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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the July/August issue of *Speciality Food*, where we're starting to feel festive and excited about the opportunities ahead.

You'll find the first of our Christmas-centric features on page 26, including plenty of expert advice to help guide you through this busiest of seasons. In a nutshell, find your own unique balance of tradition and innovation – tailored to your individual customer base, of course – and get started as early as you can.

We also dive into the spreads category on page 32, where we hear about the fight for education around better honey and why peanut butter is worth its weight in gold, and the world of homewares on page 34: undoubtedly worth dipping your toe into ahead of the festive season. We explain why Halloween is well worth investing in on page 28; if you haven't yet maximised this growing opportunity, read on to find out how and why you should.

Plus, we glean invaluable insight from across the cheese sector to find out how it's faring in 2025 on page 16; while its players are weathering a mountain of challenges, they are standing strong and innovating to survive.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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Should retailers be responsible for consumers' healthy eating?

The nation's fight for improved health is ramping up, but should the buck stop with retail? Industry experts speak out

New Government NHS plans require supermarkets to be proactive in encouraging shoppers to make healthier choices, with fines being suggested as a deterrent for those that fail to meet healthy food sales targets. A recent YouGov survey showed that of 32% of British consumers are in favour while over half (52%) oppose the idea.

According to recent studies, the British nation is becoming increasingly aware of the need to eat more healthily, but with retailers often stating that they sell ultra processed foods (UPFs) – one of the key drivers of obesity and poor health across the world – as a result of demand from consumers, is it fair to put pressure on the retail sector to improve public health?

There is a political split at play, according to YouGov: Conservative and Reform voters are most likely to be against the plans (68-71%), while Labour and Lib Dem voters are split, with 41-42% in favour and 44-45% against.

The survey comes at a challenging time for British retail; while total till sales at UK supermarkets were up by 3% in June according to NielsenIQ, unit growth has declined by 0.7% in the same period as a result of waning consumer confidence and continuing inflation. However, healthy food sales are seeing an uplift, thought to be a result of the warm weather experienced across the UK.

Meanwhile, NielsenIQ data showed that healthier food options such as rice cakes (+18%), sushi (+15%), big pot yoghurts (+29%) and frozen fruit (+21%) have seen growth, in line with their *Global State of Health & Wellness* report which revealed that 66% of British consumers are actively making healthier choices.

Limiting consumption of processed foods is the primary concern for 44% of shoppers, according to the report, with 36% making an effort to eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables each day.

Mike Watkins, head of retailer and business insight at NielsenIQ, explained, "In the first six weeks of summer 2025, shoppers have spent £700m more and 75% (£521m) of that has been in fresh and chilled foods. This perhaps indicates the shift of spend not just towards convenient fresh food options but towards a more healthy and nutritious diet."

Another report, Circana's *Eat Play Love*, stated that consumers are becoming increasingly proactive about taking control on their health. Protein and fibre-rich foods are on the rise, as are those linked with immunity-boosts, mood-enhancement and brain health-optimisation. This isn't to say that there isn't an appetite for non-health foods: while demand is rising for nutritious options in the snacking sector in particular, the study shows that 38% of consumers believe that processing improves taste and 40% say it makes food and drink products more affordable.

"Retailers have a crucial role to play in shaping the nation's diets," says Oona Buttafoco, senior policy officer healthy and sustainable food at Soil Association. "With rising levels of diet-related illness and widening health inequalities, it's no longer enough to offer healthy and sustainable food as an option – it must be the easy, accessible, and default choice for everyone. Retailers must take greater responsibility for the products they promote and sell."

While the road ahead comes with challenges, Oona suggests retailers view it as an opportunity to do better for all. "Recent announcements on mandatory healthy food sales reporting for major food businesses presents a real opportunity for retailers to lead the way – by being transparent about the healthiness of their offerings and using that insight to make whole and minimally processed nutritious, sustainable food more available and accessible to all consumers."

It is time to educate consumers

Mark Kacary of Norfolk Deli believes that retailer fines would be a step too far in the wrong direction when it comes to the fight for better health.

"One argument is that a supermarket does offer plenty enough healthy foods," he began. "They sell fresh fruit and vegetables, they sell products like rice and pasta, they sell oats, lentils, pulses and tinned fish (of course they are nowhere near the quality of specialist shops, but going to a deli is like shopping for a BMW instead of a Ford). Where I would have sympathy for supermarkets (or for any retailer) is if fines were handed out based on arbitrary targets managed by who? This feel like an especially insane idea when in many ways supermarkets are correct in saying they are purely responding to customer demand, even if that customer demand was created by them in the first place.

"While retailers have a responsibility to make healthy food available to the shoppers that want it, the buck doesn't stop with them," said Mark. Instead, education is needed across the board to help consumers make healthier choices – and this movement should start at the top of the chain. "I do not see this as a retailer issue although of course they (we) can all do better. It is an education issue," he said. "Maybe a different set of fines should be dished out. Should it be to the government for getting rid of cookery classes in school? Or should it be to parents who have failed their children by not passing on a life skill and that being how to cook?"



Cress Co adds to trophy cabinet with latest award win

Fife-based fine food distributor Cress Co has been named Specialist Wholesaler of the Year at The Grocer Gold Awards 2025

The award is in recognition of the business's outstanding service to independent retailers and producers UK-wide.

Founded by Joe Wall in 2003, Cress Co is currently Britain's largest fine food wholesaler, and its 150-strong team operates from five depots to supply ambient and chilled food and drink to over 800 independent retailers including delis, cafés, farm shops and garden centres.

Customers enjoy low minimum orders, no listing fees and an unwavering commitment to customer service alongside a diverse mix of well-known and artisan brands.The average order fulfilment rate is 99.5%, and over the past 12 months the team has achieved double digit growth – expanding its fleet and depot network and moving closer to launching a pioneering new logistics and stock management system to further boost effiency and availability.

Joe Wall, founder of Cress Co, said, "Our goal has always been to take the hassle out of wholesale. Retailers need reliability, choice and service they can trust. This award is a huge credit to our team who work so hard every day to make that happen."

According to *The Grocer* magazine, "One judge praised Cress Co for its 'outside the box; thinking, which marked it out as a company destined for even bigger things going forward."





Plans afoot for a fair, resilient food system

Key names across the food industry have expressed support for building a future-proof global food system through pre-emptive collaboration, amid building pressures on global supply chains due to climate change, economic uncertainty and a volatile trade system.

The Government's new trade strategy includes an example of collaboration through the Fairtrade Foundation's Shared ImPact business model, a commitment to support collaboration between businesses to tackle climate challenges, protect human rights and drive change across the sector via long-term sourcing commitments, deeper collaboration with producers and greater investment in sustainability.

As part of the Shared ImPact initiative, The Fairtrade Foundation will identify pools of producers who are able to provide additional product on Fairtrade terms and source guidance on better communicating their sustainability efforts.

Retailers have welcomed the move as a way to enhance supply chain transparency, ensure fairer prices and improve relationships between buyers and producers. They will also benefit from enhanced reporting and sustainability credentials, in alignment with increasing regulatory requirements in the UK and EU.

Kerrina Thorogood, partnerships director at the Fairtrade Foundation, said, "We're delighted that so many retailers, manufacturers and traders welcome the need for precompetitive collaboration to address key sustainability challenges – including Shared Impact – and that the UK Government recognises the value of pooled sourcing and long-term commitments with our essential producers as key tools to address critical sustainability, resilience and livelihood concerns related to cocoa, bananas and coffee. We plan to share our experience and learnings as we roll out Shared ImPact over the coming months to help improve industry understanding of the benefits of pre-competitive collaboration."

How to manage margins in 2025

JOE PHELAN, MONEY.CO.UK BUSINESS CREDIT CARDS EXPERT

The data shows that many UK businesses have been forced to increase their prices in the last year, amid turbulent economic times. With more tax and tariff hikes coming into effect in recent months, it's likely that even more firms will need to adjust their margins to remain profitable. Here are some tips to help with this:

"Review your finances: start by analysing where your money goes. Look at overheads, supplier costs, and staffing. Identify areas to cut back or streamline, then explain the changes and the reasons to your team clearly.

"Find out what is important to your customers: price isn't the only factor that influences purchasing decisions. Other factors include the quality of your product or service, as well as what your company stands for. For example, a business's environmental and sustainability commitments increasingly influence younger generations' spending; around two-thirds of both Gen Z and Millennials (58-60%) say sustainability is a top priority in purchase decisions.

"Boost revenue by diversifying: could you offer a new service, create a subscription model, or target a different customer segment? Look at what's already working and explore ways to build on it without overextending.

"Cut transport costs by buying local: if you import materials or stock, explore local suppliers instead. It won't always be possible, but it's worth investigating, as local sourcing can reduce shipping fees, avoid delays, and protect you from unpredictable tariffs.

"Use a business credit card to manage cash flow: when income and expenses don't line up, a business credit card can bridge the gap, helping you cover bills, smooth over shortfalls, and access emergency funds when needed. It's a flexible tool, especially when cash reserves are tight.

"These are just a few ways SMEs can stay profitable without passing rising costs onto customers. While some inflation is inevitable, smart financial strategies can help you protect margins, retain customers, and keep your business growing."





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Consumers still unconvinced by the circular economy

BSI has conducted a new global study which demonstrates that many consumers are still hesitant about 'circular' food products

The report, *The Tipping Point: Building Trust in the Circular Economy*, was developed in collaboration with the University of Cambridge's Institute for Sustainability Leadership. It showed that 'Wonky' produce or items in recycled packaging aren't connecting with today's shoppers, despite growing concern about the environmental impact of the food industry. According to the study, quality is an issue for 56% of respondents, safety is a worry for 51%, and reliability is a concern for 49%.

It also revealed that only 25% of consumers around the world would by 'wonky' produce, that 31% would choose food items in recycled packaging, and 59% stated that a recognised label would help them trust circular product claims.

A key point raised by the study was that there is a 'trust gap' in the circular economy – consumers are motivated to make environmentally-friendly choices but are not willing to compromise on the perceived standards of conventional produce. This offers a valuable opportunity for food and drink producers who are able to demonstrate the quality and safety of circular products.



Bumper year for Fairfields

Essex-based crisp producer Fairfields is continuing its expansion plans with a major factory investment set to boost weekly crisp production by 40%.

The multi-million-pound upgrade includes the installation of a second industrial fryer, and a new automated weighing and bagging system to support the increased volume. This follows the installation of a similar fryer last year, which increased capacity by 90%.

A record harvest, the launch of new products and visually stronger, more eco-friendly packaging, and a series of production enhancements are key milestones of a strong year for the brand, which reported an increase of 38% on year-on-year sales, with a further 25% year-on-year growth for July 2024-July 2025.

Robert Strathern, co-founder, said, "This upgrade is about unlocking the next phase of our growth. As we scale, we're investing in the systems and infrastructure that will allow us to stay agile and deliver more of what our customers want, without compromising on the values that set us apart."

Tash Jones, commercial director, said, "We've built strong momentum over the past 12 months – driven by product innovation, sustainable practices, and a brilliant team. With increased capacity and a pipeline of new products and contract wins, we're now in an excellent position to drive further growth across both existing and new markets."

Boost for UK retail sales

It seems sunny weather has buoyed the retail sector, with the latest data showing sales from June into early July were up across the board compared to the same period last year.

The BRC-KMPG Sales Monitor report shows total UK sales were up 3.1%, compared to a decline of 0.2% in 2024.

Of these, food sales increased by 4.1% against growth of 1.8%, non-food sales increased 2.2% against a decline of 1.9%, in-store non-food sales increased by 2.2% against a decline of 2.6%, and online non-food sales increased by 2.3%, against a decline of 0.7%.

The online penetration rate (the number of non-food items bought online) of 36.6% was unchanged compared to the same period in 2024.

Soaring temperatures increased sales of electric fans, while sports and leisure equipment were boosted by both the weather and the start of Wimbledon, noted Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium (BRC). "Food sales remained strong, though this was in-part driven by food inflation, which has risen steadily over the course of the year," she added.

Though, Helen continued, the outlook isn't all sunshine and rainbows, as retailers watch the Government closely for details of the impending business rates reform.

"If the Government includes shops within its new higher rates threshold, then many retailers will be forced to rethink their investment plans," she said. "The closure of larger stores would harm the local communities they support, costing jobs and reducing footfall in the area they serve."

Helen continued, "If Government wants to improve high streets and help communities, they must ensure no shop pays more under their new rates reforms."

Linda Ellett, UK head of consumer, retailer and leisure at KPMG, said home appliances and homeware purchases helped greatly with sales growth in June, as new homebuyers and those refreshing their current homes took advantage of summer promotions both in-store and online.

"Warm weather and the start of the holiday season led to modest monthly growth for clothing sales. But retailers will be hoping that the buying is not yet complete, and that the pace picks up further in July and August as suitcases get packed, and the sun hopefully keeps shining."

Commenting further on the performance of the food and drink sector, Sarah Bradbury, CEO of IGD, said, "Shopper confidence fell back this month, but stayed marginally above zero, landing at just one." Escalating global tensions and economic pressures, she added, have left shoppers feeling uncertain about the year ahead, and the number of shoppers expecting food prices to increase has risen from 14% to 20%, reflecting renewed inflation concerns.

"Value sales growth continues to be predominately driven by inflation, with volumes under sustained pressure, however, the arrival of new summer ranges and improved weather presents retailers with opportunities to tap into more consumer occasions, particularly amongst higher income shoppers who remain focused on quality," she added.

> "Government must ensure no shop pays more under their new rates reforms"

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"Adopting technology"



OLIVER LLOYD
CONSULTANT

Last summer, I was in France and came across two things that stopped me in my tracks. The first was a staff-less shop with a whole series of mini fridges that opened on demand to reveal a myriad of fresh items. It was like walking into a vending machine. The second was a pizza vending machine in the middle of rural France on an uninspiring street corner from a company called Just Queen. Now I can't vouch for the quality of the pizza, but it seems that there are now more than 3,000 of these machines across France, so they must be doing something right.

However, in the UK, these kinds of innovations are strangely absent, which is odd, considering we live in an era where technology permeates nearly every aspect of our lives. If you look at retail today, beyond automated checkouts and the occasional orange juice machine, very little has changed. Yes, there are stores where you walk in and walk out without scanning your actual items, but most of it seems firmly anchored in traditional practices. There are a few digital signs in-store, and I find that checkouts often still struggle to read barcodes, or maybe it's just me. Among independent retailers, many view this traditional approach as a strength, but consumers now expect more. I also think it means many are missing opportunities.

The reality is that the retail landscape has undergone significant evolution since the turn of the millennium. With the rise of e-commerce and the growing demand for convenience, consumer lifestyles have undergone considerable diversification. People are shopping differently, often seeking quick and efficient solutions that align with their shifting life rhythms. There is more home working and more home-cooked meals. People are more likely to purchase something special from a local store and supplement it with a cheaper solution. However, for many small retailers, adopting technology to meet these changing needs often seems like a step too far.

One of the crucial factors contributing to this stagnation is the fair concern over costs. Many small retailers operate on tight budgets and are hesitant to invest in new technologies that may seem risky, unnecessary and with potentially short shelf lives. However, this mindset overlooks the long-term benefits that technology can bring, such as reducing staff costs and increasing operational efficiency.

For instance, staff-less stores, which allow customers to enter, select items, and check out without the need for cashiers, can significantly cut labour expenses and extend opening hours. Similarly, advanced vending machines equipped with innovative technology can offer a wide array of products and provide a 24/7 shopping option without the need for staff presence. In mainland Europe and parts of Asia, this trend is far more advanced.

Interestingly, the fast-food industry serves as a compelling contrast to the slow uptake of technology among small retailers. Both large chains and smaller establishments have quickly adopted touch-screen technology and highly visual displays to enhance customer experiences. Fast-food outlets have transformed their ordering processes with self-service kiosks, allowing customers to customise their meals with ease while also reducing the burden on staff. These interactive displays not only streamline order-taking but also engage customers visually, showcasing menu items in an appealing way that encourages upselling. This tech-forward approach reflects a broader trend in the food service industry, where efficiency and customer satisfaction are paramount.

The opportunities for small retailers to embrace technology are vast, especially as consumer expectations continue to evolve. A prime example of a small business that has successfully adopted technology is Fen Farm Dairy, a place I often visit when I'm in Suffolk for the weekend with my family. Their milk, butter, cheeses, and yoghurts are truly artisanal products that feel as far removed from technology as they could be. But their little milk kiosk near Bungay is different. They have a vending machine to get fresh raw milk. There are fridges stocked with a wide range of local brands, including meats, cheeses, and snacks. There is a frozen unit offering pizzas, pies and other local ready-to-cook items. And when you are ready to leave, you self-check out.

I suspect this approach has had its share of problems, including theft and systems that do not always function properly. But by adopting it, I can swing by at any time and get quality produce. Fen Farm Dairy's approach serves as a valuable case study for other small retailers. It demonstrates that technology doesn't have to compromise the essence of a brand; instead, it can enhance it. By adopting new solutions, retailers can improve customer engagement, streamline operations, and ultimately drive growth.

With all the pressures on staffing and people's ever-changing life rhythms, I suspect that local retailers offering more extended hours and more frictionless shopping will win out. I know it's not for everyone, but I think for some it is worth trialling.

Renewed SFI scheme must work for all, says NFU



The NFU is urging Defra to ensure that the latest Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) scheme works for all farmers across the UK following Steve Reed, Secretary of State's recommitment to Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs)

NFU Deputy President David Exwood, said, "It's encouraging to hear the Defra Secretary reaffirm his commitment to ELMs and the principle of rewarding farmers for the public goods they deliver for the environment while producing food for the nation.

