tell *Speciality Food* that less can be more. Rory Mellis of IJ Mellis Cheesemongers advises retailers not to crowd their cheeses. "In our stores, one thing I'm always trying to drill through is never put too much on the bench. We've always had nice marble counters, and I feel that the cheese needs a little bit of room to display the marble counter a little bit and give people the opportunity to move from cheese to cheese, rather than looking at a block of lots of different cheeses in one area," he says. A less hectic display can still offer a vibrant delight for customers. "Don't be afraid to put nice, big rounds on there because your cheese bench is the first thing that the customer sees when they walk in the shop," he adds.

Wendy Kammeier of the Corbridge Larder has learned first-hand that simple layouts are often best. "We tried what I call a 'cheese theatre' where we displayed the cheese quite dramatically and, in a way, haphazardly. This didn't resonate with our regular clientele, or our staff for that matter, so we returned to our clean lines and organisation." Orderly displays can offer plenty of avenues for wowing customers with creative layouts, Wendy has found. "We don't have a flat display of cheese. We are lucky to have a quick turnaround, so we can afford to stack our cheeses sensibly high at the back of the counter, with baskets or slate and even cake stands for our small truckle cheeses at the very front." If done well, providing different heights and sizes of cheeses will help catch the customer's eye.

Finding a flow

While large rounds are great for drawing customers in, think small by the tills. "What I was always taught when I was first starting out is to put your soft goat's cheeses around the front of the till," Rory says. "Anything soft, eye-catching or unusual, and anything below 250 grams, always focus on putting a big tower of those towards the till front, and try to keep it nice and neat and uniform."

Here, more is more. "If you put out 20 logs of goat's cheese you'll always sell about half of them. But if you put out three, you'll never sell any," Rory adds.

In the counter, cheeses should be arranged in a way that makes sense to the customer, for instance by type or region. And don't be shy about arranging popular accompaniments nearby for an easy upsell and a better-looking display. "We add boxes of membrillo and fruits for cheese to add a splash of colour, as well as tubs of Mascarpone and Ricotta," Wendy says. "Presentation of cut cheese also adds interest depending on cheese shape and size, which all adds to the interesting and eye-catching display we aspire to."

Cheesemongers typically have good success with local cheeses, so don't be afraid to put them pride of place in your shop and promote your local makers. Make these cheeses shine with special displays, messages written out on chalkboards or even seasonal arrangements around any big local celebrations. Seasonal events also offer a chance to refresh the look of the shop. "Towards the spring and summertime, we put out a lot more softer cheeses, goat's cheese and goat's curd," Rory says. "The biggest seasonal change for any cheesemonger is usually Christmas, and we tend to create a couple of displays with our most popular cheeses. Creating two piles of these on the on the counter really gives us

> "Too much information on display just makes the customer switch off. The information we give allows for a more informative 'cheesy' conversation, which in my book leads to a more engaged customer and a successful cheese purchase"

MASTER DIGITAL DISPLAYS

With e-commerce going nowhere fast, it's just as important to make a good impression online as it is in-store. Impress customers with strong photography, a user-friendly website and thorough cheese descriptions with pairing ideas or even a personal anecdote about the cheese or more information about the farm if it's a British-made variety. The key is making sure your website reflects the experience of visiting your shop. "If you have a website that doesn't really reflect how your business operates or what people can expect when they go into the shop, then it can be quite misleading," Rory said. "We've taken elements from our shops and how we work and try to keep it quite simple [online]."





that ability to have a customer focus and not have to move back and forth across the bench, especially towards the busy time. In the back of our heads, it's always about how we can operate quickly and efficiently."

Capturing the imagination

The striking veins of a wedge of blue or the enticing pattern of a wrapped cheese will jump out to customers brilliantly, but an intriguing story can be equally as striking. "We love to sell quirky-named cheeses with a tale to tell," Wendy says. Fascinating names offer a simple way to strike up conversation with a shopper. "I love to tell the story of a customer who bought some Stinking Bishop from us and took it back to their hotel on the coast. Of course, it was so stinky in the room that they hung it out of the window in a carrier bag that evening, only to wake and find their favourite cheese had been consumed by a seagull with discerning palate!"

Stories can take shape around a name or a description, and they offer a sure-fire way to capture customers' imaginations and demystify the cheese journey for those who are new to the artisan food world. "We love names like Blue Murder, Baron Bigod and my personal favourite Wookey Hole, which is aged in the natural caves of the West Country," Wendy adds. "I love engaging customers with a little cheese banter."

Smart labelling

While names offer a great starting point for a curious customer, for those who want to know more, smart labelling can provide the right information – but beware of including long-winded paragraphs of cheese history. "Our labelling is clear and precise on small, black cards, which gives the customer a quick guide to what they are looking for," Wendy says. The crucial bases must be covered, but apart from that it is up to the cheesemonger. "Of course, we state the name, price, type and if it is pasteurised or unpasteurised, or made with vegetarian rennet or animal, but I think too much information on display just makes the customer switch off," Wendy adds. "The information we give allows for a more informative 'cheesy' conversation, which in my book leads to a more engaged customer and a successful cheese purchase."

Rory agrees that bombarding the customer with written information makes for a negative customer experience. Instead, labels should inspire further conversation with the shop's cheesemongers. "It's one thing that's changed over the past few years. I think when my dad started up, more information had to be on the card for the browsing element of shopping." However, with today's average customer being savvier about artisan cheese, retailers can leave more to be discovered with a sample. "With a larger knowledge of the products and people starting to gain a little bit more insight into the cheese, we don't necessarily need to put as much on the card," Rory explains. "We're very strict in the fact that our staff are the ones who should be selling that product. We offer tasters, and I think that's the best form [of information], as long as you've got your allergens on that card and your price, because no one will buy it if there's no price."

> "We add boxes of membrillo and fruits for cheese to add a splash of colour, as well as tubs of Mascarpone and Ricotta. Presentation of cut cheese also adds interest depending on cheese shape and size, which all adds to the interesting and eye-catching display we aspire to"



Remember the customer

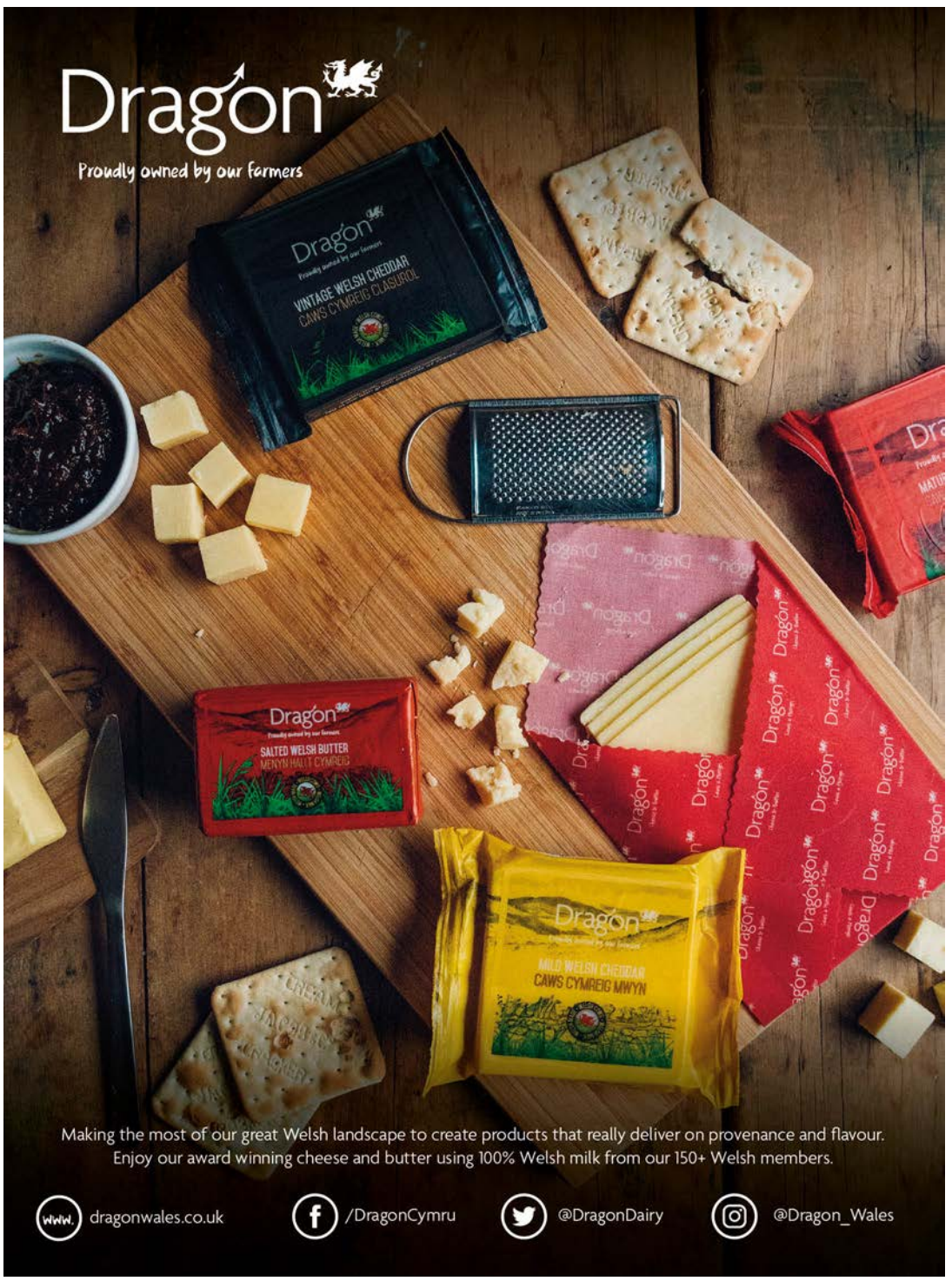
Creating a stellar cheese display and balanced labelling will involve trial and error, but one thing to remember throughout the process is the customer journey. Rory suggests creating peaks and troughs with cheeses so as not to create a wall between your cheesemongers and your customers. "Don't be afraid to have big cheeses towards the corner of your bench and lower cheeses towards the middle of the bench so that you still can see the customer. And if you do have a cutting board, put it on the front counter, because you should never be taking your eye off the customer and should always be customer facing," he adds. "Doing as much as you can facing the customer and maintaining eye contact is always the best method."