"SFI was always meant to be a simple, accessible scheme that supports work to improve the environment alongside food production. We will continue to engage with Defra to discuss how this can be achieved, provided there is openness and transparency. Choice and flexibility were why SFI worked for farmers and so any discussion about targeting and packaging must be based on clear evidence.

"While the Defra Secretary's remarks are broad, they lack the clarity needed as cashflow pressures mount and direct payments rapidly decline.

"Farmers now need to see detail on the future shape of SFI so they can better understand how it will work for them.

"We firmly share Defra's ambition to support profitable and sustainable farm businesses. Achieving that goal depends on making the SFI scheme work for all farmers, regardless of size, sector, or location.

"If the aim is for SFI to help farming deliver environmental benefits, then excluding large areas of English farmland from the scheme would be counterproductive."

> "These fees provide welcome clarity for manufacturers on the costs they will be facing for the first year of EPR. At £1.4bn a year, EPR is an expensive programme. So, it's critical that government demonstrates to industry how the scheme will deliver value for money, improve the UK's flatlining recycling rates, and build the circular economy that packaging producers expect.
>
> The UK government beginning to set out measures to ensure that local councils only spend EPR fees on packaging recycling is a welcome step in the right direction. We look forward to seeing further detail on how this will be enforced and applied across both Scotland and Wales"

JIM BLIGH, DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND PACKAGING, THE FOOD AND DRINK FEDERATION, RESPONDING TO AN ANNOUNCEMENT ON EPR FROM PACKUK, INCLUDING 2025 MATERIALS BASE FEES



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Industry reacts to new British Trade Strategy

Leaders from multiple industries have reacted positively to the announcement this week of the Government's new UK Trade Strategy, hot on the heels of myriad trade deals – with India, America and the USA

Balwinder Dhoot, director of growth and sustainability at The Food and Drink Federation, said the organisation is pleased by the plans to remove barriers to trade. "The continued focus on a renewed SPS agreement with the EU, to reduce the current burdens that businesses face when trading with our closest and most important partner is welcome." He added the inclusion of measures to strengthen imports will additionally strengthen the UK's food security.

"We look forward to working with Government over the coming months to turn ambition into action and maintain momentum in building stronger trade relationships across global markets."

This is the first Trade Strategy published since Britain left the EU, with the aim to give greater access to global markets, securing what the Government says could be billions worth of opportunities "helping deliver the economic growth needed to put money in people's pockets, strengthen local economies, create jobs, and raise living standards".

Key takeaways from the UK's new Trade Strategy

- The new Ricardo Fund tackles complex regulatory issues, removing obstacles for selling abroad.

- The strategy expands UK Export Finance (UKEF's) capacity by £20 billion, and announces a new Small Export Builder, giving smaller firms better access to export protection insurance, and introducing improvements to help overseas buyers finance repeat orders from UK suppliers in a more streamlined way.

- The Government says it will make the UK's trade remedies system more agile and accountable, to guard British businesses against global turbulence.

- The strategy targets more mutual recognition of qualifications, to boost the UK's status as a services superpower.

- It builds on existing clean energy and green sector agreements with partners including Norway, Japan and South Korea, and explores agreements with new partners.

- And it announces the UK will join the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA) - a temporary arbitration arrangement for resolving appeals to WTO trade disputes, demonstrating our commitment to an effective rules-based international trading system.

Business and trade secretary, Jonathan Reynolds, said, "The UK is an open trading nation, but we must reconcile this with a new geopolitical reality and work in our own national interest. Our Trade Strategy will sharpen our trade defence so we can ensure British businesses are protected from harm, while also relentlessly pursuing every opportunity to sell to more markets under better terms than before.

"Broad and complex trade deals like we secured with India will bring billions to our economy every year but to deliver the Plan for Change we will strike more agile, targeted deals that exploit the sectors which drive the most growth for our economy."

Trade minister, Douglas Alexander, added, "This new hard-headed, data driven, and agile approach to trade policy is guided by our pragmatic patriotism. In this changed and challenging world, we will promote what we can and protect what we must to advance the UK's national interest. Through our Trade Strategy, we are supporting our businesses to expand and export with a wider range of trade tools that harness our high-growth industries of the future to deliver this government's Plan for Change."

The industry reacts

Shevaun Haviland, director general, British Chambers of Commerce: "The Trade Strategy sets out a clear, evidence-based approach to raising the UK's export game. It rightly targets our strength in services, and vital high-growth goods sectors while identifying key markets in the Indo-Pacific, Americas and European neighbourhood.

"A focus on sectoral and digital trade deals is also welcome, alongside a commitment to a functioning rules-based global trading system.

"Place matters in trade. This strategy can generate economic growth in every nation and region of the UK, lowering tariffs and removing trade barriers. Our Chamber Network stands ready to build, invest and deliver on international trade as a partner of government and an engine for economic growth."

Rain Newton-Smith, CEO, Confederation of British Industry: "Businesses are clear that positioning the UK as an outward looking nation is a show of strength in this increasingly fragmented world. Backing free trade is critical to facing the great global challenges and opportunities of our time.

"The UK must be bold and ambitious to be a key player in the global race for growth. Today's Strategy offers a dynamic vision which will help the UK to position itself as one of the world's leading locations for investment and trade. Leaning into that openness, our international commitments, and partnerships with like-minded allies will be integral to our success.

"We now need government and business to work together to turn this ambition into action and ensure that the UK seizes on the opportunities available within the global economy."

Stephen Phipson CBE, CEO, Make UK: "Industry will welcome the Trade Strategy which, for the first time, aligns hard on the heels of the Industrial Strategy and is a perfect example of joined up thinking across Government which has long been missing.

"In particular, as well as a focus on new markets, it will help optimise market access and signposting for companies, especially SMEs, to take advantage of current trade deals with a new focus on strategic economic partnerships with key trading partners.

"At the same time, as well as helping boost exports, it will strengthen trade defences against the threat of dumping and support UK firms in reporting possible trade discrepancies to the Trade Remedies Authority."

Marco Forgione, director general, Chartered Institute of Export and International Trade: "The new Trade Strategy is a welcome step forward that reflects many of the priorities we've been championing on behalf of our members, especially SMEs, who need targeted, accessible support to grow internationally.

"From the Small Exports Builder to enhanced UK Export Finance, these are practical tools designed to reduce friction and unlock potential for thousands of firms across the UK.

"We've worked closely with government to feed in the real-world experiences of our members, and it's encouraging to see those insights reflected in today's announcement.

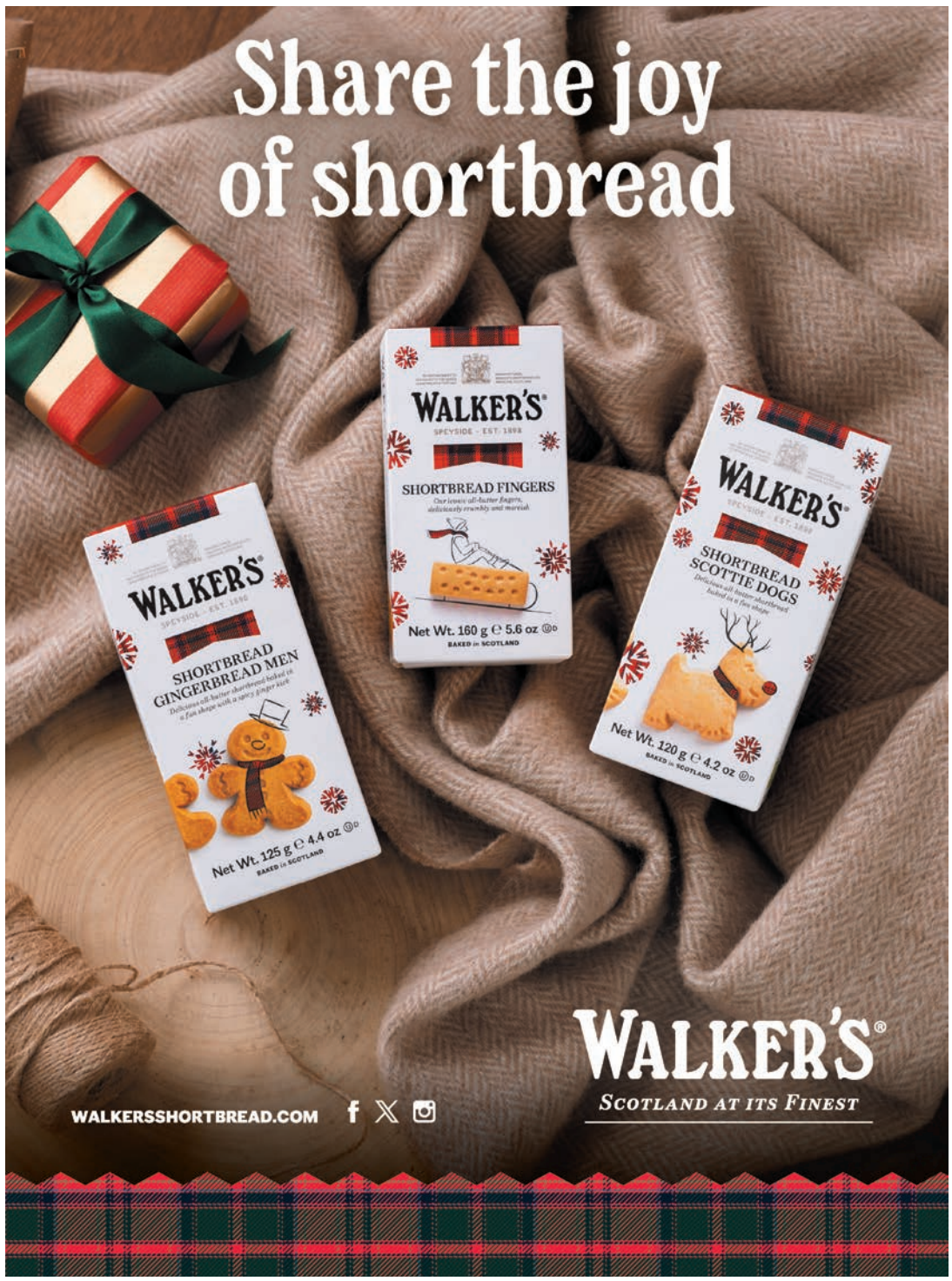
"Launched alongside the Industrial Strategy, this sets a more joined-up direction for trade and growth. Now the focus must be on delivery, and we stand ready to help make it happen."

Tina McKenzie, policy chair, the Federation of Small Businesses: "Small firms know exporting is good for growth, so it's good to see a clear strategy on trade. We welcome the government's commitment to creating better digital tools, less red tape and putting stronger focus on practical support beyond just trade deals.

"We also need to see more money and new funding programmes for SMEs wanting to trade internationally, as well as more bespoke support for the smallest firms, who do not qualify for one-to-one help.

"Small firms have been bogged down by unnecessary rules and costs for far too long, and today's strategy is the first step to creating a better environment for exporters and importers."

> "We now need government and business to work together to turn this ambition into action and ensure that the UK seizes on the opportunities available within the global economy"



Charcuterie from Europe

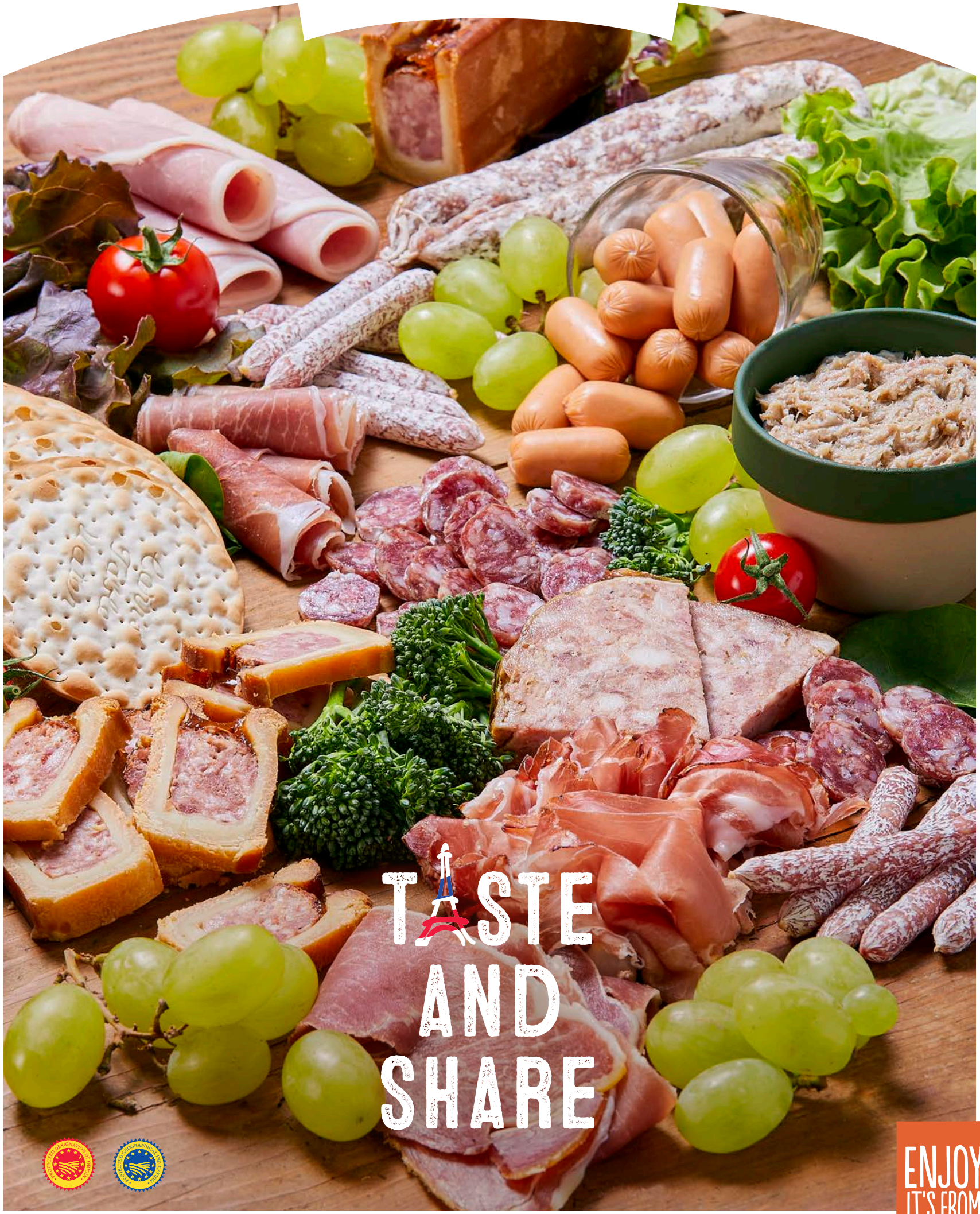


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PRODUCT NEWS

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Castle Dairies partners with Halen Mon

Wales's leading butter producer, Castle Dairies, has partnered with renowned sea salt specialists Halen Môn to create a range of salted butters.

The new products, available in block and spreadable formats, have been crafted with natural ingredients and are free from additives, colourings and preservatives using traditional methods for a pure, high quality and flavoursome butter.

The new 250g Castle Dairies Salted Halen Môn Block contains British butter, Halen Mon Sea Salt Crystals and Halen Môn Fine Salt for a crunchy texture with the distinctive flavour of hand-harvested sea salt, while the 250g Castle Dairies Salted Halen Môn Spreadable pack blends British butter and rapeseed oil with Halen Môn Sea Salt for a flavour-packed spreadable butter that can be used straight from the fridge.

Rebecca Ross, brand manager for Castle Dairies, said, "At Castle Dairies, we're passionate about crafting real butter the traditional way – using established and respected methods passed down through generations. We're committed to using only the finest, natural, British ingredients, all responsibly sourced from trusted UK suppliers who share our values around sustainability and ethical farming. Partnering with Halen Môn is a natural fit – bringing together two artisan brands with a shared commitment to quality, innovation, and delivering something truly special to delight our customers."

castledairies.co.uk



Freshly launched sweet options from Good Guys Bakehouse



Healthier biscuit brand Good Guys Bakehouse has ventured into sweet territory with the launch of two new Sweet Crispy Biscuits.

The new options – Cocoa and Ginger – are baked with cocoa, ginger and cinnamon and absolutely no palm oil for a flavour-packed sweet snack with low saturated fat and just six calories per biscuit.

Steve Monk, founder of Good Guys Bakehouse, said, "Unlike other sweet biscuits that are high in saturated fat and calories, our new Crispy Biscuits contain less than a quarter of the saturated fat of the leading brand and are just 6 calories per melt. They're perfect for snacking as they're crispier and lighter than anything else on the shelf. What we've created is a moreish, permissible product that really delivers for the new, health-conscious consumer, and that's exciting."

goodguysbakehouse.co.uk

Cotswold Fair announces exclusive Richard Hammond spirits launch



Top Gear and The Grand Tour star Richard Hammond has created a collection of spirits in collaboration with Hawkridge Distillers, and the range is available for the fine food and drink sector exclusively from Cotswold Fayre.

Ratio Dry Gin showcases a botanical ratio designed by Richard himself, including bilberries, stinging nettles, gorse flowers and local honey, and is inspired by his travels.

Iron Ridge Malt Whisky is named after a hillside ridge local to his Lake District home, and is matured in rare American bourbon casks with flavours of oak, vanilla, caramel and spice.

cotswold-fayre.co.uk



Forest Feast launches pair of coated dates

Fruit and nut snack brand Forest Feast have added two new products to its range: Pistachio Crisp Milk Chocolate Dtes and Salted Caramel Milk Chocolate Dates.

Handcrafted at the brand's manufacturing facility in County Armargh, the Pistachio Crisp Milk Chocolate Dates are dates layered with creamy pistachio butter and crispy wafer before being coated with Belgian milk chocolate.

The new Salted Caramel Milk Chocolate Dates are dates coated in Belgian milk chocolate and French salted caramel flakes for a buttery, salty-sweet treat.

Bronagh Clarke, marketing director, said, "Forest Feast has achieved a fantastic milestone, doubling sales to over £20m in the UK market over the past 52 weeks. This growth underscores our efforts to deepen brand awareness and expand market penetration. With our consumers increasingly seeking innovation, we are strategically positioned to grow the category by launching two exciting new flavours, further strengthening our competitive edge."
forestfeast.com



Califia Farms releases new nut variants



The premium plant-based drinks brand has expanded its popular Barista Blend with the launch of Pistachio Flavour Oat Barista Blend and Hazelnut Flavour Oat Barista Blend.

Both in 1 litre formats, they offer an alternative to conventional high-sugar syrups while catering for the high demand for the trending pistachio flavour and classic nutty sweetness of hazelnut. They are designed to be served with espresso coffee thanks to their smooth and creamy texture, and can be steamed.

Damien Threadgold, UK and EU general manager at Califia Farms, said, "These new flavoured Barista Blends represent a significant step forward in our mission to make premium plant-based coffee solutions accessible to everyone. We're seeing unprecedented demand for flavoured coffee experiences, particularly pistachio which has become the breakout flavour of 2025. By eliminating the need for syrups, we're not only simplifying operations for our hospitality partners but also delivering superior consistency and cost-effectiveness. This launch strengthens our position as the UK's leading plant-based barista range and demonstrates our commitment to innovation that meets real market needs."
califiafarms.com

Realfoods by Organico moves into sweet biscuits

Organic food pioneer Realfoods by Organico has launched a range of three new sweet biscuits to offer a wholesome option for consumers looking for a sweet treat.

Organic vegan Choc Chip Biscuits are full of rich dark chocolate, wheat and whole oats; Organic Speculoos are packed with cinnamon flavour; and Petit Beurre offer a simple taste of Normandy with their traditional crimped edges.

Charles Redfern, founder, said, "We deliberately choose simple yet instantly recognisable biscuit recipes that allow small decks of wholesome, gently baked ingredients to shine, as such thinking aligns effortlessly with our overriding quest to curate amazing yet convenient products that make your heart sing whilst being good for the planet. Historically consumer's attitudes to purchasing 'indulgent treats' has been more relaxed in terms of eating guidelines, too often vindicated as a well-deserved time-out from the daily eating regime. In truth, there's no reason whatsoever why even our more guilty snacking choices can't juggle best-in-class ingredients, enticing taste buds and a little sweet snacking guilt with being better for the planet!"
organicorealfoods.com



Tracklements gives bold new look to classic condiment

Wiltshire-based producer Tracklements has revamped its mayonnaise offering with two new variants: Indulgent Garlic Mayonnaise and Srirachi Chilli Mayonnaise.

Both made using Clarence Court eggs, the two new launches are deliciously versatile and packed full of flavour as well as being gluten-free. The Indulgent Garlic Mayonnaise is also vegetarian-friendly.

Srirachi Chilli Mayonnaise is made by fermenting red chillies and garlic for five days for extra tang.

Liz Cuff, marketing manager at Tracklements, said, "We're excited to be able to offer retailers these two new mayonnaises – perfect for summer. 15% of mayonnaise bought in the UK is now flavoured and shoppers can now enjoy best-quality, best-tasting options from a brand they know and love."
tracklements.co.uk





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MAKING CHRISTMAS COUNT

If you don't want to get caught short at the counter this winter, now is the time to plan

Every cheesemonger we've ever spoken to has told us nothing could have prepared them for their first Christmas in retail. The sudden surge in demand. Queues snaking along the pavement. Cheese shortages. There's a lot to contend with.

It's never too early, they say, to begin planning what your service will look like when November and December roll around.

GET STOCKED

The first consideration should be your product range, says cheese expert and author Steve Parker, who adds that you should be armed with supplier brochures, ready to make your move. It's your duty, he says, as a cheesemonger, to keep on top of what's new and to find festive cheeses you know your customer base will love.

"Talk to your customers now," Victoria Dunthorne of Victoria's Cheeses says. This will help to steer your decision-making. "This year we've got a Norwegian blue in because it went down a storm last Christmas. People do like an interesting blue. And last year we had a Brie with Calvados – that was fantastic."

Personally, Victoria prefers not to stock novelty cheeses studded with fruit and other additions, which often prove popular, but instead veers customers at the counter towards trying more festive pairings instead. "Be more creative. If someone asks for a cheese with ginger, instead see if they want to try a beautiful micro dairy Wensleydale with a piece of ginger in syrup. That would be amazing." This is also, she continues, a useful tactic for upselling ambient seasonal products.

Steve adds that you can't be a 'snob' about waxed cheeses at this time of year. They should form part of your pre-Christmas tasting plans. "You've got to take a commercial view on them. It was Tim Rowcliffe who first said to me, 'you can sit on your moral high ground, or you can make some money'."

GET YOUR TIMING RIGHT

Timing is crucial once you've thought about what you might want to sell this Christmas. Don't leave ordering until October, Victoria advises – it's just too late. "By the end of September the kids are back at school, and Christmas is everywhere. People will be talking about what they want to order. You should definitely be talking to your wholesalers right now, especially if there are some small batch, very specialist products you might want."

Steve recalls a past Christmas when he ordered 12 blue cheeses, but only received two. "If you're not careful, and don't order early enough, a lot of stuff could run short. It's not such an issue with bigger, hard cheeses being made 12 to 18 months in advance, but if you think about things made three months ahead – they're being prepared in a few weeks' time. If you want to buy in, say, 200 of a product rather than your usual 50, you have to give those cheesemakers notice – give them a chance!"

Remember those 'dry goods' too, Steve warns. "A weird thing that caught me out in year three was I hadn't got enough paper bags. I was so focused on cheese, that on 20th December I ran out. People were coming in, buying loads of cheese, and I had nothing to put it in. Stock up on extra bags, waxed paper and till rolls. Prioritise them now so you don't have to rush about when the 'crazy season' starts."

SMART STORAGE

Considering storage is something cheesemongers or deli managers new to the industry might not have considered. "It's amazing how many people don't think about it," Steve reflects, thinking back to his own early years in retail. "If you're ordering 10 times more cheese, where are you going to put it if you've got a 2m serve over? One year I went through a free local upcycling site and got three domestic fridges people were getting rid of. I put them out back in a storeroom. It was a brilliant solution!"

PLAN YOUR OPENING HOURS

The day of the week December 25th falls on can catch retailers out, Steve continues. "It might sound daft, but if Christmas Day is on a Monday, that means Christmas Eve is Sunday, and you're on restricted opening hours. If you've got hundreds of people turning up to buy cheese, that's a huge operational problem."

He recommends working out key dates now, and highly suggests looking at special seasonal opening hours – welcoming customers on a Sunday or Monday, for example, when you're usually closed, or opening for an evening or two in the weeks running up to Christmas.

"I sold more cheese from 6pm to 9pm than during the day," he reveals.

DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH STAFF?

To ensure the personal service you're known for doesn't slip, planning for additional staff is a must say both Steve and Victoria. Steve previously ran a large shop/wine bar and restaurant with three staff members – but ramped that up in the week before Christmas to 12. "You need someone getting the pre-orders from the fridge out back, people out front serving customers, and someone doing tastings." Investing in staff is well worth it. You can't afford to turn would-be customers away or to have the "wheels fall off".

"During my first Christmas," Steve continues, "my weekly takings were around £3,000 per week. In the week before Christmas, it was £38,000. The dynamic of taking 12 times more than usual does change things."

OPTIMISE YOUR OFFERING

Gifting at Christmas is huge, and cheese (as a present) has become incredibly popular. Many cheesemongers report their Father's Day sales this year were through the roof. Pointing customers towards individual cheeses to give is important, but it's also worth preparing a few small cheese hampers in the counter, priced ready for sale. And Steve likes the idea of vouchers. Pop a cheese voucher into a shop-branded bag with some crackers and a chutney at a set price, and you've got a sale, and potentially a brand-new customer in the gift recipient.

Rather than being cynical of customers who pop in once a year for their Christmas cheese, Steve says you should treat the season as an opportunity. Steer them away from their usual Cheddar, Brie and Stilton with something similar, but different, to demonstrate your expertise, while pointing them in the direction of products that will wow their friends and family.

Christmas in retail, he says, is a gift. "You've got to think, 'I've got this person in front of me in the Christmas spirit, and this could be the one time I can give them a good reason to come back'."

A device he likes is printed business cards for cheeses (complete with tasting notes and the shop address and contact details). These can be laid out alongside cheeseboards to prompt diners to explore what you have to offer well beyond December.

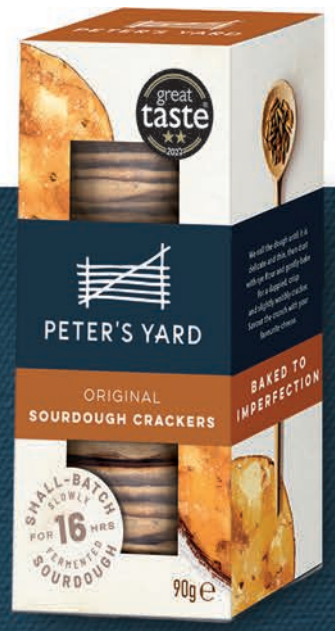
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THE CHEESE REPORT 2025

Speciality Food investigates what's impacting the world of cheese and dairy this year



COMMENTATORS



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THE RENNET WORKS



TOM RHODES
CARRON LODGE



LEONA MCDONALD
FIRST MILK/GOLDEN HOOVES



FLORENCE MANNERINGS
CHILTON FARM
(PICTURE BY JOANNE COATES FOR NFNN)

It's been a turbulent, but exciting, 12 months in the cheese arena – for makers, wholesalers and retailers. Inheritance tax rules have left farmers reeling over the future of their operations. The dry spring and summer are impacting grass-fed livestock, which in turn is affecting the supply of cheeses from pasture raised animals. And the availability of organic milk continues to be a concern.

On the flipside, we're pleased to report that plenty of innovation continues within the industry, particularly with regards to how alternative farming methods can better cope with our changing climate. And it's been interesting to hear from numerous specialist cheese shops who are seeing younger faces in-store, keen to learn more about artisan varieties, their makers, nuanced flavour profiles and sustainability credentials.

Read on to discover more of what's going on around the UK and beyond.

The great Irish cheese revival

Ireland's lush green landscapes and cool climate position the country nicely as prime cheesemaking territory. Although varieties such as Cashel Blue, Coolea, Gubbeen and Durrus are well-known within cheese retailing circles, exploring the breadth of products beyond these, and gaining access to excellent Irish cheeses, has been nigh-on impossible in recent years.

But that's all about to change. Tim Rowcliffe, acting as an ambassador for the Specialist Cheesemakers Association (SCA) and Cashel Blue owner and Cais (Association of Irish farmhouse Cheesemakers) committee member Sarah Furno, have taken up the mantel of promoting Irish cheese, fostering partnerships between Irish makers and British wholesalers, with the backing of The Irish Food Board (Bord Bia).

"Pre-Brexit, selling Irish cheese wasn't a problem," Tim explains. "But Brexit really put the cabosh on it. It was put in the 'too hard to do' basket really, and has fallen off a cliff. All that momentum that had been built up fizzled out."

Plans are underway for a 'relaunch' of Irish farmhouse cheeses in Britain, spearheaded by Tim and Sarah (who managed to get the British Cheese Awards renamed the British & Irish Cheese Awards earlier this year), and with support from Neal's Yard Dairy, who will host a showcase of Irish cheeses in the autumn.

Wholesaler Rowcliffe is also planning activity, Tim says, adding that it's logistics that have been holding sales between the two countries back. "When Rowcliffe started, we brought Irish farmhouse cheese into the UK. We were the first in, mainly because of my connection of living here some of the time. We had a massive launch with the food minister in Ireland, and I could simply make a call to one person who would collate all the cheeses for me. That then finished and there wasn't really a person in Ireland any longer prepared to do that. There's a lot of paperwork! But now we've identified a company – a husband-and-wife team – who can do it, and it works like clockwork."

Retailers will be able to put in their orders and the rest will be taken care of. "Then, hey presto, within two to three days you have a delivery."

'Phase one' of the revival of Irish cheese in Britain is getting products flowing back into the UK, Tim says, adding that 'phase two' will involve organising a visit for British cheesemakers over to Ireland in 2027.

"It's all excellent news," he adds. "We're going in the right direction, and to have Bord Bia on board is fantastic. I'm sure this relaunch is

EAT THEM OR LOSE THEM

Neal's Yard Dairy is standing head and shoulders alongside Britain's territorial cheesemakers with its campaign, Eat Them or Lose Them. It's a drive to raise consumer awareness of the remarkable historical, traditional cheeses made across the UK, from Appleby's Cheshire to Lowfields Lancashire. This is an important endeavour, and one that's being heralded by cheesemongers throughout Britain. Why not join the movement by further championing the cheeses they're highlighting in your own counter? Find out more on their website.





going to be the start of something incredible. Getting more Irish cheese on shelves in the UK will be a real testament to what we're trying to do, and I'm getting hugely positive feedback from everyone I speak to. The enthusiasm is palpable."

Cautious optimism around EU Strategic Partnership

On 19th May, the EU and UK governments announced a new Strategic Partnership – a move met with cautious optimism by EU cheesemakers, British cheesemongers, and the many devoted fans of EU cheese across the UK.

"Since Brexit, increased bureaucracy and trade barriers have made it harder – and more expensive – to import cheese from the EU into Britain," says The Cheese Tasting Co founder and cheese writer Ned Palmer. "These challenges have hit smaller producers and retailers on both sides of the Channel particularly hard, leading to a reduced range of traditional EU cheeses available to UK consumers.

"Some have framed this as an opportunity for British cheesemakers – and indeed, there are outstanding Continental-style cheeses now being made in the UK. But to see this simply as a matter of substitution is to misunderstand what makes cheese so special."

Every traditional cheese, Ned says, is a product of its terroir – a unique expression of the landscape, culture, and history of the place it comes from. Across the EU, hundreds of these cheeses are still being made, many of them protected under the PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) scheme.

"There's salty, animalistic Feta PDO from Greece; buttery Bulgarian Kashkaval; fiery blue Cabrales PDO from the mountains of northern Spain; creamy, leaf-wrapped Robiola di Roccaverano PDO from Piedmont; the deeply savoury, toffee-toned aged Goudas of the Netherlands; and, of course, France's mighty Brie – to name just a few. For British cheese lovers, being cut off from such a rich and diverse selection has been a genuine loss," he continues.

The new Partnership includes plans to simplify trade paperwork – a change that should, in time, make it easier and more affordable to bring these cheeses from EU farms and dairies to shop counters in the UK. "While the changes won't come into effect until 2026 and many details remain to be resolved, the shift signals a welcome change in direction for EU-UK food trade – and a hopeful step forward for those of us who care deeply about access to really great cheese."

ON THE **UP**

1 A YOUNGER AUDIENCE
Specialist retailers tell us they are seeing an increase in footfall from customers in their 20s and 30s interested in artisan cheese for dinner parties and grazing platters

2 SOFT BLUES
Demand for soft, creamy blue cheeses continues to grow, with scooping Gorgonzola in especially hot demand

3 SHEEP AND GOATS' MILK
Consumers are seeking out alternatives to cow's milk cheeses more frequently. Interest is currently higher than potential supply, however

The raw milk debate

Raw milk cheeses are feted by many cheesemakers and mongers as being the ultimate way of expressing all the qualities that go into the finished product, from the grasses, feed and raising of the animals to the cheesemaking rooms and their locations.

Producing raw milk cheese, however, has become fraught with difficulty. Many French and Italian raw milk varieties are currently banned from import into the UK, and several British makers have found themselves at the mercy of EHO officers and the Food Standards Agency. Last December, Mrs Kirkham's Lancashire Cheese was forced to pull four products from sale, despite its lab testing showing no trace of harmful pathogens.

Humphrey Errington of Errington Cheeses in Lanarkshire was similarly impacted in 2016, when Food Standards Scotland seized batches of Lanark Blue and Corra Linn. The business went on, two years later, to be cleared of any wrongdoing.

And more recently, Isle of Mull Cheese has had to shelve its popular raw milk Hebridean Blue. Brendan Reade, who leads the family's cheesemaking operations, says, like Humphrey, he feels the business is in a no man's land at the moment, adding that conditions for selling raw milk cheeses in Scotland (where raw milk is banned) are nigh-on impossible.

The maker's independent commercial lab testing, he says, could not detect what was found by regulators. In fact, Hebridean Blue's results were perfect. "But we're in a stalemate. They can't prove what they've found is dangerous but if we did distribute, EHO would take us to court."

At the time of going to press, the Reade family were waiting on the results of a study on the cheese – a study they haven't been privy to the details of.

It's a very frustrating and difficult time, Brendan says, adding that he doesn't think the regulations are clear enough when it comes to raw milk cheeses within the EHO. "And they don't seem to understand what they're doing. They've got the equipment, will find something, don't know what it is and don't know how to prove either way if it's pathogenic." It's a practice he feels is wholly unfair to raw milk cheese producers. He adds that the transporting of cheese for testing should be taken into account as well – how it is picked up, stored and taken to labs by EHO. Currently, he says, there's no way to prove if cross-contamination has happened once cheeses leave a cheesemaker's premises.