By keeping these tips in mind, retailers will be able to craft a cheese display that's practical, informative, and above all allows artisan cheeses to look as good as they taste.

> "Place big cheeses towards the corner of your bench and lower cheeses towards the middle of the bench so that you can still see the customer"

CHEESE CARE 101

One element of the cheese display which cannot be left up to creative interpretation is cheese care. Ensuring cheeses look their best with careful attention throughout the day is key to securing sales. "Cheese is living, and we should be kind to our cheese counters to ensure our babies look their very best every day," Wendy says. "We check, trim and re-wrap on a daily basis to keep them in tip-top condition and looking as fresh as a daisy." Monitoring the deli counter temperatures constantly is crucial for healthy cheese, but some products will need special attention. "Some cheeses mould quite quickly and some crack. Both issues are easily resolvable by wiping with paper towel or preventable by covering with a damp cloth," Wendy adds. "All these actions will make your cheese counter sing."



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KEELHAM FARM SHOP

Yorkshire's Keelham Farm Shop has long championed its local region. No wonder it's award-winning

Recently voted as the Best Farm Shop & Deli in the North for the second year in a row, the team at Keelham Farm Shop is an established foodie favourite in the Yorkshire region. After opening its doors six years ago, Keelham has grown from strength to strength and with an award-winning restaurant and butchery, there are plenty of reasons to visit.

What sets the business apart from other independent retailers?

Championing more than 450 local suppliers, the Keelham ethos is rooted in supplying quality produce and supporting local growers, makers and producers. With an in-house butchery, bakery, fresh produce, florist, beer, wine, and store-cupboard selection, Keelham offers superb quality food and drink from the region's finest suppliers, all under one roof. Based on the outskirts of Skipton, in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales, the Keelham team are passionate about food and sourcing the best, seasonal produce from suppliers on their doorstep.

The team at Keelham focus on providing real value to the community. Throughout the first pandemic Keelham adapted to offering an online delivery and click and collect service to help those customers shielding during the lockdown. Making sure to bring the taste of Yorkshire to homes in the area, the team offered dine at home kits, afternoon teas and as well as the option to purchase your weekly shop online. Supporting both the local supply chain and the local community.

The Keelham team continue to support the community and have hosted a number of family-oriented celebrations and events. From a big Yorkshire Day celebration weekend to offers such as "kids eat free" in the Keelham Kitchen, the Keelham team are always focusing on giving families and locals a truly Yorkshire experience.

Throughout the festive period, the team put on a number of popular Christmas events such as live reindeer, afternoon tea / breakfast with Santa, festive menus and tasting evenings.

A focus on sustainability

As part of the rural community, protecting the environment and landscape are a key factor in Keelham's approach. By sourcing local and seasonal food, Keelham Farm Shop ensure that their offering is fresh, as well as minimising the impact on the supply chain and reducing the environmental effects. Keelham's commitment to reduced plastic packaging allows customers to buy just one singular item, thus helping to reduce food waste. This is also shown through their participation in the Too Good To Go initiative, which allows users to purchase produce that is on the verge of going out of date at a massively reduced price. Keelham work hard to reduce their plastic, by providing reusable bags, plastic-free produce and recyclable options. The grain store promotes zero-waste and customers bring their own tubs to fill.



In addition to a jam-packed shop, Keelham also boast an award-winning restaurant – the Keelham Kitchen (KK). Awarded Travellers Choice 2021 by TripAdvisor, the must-try Keelham Kitchen offers up a delicious range breakfast, lunch, and dinner options all created from locally sourced ingredients. The menu at the KK has been curated by a team of top chefs and changes seasonally to reflect the best local produce from their suppliers. Whether you are looking for a sit-down breakfast and lunch, or a quick spot for coffee and cake, the KK has both a main restaurant or a café-style mezzanine.

What's next for Keelham?

The Keelham leadership team is focusing on adding value for customers, MD Paul Tidswell said, "we are working closely with our suppliers to continue sourcing the best quality, local and seasonal produce at an cost-effective price. We are aware that post-Covid, food retail prices have increased and our focus in the coming months is to provide the best value to our customers. With this in mind, we have recently launched our new loyalty club, helping customers carrying out their weekly shopping with 5% off, plus many other benefits."

The Keelham Loyalty Club launched in October 2021, and with a huge initial uptake it is easy to see why the scheme is fast becoming a Keelham success story. Customers can take advantage of 5% off their shopping all year round across all departments. On top of this, they can also enjoy a range of restaurant benefits such as 2 for 1 afternoon tea once a year, 2 for 1 lunch once a year and a free hot drink every single month. All these benefits and more for just £10 a year.

> "Based on the outskirts of Skipton, in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales, the Keelham team are passionate about food and sourcing the best, seasonal produce from suppliers on their doorstep"



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SAMEER VASWANI
PRODIGY



JO COLMAN
SUMMERDOWN



TRACEY HUGHES
HENLEY BRIDGE



RICHARD TURNER
OMBAR



HOW TO SELL INDULGENCE

Chocolate is the pinnacle of luxury – but this year, consumers are craving more than great taste and a pretty package

48% OF PEOPLE SAY **INDULGENCE** IS THEIR PRIME **MOTIVATION** FOR EATING **CHOCOLATE**
SOURCE: MINTEL

Picture an indulgent treat and there is no doubt chocolate will come to mind. From decadent, sweet spreads to silky, smooth bars and from creamy milk chocolate to deliciously bitter dark, there's variety aplenty to enjoy in the chocolate sector. And as fine food retailers will know well, taste is king. Yet, as conscious consumerism goes mainstream, shoppers are more and more often scrutinising the labels of their favourite chocolates. Sugar-free, palm-oil-free, gluten-free, dairy-free, plastic-free – these free-from markers are the new buzzwords shaking up the world of cocoa.

Indulgence, explains Raffaella Baruzzo, business development manager at BRIK Chocolate, is changing. "In the past few years, I have seen a change in attitude and consumer behaviour in purchasing chocolate. Taste is still the key factor influencing our purchasing, but today people are also considering the types of chocolates to eat for personal health, and purchasing in consideration of social responsibility and the environment," she says. As self-indulgence transforms to conscious-indulgence, we take a closer look at how retailers can excite their customers with the new generation of artisan chocolates, while ensuring beloved classics remain pride of place.

Best of both worlds

When great taste is a given, a health or wellness twist can make a product jump out on-shelf. "I think more and more consumers want low or no sugar in their chocolate, and this has been a growing trend for many years," says Sameer Vaswani, founder of healthy, vegan chocolate brand Prodigy. "More recently, the rapid growth in plant-based and dairy-free eating means more consumers are looking for those options. For us, it's been similar to plant-based meat," he explains. "A huge number of consumers who have made a conscious decision to go plant-based – either for health or environmental reasons – have missed their childhood favourites."

Modern chocolates can even offer health benefits in the guise of functional ingredients like superfoods, high-quality cocoa or botanicals. "Too many consumers believe that it is not possible to have a chocolate treat that tastes amazing and also is a healthier option," Sameer says. He believes that the industry has historically been held back by a lack of innovation – but this is changing. "With innovation, we now have access to better, more natural ingredients, and delivering a chocolate treat that is healthier for you and tastes great is now a reality." Increasingly, brands are scrapping processed ingredients for nutrient-rich ingredients and natural sugars. For consumers who want to have their cake and eat it too, these developments are game changers.

An ethical choice

Part and parcel of selling fine food today is ensuring products have top-notch sustainability and ethical credentials. This is of huge importance in the chocolate industry, where Fairtrade labels offer a stamp of approval that consumers recognise and trust. Just like great flavour, though, Fairtrade is now an expectation. To loom large on retailers' shelves, producers are targeting other high sustainability and ethical standards. "At Summerdown, as a certified B-Corp, we believe that business can be a force for good. That is to say, we believe we can bring Great Taste Award-winning peppermint chocolates to consumers whilst looking after the planet and people too," says Jo Colman, grandson of Summerdown's founder, Sir Michael Colman.