For the time being, Hebridean Blue remains out of action, with the family hoping they can find a resolution soon. "There's so much talk in the industry about terroir," Brendan says. "That's what we'll lose if we have to pasteurise. It won't be the same cheese."

SCA board member and The Courtyard Dairy founder, Andy Swinscoe, says there have long been concerns for the future of raw milk cheeses. "It's an area that continues to struggle," he says, adding that part of the issue currently is there's no premium for crafting cheeses in this way. "If you look at the new cheeses coming on board nowadays, they tend to be pasteurised, because if you make raw milk cheese in this day and age, in any way, shape or form, you're making life slightly harder for yourself and you don't get much return from that. You can't charge more, but there are loads of boxes to tick, so there's a lack of incentive."

It's a shame, he adds, that his counter (which once boasted 80% raw milk cheeses) is down to 50%.

That being said, the SCA continues to provide a good regulatory





framework to help the producers of these cheeses. "We need to keep thinking about how we can continue to make raw milk cheese in a safe way."

Melting cheeses are a hot topic

Bubbling fondues and molten Raclettes are having their moment in the spotlight as consumers continue to put cheese at the centre of dining occasions and entertaining.

"Shoppers are looking beyond familiar blocks and Cheddars, and seeking out cheeses with provenance, character and culinary flair," says Amanda Burningham, head of cheese marketing at Emmi UK, adding that Britain's Continental cheese market has reached an all-time high of nearly £1 billion.

Around 90% of UK consumers have now tried a hot cheese product, Amanda continues – half of them saying they've experienced fondue. These figures are clear signs of increasing mainstream appeal.

Emmi's own products, Emmi Fondu and Emmi Raclette Slices, are driving growth in the hot cheese category, showing a 7% year-on-year sales increase.

Amanda has a few tips for capitalising on cooking cheese sales while interest is high.

• Tell the story of the cheese: Highlight the heritage, region, and artisanal methods behind cave aged speciality cheeses like Kaltbach, Gruyère AOP and Kaltbach Emmentaler AOP. Shoppers love understanding the origins of what they're eating.

• Create theatre: Offer tastings or simple melted cheese demos in-store to show off the aromas, textures and versatility of hot cheese products.

• Merchandise by occasion: Position hot cheeses alongside accompaniments like crusty bread, charcuterie, pickles, and wine to inspire customers and build basket size.

• Educate through signage: Use clear POS that explains how to use and serve these cheeses, especially for Emmi Fondu or Raclette which can demystify the products and boost confidence to try them.

"Cheese buying today is about more than just flavour," Amanda continues. "It's about experience, storytelling and emotional connection. Retailers and brands who lean into this and help customers explore the world of Alpine and melting cheeses will be well-placed to ride the wave of this delicious trend."



The social generation

NPD in cheese is being heavily influenced by social media, and by an audience of shoppers that is becoming more and more excited by, and interested in trying, the latest flavours and formats, says Carron Lodge director Tom Rhodes.

"There's no doubt about it, we're starting to see Gen Z and TikTok making their way into the cheese industry. One of our fastest growing lines at the moment is scooping Gorgonzola." Influencers are helping the cheese's popularity by using it in myriad ways, Tom explains, such as spooning it into ice cream cones.

"It's really quirky, and not something people are going to find in the supermarket. In the deli, it's not about just putting it on the counter, you've got to think, 'what can we do to engage our customer base?'"

Fresh cheeses are appealing to this younger market too, Tom adds. "I'm seeing a continuation of fresh, Continental styles very much being on the rise. They can be used as a starter or on a grazing board rather than a historical cheeseboard. One of our fastest growing brands is Ribblesdale. It's traditionally a hard goats' cheese, but there's a new range of soft goats' cheeses this year with incredible flavours like honey and flowers. We really worked on that recipe so that sweetness comes across, complementing the acidity of the cheese, while the flowers give it great presentation."

These are the kinds of cheeses the next generation wants, Tom says. "They're going towards these softer profiles and are continually looking for products that are new and innovative."

In the mood for blues

Though analysts say blue cheese sales are in decline, retailers tell *Speciality Food* they're seeing a resurgence of interest in blues – especially softer varieties. And a number of new blue cheeses have launched this year in response.

Stinking Bishop maker Charles Martell has just forayed into the category, for example, having worked on the recipe for Hulla Baloo for quite some time. "A year ago, one blue cheesemaker said to me there's too many blue cheeses around," Charles says. "You could argue there's too much Cheddar. I think a lot of people are going into blue cheese as they're wanting to increase their portfolio. If somebody buys one type of their cheese and likes it, for example, they're going to want to try others."

Single origin cheeseboards are becoming 'a thing' he adds – with consumers happy to buy a washed rind, Cheddar style, soft and blue, all from the same producer to contrast and compare.

Timing is another reason for the sudden surge in new makes, Charles thinks. Blue cheeses can be ready in eight to 12 weeks, giving a quicker turnaround than harder cheeses, which require around a year to mature.

Matthew Lloyd of The Rennet Works has been turning heads and winning awards with his ingenious small batch cheeses – each the work of his engineering mind. Kaleidoscope caught many judges' eyes this year. "Rather than blueing ruling the cheese, I thought about how I could manipulate the blue to my specification and how I wanted it to look. It was about making a specific pattern, using the blueing to create a beautifully aesthetic cheese." The result is very labour intensive, involving making 220 individually cut curds put together in a circular pattern.

It's this kind of 'bonkers' creativity and 'newness' that's driving modern cheesemakers and cheese shoppers, Matthew thinks, and the future could look very blue indeed.

A WHOLESALER'S **PERSPECTIVE**



The Fine Cheese Co's UK sales manager, Robert Bowden, gives his take on the British cheese industry right now

ARE YOU NOTICING ANY TRENDS AT THE MOMENT?
We're seeing strong demand for Alpine style cheeses such as Red Wine Farmer. People enjoy their sweet, punchy flavours and smooth textures. We are also seeing British cheeses inspired by European styles on the rise, such as Burford. Some are now even outselling the originals.

WHICH MAKERS/DAIRIES DO YOU FEEL ARE THE ONES TO WATCH?
King Stone Dairy are turning heads with its French-inspired cheeses, like their new sheep's milk varieties Bibury and Hidcote. Fen Farm Dairy also keeps impressing, with Raedwald showing that they can do more than Baron Bigod, for which they are so famous.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST ISSUES IN CHEESE RIGHT NOW?
Climate change is affecting pastures and winter feed, meaning some farmers are embracing regenerative farming to improve soil health and the resilience of pasture. Also, supermarkets' attempts to appropriate the success of artisan producers can blur the line for consumers, so we are working closely with our cheesemakers and customers to champion small scale artisan cheese and help protect its integrity and future.

CHRISTMAS NEED-TO-KNOWS



Dan Bliss, head buyer at Paxton & Whitfield, recently hosted an industry event focused around Christmas trends and the retailer's Christmas plans. Here are her key takeaways for Christmas 2025...

Accessibility is key: Cheese is a product we want everybody to enjoy. It's about finding that accessible price point and flavour profiles that are really good crowd pleasers. Also, with hampers, people are very price sensitive, so make sure you offer really good value for money.

It's time to champion territorials: We're looking at how we can support the British industry more. There's a big campaign amongst cheesemongers at the moment around territorial cheeses. Consumers seem to be craving Alpine styles and their sweeter qualities, and it's so important to keep talking about artisan farmhouse territorials to keep them alive.

Regeneration: People are increasingly looking for cheeses from farmers that take into account things like regenerative agriculture. A lot of people are talking about the way the land is looked after, and cheesemakers tend to be at the forefront of those kinds of conversations.



"Blue cheeses are ripe for exploration," he continues, echoing Charles' views. "The short maturation means your assets aren't hanging about. For producers, like me, who aren't cash rich and haven't got the space or time to have thousands of pounds worth of milk-based products sitting on the shelf for 12 months, blues and lactic cheeses are perfect. You have that quick turnaround and can get that cash back in the bank."

A tough year for pasture grazing

The long hot spring and summer experienced in the UK so far this year will inevitably impact the production of cheeses from pasture-fed animals. "A lot of cheesemakers, like Sparkenhoe, are starting to think about how they farm long-term," says Andy Swinscoe of The Courtyard Dairy. "They can no longer rely on grass and methods that worked in the 60s, 70s and 80s. In farming, people are having to wake up to the fact they have to think broader and longer about what they're doing in our ever-changing climate. This long, dry period is definitely an ongoing concern."

NFFN (Nature Friendly Farming Network) member Florence Mannerings farms a herd of native Shorthorns at Chilton Farm in Kent's Alkham Valley, and says the issue is a particular problem in her part of the country, where animals graze on chalk soil. "Even in very wet years we are well drained and dry. As soon as this kind of weather comes, we are bone dry instantly. This year has been harder than usual and while we try our best to plan in advance in terms of getting sileage in," she says, "spring was late and quite cold and dry, which meant the grass didn't grow until a bit later on than usual, and we've been buffer feeding hay and sileage a lot earlier than most years," she explains.

Farms having to buy in quality feed (where they don't grow it themselves) will inevitably push up cheese prices, but solutions are being found within the regenerative system. Florence, for example, says they've put a lot of land to herbal lay crops and wildflower meadow. "You get more diverse root lengths from herbal plants, and they're more drought resistant – they do really well. We recently sileaged and yielded 96 bales from eight acres of fields. For us, this has been brilliant. We've put another 15 acres in this year and plan another 15 next year."

Dependence on sileage – enough not only to maintain cows, but to boost their productivity within the dairy sphere – is an extra cost many cannot afford and won't have anticipated in their forecasts. Could herbal lays and flower meadows, then, be the future of pasture feeding? Time will tell.



A regenerative future for dairy?

More and more 'noise' continues to gather around the topic of regenerative farming, which was given a huge spotlight on Amazon Prime's Clarkson's Farm, as Jeremy Clarkson demonstrated the movement on his land alongside Wildfarmed's George Lamb and Andy Cato.

Public and farmer perception and knowledge of regenerative agriculture continues to grow, says Leona McDonald, sales and marketing director at First Milk – producer of the UK's first regenerative cheese brand, Golden Hooves.

"Groundswell has had a 1,700% uplift in the last eight years, and Bath & West is putting on its second regenerative agriculture show, LandAlive this year. I think the interest is massive," Leona says of the regenerative movement.

"Retailers are looking to support the regenerative movement too, which we've seen with the recent launch of our Golden Hooves Salted Butter and Mature Cheddar into Waitrose. It certainly seems that the rest will follow and that's exciting for us and our farmers as it's our consumer brand that exists to celebrate the incredible work that they do every day to farm with nature."

When it comes to food security and safeguarding the production of regen dairy, Leona says regenerative techniques can lead the way. "The whole thing around soil health is just massive. That's where it all starts after all - we need healthy soil and we need to continue to regenerate and create a sustainable and resilient food supply for the future."

The results and impact regenerative farming methods are having already within the First Milk system are clear to see, Leona adds, saying they're recording improvements in soil health and habitats all the time. "For us, regenerative agriculture is a way of life. We're deeply passionate about it. We love every worm and dung beetle we can possibly get our eyes upon. But we're learning all the time as well. We've had a hot summer, and we've learnt through that - different things we can do, such as new soil compaction techniques and different herbal lays." Flexibility and reactivity are what, she thinks, makes regenerative agriculture so important. "It's a regenerative mindset. We've got to make sure we keep moving it forward, doing things better every time. The beauty is we can try something, hope it makes a really big difference, and if it doesn't, we will pivot and change, but with the same goal in mind.

"In our recent survey, we found that 95% of consumers would like to see more regenerative food where they shop, so now is a really pivotal time for collaboration between retailers and brands to meet people's needs, but also to help them better understand the real meaning behind 'regenerative'. We have to build trust and transparency in the supply chain by showing real examples and using clear language with no greenwashing. This type of piece is perfect - the more we talk about it, the more people know or can ask."

A RETAILER'S **PERSPECTIVE**



Mouse & Grape founder Jessica Summer shares her views on cheese retailing in 2025

"I think there's a lot of emphasis at the moment on quality," says Mouse & Grape founder Jessica Summer. "More people are conscious of what they're consuming, and this lends itself well to cheesemongers because we're obviously selling the best quality and best versions of cheese we can." As more supermarkets put stock in packaging their cheese selections in a premium way, it's up to indies to ensure they keep that quality high, constantly refresh their selections, and engage with would-be customers on social media, Jessica adds.

In terms of trends, sales of soft cheeses such as Burrata, Mozzarella, Feta and Halloumi are growing, with more consumers heading into cheese shops and delis to find better versions of what's available in multiples. These don't traditionally make it onto the tasting block, but it's worth making pairings and cooking pieces up if you have the facilities, to showcase not only their flavours, but the many ways they can be used.

Jessica has noticed (like many others) an uplift in Gen Z shoppers, who are frequently popping in to make up cheeseboards. "It's still expensive to go out for dinner. I went to a nice but average chain restaurant recently and spent £50 on dinner. Whereas you can come into a cheese shop and spend £50 for a group of six. It's more economical definitely, and I think people are enjoying hosting. Where I am in Northwest London isn't the most hip and young area, but we get a lot of young parents making the journey over here."

Gen Z and Millennial shoppers are not only concerned with taste, but with the way their cheeses (and the places they buy them) look. "You have to make your shop Instagrammable these days," Jessica continues. "A feature wall is a nice idea. We always make sure the shop and the cheeses are well presented and beautiful. The younger generation is all about showing the best version of themselves – having a glass of rosé on Friday afternoon with a plate of lovely cheese. Think of your shop as a background. The choice of music is important too. One of our team members, who's only 19, loves music and is always making us playlists – music people would recognise but with a younger twist. It gives our shop a fun atmosphere. If your cheese room is dry and uninviting people won't want to come in."





Up your cheeseboard game with this selection of flavour-packed inclusions

1 LONG CLAWSON 1912 GOLDEN BLUE



This vibrant cheese is a rich orange colour, with natural extract from the berry on the achiote tree, originally discovered in South America. It has distinctive blue veining with a creamy, mellow and tangy taste. Each cheese is turned by hand and matured under the close love and care of Long Clawson's master cheesemakers.

clawsonfarms.co.uk

2 GOLDEN HOOVES CRACKERS



If you're looking for crackers that are perfect for crunching, snacking and dipping AND that help nature thrive, then look no further! Golden Hooves crackers are not only out of this world scrumptious, but are also made with wheat and butter from British, regenerative farms that are encouraging biodiversity and healthy soil.

goldenhooves.co.uk

3 TREUR KAAS WEYDELAND RIJCK



This cheese has undergone a long maturation process in the warehouse, resulting in a rich, mature flavour and a crumbly texture. The small ripening crystals in the cheese create a pleasant crunch in the mouth. Full of aroma and boasting a distinctive taste, this cheese is available at Hamish Johnston.

treurkaas.nl

4 DRIVERS PICKLES DELI RANGE



Elevate your cheeseboard with these delicious savoury offerings from Drivers Pickles. Producing premium quality pickles, relishes and chutneys since 1906, the 5th generation of the Driver family know a thing or two about pickling perfection. Choose from any of the 22 products in the Deli range to take your grazing table to the next level.

pickle-lovers.co.uk



5 SNOWDONIA CHEESE CO
BEECH WOOD

Sweet and delicately smoky. Beguilingly complex. The winner of multiple awards, this handcrafted mature Cheddar is naturally cold-smoked over beechwood chips using traditional techniques, refined to perfection over the centuries.
snowdoniacheese.co.uk

6 SHEPHERDS PURSE
ORGANIC YORKSHIRE BLUE

Creamy, sweet, herbaceous and mild, Organic Yorkshire Blue is an ideal introduction to blue cheese. With age, the flavour deepens and becomes more complex without compromising the mellow creaminess. Handmade and matured over a minimum of eight weeks. Turned by hand every week, this helps to achieve the lovely blue veining and even smooth texture.
shepherdspurse.co.uk

7 RENARD GILLARD
BRIE DI MEAUX AOP

Winner of the best French Cheese at the International Cheese & Dairy Awards. This is a very special cheese made using traditional, precise methods. It's hand crafted exclusively with the finest raw cow's milk, and ripened for a minimum of 28 days, giving each finished round its ubiquitous thin, bloomy rind and tender, soft heart.
sodiaal.co.uk

8 LE GRUYÈRE AOP

A popular cheese from the western cantons of Switzerland, the award-winning Gruyère AOP is revered for its unique and delicious flavour. It is made with raw milk sourced from a small cluster of dairy farmers in the region, which is transformed by master cheesemakers using customs shared throughout the generations.
gruyere.com/en

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

FARM RETAIL ASSOCIATION
REAL LOCAL FOOD



LENHAM COUNTRY MARKET

Supporting local food businesses is at the heart of this passionately-run establishment

Over 20 years of running farmers markets in Kent has demonstrated to Sandra Woodfall just how important the roll of true farm-to-consumer connection is, but the business didn't have a conventional beginning. "I worked for a local authority, and a consultation brought up the topic of the local food sector," she begins. "I joked that my husband, Brian, wanted to go to a farmers market but that there weren't any in the local area, which led to me signing up to run a one-off farmers market to promote local businesses."

The event proved so popular that the one-off turned into a six-month trial run, where Sandra worked as a volunteer. After leaving her role at the local authority, some of the stallholders asked her to set up another farmers market – proving that the demand was certainly there from the food producers' perspective – and so Sandra and Brian set up a business to do just that.

The appetite for local food has changed a lot since the inaugural market. "Back then, people didn't know what a farmers market was," Sandra explains, "so we had to do a lot of education around what they are and the benefit they have for producers and consumers." Fast forward to 2025, when the term 'farmers market' is often used to represent something far from its conventional definition – a number of local farmers brought together to sell their produce – and Sandra's role is more important than ever. "We have always run our markets to an accredited standard, supported by the Farm Retail Association," she says. In fact, the FRA are currently running the More Than Food campaign to encourage consumers to shop locally at farm retailers.

After over two decades of running farmers markets, the physical exertion is starting to take its toll. "We're still as passionate about farmers markets as we always have been, but our bodies are letting us down and we can no longer run three markets in three days like we used to," says Sandra. The pair still run five markets a month, to the delight of the local food industry and food-loving shoppers alike.

A considered approach

While running farmers markets is a huge job in itself, for 17 years the business has had an additional arm. "We realised in around 2008 that we needed to have a base at the markets so – as a trained chef – my husband suggested that we could start our own brand of jams, marmalades and chutneys, which we make at home."

This first-hand experience of living behind the scenes of a food production business has proven to be invaluable when it comes to running the markets. "We have experienced the environmental health inspection, and we know how it feels on the day of the market when people don't turn up or engage with your hard work."

Sandra and Brian having lived both sides of the farmers market experience – both as an organiser and a stallholder – has proven to be useful to other producers, too. "We have had businesses asking for our advice before they join the market," says Sandra, "and we have been with them on the day of inspection to support them." This hands-on approach to building relationships with their stallholders has reaped rewards for Sandra and the visitors to her market, making it more likely that the businesses she has supported will take up a space at one of her markets – providing a wider range of products for customers to discover and enjoy. "We feel that by treating micro businesses as supportively and as fairly as we can, we are able to get them into the market – and as much as when a business is really small you can't be sure what you're going to get, including in terms of how reliable they are going to be, but some of the producers we have started out with in this way have gone on to open their own shops so with those we really were a valuable foundation."

Sandra and Brian have even been invited to the weddings of stallholders of markets, an example of the strength of the relationships they've built.

What's on offer

A great quality range of core farmers market fare is what to expect from Sandra's markets – "We have different stallholders at all of our markets, but generally we have fresh fruit and vegetables, fish, bread, cheese, cakes and honey – all of the things you would expect to see at a market." The range at each of the markets is carefully curated, and Sandra goes to great lengths to avoid competition between stallholders but is passionate about keeping its produce true to the farmers market ethos.

"A lot of organisers of farmers markets fill them with craft stalls when they can't find the right producers, and while there's nothing wrong with craft makers, it can be disappointing for customers when they travel to the market for great food but most of the space is taken up with craft instead." With one of Sandra's markets filled with just 17 stallholders, and her largest 45-50, this can be a difficult balance to juggle.

Managing customer expectations can be too. "Visitors once complained that a cheese stall at one of the markets wasn't selling the cheeses that they wanted, but you can't always control the cheeses that are available at any given time," Sandra explains. "We've also had people requesting a fish stall, but if the market is located miles away from where businesses are able to fish, this gets tricky."

It's not possible to curate the perfect farmers market where consumers are able to get the very best example of everything they're looking for, she continues. "We put a lot of effort into making everything as local as possible, which means we're at the mercy at what's available in the local area. Different areas have different resources, so we can't tick everyone's boxes everywhere."

A challenging position

Additional obstacles are posed by local authorities. "One market runs on a Sunday and the local authority imposed parking restrictions on a Sunday, making it less likely for customers to attend. Other authorities have raised the prices of road closure orders and the cost of being on-site. For these reasons, Sandra says, "the past six months have been the hardest we've ever experienced in over 20 years," but a petition started by customers to save one of the markets received two and a half thousand signatures – testament to the value of the market to the local community.

Despite the sticking points, Sandra remains passionate about supporting her local food economy. The Covid-19 pandemic was a particularly difficult time, but she supported her stallholders in brand new ways to help them survive – planning routes so they could offer home deliveries to consumers and promoting their businesses on the markets' social media platforms. Passionately authentic and supportive to Kent's outstanding food producers, Sandra and Brian have worked tirelessly to connect consumers with the best local produce for over two decades – to the grateful delight of all.

> "Our shoppers now come to our markets whatever the weather conditions, such is their appetite for what our authentic farmers markets represent"





A hat trick for Perry

Perry James Wakeman, chief of cheese at Rennet & Rind, has been named British Affineur of the Year for the third time.

It's only the fourth year of the competition, organised by the Academy of Cheese to demonstrate the skills of UK affineurs and cheesemongers – with Perry taking a 'lay year' to judge in 2024.

As others in the category, he was challenged with pushing the boundaries on a truckle of Cheddar from Quicke's. The resulting cheese (named Dillon) was matured at a high temperature and humidity in cloth for three weeks, followed by rolling with a spiked device to develop intense notes close to the rind.

"When you sell cheese to your customers, a lot of the time you don't get a lot of feedback," Perry said. "But here, in one room, you have the best cheese people in the world looking at your cheese and judging it. And it's so nice to go down with all the other competitors, standing side-by-side, talking about what they did, how they did it, what they didn't like, and what they did like. Everyone is sharing and growing."

Nick Bayne and Martin Knapp of The Fine Cheese Co in Bath won Best Washed Rind Cheese, Best Soft Cheese, Best Crumbly Cheese, and the People's Choice award for their Cheddar entry. Roger Longman of White Lake Cheese won Best Blue Cheese.

Cotherstone returns

When famed cheese writer Patrick Rance wrote *The Great British Cheese Book* (published in 1982), having lounged by the Cross family's fire at Quarry House Farm in Teesdale, enchanted by the slow process of crafting Cotherstone cheese, he declared that if Stilton was the king of cheeses, Cotherstone had to be the emperor.

There were fears, nearly two years ago, when Joan Cross (who'd been making the cheese since childhood) retired, that the recipe would be put to pasture.

But her son, and fourth generation farmer, Gordon stepped up to the table – and now Cotherstone is back in production.

Not as heavily marketed or recognised as Dales cheeses (such as Wensleydale), Cotherstone first came to the attention of the cheese world in the 1860s, when it debuted in London (thanks to increasing rail services). Later, when Gordon's father, Alwyn, struck up a conversation with Neal's Yard Dairy founder Randolph Hodgson, it became one of the first farmhouse cheeses sold in the shop, ramping up production, and transforming Cotherstone from a fireside make produced in the sitting room Gordon grew up in to



a commercial operation. With this heritage under threat, Gordon couldn't deny his calling. "My personal view, if we sold the business and it went to another maker, was that it might lose its unique flavour and texture," he said. "I've been out of the country for 20 years. My kids are getting older. I want them to have a legacy, so I decided I would keep it on."

Significant investment was made last year, and now Cotherstone is back on the order books, largely via Carron Lodge and Neal's Yard, who age it on to around three months for a stronger profile.

Gordon describes the cheese as semi-hard and smooth with a tang. "It reminds me of the Pennines on a cool, damp day."

New 'hot cheese' launch for Emmi Kaltbach

Melting and cooking cheeses are big business, as consumers continue to value making cheese the centre of their dining and entertaining occasions.

Tapping into the upwards trend, Emmi Kaltbach is launching a new seasonal line – Kaltbach Fondue – into cheesemongers, independent and fine food retailers this September.

Made from a blend of award-winning Swiss Kaltbach Le Gruyère AOP and Kaltbach Emmentaler, white wine and Kirsch, the rich, indulgent new offering should prove to be a hit.

All consumers need do is warm it up and add their favourite accompaniments, from boiled new potatoes to crusty sourdough bread, grissini sticks, charcuterie or crudites.

It's ideal not just for counters as the weather cools, but in foodservice as an easy option too.





Cheesemonger named Food Hero

Andy Swinscoe, co-founder of The Courtyard Dairy in Yorkshire and a passionate advocate for traditional British farmhouse cheeses, has been named a Food Hero in the British Library Food Season.

He was selected from a shortlist of eight potential winners, chosen for having an outstanding impact on the food we eat, food culture, or our understanding of food, with judges calling him one of the most knowledgeable, engaging and proactive experts in his area. "A successful cheesemonger, he has built up a business that's become an important platform for farmhouse producers to sell cheese and tell their stories."

Andy attributed the award to the entire team, and went on to say he was thrilled that the efforts they've put into reviving traditional cheesemaking have been recognised. "We will continue to build on the strong foundation that has been established, so that small-scale cheesemaking goes from strength to strength in the UK."



"Healthy cheese makes for a healthy world"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

When we consider our cheese choices today it is a bit of a minefield. So many varieties and pretty much with every flavour that you can imagine.

We are literally spoiled for choice and in my opinion we have too much choice. There are industrial producers working hard to come up with the next trend in cheese to adorn the supermarket shelves. There will be people paid highly to come up with eye catching packaging and buzz words to help convince you that your choice is correct.

How do we grow our food for our dairy animals? Let's take a varietal that have been bred for volume as an example. We put that varietal into the soil, we manage that soil with chemical inputs, and then we expect magic to happen to continue to produce more and more volume of food as the basis of how we transact.

One problem is that along the way we forgot that the pastures are supposed to nourish the animals, and the primary outcome should be nutrition for the animal and equally for the human when the milk is turned into cheese. So, the question becomes how do we measure nutrition, how do we measure the nutritional quality of our food, and how do we help all the farmers who are doing great work on the soil and in the land to get paid based on the quality of their cheese?

When it comes to soil and plant health, we cycle carbon and other things but most importantly we cycle nutrition which is ultimately what we're moving from beginning to end. Depending on how we treat the soil, the biology will become active and will make nutrition available to enter the plant through the rhizosphere. Those nutrients move up to create a healthy plant that is ultimately consumed by the animal whose milk will then be processed into cheese for human consumption.

Today we are overfed and undernourished. We are getting the wrong balance of macronutrients. We are getting inadequate levels of micronutrients and completely deficient levels of phytonutrients.

How did we get here? We like to attribute it to soil health, but we must remember genetics play a very important role in this equation. The varietals that you choose and what you are choosing to optimize for in your production system are going to determine the nutritional quality and the outcome of your system. So, what the farmers feed the animals is important for animal and human health.

Genetic dilution plays an important role here because as industrialists and large cheesemakers design for consumer packaged foods that are bigger, prettier, shelf-stable makes that last longer and that play to the quality metrics of the supermarkets, we have put less nutrition in every gram of food. That is one reason why a lot of our cheese is nutritionally depleted today. Another reason is soil health, and additionally, chemical and toxic inputs in our system hinder nutrient absorption.

There are great studies beginning to emerge about the impact of pesticides and the impact of synthetic fertilizers on distorting plant health, which is ultimately an expression of nutrition.

I know that the food system could hold the keys to help slow negative climate change. There is no doubt that if we can activate the stewards of the land and reward and incentivise them for the great practices to put carbon back in the soil and mitigate the greenhouse gas intensity of their production systems, we could solve climate change.

The science says that we can take a big chunk out of the problem. Unfortunately, consumers are not choosing cheese on its environmental attributes.

We need to keep telling our customers about our exceptional artisan cheese and why it is good for their family, including the health benefits, not only to them but the positive impact of their food choice both environmentally and sustainably. They need to know this story which will give them the reason to buy the cheese. That's where we've lost this thread; there are no such stories in the supermarkets, just pretty labels with pictures of farmers and animals.

We must connect the dots between the quality of the cheese and the impact on the human. We must start treating our food not as a commodity, but as a functional ingredient to health.

So, what is healthy cheese? Healthy cheese is both safe and nutritious. Today, a lot of cheese is neither.

We need someone to analyse industrial cheese over proper artisan cheese. Only then will we have an objective benchmark for the relative concentration of health-promoting compounds within the cheese so that we can make objective decisions on the land to produce better, healthier dairy products.

The writing's on the wall. Support small producers that are working chemical-free who are happy to produce a smaller, healthier yield whilst working properly with animals, land and nature. Cheese produced here is more wholesome, nutrient-dense and guilt-free.

Awards Season Arrives

It's been a successful summer for Britain's artisan cheesemakers, who have been picking up prizes for excellence at numerous industry events

BELTON FARM CHESHIRE CHEESE CROWNED SUPREME CHAMPION AT ICDAS

The team at Belton Farm in Shropshire are celebrating the maker's traditional Coloured Cheshire cheese being awarded Supreme Champion at the International Cheese and Dairy Awards (ICDA) 2025.

It's the fifth time Belton Farm has taken home the prestigious prize in the last 60 years. Managing director, Justin Beckett, called the award a huge honour. "Our Coloured Cheshire is a true classic, and this recognition is testament to the skill of our cheesemakers, the outstanding quality of milk from our local farming partners, and the dedication of everyone at Belton Farm to producing the very best in British cheese," he said.

Hot on the heels of the award, Belton Farm has unveiled its Fox Cheese Trio. Bringing together three 100g portions of Silver Fox, Red Fox and Smoked Red Fox, it offers consumers a chance to explore the full Fox range, and is available now for retailing in farm shops and independent food retailers.

"The Fox Cheese Trio is our most exciting innovation yet," Justin continued. "It gives consumers a perfect introduction to our most characterful cheeses, and it's also a response to clear demand for premium formats with strong gifting appeal."



THE ICDA 2025 WINNERS

SUPREME CHAMPION CHEESE
BELTON FARM

SUPREME CHAMPION CHEESE RESERVE
DEWLAY CHEESEMAKERS

SUPREME CHAMPION DAIRY PRODUCT
LANCASHIRE FARM DAIRIES

THE CHAMPION OVERSEAS
RYGGE MEIERI

RESERVE CHAMPION OVERSEAS
ORNUA FOODS

THE CHEESE BOARD AWARDS
DAUNTSEY PRESERVES

SUPREME ARTISAN SPECIALIST CHEESE
CORNISH CHEESE CO

CHAMPION FRENCH CHEESE
SODIAAL UK

GYS CELEBRATES ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL CHEESE AND DAIRY SHOW



More than 20 cheese and dairy businesses have taken home prizes from the Cheese and Dairy section awards at the 166th Great Yorkshire Show in Harrogate.

The Judy Bell Memorial Trophy for Supreme Champion Cheese was lifted by Roger Longman of White Lake Cheese for his Shilling goats' cheese which, in a first for the show, was also named Reserve Supreme Champion Cheese. The tractor engineer turned goat farmer picked up a further two accolades for Best Raw Milk Cheese and Best Specialist Cheesemakers Cheese. "To win both Supreme Champion and Reserve... I'm a bit lost for words," he said.

Other wins included Best Territorial Cheese for Long Clawson with their Red Leicester, Best Speciality Product for Lynher Dairies' Cornish Kern, and Best Organic Product for Belton Farm's Organic Mature Cheddar.

Caroline Bell, chief cheese and dairy steward, said, "With entries up across the board, it was great to see strong competition in all the categories, particularly speciality cheese, territorials, alternate milk and ice cream. We hosted a judging team of 60 experienced professionals from across the UK cheese and dairy industry, and it was an excellent day of judging.

"After class judging and 'best of' judging, the quality of the top table was exceptional, so for White Lake Cheeses to make what we believe is history by winning both the Supreme Champion and Reserve Champion cheese was a real accolade for Roger Longman and his team in Somerset."

The David Hartley Memorial Trophy for the Supreme Champion Dairy entry went to farmer owned dairy co-operative South Caernarfon Creameries (SCC) and their Welsh Salted Butter. Meinir Parry, SCC's sales and marketing coordinator, said: "We've entered for many years but this is the first time we've won Supreme. It's come as a surprise. It's a great achievement."



BIG WIN FOR STILTON MAKER

Cropwell Bishop Stilton beat 220 other varieties to be named Supreme Champion and Best British Blue at the Reiser Virtual Cheese Awards 2025.

Made by hand at the family-owned dairy in Nottinghamshire, the awards' Super Jury (including The Cheese Explorer Emma Young, Bronwen Percival from Neal's Yard Dairy, Sarah Miness of Waitrose & Partners and Kay Brennan of Tesco), applauded the cheese for its "buttery, fudgy texture" and "outrageously good, creamy mouthfeel".

Cropwell Bishop director, Robin Skailes, said, "We're absolutely delighted to win the Supreme Champion, and we really enjoyed hearing the judges' comments about our cheese. We love making cheese, and to get this recognition makes it all worthwhile."

Mrs Bournes Cheshire took second place and Best Territorial, and Montgomery Extra Mature Cheddar took third place and Best Cheddar.



CELEBRATIONS AT SHEPHERDS PURSE

North Yorkshire-based Shepherds Purse is delighted that its Organic Yorkshire Blue was recently named Supreme Champion Cheese at the Artisan Cheese Awards 2025.

The product also delivered a Best Organic Cheese win for the maker, and a plethora of other accolades were picked up, from a Gold for Northern Blue and Yorkshire Blue to Silver for Buffalo Blue.

Joint managing director, Caroline Bell, said, "These awards are so special as they shine a light on the smaller producers throughout the UK and Ireland and recognise the fantastic quality and innovation taking place throughout the industry, even from the very smallest micro-producers and start-ups, so to be judged Supreme Champion is a real honour."

New blending facility for maker

Cryer & Stott has just opened its new state-of-the-art cheese blending facility in Castleford, representing a leap forward in the company's commitment to innovation, tradition and celebrating regional heritage through cheese.

The addition enables the maker to increase its range in collaboration with local producers, and to mark the milestone it has launched four distinctive new cheeses.



Silkstone Seam is an 18-month mature Cheddar with a ribbon of edible charcoal through its centre, honouring Silkstone's coal mining heritage. Knavesmire is a 12-month matured Cheddar infused with York Rhubarb Gin. Flagship sees Cheddar aged for 12 months and blended with Filey Bay Whisky Distillers' single malt whisky. And 1606 Rebel blends creamy Cheddar with The Chilli Jam Man's Scotch Bonnet Chilli Jam.