Caring for the environment has been at the heart of Summerdown from the very start. "Farming for the future is at the core of Summerdown's sustainability strategy, so we're always thinking about our impact on the environment, how to maintain a thriving, sustainable ecosystem and, vitally, how we can protect it for years to come. The underlying aim of our business is to be regenerative; that is to say, we strive to make business decisions that actively engage the restoration of the environment and reduce our negative impact on it," Jo explains.

Some chocolate makers are delving deep into the fine details of their carbon emissions. Ombar recently launched a range of chocolate which states the carbon footprint of the product on the label. "We knew we wanted to do more to make a positive impact, so we set out to make a range of chocolate that was as sustainable as possible," says founder Richard Turner. "The range has less than half the carbon emissions of 'regular' milk

> "We now have access to better, more natural ingredients, and delivering a chocolate treat that is healthier for you and tastes great is now a reality"







> Whilst chocolate is considered an indulgence, having impressive ethical credentials lessens the guilt and makes consumers feel good about themselves

chocolate, and we're proud to be the first chocolate brand to state our carbon footprint on our packaging. At the moment, we're one of a select few brands at the forefront of the movement for climate transparency, but we hope that knowing and showing a carbon footprint on-pack will soon be adopted by the rest of the food industry, helping consumers to make informed choices."

Indeed, transparency is a key motivator for consumers today. "Consumers want to know the backstory of the brands they are enjoying so that they can share their knowledge with their friends and on social media," says Tracey Hughes, managing director of Henley Bridge, the UK's leading independent chocolate supplier. Belcolade, one of the group's brands, has launched its own Cacao-Trace programme, which is a transparent payment scheme for cacao farmers. "Whilst chocolate is considered an indulgence, having impressive ethical credentials lessens the guilt and makes consumers feel good about themselves," Tracey adds.

As well as cutting out carbon emissions and ensuring ethical standards are met, chocolate makers are taking a stand on single-use plastics. Summerdown, for example, has launched new peppermint chocolate bars in fully compostable packaging. "This is only the beginning of a long journey," Jo says. Challenges remain, chiefly cost. "It's not economically viable to replace all our existing product packaging with plastic-free alternatives right now, so instead we've looked at ways in which we can take steps towards offsetting our plastic."

Sameer has also strived to ensure Prodigy part of the plastic solution rather than the problem. "From inception, we wanted to be a plastic-free brand. We were forced to delay our launch by almost a year in order to maintain this goal," he admits. "Once we launched, we felt we needed to go one step further and also help reduce the single-use plastic problem, so for every Prodigy Bar sold, we fund the clean-up of 10 single use plastic wrappers from the environment."

Tasting the difference

The industry's shift towards sustainability is a positive one, but impressing and exciting customers with great flavours remains core to retailers' chocolate offering. "Chocolate is an accessible luxury that we eat to treat ourselves for our own gratification," says BRIK Chocolate's Raffaella. Demand for indulgence is on the rise, she says, but rather than purchasing large bars of chocolate, consumers are buying smaller amounts of chocolate that bring a larger dose of indulgence. "Smaller mouthfeels of chocolate, perhaps of different taste, texture and type, extends the time of the tasting experience, meaning consumers will enjoy it more, improving the perception of taste and satiety," Raffaella says. "Small portions are also associated with a more premium image and higher quality chocolates, with the size of the pack also influencing the occasion of consumption."

Demand for comforting indulgence peaked in the pandemic, but this has petered out as the 'new normal' takes shape. "This isn't to say the demand for indulgence has disappeared entirely, but perception of indulgence has shifted," explains Richard. "'Everything in moderation' has never been truer, and consumers are finding that a smaller amount of something indulgent brings more satisfaction than a larger quantity of a less indulgent alternative."

"It's about permissive indulgence," adds Summerdown's Jo, "allowing yourself a treat because you know the treat contains only the finest ingredients." While luxury and indulgence are changing for the modern consumer, there is one thing that will always be true: a bar of chocolate, whether enjoyed in secret while the rest of the family is out or shared amongst friends, offers a simple way to brighten up the everyday.

THE GLOBAL **VEGAN** CHOCOLATE **MARKET** SIZE IS **EXPECTED** TO REACH **$1.41BN** BY **2028**

SOURCE: RESEARCH AND MARKETS

TRENDING: UNIQUE FLAVOURS

Consumers certainly have their favourite chocolates that they will go back to time and time again, but adding something a bit different to your range is guaranteed to attract attention. "Consumers are looking for unique flavour profiles and high cacao content," says Henley Bridge's Tracey. "From earthy, woody tones to hints of fruit, or notes of sweet, dried nuts, high-quality chocolate has a myriad of flavours and aromas, which can differ hugely depending on their place of origin."

BRIK Chocolate plays around with consumers' expectations to add an element of surprise. "We try to provide a unique way to explore new tastes and flavours," Raffaella says. "Our chocolates are created in unexpected shapes and colours, which also leads to an unexpected, amazing flavour experience. We work with pairing and contrast principles to try to create new associations for the mind. Ultimately, chocolate is a wonderful material for different kinds of flavours: from sour and sweet to bitter and umami," she says.

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The Life & Soul of the Pantry



VEGAN FISH

Should you stock fashionable faux fish or serve it in your restaurant? And how do you ensure the real fish you sell is sustainable, asks Sally-Jayne Wright

Vegan fish sounds like a contradiction in terms. Yet multinational food companies are launching innovative, fake fish products onto the market just as they've done with meat-free burgers, and dairy-free milk and cheese. Waitrose reported that sales of their vegan Plantlife range – which includes vegan fish – are up 21% compared with 2020.

GIVE ME SOME FAUX FISH EXAMPLES, PLEASE

How about calamari made from oyster mushrooms, or smoked Zalmon made from thinly-sliced carrots in a smoky marinade. Waitrose sells Plantlife Thai-style No Fish Cakes made with jackfruit and Ocado will deliver Vegan Zeastar Lemon Shrimpz, a frozen product.

HAVE YOU SEEN FAUX FISH ON RESTAURANT MENUS?

At the Turk's Head pub in Penzance in September, we enjoyed their bestselling vegan fish and chips made by sprinkling banana blossom – a south-east Asian fruit – with seaweed and deep-frying it in batter.

Opened in May 2021, Holy Carrot is a sleek new vegan restaurant inside a spa in London's Knightsbridge. Diners can opt for a 'crab' burger made from palm hearts and lobster mushrooms, or cauliflower rice maki made with avocado and tomato 'tuna'.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE TREND?

Plant-based lifestyles. Only 1.9% of households contain a full-time vegan (Kantar). However, the Vegan Society predicts that by 2025, a quarter of the population will be vegan or vegetarian, and half flexitarian – people who eat animal foods on some days. Ethics. A Netflix documentary, *Seaspiracy*, caused particular alarm. The gist was there's no longer any sustainable fish from the ocean.

IS THAT TRUE?

Critics of *Seaspiracy* cited out-of-date facts, unrealistic extrapolations and hidden agendas to sell vegan food. The Marine Stewardship Council, set up to certify sustainable fish, was obliged to defend itself on its website. "Fish stocks can recover and replenish if they are managed carefully for the long-term." It mentioned the many people around the world who rely on fishing for their livelihood.

HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR IN-STORE FISH COUNTER MORE SUSTAINABLE?

Copy Hackney fishmongers, Fin and Flounder, who have exchanged farmed and imported fish for that caught by small sea boats and inshore vessels.

Sell local and seasonal fish and promote lesser appreciated species such as flounder, whiting and plaice. Other tips are to sell shellfish, crabs, mussels and lobster – sustainable because of their abundance and position in the food chain.

Charles Redfern, founder of Fish4Ever, suggests that, "from a climate point of view, wild fish is almost as eco-friendly as a vegan diet with barely any footprint and, if fished in sensible volumes, an infinitely renewable resource".

HOW SUSTAINABLE IS FAKE FISH?

Simon Wright, who chairs the Quality Food Awards judging panel, noted many vegan fish entries this year. His personal view is that "too many rely on soy or pea protein which unless grown sustainably (i.e. with no GM or deforestation) are not sustainable ingredients".

WHAT'S ACTUALLY IN THOSE FAUX FISH FILLETS?

It ranges from relatively simple ingredients like jackfruit, banana blossom, mushrooms, tofu and Quorn, to less appetising-sounding combinations such as pea, soya and wheat protein, methyl cellulose thickener, maize and wheat starch and sunflower oil.

HOW DO THEY TASTE?

Customer reviews are mixed. We enjoyed the novelty of banana blossom fish and chips though craved more seaweed for a fishier taste. Much of the pleasure came from associated tastes and textures – mushy peas, crisp batter and tangy tartare sauce.

WHICH BRANDS DO YOU RECOMMEND?

The Times gave Moving Mountains' Fish Fillets five out of five stars, food editors praising the flaky 'meat', subtle cod-like taste and crispy, crunchy batter. Vegan expert, Richard Makin, on *BBCGoodFood.com*, praised the delicate flavour and sweet-salty balance of Zalmon – see above. He said, "The texture isn't identical to salmon but we barely noticed this when (it was) layered on a bagel with vegan cream cheese and dill." We like Cavi-art, a seaweed-based faux caviar from Denmark, ideal for vegan canapes.

HOW CAN I MAKE THE MOST OF THE TREND?

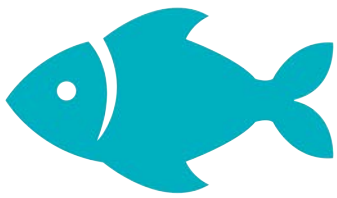
- Ask customers if they want to buy vegan fish. Start cautiously with frozen, not chilled and don't lecture
- Buy good vegan sauces such as Inspired Vegan's tartare
- Educate yourself about ethical vegan brands
- Molly, 21, will love you forever if she can order vegan fish and chips in your café while Nan and Grandad are eating mainstream cod and chips. The fryer's on anyway so it can't be that difficult
- If you succeed in creating an affordable vegan smoked salmon bagel, put it on Instagram and the fans will come

> "From a climate point of view wild fish is almost as eco-friendly as a vegan diet with barely any footprint and, if fished in sensible volumes, an infinitely renewable resource"

WILL THE TREND LAST?

Faux fish is still a novelty and we predict a backlash against ultra-processed foods. We agree with Simon Wright that manufacturers must improve the nutritional profile and use fewer, more natural ingredients. Let's be optimistic. Gluten-free bread has improved hugely since the early days. Quality rises to the top.

Meanwhile, a great-tasting vegan fish dish on your café menu can make you a destination restaurant, especially if your area is poorly served and you appear on vegan forums. So shout about it.



ONLY 1.9% OF HOUSEHOLDS CONTAIN A FULL-TIME VEGAN (KANTAR). HOWEVER, THE VEGAN SOCIETY PREDICTS THAT BY 2025, A QUARTER OF THE POPULATION WILL BE VEGAN OR VEGETARIAN, AND HALF FLEXITARIAN – PEOPLE WHO EAT ANIMAL FOODS ON SOME DAYS



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Icertech offers a very high level of friendly and personal customer service, offering tailored support and advice to start-ups and established companies alike. Its packaging solutions are available from stock, and the team can also offer custom branding on all packaging solutions from quantities of 300+.

Squished

MIXED SAMPLE BOX FIRST 200!

Squished is an exciting new planet-friendly fruit snack brand offering a range of delicious flapjack bites and energy balls, created from rescued fruit.

Perfect for the whole family, these naturally sweet treats contain nothing but simple ingredients and are packed with 53% fruit – no nasty concentrates or flavourings.

Squished is on a mission to reduce food waste and cut CO_2 emissions, by transforming surplus fruit into irresistible, healthy fruit-based bites.

Presented in eco-conscious recyclable packaging featuring colourful, fun graphics, and suitable for vegetarians and vegans.





FREE MIXED BOX FIRST 100!

Borderfields

Borderfields British cold pressed rapeseed oils started back in 2005 in Nottinghamshire on the edge of beautiful Sherwood Forest. Farming since 1900, the business has invested heavily into the quality of the Borderfields brand including the use of single seed varieties and premium flavours.

Borderfields Gold is its premium oil range which is available exclusively to small businesses, farm shops, food halls, delis and garden centres.

With great flavours including Smoked Chipotle and Aromatic Thyme, the new design has a fabulous in-store presence and offers foodies really tasty, contemporary flavour choices for cooking, frying, drizzling or baking.

Borderfields offers a direct delivery service to retailers through its Borderfields 'Big Box' distribution system, offering a full range of delicious Borderfields oils, sprays, infusions, including gift packs direct to your door.

RedLoon

FREE SAMPLE PACK FIRST 100!

RedLoon is a brand-new and exciting addition to the condiments category designed to take a variety of dishes from bland and boring to bursting with flavour.

Available in a RedLoon Seasoning and RedLoon Spicirub format, both products magically transform meals with ease. Authentic and original, the salt alternative and aromatic rub represent a bold and aromatic blend of spices capable of adding deliciousness to a host of favourite foods, raising the taste experience bar to a whole new level.

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Ahura Food

TASTING SAMPLE PACK FIRST 100!

Ahura® is a registered Trademark of Novatris Ltd, a family-owned business based in London. The team is as passionate about supplying the world's finest quality authentic saffron as it is about promoting its health benefits.

The team at Ahura® prides itself on its range of expertly hand-picked all-red grade-1 Saffron from selected farms. Every pack contains only red stigmas, naturally flash-dried by a traditional method that is perfected through centuries minimizing loss of taste and aroma. The crimson red colour and smooth, rich honey-like scent of the magical spice tempts eyes and taste buds, and each pack is professionally presented to showcase its quality. They surely stand out from the crowd on the shelves and your customers will love them.



Pennington's Spirits



Pennington's is a wholly family-owned business from Kendal in Cumbria, producing a range of unique and utterly delicious regional, British spirits and liqueurs. Its popular range of liqueurs were born out of Mike Pennington's passion for creating unique products for his bar in the early '90s and has now developed into multiple international award-winning products available for all to enjoy.

Pennington's Spirits blends the finest ingredients and highest quality botanicals, including wild juniper berries from the Lake District fells, to ensure that all of its products are free of the main allergens and suitable for vegans.

FREE MINI TRIO GIFT SET FIRST 100!

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@specialityfood

PASTE & EXTRACT SAMPLES FIRST 50!



LittlePod

LittlePod's responsibly-sourced product range includes innovative, easy-to-use natural vanilla paste and organic vanilla pods, as well as extracts of vanilla, coffee and chocolate. These ingredients not only support each other in the rainforest, but are also perfect flavour partners.

Little Pod's delicious paste has been specially created to provide top-quality vanilla in an easy and versatile form, with no wastage and less flavour bake-off. Each tube has a two-year shelf life and contains the equivalent of 20 pods, seeds and all. Put it in your coffee, porridge, smoothies and ice cream, rub it into meats like duck and pork, use it in your cakes and bakes, or as a marinade for fish! LittlePod products are gluten-free, suitable for vegans and kosher certified.

MIXED SAMPLE BOX FIRST 50!

Charlie & Ivy's

A family-run business, the Charlie & Ivy's mission is simple. It strives to create excellent products, showcasing the very best flavours, whilst bringing something unique to British artisan food.

Charlie & Ivy's was launched in 2014 by the Palmer family from its farm in Yorkshire. It is dedicated to making customers feel special, involved and inspired by the brand and its flavours. Proudly wearing the badge of 'Great Taste Producers', all Charlie & Ivy's products are made using its own Great Taste Two Star British cold pressed rapeseed oil. The business offers the opportunity to list unique, quality product ranges that sell strongly for personal use, as well as being an attractive option for the rapidly growing foodie gifting market.





Ahmad Tea

Ahmad Tea is a family-owned UK tea company and global leader in speciality tea, with a mission to inspire tea drinkers around the world with its passion for tea, its commitment to quality, and its dedication to people and planet.

With a monumental shift towards health and wellness, Ahmad Tea's Natural Benefits collection of herbal and green tea infusions with added vitamins and botanicals has been specially crafted to support tea drinkers in their quest to feel good and stay nourished.

Boasting six all-natural premium blends including 'Immune' – Lemon, Ginger & Turmeric with added Vitamin C to support the immune system, 'Energy' – Grapefruit, Mate & Guarana Seed with Vitamin B6 to help reduce fatigue, and 'Sleep' – Camomile, Honey & Lavender with Passion Flower to aid relaxation, this innovative collection of wellness teas has been created to care.

SAMPLE PACK FIRST 100!

TRIAL CONDIMENTS BOX FIRST 200!

Hunter & Gather

'Clean' condiments pioneer, Hunter & Gather (the brand behind the UK's first 100% Avocado Oil Mayonnaise, Olive Oil Mayonnaise and Unsweetened Sauces) is leading the field in best-in-class condiments. It's range of Great Taste Award-winning all-natural mayos, oils, sauces and dressings are not only made with the finest sustainably sourced ingredients but are always free from added sugar, grains/gluten, and poor quality fats, making them a delicious and healthy choice for the whole family, as well as diabetics, keto, low carb, gluten-free and dairy-free lifestyles.

The latest product in Hunter & Gather's line-up is 100% Olive Oil Mayonnaise (available in Classic, Olive & Lemon and Horseradish) – made in the UK with 100% light tasting olive oil from ancient groves in the Cordoba region of Spain, plus British free-range egg yolk, apple cider vinegar, and a pinch of pink Himalayan salt – resulting in a product that's creamy and delicious, yet all natural and free-from nasties.