Richard Holmes MBE, managing director of Cryer & Stott, said, "Our new facility is more than just an expansion – it's a creative hub where tradition meets innovation. These new cheeses showcase the incredible talent and flavours found right here in Yorkshire. We're proud to collaborate with local producers and celebrate our heritage with every batch we make. It has allowed us to create three new positions within the company, sharing our expansive knowledge."



Godminster unveils new cheese duo

Godminster has just revealed the bold, standout consumer packaging for its new duo of cheeses – Scarlet Crumb Red Leicester, and Mighty Middlewick Witch – both inspired by Wessex folklore and the impish Hunkey Punk sculptures carved into Somerset churches.



Designed with disruption in mind, the cheeses are a premium alternative to everyday block Cheddars and come in at a lower price point than Godminster's waxed truckles.

"We want them to look great and taste even better," said head of sales, Clair Archer. "These prepacks are all about turning heads and making a statement. The bright and bold packaging is designed to encourage customers to pick up a pack. One taste is all it takes to get hooked on Godminster's exceptional flavour and quality." Tasting packs, point of sale materials and marketing support for the new products are available.



New blue from White Lake Cheese

White Lake Cheese has once again expanded its range. Inspired by the classic French Bleu d'Auvergne, Kingfisher Blue is made using milk from the farm's own French Alpine goats, and boasts a crumbly, creamy texture, and a tangy, savoury, slightly earthy flavour profile.

The team say it's a good all-rounder for the kitchen, being versatile as a cooking cheese, as well as sitting nicely on a cheeseboard with orchard fruits, nuts and honey.

COMMENTATORS



STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE



JOHN SINCLAIR
CRAIGIE'S FARM SHOP



MARK HILTON
BRAMBLE FOODS



TOM BRADSHAW
BRAMBLE FOODS



TASTE FOR **TRADITION**

2025's shopper is looking for a carefully curated blend of tradition and innovation. Here, experts share how to make it work

With Christmas undoubtedly the linchpin in retail establishments – the majority of sales occur in just a few short weeks, so getting your approach right is of paramount importance – it's all to easy to leave preparations until the last minute, relying on tried-and-tested techniques and your regular customer base to build solid sales foundations.

The devil is in the detail, however, and 2025's shoppers are always on the hunt for newness, experience, and great value – and if you can offer a heady cocktail of all three, you're onto a winner.

At Macknade, CEO Stefano Cuomo's team has discovered that it's best to get started on preparations as early in the year as possible in order to build on the previous festive season's momentum and learn from any mistakes made. "Our team are on it from January or February," he explains. "It's very much a case of capturing the information while it's still fresh in people's minds and acting on it – January is part of our Christmas trajectory."

While EPOS data is a key driver when it comes to festive planning, the more emotive, experiential intel that can only be gathered on-site in the moment is of vital importance. "A lot of our sales will come as a result of how people feel in our space and what we're delivering," Stefano says, "so we do a lot of walking around the shop floor, seeing what our customer sees." The team also invests time in market research – what others are doing, any opportunities that might have been missed, and which trends for the coming year could work within their budget.

Christmas is often a time for shoppers to lean more local in their purchases, keen to support the small business economy of their region, and the Macknade team make sure to provide a balance of locally-made produce and longer-life items that can be planned for ahead of time. "A good example of this is that we'd like to increase the number of mince pies we stock from a local baker this Christmas, but they might not have the infrastructure to take orders now so this needs to be a consideration for nearer the festive season – whereas a wholesaler is primed to take our order now."

"Ultimately, we try to be as prepared as possible when it comes to orders and wider plans earlier in the year, so when December rolls around we can put all our energy into front-facing customer engagement."

While consumers will be looking for a set of markers for the festive season – familiarity is perenially popular – that's not to say that there isn't an appetite for innovation. "You've got to carve out space for innovation," he says. "For example, every year we take a fresh look at our own label range, specifically in terms of how we want it to be defined and how it represents us."

Connecting suppliers with customers is also given a fresh approach year-on-year. "During November and December we bring more partners into our space to present their products and run tastings, and the way we do this is constantly being strengthened. Our innovation isn't just in terms of products, it's also about how we operate as a business."

As much as it pays to plan for Christmas throughout the year, it's also worth remembering that for some, the appetite for festive fare doesn't end as the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve. Stefano likes to enjoy the Christmas cake made by his mother and daughter in the new year – "you just don't need Christmas cake when you've already eaten so much" – and tends to finish it in May. "Of course Christmas comes with its schedule and traditions, but for me it's much more about the feeling that it captures, which can be enjoyed beyond December."

Tradition sells

At Grandma Wild's, Harriet Lister has found that the popularity of Christmas products centre around their ability to create a moment. "At Christmas, consumers seek more than just flavour – they're looking for comfort, nostalgia, and a sense of tradition," she begins. "Baked goods become part of the seasonal ritual, whether it's sharing biscuits with family, gifting a beautifully packaged tin, or enjoying a quiet moment with a cup of tea. Tray baked in the traditional way to achieve that crispy crunch and utterly delicious taste. Just as Annie Wild did back in 1899."

When it comes to the tastes shoppers want to experience



come the festive season, comfort is favoured says Harriet. "Flavour preferences during the festive season lean towards rich, warming, and indulgent. Consumers are drawn to comforting spices, zesty citrus, and creamy, buttery textures." Don't feel that you have to stick to the conventional Christmas bakes – Christmas cake, mince pies et al – to satisfy this appetite. "Our Stem Ginger & Lemon Biscuits offer a vibrant twist – combining the gentle heat of ginger with the brightness of lemon for a refreshing yet festive flavour. Meanwhile, our Clotted Cream Chocolate Chip Shortbread Biscuits deliver a luxurious, melt-in-the-mouth experience, blending traditional shortbread with the richness of clotted cream and indulgent chocolate chips," she says.

'Tis the season of gifting, and food and drink products that come ready to be gifted are a boon to the retailer and customer alike. "Our tins experience a notable uplift in sales during the festive season, and gifting is a key reason," explains Harriet. "The tins are designed to be ideal for giving, sharing, or simply enjoying at home. Their festive designs make them a standout on shelves and a popular choice for those looking for a thoughtful, ready-to-give present. Many customers also appreciate the keepsake value of the tins, which often find a second life in the home."

An appetite for the familiar

Product visuals and 'creating a scene' are well worth investing in, says Emma Cyrus of WBC. "If you think that 72% of consumers say that their purchasing decisions revolve around packaging, it's easy to see why it should be considered a sales asset. In fact, it's your key to building brand awareness, communicating your core values and creating that all-important buy-in. Which, ultimately, is what good retail marketing is all about."

Cementing how you want to represent your business and ensuring that this image resonates throughout the customer experience is key. "Whatever resonates will trigger an emotional response which, in turn, creates a link with your brand image that forms the foundation of recognition and loyalty," says Emma. "Add festive vibes to the mix, and you have yourself a dynamite way of standing head and shoulders above the (very stiff) competition."



Keeping things familiarly seasonal – reds, greens and metallics – is still a winner. "Seasonal branding takes this up another notch giving you, the retailer, a chance to hone into trends around societal behaviour and ramp up your proposition to reflect current needs," she continues. "The festive season is all about tradition and nostalgia, and with an astounding Christmas spend of £28.6 billion in 2024, who wouldn't want to go with the flow?"

Tradition certainly sells at Craigie's Farm Shop, and seasonal shortcuts created on-site are a key driver. "In June the team starts discussing what we want to build on from last year and what we want to do differently in terms of dishes, and then we start looking into shelf lives as it rolls around quickly," says founder John Sinclair. The aim of the game is to save customers' time during the busy festive period, so on the list of dishes prepared are things like roast potatoes, red cabbage, and sprouts with cranberries and walnuts.

Mince pies and Christmas puddings made to John's Granny's recipe – "it contains a lot of booze, so shelf life isn't such a worry!" – are must-haves, but the team has noticed a fall in the popularity of traditional cakes and puds and work hard to provide desserts that cater to customers' evolving sweet tooths. "We sell a lot of festive cheesecakes and chocolate logs," says John, "nothing too substantial as you don't want anything heavy after you've eaten half a turkey."

DISTRIBUTOR INSIGHT



Now in its 17th year, the team at Bramble Foods is preparing for a bumper Christmas. "We're growing year-on-year, but Christmas is growing bigger than anything else we do," say Mark Hilton and Tom Bradshaw, creative manager and operations manager. They put this growth down to the size of its gifting range; hampers, bagged items and boxed cakes are flying off the distributor's shelves, and its 1,300 lines of festive fare – potentially the largest selection in the sector – are selling better than ever.

Pulling together as a team – and industry – is especially important at Christmas, and everyone in the Bramble Foods team chips in when it comes to packing products in the warehouse. This comradery is demonstrated beyond the business's HQ too, with a proactive sales team building tailored and invaluable relationships with retailers that benefit all parties – and the on-site tastings service is proving popular with customers, too.

Face-to-face interactions and a reliable operations service are key to a smooth-running festive season for all, say Mark and Tom, and Bramble Foods is proud to offer that and more to a growing customer base.

> "We're growing year-on-year, but Christmas is growing bigger than anything else we do"

Wastage in the New Year is a common occurrence in food businesses, but Craigie's has a smart solution. "We tend not to buy in much overtly Christmassy stock, instead we bring in lines that we can sell throughout the year but put in a hamper with a festive decoration to Christmas-ify it, or display it alongside our own mince pies or cranberry sauce – there are enough things to make the shop feel Christmassy without bringing in lots of reindeers and the like."

The restaurant is also a handy outlet for spare stock. "Any surplus meat products go onto our menu," explains John. "If we ordered in too many chipolatas for pigs in blankets, for example, they go into our breakfasts. We always have spare turkeys in the New Year as we don't want to be out of stock if a customer comes in looking for one last minute and we've sold out, but our turkey and cranberry pies sell well into February." Un-iced Christmas cakes get a second outing as Easter cakes later in the year if they remain unsold by the New Year.



2025 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE STOCK CHECK



BILLINGTON'S GINGERBREAD
Made using one of the UK's oldest gingerbread recipes, featuring a secret blend of spices, rum and golden syrup.
billingtonsgingerbread.co.uk



TIPTREE MERRY CHRISTMAS
Pieces of Tiptree Christmas pudding are infused in small batch English craft rum for a moreish flavour.
tiptree.com



STAG BAKERIES SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR CHEESE
A rich and tasty cake which pairs beautifully with a cheese board.
stagbakeries.co.uk



WALKER'S SHORTBREAD SELECTION
Proudly crafted in the Scottish Highlands using only the finest all-butter ingredients – no artificial flavourings, colourings or additives.
walkersshortbread.com

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HALLOWEEN

October has become a lucrative time in retail – especially for farm shops. So how can you cash in on this trend?

Love it or loathe it, when the 'spooky season' comes around, there's no ignoring the excitement Halloween conjures amongst today's shoppers.

As more and more customers (especially Millennial parents tapping into the nostalgia of a childhood spent watching American Halloween celebrations in the 90s) sit up and take notice of the season, it has, for many in retail, become a key calendar event. In fact several retailers have told Speciality Food it's become one of their most lucrative times of the year, filling the gap between the busy summer holidays and Christmas, and giving families, especially, an extra reason to visit.

From pumpkin patches, haunted houses, and scary tractor rides, to themed menus and products, there are loads of ways to thrill your customers this October.

IS IT WORTH PUTTING TIME INTO HALLOWEEN PLANS?

In a word, yes. According to Finder, last year a predicted £776 million was spent on Halloween in the UK, with 58% of Brits saying they planned to make a purchase. The average spend was £25 per person, rising to £43 for Millennials, though Gen-Z (who crave Instagrammable experiences) are most engaged with this time of year.

WHY HAS HALLOWEEN BECOME SO POPULAR?

The answer to this is twofold. Firstly, the drive towards more eating at home occasions continues to strengthen, and consumers are looking for different ways to 'jazz up' and theme their dinner parties and get-togethers. Secondly, Halloween events and products are seen as an affordable, permissible treat. A themed farm trail, for example, will set families back far less cash than a trip to a big-name attraction during October half term.

WHAT ARE OTHER BUSINESSES DOING?

There's a lot going on. Foxes Farm Produce in Essex has its own pumpkin patch and maize maze, with daytime and evening experiences tapping into a variety of demographics. Cattows Farm in Leicestershire grows around 100,000 pumpkins per year, and from humble beginnings, now hosts a month-long Halloween festival, filled with activities and special food and drink. And Millets Farm Centre in Oxfordshire is planning pumpkin picking, spooky discos and a circus of tricks.

A trailblazer in farm-based Halloween fun is Suffolk's Hollow Trees Farm. Co-founder, Sally Bendall, says the first event took place almost 30 years ago when the Spice Girls were at their height of fame. The team dressed life-sized dolls as the quintet, complete with pumpkin heads, and put them on display along the farm trail with their music on loop. "We sold out of pumpkins because we were doing something quite different," Sally says.

Today, the farm still grows pumpkins, but they've become secondary to what is now a huge part of the year for the business, enticing families from far and wide to enjoy the themed farm trail, Halloweeny food in the cafe, barrel train rides and sledges. "We always like to have a spooky barn or house and it's never in the same place – it's a surprise each year. This year the theme is monster bugs!"

Sally says, commercially, Halloween is the biggest event for Hollow Trees "if the weather is right". This is absolutely key. "Being on heavy clay, if it rains we're up to our eyes in mud. Otherwise, it's brilliant. We have lots of regulars, and people who don't visit on a regular basis, but always make a point of coming for October half term." You could, if you execute your plans well, earn yourself a whole new fan base, and clinch extra sales in store with this captive audience.

SHOULD I BE GROWING PUMPKINS?

Authenticity matters to today's consumers, who aren't being hoodwinked by 'faux farms' which buy in pumpkins for them to 'pick'.

If you have space to grow your own, offering attractive photo opportunities, good facilities, and tailored onsite catering, you could be onto a winner says Geoff Barton of Canalside Farm Shop in Stafford. The PYO farm and farm shop (renowned for berries) added pumpkins to its fields nearly a decade ago and hasn't looked back. October is now the second-best month for overall sales, he reveals. "It was definitely worth it and, with our 3D maize maze field, has become a real family attraction. It basically takes everything that works for us in summer, and translocates it into autumn."

WHAT'S TRENDING FOR HALLOWEEN?

Asda's most recent Halloween trends report showed an upwards trajectory for themed food and drink during October. But this goes beyond sweets and chocolate. Consumers are looking for Halloween-themed cakes and baked goods (the strongest growing category), and the British appetite for 'picky teas' means Halloween parties and suppers are becoming commonplace too. Now's the time to start experimenting with products in those foodservice and cafe kitchens.

ANY TIPS FOR SUCCESS THIS YEAR?

Sally says you should always have a Plan B for bad weather. "We were inspired by Halloween celebrations we saw on trips to America, but we're not as fortunate to have such sunny days here in October."

Thinking about staffing is key as well, she adds. "Remember that the university students who have been so helpful during the summer months don't get that time off later in the year, and schools and colleges can change their half terms. Know when these are and plan your labour well in advance."

If you've bought in seasonal stock, don't forget to shout about it on social media daily. Again, now is the moment to look at your plans, and to plot in captivating, engaging content that promotes your Halloween events, while shining a light on any themed items you need to sell before Christmas. Speaking of Christmas, make sure those order books are open, and use Halloween as a 'hook' for showcasing hampers and gifts, and sampling out festive products.

ARE THERE ANY HALLOWEEN-THEMED PRODUCTS YOU RECOMMEND?

There's a fine line in speciality retail between kitsch and naff. We recommend leaving the overtly themed products to the multiples (who can shift them at hugely discounted prices in early November) and instead sourcing food and drink that celebrates the season but can be marketed as 'Halloweeny'. Mulled ciders and apple juices. Anything with pumpkin spice. Chai. We like Bird & Blend's Bonfire Toffee Tea, Walker's Nonsuch Toffees, and Parkin from Lottie Shaw's.

> "We always like to have a spooky barn or house and it's never in the same place – it's a surprise each year"
>
> **SALLY BENDALL, HOLLOW TREES FARM**



THE PREDICTED HALLOWEEN SPEND IN THE UK LAST YEAR WAS £776 MILLION

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TOP CHRISTMAS PRODUCTS

Christmas is a valuable opportunity to bring in exciting new products to tempt your customers' taste buds. From traditional festive fare to seasonal takes on classics and delicious new innovations, shoppers are hungry for foodie indulgences and experiences. Here's our wide-ranging pick of the best Christmas-ready products on the market right now...