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- LittlePod ☐
- Charlie & Ivy's ☐
- Ahmad Tea ☐
- Hunter & Gather ☐

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HOW TO SELL TO CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS

No longer a niche audience, conscious consumers are taking up an increasing market share, and the fine food sector is well placed to capitalise in the growth, as Rachael Perrett discovers

COMMENTATORS



MATTHEW RYMER
HAPPERLEY



LOUISA ZIANE
TOAST ALE



RICH FORD
SHERLOCK STUDIO



MARK JONES AND ANA MARTINS
PANTREE

From COP26 to Netflix's *Seaspiracy*, sustainability has made top headlines recently – and it's leading to changes in consumer behaviour and consumption. That said, being 'eco aware' is certainly not a new trend. Indeed, many in the industry have noticed a gradual shift in the way people shop. With an increasing awareness of the impact our purchases have on the planet and other people comes a rise in conscious consumers hoping to make a difference through more considered purchases. But what does this mean for the fine food sector?

From farm to fork

According to Matthew Rymer, managing director of Happerley, the movement to drive provenance, honesty and transparency across food and drink supply chains, a conscious consumer essentially refers to a savvy shopper who "thinks about what they are buying, where it has come from and the implications, from farm to fork, of that buying decision".

"Consumers are becoming more savvy," Matthew says. "They're beginning to understand that, for example, a product labelled 'local strawberry jam' might not in fact contain local strawberries but pulp shipped from China."

While many consumers are now familiar with certified labels such as The Lion Mark, Red Tractor, Fairtrade and Soil Association, the conscious consumer wants to take things further.

"Although these are valuable schemes and provide assurance on their own merits," Matthew says, "they don't go far enough in giving consumers the information that they are now demanding. Assurance over process is not the same as authenticity of supply or production. Consumers want to know where their food comes from, what is in it and have the assurance that, if they are paying a premium, they are getting what they think they are getting!"

Whether they're looking for organic produce, meat alternatives or zero-waste goods, it's safe to say the conscious consumer actively goes beyond the average shopper before making a purchase, as Louisa Ziane, chief operating officer at Toast Ale, explains. "People are increasingly making purchasing decisions that reflect a desire to take personal action. They may not be ready to make major changes, and so are looking for brands that meet their needs and have a positive impact. They will spend time researching and trialling, engage with the brand on social media, and pay more if the product tastes good and does good.

"This has been a slow, growing movement for many years," Louisa adds, "with surges following key moments, including the Blue Planet effect that shifted consciousness about plastic, significant investment in plant-based food companies, and most recently COP26 hosted in the UK. It's a combination of moments like these, the popularity of sharing sustainable consumption behaviour content on social media, and the increase in choices as brands big and small have responded that is driving increasingly conscious purchase decisions."

Staying flexible

USPs like provenance, short supply chains and ethical processes are already at the heart of the fine food industry, meaning indies are well placed to capitalise on the rise of conscious consumerism. And with 62% of consumers taking a brand's eco-credentials into consideration when choosing which food and drink products to buy, according to a 2021 report by Hearts & Science, it's certainly worth considering how you can tap into this market segment.

Being independent automatically allows for greater flexibility. As

> "Consumers are becoming more savvy. They're beginning to understand that a product labelled 'local strawberry jam' might not in fact contain local strawberries but pulp shipped from China"



Louisa explains, it gives brands the opportunity to share data and knowledge with others to help meet consumer expectations while also demanding more change from within the industry.

"Toast has been a driving force in the beer industry to raise public awareness of issues such as food waste and demonstrate practical actions everyone can take, collaborating with bakery suppliers, other breweries and fellow B Corp food brands," Louisa explains. "Collaboration means we can learn from each other and improve at a faster pace – in the climate crisis, sustainability shouldn't be a USP. That might mean sharing data and knowledge on carbon footprints, partnering to create innovative circular economy products, or jointly campaigning for policy change or regulation, such as making food waste reporting mandatory."

This independence is also what Matthew says will allow for the fine food industry to drive further change: "The fine food sector is leading the way in terms of honesty and transparency, and consumers are actively seeking out retailers they can trust," he says. "But there is much more that should be done to enable consumers to access the information that they want at the point of purchase. Because the sector is driven by independents who can make swift decisions and take action on supply chains without long decision trees, the sector is able to take a clear lead."

Value and accessibility

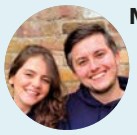
With so many companies competing for the attention of shoppers today, how can you fine tune your branding and messaging to attract conscious consumers without alienating others? First of all, it's important to consider your target audience, keeping in mind that conscious consumers are no longer a standalone, niche group, as Mark Jones and Ana Martins, co-founders of online marketplace Pantree, explain. "Almost every customer wants to make sustainable choices if they can do so without having to make significant compromises on convenience, price or quality. Practices that would previously have been targeted to niche audiences, such as eco-packaging or carbon neutral delivery, are increasingly a standard expectation. The pool of consumers being alienated by conscious or ethically focused messaging is shrinking rapidly.

"That said," Mark and Ana continue, "speciality foods, artisanal vendors and products or brands



MARKETING INSIGHT

How to devise your messaging strategy

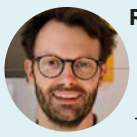


MARK JONES AND ANA MARTINS, PANTREE

Like any strong marketing strategy, for a message to be relatable and convincing, it is crucial that what you are communicating is genuinely authentic.

Keep it clear and simple by identifying one or two USPs which underpin your business proposition and ensure that these messages are both reflected in your core values, from supply chain to customer, and that they are woven into the fabric of all your communications – internal and external.

Whatever the size and scale of your business, with consumers more considered than ever in their purchasing decisions, keep your messaging simple and clear and your business model robust enough that you can back up what you are promising.



RICH FORD, SHERLOCK STUDIO

Take your customers on the journey with you. Tell them that you've got your waste-to-landfill down to 30% but you're working really hard to get that down to zero. They'll respect you for your efforts and who knows, may even have some ideas to help you. Honesty and transparency should also make it less likely that customers will feel isolated or overwhelmed.

In a physical store environment, think carefully about the material you choose to display it on. A message that reads 'We're all about reusing everything we can' that is printed on say, single-use plastic vinyl, is a contradiction in terms. But one that is handwritten on an old wooden palette will demonstrate that you're putting your words into action.

that place priority on sustainable practices can have the association of higher price points and less inclusiveness. Therefore, it is essential to demonstrate the value and accessibility of 'shopping small'. At Pantree, over 70% of the products are £20 or less, and thanks to our unique fulfilment model, shoppers can buy from as many small sellers as they want, all with one low shipping fee and a 48-hour delivery turnaround, proving that price, convenience and indie retailers can coexist."

As a brand, it can be difficult knowing where to start, and there are certainly no easy fixes, as Rich Ford, strategy director at Sherlock Studio, a branding, design and copywriting studio, explains. But when it comes to reducing our impact, it's certainly worth the consideration. "It's easy to switch to biodegradable packaging, but that doesn't fix the problem if people don't have a compost heap or

> "Collaboration means we can learn from each other and improve at a faster pace – in the climate crisis, sustainability shouldn't be a USP. That might mean sharing data and knowledge on carbon footprints, partnering to create innovative circular economy products, or jointly campaigning for policy change"

if the ink is not planet-friendly; it still ends up in landfill. Plastic has been demonised, and in many ways it's a terrible thing. But reusable plastic can be less damaging for the environment than some alternatives. So, always consider the best all-round solution before making a change."

Facing the future

There's no denying that sustainability is making its way up people's list of priorities. According to research from Kantar, 62% of the British population will make up what it bills as Eco Actives by 2030 – that means we're likely to see an even bigger rise in the number of shoppers who take actions to reduce their impact and increase their awareness. With Eco Actives already worth £37bn to the British grocery market, it's safe to say conscious consumerism is here to stay.

"There is a real opportunity for buyers to be more discerning, balancing consumer demands and the need to make a profit with real supply chain traceability and authentic provenance," Matthew says. "More widespread adoption of supply chain validation, like Happerley Transparent, will drive consumer understanding and lead to a shift in buying patterns."

Naturally, as the sector grows, so too will competition; and when it comes to the fine food sector, healthy competition could lead to more innovation and accessibility. "I hope there'll be a race to the top amongst businesses, meaning the environment and social impact of products continues to improve," Louisa says. "The fine food sector is likely to continue as the gold standard, but ethical, regenerative food staples must become mainstream and affordable to everyone."