TRUEFOODS BREAD SAUCE

Creamy, comforting, and full of nostalgic flavours, TRUEfoods' traditional bread sauce is carefully crafted to elevate your seasonal roasts. They slowly infuse the sauce with warming cloves, aromatic onion and a hint of nutmeg, creating a smooth and delicately spiced accompaniment that brings out the best in roasted meats, especially turkey or chicken. Whether it's part of a festive feast or your Sunday roast, this classic sauce adds a rich, savoury note to every bite. Made with specially selected ingredients, free from artificial colours and flavours.

truefoodsltd.com



BLACK BEE HONEY CHRISTMAS HONEY

With sweet and nutty notes of marzipan, Christmas Honey is the delicious new festive edition to the award-winning line up of 'flower to jar' 100% British honey from B Corp beekeeping collective Black Bee Honey. This soft set, single-origin honey is foraged from rapeseed, hawthorn and plum blossom in Somerset, Yorkshire and Northamptonshire, with natural almond flavouring and organic vanilla extract added to create a marzipan flavour and texture reminiscent of everyone's favourite layer of Christmas cake.

blackbeehoney.com



DRIVERS PICKLES CHRISTMAS PICKLE

The Driver family have perfected their traditional Christmas Pickle recipe with almost 120 years of pickling expertise. Packed full of apple, mixed fruits, aromatic spices and with a hint of ginger, this annual staple from the Drivers Pickles range even smells like Christmas. Tasting akin to a pickled mince pie it is the perfect accompaniment to any Christmas grazing table, Boxing Day platter and cheeseboard over the festive season. Nothing says Christmas like Drivers Christmas Pickle!

driverspickles.co.uk



SUMA KOMBUCHA

Discover Suma's refreshing Kombucha range, craft brewed with organic, natural ingredients for a deliciously uplifting drink. Each flavour is alive with subtle tang and delicate sweetness. Explore classic Ginger, vibrant Peach & Turmeric, Elderflower & Lemon, zingy Cola and Strawberry & Raspberry. This winter savour Suma's limited editions – fruity Winter Berries and warming Spiced Apple & Plum – perfect for cooler days. Suma Kombucha is low in sugar, vegan, and bursting with billions of live cultures.

suma.coop



THE COTSWOLD CARDILLO PANETTONE

Rooted in Italian tradition and crafted in their Cotswold family kitchen, The Cotswold Cardillo's artisan panettone celebrate hero ingredients with purpose – perfect at Christmas time. The Tradizionale, awarded for its excellence, features fragrant, home-candied orange that preserves peak citrus flavour. The Chocolate variety blends naturally leavened dough with indulgent dark chocolate chunks. And for a rich, nutty crunch, their Pistachio Panettone is finished with premium pistachio crumb. Each panettone offers carefully balanced textures and authentic taste – an elegant nod to heritage baking.

thecotswoldcardillo.co.uk



COTSWOLD GOLD FESTIVE BUTTERS

This indulgent duo gift pack contains a selection of Cotswold Gold's award-winning Festive Butters in a smart gift box, with the Whisky Butter winning 3 Stars Great Taste Awards 2024. A traditional accompaniment to warm mince pies or Christmas pudding, these butters are made with a good glug of Cotswolds Distillery signature Single Malt for the Whisky Butter and Cognac in the Brandy Butter. These butters are made by Cotswold Gold on their family farm in the Cotswolds with all-natural ingredients. No added colours, flavours or preservatives. Available to order direct from the Cotswold Gold website.

cotswoldgold.co.uk



COTTAGE DELIGHT FABULOUSLY FRUITY HAMPER

Cottage Delight's Fabulously Fruity Hamper is a celebration of sweetness and sophistication! Brimming with luscious jams and zesty marmalades crafted from the ripest fruits, each jar bursts with vibrant, natural flavour. Paired perfectly with melt-in-your-mouth buttery shortbread, this luxurious hamper is a feast for the senses. Whether you're elevating your morning toast or indulging in a refined afternoon tea, this delightful collection transforms everyday moments into gourmet experiences. Beautifully packaged and irresistibly delicious – it's the perfect gift or treat!

cottagedelight.co.uk



BOOJA-BOOJA WINTER SPECIAL RANGE

Award-winning free from brand Booja-Booja is expanding its seasonal Winter Special range. The new Winter Special Eight Truffle Box features two exquisite chocolate truffle flavours in one pack; four enchanting Cherry Bakewell and four bestselling Hazelnut Crunch. A double bill of deliciousness, it's an ideal gift for any chocolate lover. And for a sublime stocking filler look no further than new Orange Scrunch Chocolate Wonders; sensational little chocolate orange bites with crunchy honeycomb. Fabulously festive!
boojabooja.com



MATTHEWS COTSWOLD FLOUR REGENERATIVE ALL PURPOSE WHITE FLOUR

Bring sustainability to your festive bakes with Matthews Cotswold Flour Regenerative All Purpose White Flour. Milled from regeneratively farmed British wheat, it's a highly versatile flour which is perfect for Christmas cakes, pastries, biscuits and more. Milled in the Cotswolds using traditional methods, it supports better soil health and British farming. A natural choice for bakers who care about quality and provenance, it's an ideal addition to your Christmas product range.
cotswoldflour.com



WALKER'S NONSUCH 350G GIFT BOXES

Make Christmas extra special with Walker's Nonsuch 350g gift boxes, available in three indulgent flavours: Assorted Toffees and Chocolate Eclairs, Salted Caramel and Lovely Liquorice. Made with care by the renowned family toffee maker since 1894, each piece is twist-wrapped for freshness and presented in beautifully designed, foil-finished boxes that ooze festive charm. Vegetarian friendly, gluten-free and free from artificial colours and preservatives, these irresistibly nostalgic treats make the perfect premium gift for any toffee lover.
walkers-nonsuch.co.uk



FUDGE KITCHEN CHRISTMAS CRACKER

A sophisticated twist on the classic Christmas cracker – no plastic puzzles or novelty moustaches here! Each one opens to reveal three generous pieces of Fudge Kitchen's handmade artisan fudge in Sea Salted Caramel, Chocolate Orange and Speculoos. Elegantly designed and unsealed for you to add a personal touch, they're perfect for festive tables, stockings, or a tasteful tree. Crafted by the UK's original fudge specialists, these are crackers worth pulling.
fudgekitchen.co.uk



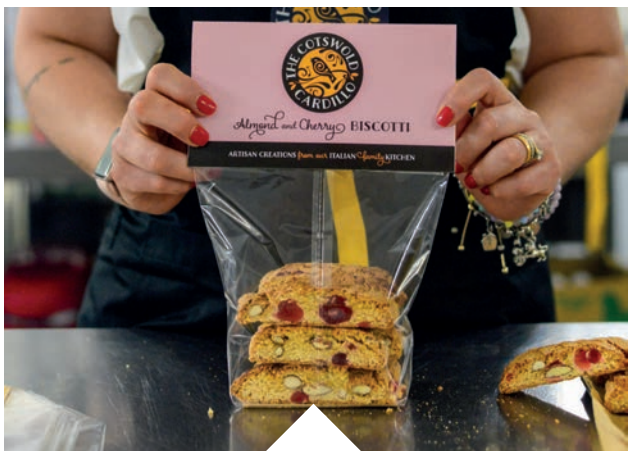
TRUEFOODS CRANBERRY SAUCE

Fruity and festive, TRUEfoods' rich cranberry sauce blends juicy cranberries, fresh apples, and a splash of ruby port to create a vibrant and flavourful accompaniment. Carefully simmered to balance sweetness and tartness in a luxurious sauce. A perfect match for your Christmas roasts, especially turkey and ham. The addition of port adds depth and warmth, giving it ideal for festive gatherings. Serve alongside your Christmas favourites to bring a touch of seasonal sparkle to every plate. Made with specially selected ingredients, free from artificial colours and flavours.
truefoodsltd.com



FOREST FEAST TRUFFLE & PECORINO ROASTED NUT MIX

Truffle & Pecorino Roasted Nut Mix from Forest Feast is a new gourmet snack blend featuring slow-roasted peanuts, cashews, almonds, pecans and macadamias, seasoned with zesty Italian Pecorino cheese and enriched with the earthy flavour of black truffle. This innovative offering caters to the growing market for premium, high-quality snacks, providing a standout option in the snacking category.
forestfeast.com



THE COTSWOLD CARDILLO BISCOTTI

The Cotswold Cardillo's biscotti range brings a crisp, handmade bite to the everyday. Each pack pairs heritage with distinctive flavours: Almond & Cherry, Orange & Chocolate, Hazelnuts with Coffee & Apricot, and a standout Pistachio & Bergamot. The spotlight lands on the hero ingredients – whole nuts, real fruit, and fragrant citrus – sourced for both flavour and texture. Crafted by Clara and Matteo to honour Italian roots with a Cotswold twist, these biscotti are your go-to for an elevated, authentic crunch and a perfect gift at Christmas time!
thecotswoldcardillo.co.uk



THE BAY TREE SPICY TOMATO & CARAMELISED ONION CHUTNEY

The Bay Tree believes that taste is one of life's great pleasures, and with the Bake Off culture boosting the idea of experimenting with flavours, many people are discovering that food can be fun and exciting. Made with a sense of adventure and a passion for tradition, The Bay Tree's goal is simple – to make the joy of nature's finest flavours a part of everyday life without the addition of any unnecessary ingredients or preservatives. From catering tubs to hospitality tinies, and a range of consumer sizes, The Bay Tree offers superior preserves, sauces and condiments for everyone.
thebaytree.co.uk



SUMA NUT LOAF

As Artisan Grains exits nut roast production, Suma's trusted own-brand mix is the ideal replacement. Packed with nuts, seeds and fruit, it's free from ultra-processed ingredients and perfect for clean, plant-based diets. A seasonal favourite with year-round appeal, it's made by a workers' co-op with decades of wholefood heritage. Stock up now ahead of Christmas – limited packaging run before the 2026 relaunch.

suma.coop



TRUEFOODS TURKEY GRAVY

A deliciously rich turkey gravy, carefully infused with fragrant thyme and a splash of brandy. This luxurious sauce brings deep, savoury warmth to your festive feast, perfectly complementing roast turkey and all your festive favourites. Its smooth texture and robust flavours enhance every bite, adding a touch of elegance to your Christmas dinner. Crafted to elevate your seasonal dishes, this classic gravy is the ideal finishing touch to make your festive meal truly memorable and delicious. Made with specially selected ingredients, free from artificial colours and flavours.

truefoodsltd.com



LE GRUYÈRE AOP

Made in western Switzerland, Gruyère AOP has been produced in the same way since 1115AD, using raw milk from cows fed on grass in summer and hay in winter. It is the only cheese that has won the title of Best Cheese in the World at the World Cheese Awards four times, demonstrating how much work and skill is needed to create its unique and delicious flavour. Gruyère AOP can be found with different maturities: the Classic is matured for six months and has a delicate, nutty, creamy flavour. The Reserve is matured for 10 months and has a drier, more grainy mouthfeel. Then you can find an older Gruyère AOP, 14 months or more, giving it a much stronger flavour.

gruyere.com



SUMMERDOWN PEPPERMINT RANGE

Summerdown has refreshed its award-winning peppermint range with the return of their specially designed Christmas sleeves. Crafted using Black Mitcham peppermint grown and distilled on their family farm in Hampshire, each tea and chocolate offers a signature taste that's perfect for gifting or entertaining. To support independent retailers, Summerdown's complimentary festive point of sale kit includes the sleeves, peppermint chocolate samples, seasonal postcards and a Christmas showcard – everything needed to create an eye-catching, gift-ready display.

summerdown.com/trade



WALKER'S NONSUCH LUXURY TOFFEE SELECTION

A festive favourite from a cherished family company, the Walker's Nonsuch Luxury Toffee Selection features four classic toffee bars: Original Creamy, Liquorice, Roasted Hazelnut and Brazil Nut, plus a novelty toffee hammer to whack, unwrap and enjoy! Made with whole milk, butter and over 130 years of tradition, this deliciously nostalgic treat is full of old-fashioned charm. Beautifully packaged with a touch of heritage, it's a delightful and memorable gift that's sure to delight any sweet-toothed recipient this Christmas.

walkers-nonsuch.co.uk



BUITEMAN SAVOURY BISCUIT GIFTING RANGE

Celebrate the festive season with Buiteman's premium savoury biscuit gifting range – the perfect addition to any Christmas hamper or gourmet selection. Crafted in the Netherlands, using traditional recipes and quality ingredients, Buiteman's baked delights include favourites such as Cheddar Cheese, Gouda and Sun-Dried Tomato – all presented in beautifully designed packaging ideal for gifting. Whether you're looking to elevate your seasonal offering or provide customers with indulgent savoury treats, Buiteman's products deliver on taste, style, and shelf appeal.

rhamaronline.com



STAG BAKERIES HEBRIDEAN BAKER CHRISTMAS COOKIE

Bringing together a shared passion for the Hebrides and a baking heritage dating back to 1885, the Hebridean Baker is the newest addition to the Stag Bakeries family. Together they have created a special range of products inspired by the Hebridean way of life. These small batch-baked Gingerbread and Dark Chocolate Oaties are full of flavour and deliver a satisfying crunch. Created especially for the festive season, enjoy them with a cup of tea or coffee, or on their own.

stagbakeries.co.uk



SHEPHERDS PURSE BLUE CHEESES

30 years ago Shepherds Purse launched their innovative cow's milk Yorkshire Blue and ewe's milk Mrs Bell's Blue; creamy Continental-style cheeses which have since become firm favourites of top chefs and consumers, both home and abroad. Internationally award-winning and handmade on the family farm in North Yorkshire from local milk, they are a great introduction to blue cheeses with their balanced flavours and sweet, grassy and herbaceous notes. Perfect paired with crackers, fruity chutneys, walnuts and honey or even the Yorkshire favourite, Christmas cake!

shepherdspurse.co.uk





SPREAD THE STORY

Traditional spreads are as popular as ever, but 2025's shoppers are seeking quality and education

COMMENTATORS



PAUL WEBB
BLACK BEE HONEY



CARMEN FERGUSON
WINDMILL ORGANICS



SIMON GREENWOOD-HAIGH
PROPER NUTTY



JOHN SINCLAIR
CRAIGIE'S FARM SHOP

The British spreads category is the perfect microcosm of the wider industry at present, and a world of potential contrasts; shoppers are seeking value but not at the expense of quality, and they want innovation but not to replace traditional products. Jams, honeys and spreads have long been staples in kitchen cupboards up and down the country, and while the classics – raspberry jam, peanut butter and a jar of locally-produced honey – are as popular as ever, consumers are after more.

The health benefits of these products with ingredient lists just a handful – or fewer – items long are becoming increasingly recognised as shoppers become more aware of the additives used in the production of many mass-produced jars, so it's always worth checking the ingredients deck of your products before you display them on your shelves. An increasing number of savvy consumers will be turning jars around for themselves, and when high quality staples such as these can and should contain only a small number of ingredients, it is easy to be put off by the listing of multiple items one cannot pronounce.

The buzz about honey

Honey is a hot topic of conversation right now, with experts campaigning for better understanding of the difference between high and poor quality options – and the good news is that shoppers are starting to demand better. "Consumers are becoming much more aware of the huge issue with honey adulteration and are demanding better from retailers," begins Paul Webb, co-founder and beekeeper at Black Bee Honey.

How to tell the difference at a glance? "Check for country of origin," Paul says. "If there isn't one it's probably mechanically dried and adulterated honey from China. We include the name of the beekeeper and hive location on every jar."

Education is paramount to ensuring that only respectfully produced, high quality honey is purchased across the board. "In general people have come to expect honey to be a bland, runny syrup with not much of an idea of how it's produced," says Paul. "When we do honey tastings at events people are always blown away by the variety of flavours, textures and colours and this just from our range of British honey varieties which is solely from the pollens and nectars that the bees are foraging on at a particular time of year in a particular area."

The future is looking brighter for the British honey sector. "We're campaigning for stricter regulations to remove adulterated honey from our shelves," says Paul, "and the press are continuing to highlight the issue, which means public awareness is also growing. This will mean pressure on retailers to change their purchasing from cheap imports to more quality honey from the UK and beyond."

For Carmen Ferguson, brand manager at Windmill Organics, selling food that is good for both people and planet is of paramount importance. "We have a number of different brands in our portfolio, and, as the name suggests, perhaps the most inherently pure brand in our portfolio is RAW. The ethos behind RAW is the belief that the food we eat should be as close to its natural state as possible; unfiltered, uncomplicated and untampered with."

The RAW range includes three honeys – a rich and aromatic Pure Blossom Honey, a mellow Tropical Forest Honey, and a fragrant Acacia Flower Honey – "all of which provide a healthy and organic sweetness to food," she says.

Next gen spreads

In recent times, even supermarket shelves have started to span beyond the conventional options to provide versatile culinary adventure to



> "People are blown away by the variety of flavours, textures and colours from Britsh honey varieties"

PANEL RETAILER



John Sinclair of Craigie's Farm Shop has found that traditional jams and honeys often wins out over innovative spreads

"We started out making jam in the eighties, and we're definitely seeing a rise in popularity of people making their own jams again. I think people are starting to recognise that if you buy a mass-produced jam it doesn't have the flavour of fresh jam, and that's what people are looking for – if they're not able to make it themselves, they want a product which tastes homemade. It's important to bring in new lines, but people keep coming back to the good old favourites – strawberry jam, raspberry jam and classic marmalade. We even run frozen jam making classes for kids in the summer!

"I don't know if there's any truth in it or not, but we're happy to promote the health benefits of honey in terms of local ones being good for hayfever. We set up an education and environment foundation which has 16 hives, and the honey produced is sold in the shop alongside other Scottish honey – it's important to us to support local producers.

"We have a machine that customers can use to make their own peanut butter; it draws the crowds more than peanut butter sitting on a shelf would. Beyond that, we sell a few nut butters made using different nuts, but it's definitely the DIY machine that sells the most spreads for us."



shoppers, and indies have a rich opportunity to stand out and support small-scale makers producing exciting spreads.

From extra indulgent nut butters bringing together an array of nuts with innovative flavouring to fruit and chocolate spreads, in 2025 the range of spreads on offer for adventurous foodies is impressive.

At Biona, the focus is on natural deliciousness. "Our Biona brand offers a wide variety of organic spreads, including fruit ones which are naturally sweetened with organic apple juice and puree, such as orange, strawberry and forest fruit, our ever-popular nut butter ones, including peanut, almond and cashew, as well as cocoa and hazelnut spreads too," says Carmen. Health is a consideration, too: "a couple of years ago we launched Europe's first organic high-oleic peanut butters."