62%

OF CONSUMERS TAKE A BRAND'S ECO CREDENTIALS INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN CHOOSING WHICH FOOD AND DRINK PRODUCTS TO BUY

SOURCE: HEARTS & SCIENCE 2021 FORCES OF CHANGE SERIES

81%

OF ADULTS THINK THERE IS LOTS OF JARGON WHEN IT COMES TO SUSTAINABILITY AND BEING ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

SOURCE: YEO VALLEY ORGANIC ONEPOLL SURVEY

BEWARE OF GREENWASHING

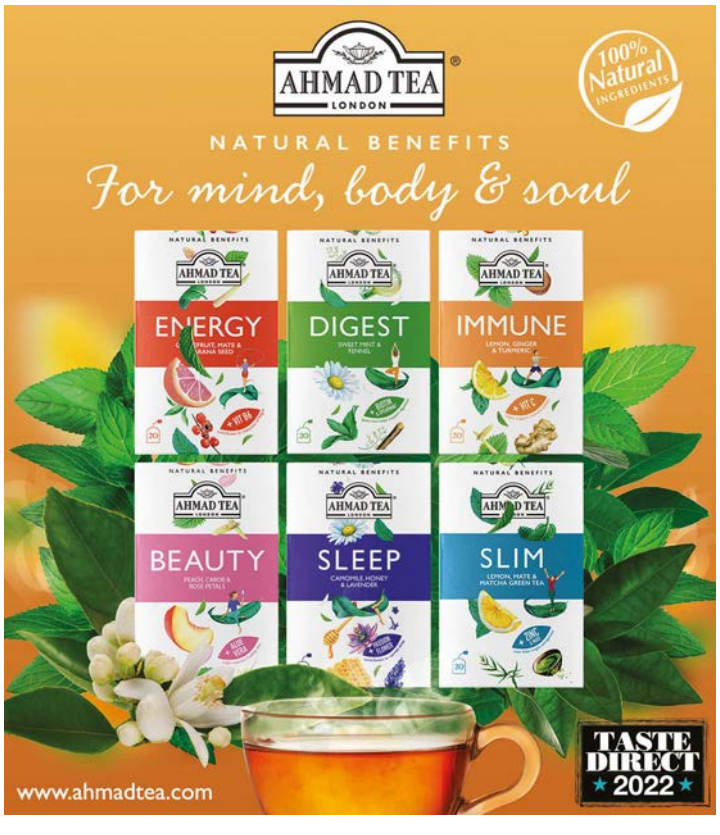
Check your green claims to ensure they're not misleading

As with any movement, there is a downside to the rise in conscious consumerism. According to the UK Government, 40% of green claims made online could be misleading. It's a practice known as greenwashing that sees brands use clever marketing tactics to bill their products as more ethical than they are. But savvy eco consumers are wising up to ambiguous and deceptive claims, becoming more wary, doing more research and demanding answers.

"People are increasingly wary of greenwashing and asking what brands mean when they talk about sustainability," Louisa says. "They want to dig deeper and see evidence. The availability of information online, particularly from brands in the fine food sector, makes that easier than in the past."

You may be eager to share the message of your business' eco credentials with conscious consumers, but it's important to go about it the right way. The new Green Claims Code, developed by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), identifies key areas to measure your claims against, so you can be sure any green claims are genuine and won't mislead buyers.





COMMENTATORS



JADE HOAI
WHOLE FOODS MARKET



BETHAN WALLACE HIGSON
MOTHER ROOT



BECKY VALE
TRACKLEMENTS



TONI VERNELLI
VEGANUARY



ANNE-MARIE CANNON
RH AMAR



MAX SPIEGELBERG
GREENYPEEPS



A FINE FOOD TWIST ON THE HEALTH OPPORTUNITY

Vegan and health food are here to stay. Can speciality retailers put their own stamp on the trend?

It's a well-established fact that more Brits are taking a mindful approach to their food and drink choices. Forget the fact that January is the time of healthy habit-making, moderation and Veganuary pledges – even beyond these temporary campaigns, the desire for food that nourishes the mind, soul and body, as well as the planet, is gathering pace with consumers.

NielsenIQ called health and wellness the single most powerful consumer force, with 48% of global consumers saying they make proactive health and wellness choices on a regular basis. But what do these abstract desires look like in action in a weekly shop? "Think soft drinks with probiotics, fizzy tonics with added prebiotics and ingredients that highlight sustainability and giving back to the environment," says Jade Hoai, director of purchasing and operations at Whole Foods Market. Products with words like 'prebiotic' on their label haven't traditionally been the domain of fine food shops, and it can be intimidating territory for shop owners who aren't health experts but find their customers increasingly seeking out food and drink that enables them to live a healthier life.

Luckily, there's a growing band of brands that are blending sustainable credentials, health-boosting ingredients and premium flavours to create products at the intersection of the fine food sector and the health and wellness movement. Jade says Whole Foods has watched these changes in the market play out. "We've definitely seen an increase in demand for healthy foods that incorporate finer ingredients, which is evident through the findings in our 2022 trends report. Some products that fit into this category would be Aduna Cleanse Tea made with moringa mint and nettle, Gimber Ginger Juice, an alcohol-free organic drink made from ginger, lemon and herbs, and Osius Bone Broth, organic bone broth made with turmeric."

While these products have strong health leanings, they also make use of top-quality ingredients that have the buzz of superfood status, as well as stand-out packaging and a strong sense of provenance. Bethan Wallace Higson, founder of switchel brand Mother Root, says these are principles that the fine food and health food sectors both believe in. "We understand that food and ingredients with provenance, slow grown or products made with few ingredients are often not only the tastiest, but also the best for us, too."

Clever positioning

While more and more products tick the boxes for both health and flavour, sometimes all it takes to transform an item on your shelf from deli favourite to health food superhero is smart product positioning and storytelling. "The pursuit of wellness has become a powerful driver with shoppers looking for food to boost mental as well as physical health. And what we're seeing is that this isn't just limited to 'health foods' or powders and supplements," says Becky Vale of artisan condiments brand Tracklements.

"Our ancestors knew a thing or two about the medicinal properties of some foods: enter wholegrain mustard!" Wholegrain mustard, Becky explains, was historically used as a cure-all, from healing wounds to treating colds. In order to understand these benefits, Tracklements teamed up with Cardiff Metropolitan University to run a trial that proved eating just a heaped teaspoon of wholegrain mustard every day can help achieve healthy blood glucose and cholesterol levels. "This humble hero of the larder and the table not only makes food taste great but it also does you good. So there's now another reason to love those jars of mustards on your shelves!"

Retailers can make the most of traditional products with all-natural formulations or powerhouse ingredients with signage and storytelling in-store. These appeal to customers who prefer to get their health benefits the old-fashioned way. As Becky asks, "What could be better than discovering your favourite meal or condiment is actually good for you?" Be a sounding board for customers, and a source of inspiration too. "As shoppers look to increase the healthiness of their diet, they're likely to turn to their trusted specialist retailer to help them with inspiration. Providing pairing suggestions gives some much sought-after inspiration and a new and different way of using old favourites to liven up new ingredients," Becky says.

"We are beginning to connect the dots that what we put in our bodies (more than what we take out) has a powerful effect on how we feel, both physically and mentally," Bethan adds. "Products that have functional benefits can be particularly appealing as they offer the customer an extra feel-good factor. But this is provided they deliver on taste too as that remains the number one consideration." But don't relegate these to a 'health food' section in a dark corner of the shop – instead, retailers should dot these products throughout the store. "Stay core to your values on taste, but make sure to put interesting food and drinks on shelf that tick some of the key functional and health benefits people are most concerned about today." These include gut health, alcohol moderation and healthy sources of protein and fibre, Bethan says.

The vegan movement

Another area of health and wellness that can be a big money-maker for retailers is vegan food and drink. The sector is full of innovation and excitement as producers seek to develop top meat replacements as well as stand-alone veggie hero products. Research commissioned by Atura Proteins revealed that 56%



of food and drink brand owners and manufacturers are most likely to invest their new product development budget in plant-based products in 2022, meaning even more innovation is on the way.

January is the time of year when the spotlight is turned to vegan innovation, thanks to the industry campaign Veganuary. According to Toni Vernelli, its international head of communications and marketing, more than 582,000 people from 209 countries and territories took part in Veganuary last year, and this year is set to be even bigger. "It has become much more mainstream, with people from all demographics taking part and businesses from every sector getting involved," Toni says. Jade agrees that Veganuary has become a significant event for retailers. "We stock over 5,000 vegan products and just in the past year we've seen an increase in listings of vegan products. With more people taking part in Veganuary each year, we're finding that consumers are looking for alternative food offerings that are not only unique and trend-driven but don't require them to go out of their way in both time and money."

Indeed, while innovation is huge in the plant-based sector, in the same way that fine food products are often 'accidentally healthy', so too can they be 'accidentally vegan'. "Most people will have assumptions about which foods are likely to be vegan and which aren't, so they might walk right past something that is suitable and delicious because they never thought it could be vegan. This is where signposting from the retailer is so important – both on the shelf but also in the window or on signs outside the shop," Toni says. "During January, displaying all of your vegan products in one area is a great idea so it's easy for those deliberately seeking out vegan goods to find. The rest of the year it's better to keep vegan products in with similar products but clearly label them as vegan," Toni continues.

While Veganuary is a huge event, with flexitarianism pegged as a major trend for 2022, there's good reason to invest in vegan year-round. And beware of putting all your stock in meat replacements. Digging deeper into the vegan sector reveals veg-based products that are easy to cook with too. "Shoppers are looking to reduce their meat intake and choosing easy-to-cook and convenient plant alternatives that can help them make a difference," says Anne-Marie Cannon, senior brand manager of Cooks&Co at RH Amar. "Our Cooks&Co Banana Blossom, which is up 237% over the past three months, is a fantastic fish replacement, and an easy swap for fish and chips."

Vegan and healthy food products are no longer a niche. "As more and more brands adopt health- and wellness-focused messaging and NPD, we will find this becoming the baseline across a number of categories," says Max Spiegelberg, marketing director at eco tea brand Greenypeeps. "Soon we may well see prominent, health and wellness shorthand symbols as an alternative form of nutritional or calorie labelling appearing on packaging guiding consumers in their purchasing decisions. New wellness sub-categories will spring up throughout the supermarket aisles. It's already happening in snacking, ready meals, hot and cold beverages and juices. Will it be long before we see widespread health and wellness propositions and messaging across other categories such as soups, dairy and even desserts?" he asks. Health, wellness and plant-based eating will undeniably be part of the fine food industry's 'new normal'. Is your shop ready?

2022 STOCK CHECK



COOKS&CO BANANA BLOSSOM

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rhamar.com



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superghee.co.uk







APPETITE ME


THE GOAT SHED

MAKE YOUR SPACE PAY

Spotted potential for expansion in your business? Great! So what happens next? Anna Blewett finds out

COMMENTATORS


MARK ELLIS
APPETITE ME


MATT WHELAN
FIELDFARE


SAM STEGGLES
THE GOAT SHED

Are you sensing the potential of an exciting expansion in your bricks and mortar business? Dreaming of a bustling coffee counter, a lucrative new chiller area or just a few extra aisles to ease congestion in-store? You're not alone. Mark Ellis, project manager at rural retail developers Appetite Me, found this year's Farm Innovation Show buzzing with interest around expansion. "So many estates, farms and garden centres are looking to expand their food offer, or get a food offer launched, because they know the demand is out there," he says.

While Harrods in Knightsbridge, London no doubt spent thousands upon thousands of pounds upgrading their food hall offering to include a chocolate theatre from Pierre Marcolini, you don't need to invest quite so much to make a big impact. So where do you start?

Is it feasible?

A feasibility study, whether an informal bit of digging or a deep dive into the economics of fine food retail, is the kind of due diligence that will decide whether your project sinks or swims. For Mark, the conditions are definitely right nationally for indie foods to expand, you just have to find out if that's the case locally too. "You only have to go into supermarkets now to see the potential for indies," says Mark.

"The supply chain is still not good. There are still big gaps with drivers, staff and stock... a lot of people have fallen out of love with supermarkets and would rather buy from their local area. Even so, in terms of feasibility it's very important to look at your region and the local competition. For existing businesses it's a case of developing an offer that's different enough from what's already there. Sounds easy, but it really isn't. One of the key things is making sure the shop is the right size, you have the right equipment to display the product, and the right kind of product."

Where are the cashable benefits?

If your USP is offering the finest selection in a particular market, expansion can give you the opportunity to consolidate your position. For example The Courtyard Dairy, which expanded into new premises in 2017, has just opened the doors on its newly-extended shop enabling "more cheeses, less queues". For others, expansion allows a lucrative food service element. So what suits you? "Let's say you had a farm shop that was 500 square feet, now it's 3,000 square feet," says Mark. "Stocking it means choosing products that will drive a margin you can make a profit on. As an existing operator you have a good idea what currently sells, but it's a case of what more can you sell.

"That's where we come in with the data – should you to expand into fresh food, open a butchery... Not every farm shop operator has the skill set or the time to run a butchery, but also not everyone has the time. A lot of our clients farm during the day, so when it comes to making their farm shop a more interesting destination it can work really well to outsource some of the work, work with local suppliers who might be interested in running a concession counter."

How will it look?

You've visualised a new space extending your existing shop floor, but what do you do with it? "The trick is not to just fill it with stock," says Mark. "Yes, in the short term you might get a very high density of sales but in the long run you'll damage your brand. What people want in farm shops is space to be able to navigate around. To look, touch,

HONESTY BOX SHED > 8,000FT FARM SHOP

Sam Steggles shares the story of The Goat Shed, Honingham



Our main business is making cheese, so when Covid hit a lot of our trade dropped off overnight. We had a little garden shed in the yard selling our cheese and other bits on an honesty box system; people were struggling to get things from the supermarket so we started buying pasta, loo roll or whatever to help locals. On the same site builders had been working on our new cheese factory, so we swept it out and moved our shed in. People kept asking us for more things – flour, bread – so it grew and grew. We put up another building and now we have a farm shop and a restaurant serving breakfasts and lunches, plus a pop-up German market in an adjoining barn that's got 25 wooden huts brimming with Christmassy gifts and decorations.

At the start I think a lot of customers came to us because they felt safe. We had a great big barn that's really airy with lots of space. We've been really fortunate that we've designed it in such a way that we can continue with that.

The farm shop cost £250,000. We have a very understanding bank manager, and were very fortunate in getting a rural development grant at the right time which helped. In March '20 we had three people working here and now have about 33. One person's sole job is to greet cars and show them where to park. We started with a calculator and a pen; now we have EPOS across the whole site. There's a huge amount of risk in this, and it's been a baptism of fire. There are plenty if retail places locally – Sainsbury's and M&S, Waitrose, another farm shop 15 miles away... The difference here is that we're more of a destination than a shop. We take very few orders online – everyone wants to come! People can see the goats in the paddock, have coffee and lunch... it really is an amazing experience.



> The dynamic customer habits that are enabling so many expansions will never stop evolving

feel and browse. Supermarkets are spaces for people to mechanically pick up products. With a farm shop you need to allow space."

Normally, when farm shops are expanding they're creating a café or restaurant space. You want those spaces to be flexible so you can increase the space in the farm shop and decrease the café or vice versa. Mark and his buying team have been working with Marshall's Farm Shop and Kitchen in Aberdeenshire, which opened its doors last month on a seven-figure expansion that includes a 'still house' hosting Scottish whiskies from 50 distilleries.

"We spent the last six months working with their local suppliers to create a very specific range just for them," says Mark. "They had an existing farm shop that was very small so they developed plans about two years ago and it's just come to fruition."

How long will it take?

Here's the rub. Grasping the opportunity you've spotted might mean moving fast, but with so many others doing the same experts caution about managing your expectations. "Whatever time frame you want to put on your extension you usually have to add more on," counsels Mark. "Right now, everything is taking longer than normal. If someone says they want a farm shop extension open by next April it's a no brainer. The first thing is planning, and that's a big factor. There are many challenges from planners and we face them daily; you only have to look at what Jeremy Clarkson is doing to see the issues for farm shops. Some operators do it on their own and have been very successful. Some need a little more help, so companies like ours can come in and hold their hand on that. At the moment the planning system is very clogged up and very slow. On top of that building materials are difficult to get hold of, and getting people to build is difficult. Unless your building is up and it's a case of retro-fitting an internal space, timing is going to be the biggest challenge."

> Unless your building is up and it's a case of retro-fitting an internal space, timing is going to be the biggest challenge

Is it future proof?

A great example of expansion across an extended timeframe is Mainsgill Farmshop in Yorkshire which, since it moved into a purpose-build space in 2001, has been extended in 2006 (a new tearoom), 2007 (a dedicated butchery and gift shop), 2011 (an expanded tearoom and kitchens), 2014 (a two-story granary retail space) and 2020 (when the food hall was extended). "Your building needs to be designed so if you want to put 20% more floor space on it's quite easy to do that," says Mark. "It's not just, 'We want to open a bigger farm shop in a year's time' but also what will it look like in five years' time?"

"If you want to add more retail space or add some concessions does the building allow you to bolt those extra elements on? A farm shop extension we're working on now has been purposely designed so that three of the four elevations can be easily extended."

The dynamic customer habits that are enabling so many expansions will never stop evolving. The pandemic has taught us all to be more flexible and canny in our planning – secondary routes out of shops, a rethink of outdoor spaces – but it's also given independent retailers a golden opportunity to break new ground. So go and seize it!

NEW SPACE, NEW MOVES

Why adding branded freezers can maximise the potential of extra floorspace



GROW YOUR OFFER

"Having worked with farmers and growers for 30 years we know they're entrepreneurial by their nature," says Matt Whelan, managing director of premium frozen brand Fieldfare. "We're seeing a lot of new farms shops opening and existing ones expanding at the moment, and are finding our range is very complementary to farm shops' core offer. They might produce wonderful beef and have a great butcher's counter, or run a dairy with a great cheese heritage, but working with us allows them to round that out with a more diverse offer. So you'll see the butcher encouraging customers to try our gratin with their steak, or using our range to offer vegan products so the whole family is happy. It helps get that balance and choice that really complements what the shop is already great at."

DRIVE EFFICIENCY

Extra running costs are a consideration when expanding your shop floor, but there are efficiencies to be made. "Energy price rises affect a whole store – from the chillers, to the tills to the café – but we have highly-efficient glass-top freezers that reduce the loss of energy," says Matt. "Offering frozen also delivers efficiency at that step above; deliveries are less frequent, wastage for your business and also the customer is reduced. We've been champions of loose food since Richard and Ann started the business, and we're working with magazines like *Olive* and *BBC Good Food* to drive people to choose loose at the freezers. The whole proposition is 'take only what you want' which fits very nicely with customer priorities. It's all about quality first, rather than quantity."

ADD-ON SALES

With extra space enabling a more diverse range of SKUs, there's a great opportunity to up the income from your existing footfall. "We work with very small suppliers to produce something really special, whether that's our croissants that home cooks can prove in the evening to make a really fluffy breakfast pastry, or our rainbow fries made from parsnip and carrot, or our new pastel de nata..." Capturing your shoppers' imagination with a taste of the unexpected could really make your new space pay.

> Capturing your shoppers' imagination with a taste of the unexpected could really make your new space pay


HARRODS CHOCOLATE THEATRE



FINAL CALL

It's hard to believe that another year has come and gone, and the pandemic continues to rumble on. Although it feels like 2019 was just yesterday, we're jumping into 2022 with both feet – and we have no doubt independent retailers are doing the same following another busy Christmas season.

A new year offers a time to set new goals and resolutions. What areas of your shop have you been neglecting? What's your biggest priority for 2022? Do you need to improve the customer experience on your website or refresh the layout of your shop? What new products will you try this year? Setting a plan out on paper can make your intentions come to life. They're no longer buzzing around your head with your everyday, arm's length to-do list as half-baked ideas or snippets of a thought – they're concrete.

Could your shop use a new lick of paint or a marketing refresh? Maybe it's time to get started on that refurb you've been putting off for years (tips for this on page 36). Your plans might not be on a grand scale, but simple tweaks can be equally game-changing. Is 2022 the year you finally learn everything you can about SEO or make your first ever Instagram post?

There are endless ways to improve your business, but at the heart of everything is the passion and spirit you bring to your shop. It's something we hear about time and time again that makes this sector so special. Whatever you choose to focus on this year – be it a physical upgrade or improving your technical mastery – we hope you'll take us along on your journey. We love to hear what our readers are doing and what's important to them. Are you looking for advice on website building or tips on reviving tired displays? Let us know and we will endeavour to bring you the answers. We also want to celebrate with you, so tell us about your new openings and your big plans for 2022.

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

5 MINUTES WITH

URVASHI AGARWAL, FOUNDER OF JP'S ORIGINALS



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I would continue my 'other' job at Stone World, distributing marble to architects and interior design projects.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
A receptionist, and then assistant, at a city law firm.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
My parents. They arrived in the UK in their late 20s and carved out a niche for themselves after much trial and error as entrepreneurs. Their work ethic, persistence and passion for what they do inspires me daily.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
Working the shop floor at Abercrombie & Fitch whilst at university. The stores were dark, music was shocking (and loud) and you would leave your shift smelling like their men's signature fragrance.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
Knowing how much of a difference JP's has made to so many of our loyal customers.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
Having to take a greater interest in logistics off the back of recent supply chain issues.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I'm interested to see where the current interest in sustainability, wellness and provenance takes us. Consumers are getting more involved in knowing what they are eating/drinking and cultivating more refined tastes.

TEA OR COFFEE?
Tea, tea, tea! I started JP's Originals after cutting my coffee addiction.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
A homemade roast with all the trimmings, an apple and rhubarb crumble, followed by a JP's Original Soul Soother, of course.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
Persistence, patience, positivity.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
Pigs' trotters. Never again.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Shoe Dog by Phil Knight. I really savoured this book, reading chapters to give myself a motivational boost.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
My current guilty pleasure is a lemon curd Longboys doughnut with a cup of JP's Earl Grey – can't go wrong.

BE CONNECTED

"The UK cheese industry is abundant with people whose *passion and skill* are evident in the superior quality artisanal cheeses produced. When championing our cheeses, we must do more to *celebrate* those that make it all possible"

PAUL HEASMAN, PURCHASING COORDINATOR AT ROWCLIFFE

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- Tea
- Selling Cheese
- Temperature Controlled Packaging
- Frozen Food & Ready Meals
- Fairtrade and Sustainable





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TRIED & TESTED

BODHA ROSE AND CARDAMOM



Thanks to the growing alcohol moderation movement (hello, Dry January participants!), the drinks sector is poised for a refresh. Mocktails, low and no beverages and grown-up soft drinks are spilling into the market with fantastic flavours and innovative ideas, and Bodha is no different. Crafted with Damask rose and fragrant cardamom, plus botanical extracts, this drink is indulgence in a can. Plus, they were designed to be enjoyed alongside pan-Asian and Middle Eastern food, so customers will have a brand new tipple to try on their curry nights.
bodhadrinks.co.uk

BEPPS POPPED BBQ

It might be January, but I'm already daydreaming ahead to summer picnics and sunny gatherings with friends and family (British weather dependent). Of course, that means thinking about the contents of my picnic basket too, and I already have a flavourful inclusion in BEPPS Popped BBQ. Named after one of their primary ingredients, black eyed peas, BEPPS are not only full of tangy, rich barbecue flavour, but they are also vegan, gluten-free and 90 calories or less per serving, making them a perfect stock for health-conscious shoppers.
beppssnacks.com



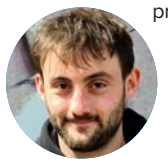
ST MAUR ELDERFLOWER LIQUEUR

It's always a pleasure to discover an artisanal alternative to a favourite food or drink, so I was delighted to discover St Maur: an elderflower liqueur made using elderflowers gathered from the producers' – The Earl and Countess of Yarmouth – ancient family-owned woodland in Warwickshire. This tipple is beautifully balanced with notes of red fruit and is pleasingly versatile, and is just as delicious used as the star of a cocktail as it is topped with sparkling wine for a simple, party-ready drink.
drinkstmaur.com



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Tomas Gormley, co-owner and joint head chef of Heron, Leith



Heron is a relaxed fine dining restaurant serving an a la carte menu, with views looking out to the Water of Leith and the Firth of Forth beyond. After starting a pop-up fine dining home delivery service in the pandemic called Bad Seeds, my business partner Sam Yorke and I decided to open our very own restaurant where we could both be head chefs. We came to visit a restaurant space on The Shore and immediately knew this was the perfect home for Heron.

We describe our approach to using ingredients as farm to table. We are so lucky to have such an inspiring roster of passionate producers in our local area who are disrupting traditional supply chains and selling direct to restaurants.

We know where our meat, cheeses and fresh produce are coming from because we have been able to visit our suppliers before opening and discuss new product launches, seasonal varieties and create a menu inspired by our surroundings.

Having worked in Edinburgh restaurants before launching our own, both Sam and I were lucky to already have great relationships with local growers, fisherman, butchers and farmers. For example, our shellfish, lobster and crab come from Dunbar just a short drive down the east coast from Belhaven Lobster. They're a small company, and we were introduced by a mutual friend who was seriously impressed by their ethics and product. It's the best seafood we tasted.

The Free Company is a small regenerative farm based in the Pentland Hills just within the city limits. Run by three friends, they are moving away from traditional farming methods to regenerative practices to improve the quality of produce, whilst protecting and preserving the landscape. Our meat suppliers, MacDuff Butchers, invited us to their abattoir, and it was great as a chef to see how butchers work to break down a carcass for the best quality cuts for us to prepare in the restaurant. They champion unusual cuts of meat. In East Lothian, Phantassie Organic Farm provides our tomatoes, summer squash and courgettes. We've had great support from East Coast Cured, whose charcuterie jungle curing room is less than a mile from the restaurant, and our bread comes from Company Bakery, one of the best in Edinburgh.

> "We know where our meat, cheeses and fresh produce are coming from because we have been able to visit our suppliers before opening and discuss new product launches, seasonal varieties and create a menu inspired by our surroundings"

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Garofalo



THE ITALIAN UPSELL

We explore how retailers can boost their Italian food and drink sales in 2022

It's the time of year for resolutions and goal-setting sessions, and for diets and healthy eating pledges. When consumers swear off chocolate and indulgences and vow to eat their vegetables, cut down on takeaways and cook meals at home. Out, once again, come the bulky bags of dried pasta and the jars of rich ragu. As a simple, flavourful dish, it's hard to think of a better option.

Maybe your customers are some of the many UK shoppers who pushed the boat out with a pizza oven this year, or they could be experimenting in making their own pasta. These new-to-them recipes are easy to indulge in January as there are so many ingredients which suit the annual health-kick. Waitrose's 2022 Food & Drink Report sung the praises of tinned fish as sales of mackerel and anchovies both jumped 17% over the last year, while tuna sales shot up 500% during the first half of 2020, thanks to the product's versatility and simplicity – just pop open and pop in your pasta.

With many consumers feeling the bite of price inflation, it's time to shout about the benefits of authentic Italian products. Despite price pressures, consumers have still shown an inclination to support small businesses and upgrade their purchases where they can – for instance, forking out on the flavour of Italy through brands like Mutti.

The proof is in the pudding – or pasta. Explain clearly what makes a product like artisan olive oil so special, offer a taste with a hunk of freshly baked bread, and your customers will be coming back for more. Retailers can also sing the praises of superfood-rich Mediterranean diets, which are shown to reduce the risk of developing conditions like high blood pressure and cholesterol as well as heart disease. Showing customers that healthy eating doesn't have to be flavourless will go down a treat this time of year. Explain just how easy it is to turn an Italian dish vegan and you'll win the favour of Veganuary followers, too.

Italian cuisine is endlessly flexible and whatever the season or reason, consumers will keep coming back to their favourites. By showing them why fine food shop products stand head and shoulders above anything they could find at a supermarket, retailers will win loyal customers for 2022.

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



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