> "Peanut butter is seen as an affordable snack or meal – even a high quality peanut butter on artisanal bread will cost pennies"

Peanut butter is still the biggest seller when it comes to nut butters in the UK market, says Simon Greenwood-Haigh of Proper Nutty. "We're in a recessionary market, and peanut butter as opposed to other nut butter options is seen as an affordable snack or meal – even a high quality peanut butter spread on some artisanal bread will only cost a few pennies, but it still provides health benefits such as high levels of protein."

In a world where ultra-processed products are demanding increasing numbers of headlines, nut butters are a product which could – and should – come with an impressively short ingredients list. "We roast peanuts, grind them then put them in a jar or tin," he says. "It's a really simple process and people can overcomplicate it, but ultimately it's a very natural ingredient and product."

While at its core nut butters are supremely simple, there's a raft of new brands making the nut butter sector an exciting place to be. "New brands are trying to come onto the market in a very fun, foodie way, by talking about sourcing and origin – we rate Argentinian peanuts, and American peanuts often taste sweeter than their counterparts – and the flavour-added options are often very clever as it's far from easy to add anything to peanut butter, especially chocolate, as peanuts don't like moisture."

Ultimately it all comes down to price, and while the commodity price of peanuts is going down, the price of other nuts is increasing – which explains the higher price point alternative nut butters command, including the reasonably ubiquitous almond butter, and the built-in luxury of pistachio butters and spreads.



STOCK CHECK

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE · 2025



RAW ACACIA HONEY

A 100% organic acacia flower honey with a light and fragrant bouquet.

rawvibrantliving.co.uk



LONDON HONEY COMPANY WILTSHIRE WILDFLOWER HONEY

From tumbling Wiltshire downlands, beautifully fragrant with delicate undertones.

thelondonhoneycompany.com



RADNOR PRESERVES DARK SKIES PRESERVE

This stellar Great Taste Award-winning preserve is jam-packed with chuckleberries – a cross between a blackcurrant and gooseberry – for a stunning tart preserve that is out of this world,

radnorpreserves.com



BUTTER BIKE CHOCOLATE PEANUT BUTTER

A blend of almost smooth peanut butter and dark cacao. Handmade in small batches, suitable for vegans and palm oil-free.

butterbike.co.uk



RHYTHM 108 CREAMY PISTACHIO SPREAD

A luxuriously smooth blend of rich, roasted pistachios, slowly crafted to perfection.

rhythm108.com



THE BAY TREE SEVILLE ORANGE MARMALADE

This classic marmalade will remind customers what marmalade should taste like.

thebaytree.co.uk





THE HOMEWARES OPPORTUNITY

Destination retailers offer more than just food, and homewares offers a valuable opportunity to extend stay time (and sales)

COMMENTATORS



FAYE COOKSON
COTSWOLD FAYRE



WILL KOGAN
FRANKLIN PARCEL



STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE

Offering homewares is often seen as a nice-to-have; a range of products which is a step away from the core food offering of a deli, farm shop or food hall that – if space allows – might make for a bottom line boost. But you don't need to have masses of space to see if your customer base has an appetite for non-food items, and Christmas is one of the best times to try it on for size.

Is it worth branching out into unfamiliar territory in this case? "In my view, yes!" says Faye Cookson, buyer at Cotswold Fayre, which now has two Flourish Food Halls to its name. "Sectors such as farm shops and garden centres are becoming more and more known as 'one stop shops' where consumers can shop multiple categories under one roof, so think homewares gifts, wrapping paper and greetings cards as a solution for consumers who are maybe time-poor."

"Homewares remain a strong category for independent retailers, especially in lifestyle-led settings where customers seek pieces that combine function and personality," agrees Will Kogan, general manager at Franklin Parcel. In terms of what to stock, Will advises that "items that offer warmth and individuality tend to perform well, such as those made from natural materials, with earthy colours and handmade finishes." Of course, homewares offer the same opportunity as artisan food to stand out from the crowd. "Shoppers want their homes to feel personal rather than strictly on trend, so products with a story or artisanal quality often stand out," he says.

Cotswold Fayre has found homewares to be a valuable addition to its arsenal. "Homewares is a very important (and exciting) category for both us and Flourish," says Faye. "From a wholesale point of view, we are always focused on the latest trends, new fragrances, and any artisanal brands with a strong sustainability story that we can add to our portfolio."

When it comes to retail, the team has found homewares to be a boon – even opening a separate building on the Glenavon site dedicated to them. "Within our retail side of the business, Flourish is a real destination for homewares, often offering consumers something local as well as brands from further afield that fit within their buying strategy and vision for that season," says Faye.

Aligned values

Sustainability credentials are a key sell. "At Flourish we love a strong sustainability story – anything with environmental credentials and brands that align with our brand values," she continues.

Indeed, staying in tune with your philosophies is vital to adding to your business without diluting what you offer. "Homewares aren't our key focus, but we see the opportunity in businesses that align with our values," says Stefano Cuomo, CEO of Macknade. "For example, we might have a local potter set up a space outside the shop – this is great for social media, and with an agreement that we will take a percentage of the sales it can be a new way to bring in some revenue.

"There are great companies out there which align with our food and drink ethos, and our range covers kitchen utensils to beauty products such as soaps and candles."

Standing out from the crowd is important but takes an investment of time. "You don't want to have a generic line that is seen in every farm shop," he says, "so you must look into what's around you. For example, we sell incredible soaps and skincare products from a working farm in Kent."

Seasonal sales

Homewares also offers a chance to tap into seasonal demand, says Faye. "Alongside our all year-round offerings we often lean into seasonality, whether this be new fragrances for Mother's Day or new gifting ranges for Christmas – we are seeing more brands move more into seasonal offerings to cement their visibility with consumers at key gifting times throughout the year."

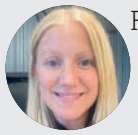
"Really lean into seasonality and limited editions, whether that be spring such as Valentine's Day/ Mother's Day and Christmas," she advises. "We find that all retailers switch their seasonal ranges on earlier and earlier, it will give retailers a longer selling period for each calendar event and a longer period for consumers to shop with you."

WHAT'S TRENDING

"Multi functional homewares and kitchenware, brands with a strong story – either sustainability of buy women built, nostalgic scents and candles, retro colours, minimalistic aesthetics, sustainable homewares and functional items such as bags made from recycled plastic bottles or recycled notebooks," says Faye.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



Faye Cookson, buyer at Cotswold Fayre, shares her tips for maximising the homewares opportunity

- Retailers need to be more consumer aware than ever before; consumers increasingly want to know and understand where and how things are made and what effect the products that they are buying will have on our planet
- Merchandising is key (our Garden Centre sector do this so well!). Consumers will buy what they can picture in their space so think POS, lifestyle images/displays, lifestyle settings and styling
- Homewares and gifting trends can sometimes move quickly, so don't over buy, buy to sell out quickly and create that demand for the next season
- Choose suppliers that align with your brand values, so your messaging and communications are consistent across all your platforms
- Multiple categories and price points will also help enhance consumer basket spend throughout the year

> "Homewares remain a strong category for independent retailers, especially in lifestyle-led settings where customers seek pieces that combine function and personality"

Our pick of homeware and gifts that will help your establishment stand out from the crowd

1 CIRCULAR & CO
Recycled Coffee Cup

Perfectly catering for the British consumer's thirst for on-the-go drinks in a brilliantly sustainable format, the Fabric Cup in the Made From range from Circular&Co is 100% recyclable and made using materials including fabric waste, trainers, bubble gum, recycled coffee grounds and traceable marine plastic such as disgarded fishing nets.
circularandco.com

2 STELLAR
Oak Chopping Boards

The new Pure Oak Chopping Boards from Stellar fit into any kitchen decor and are crafted from 100% pure red oak. Their unique grain patterns and softly curved carving make them an attractive and practical gift – perfect for food prep or as a serving platter. Available in two sizes – 47 x 23cm and 53 x 29cm.
stellar.co.uk/

3 HYDRO HERB
Fresh Herb Kit

Made in Suffolk from recycled, recyclable or biodegradeable elements, these kits are perfect for cooks who like to use fresh herbs in their dishes – or cocktail lovers who use fresh mint in their mojitos. The organic solution in the kit is vegan-certified, and the kits don't require any soil or electricity, just lots of natural sunlight. Windowsill gardening at its best!
hydro-herb.co.uk

4 FRANTOIO MURAGLIA
Ceramic Olive Oil Bottle

A true celebration of Apulian artistry and flavour, this hand-painted ceramic bottle from Frantoio Muraglia is both a collectible and a culinary gem. Crafted by local artisans and filled with bold, intensely fruity extra virgin olive oil from 100% cold-pressed Coratina olives, it's rich in taste, antioxidants, and heritage. A striking addition to any kitchen or a gift guaranteed to impress.
justgourmetfoods.co.uk

5 PROP OPTIONS
Scandinavian Birch Cake Stand

This pedestal cake stand is a natural fit for the homewares sections in independent retail establishments. Available in a range of natural wood finishes and sizes, as well as colours that boast a striking wood grain, these stands can also be personalised – making them an excellent gift for bakers who love to showcase their cakes with natural flair.
propoptions.co.uk

















BRITAIN'S BEST DELIS

EMMETT'S, PEASENHALL

As part of *Speciality Food*'s series shining a light on some of the UK's finest independent food and drink retailers, we chat with Mark Thomas of Emmett's



Once you've become a fan of Emmett's in Suffolk, it's for life. Fact. Owner Mark Thomas says he has a band of loyal regulars – some who tell him there'd be war at home if they didn't order one of the store's hams for Christmas, and others who pop in, week after week, month after month, spending often hundreds of pounds on their favourite products, many of which genuinely cannot be bought anywhere else.

It is, in a nutshell, an epicurean's dream. A very carefully considered collection of fine things to eat and drink, chosen personally by Mark. Shelves and displays blossom with vibrant, enticing displays of jewel-like crystallised fruits, candied peel encased in chocolate, curry pastes, chutneys and, of course, the shop's Royal Warrant-holding hams.

This is a place that feels rooted in history. Which it is. Originally called Tunmer, Emmett's has been part of village life in Peasenhall since at least 1820 when it was a recognised pork shop. It would change hands to become Emmett's in the late 1800s. Mark still has the contract of sale framed on the wall, reflecting, "one day, when I sell up, my contract can go up there too!"

In its past, Emmett's was a one stop destination. A grocery shop, haberdashery, Post Office and general store rolled into one, handily perched close to an important ancient Roman crossroads. "Going back in time, Dunwich was the biggest port in England," Mark says. "People had to go past the shop to get to the sea. We're in a very good position here."

The exuberant shopkeeper has an illustrious background in food and food retail, starting at a tender age, growing lettuces as a child to sell at the top of the road. Mark then worked in Harrods' food hall, at David Jones' food hall in Sydney, for a pig farmer in Canada's Fraser Valley, and later for his father's business, Culpepers, setting up shops in Japan before landing in Bungay, Suffolk to open his own fine food shop.

This was at a time when, remarkably, talking about 'local' and 'provenance' was a burgeoning thing. Emmett's was Mark's first supplier, the second being Suffolk juice producer Maynard House – who he continues to support today.

A move to tradition

The move to Emmett's happened in 2000. They really were different times, Mark reflects. "It still sold individual cigarettes, loose flowers, dog food, clothing, coal and wood. It had a 24-mile paper round seven days a week. And it was all on account! The same people would be at the door a quarter of an hour before we opened, coming in to get their slice of ham, milk and paper, then they'd come down in the afternoon with a hand-written note of everything else they needed."

Emmett's had (and still does have) a name for itself for selling both daily essentials and specialties, such as its hams – which went out on credit. "We obviously don't have credit accounts anymore," Mark jests, "but we were one of the first shops to accept credit cards as payment."

Payment terms and stock may have changed, but something that Mark would never edit is the character and heritage of the building, which he has kept, as far as possible, in its original state. Through the enormous double-fronted windows, passersby will spy the original counter (filled with artisan cheese and charcuterie) and even the original bacon slicer. "We do have a modern slicer but it's not as good," he remarks.

"I'm lucky to have premises that are physically bricks and mortar. We have a lot of first-time visitors who spot us, find a parking space, come in and, without prompting say, 'wow, this is amazing' or 'this looks extraordinary'.

"The visual display and how we present the shop makes an impact. It's good-looking... very photogenic. The glass in the windows are original, and the original awning is encased above your head as you













walk out to the road. I would love to pull that out but lots of lorries come through here so it wouldn't be wise!"

Besides looks, it's smell that captures customers as soon as they step foot in Emmett's. "I can't smell it myself anymore," says Mark. "But I know people really love that. We don't pump it in – the smell is from all the wonderful products we sell."

Another enticement is the store's bijoux cafe, which has been stripped back to offer hot and cold drinks, and what Mark thinks are some of the best ham and cheese sandwiches around – to enjoy alongside a drop of wine if they wish. "There can't be many shops where you can walk around with a glass of wine," he smiles.

Not just any ham

Emmett's has been put in the spotlight multiple times. Its revered smoked goods have been name-checked by Delia, Rick Stein, James Martin and, more recently, food writer Felicity Cloake, who included them in her book Red Sauce, Brown Sauce.

"We still have the original brick smokehouses," Mark says proudly. "It goes back to when this was a pork shop. Over 200 years ago people would have kept a pig to be slaughtered, and the meat would provide for the family throughout winter. We are lucky to have a shop with such history and heritage."

All pork is sourced from Blythburgh, just a few miles from the smokehouses. "It's free-range. This is one of only around 3% of free-range pig farmers in the UK," Mark explains. "You can see them playing around outside. They're very relaxed."

Hams are available whole on or off the bone, or in pre-sliced packs, with smoked and unsmoked varieties to choose from. Suffolk Black is the signature marinade, dark as a conker, with a delicate, rich sweetness. "It's made with black porter beer, molasses and brown sugar, and marinated over six weeks," Mark explains. "We also take that a step further with an orange version, covered with fresh oranges, dried apricots and dried figs, so you get this amazing compote to go with it."

There's the famous Christmas ham, prepared with six aromatic spices. Ham marinated in Earl Grey tea. Even ham presented coated in edible flowers.

"They are proper hams, not 'sham hams'," Mark jokes. "Our first order for Christmas came in May this year." For many, buying Emmett's ham has become a ritual. "When you talk to people who come in here, asking how they found it, often they'll say they're the third generation of a family brought up on our hams at Christmas. It's part of their tradition. A lady who works for me reminds me lots of times that once she gave her grandson (who's now 15 or 16) our ham. It's now the only kind he'll eat!"

Mark thinks the shop was one of the first places to make and sell nitrate-free bacon too. "We've been offering it since 2002. Making it goes back to my upbringing, being around my father's company. I was brought up on natural foods and the most natural way to preserve pork is in salt. It's really delicious bacon, whether you have it smoked or unsmoked, marinated or in a Christmas cure. Customers also like having a rind on their bacon! For me it's the best combination of provenance and flavour."

On the shelves

Mark only stocks products he can speak passionately about. Brands that find themselves on his shelves are the ones he considers the best of the best. Much of what's on offer is own label. A bit like Harrods or Fortnums, if something bares the Emmett's branding it's not a cheap gimmick – these are foods and drinks Mark has tested, tasted and chosen for excellence, just as his customers demand.

Working with producers he knows by name, working to exacting standards, is a no-brainer for Mark. "I could see, when I bought the shop, the existing client base was essentially the village and its surroundings, but that changed at Christmas as more and more people came to us for their hams. I could also see supermarkets moving much more into the area and into people's lives. Working with artisan producers, for me, makes sense.

"My producers are private people who respect the food they make. If I have an issue with a product I can go straight to the maker rather than a middle person."

Alongside firm British favourites (which have been with him since his Bungay days) such as Montgomery's cheese, Colston Bassett Stilton and Fen Farm Dairy, there's a strong pull towards the gastronomy of Spain.

"I first went to Spain when I was eight, and we stayed at the Orange hotel near Valencia. I remember the white buildings, the green trees and the oranges – I love oranges. I've been skiing in Spain since I was 17 too.

"I just think Spain is amazing for regional foods, from potatoes to tomatoes to rice. They enjoy food, and I'm afraid in this country we are very much fast food and supermarket-led."

The first Spanish product Mark stocked was a Rioja, which is labelled up for Emmett's as its house wine, still sourced the same supplier. It was launched at his Bungay shop in conjunction with Go airlines, after Mark wrote to its founder. There was a prize to win flights to Barcelona, flamenco dancers were flown in from Seville, and the Spanish Embassy sent 100 catalogues to the shop, used on the day as place mats.

Spanish products continue to top the shop's list of greatest hits – be that blanched, fried and salted almonds, sourced from a private estate, or bars of chunky milk and dark chocolate studded with almonds or hazelnuts.

An Emmett's must-have for Mark is the Date & Lime chutney made for him in Sri Lanka, alongside other preserves and pastes. Tart, tangy and sweet, it is the ideal partner in crime alongside the shop's hams, or (he suggests) stirred into chicken stock for a tasty, reviving broth.

What makes a great deli?

Just as we eat with our eyes, we shop with all our senses, and having a shop with curb appeal makes all the difference, says Mark. "If I was setting up now I would make sure I had a building that architecturally looks good. The colour of the produce and the way you're merchandising can make all the difference to sales." As can lighting. "Many years ago we had an awful summer when it was very dark. There were lots of strip lights in the ceiling and it didn't really show the place off, so I put in LEDs. Now the shop glows. It looks wonderful."

But you've got to back up looks with good service. "We are a small business with friendly service. We're personable. In the age of internet shopping, we offer that personality and communication. We are human beings. If someone rings up and says, 'is that AI?' I can say 'no, it's MI' Mark's intelligence. We're real, and that's so important."

His advice to others? "You've got to work at it and be prepared for long hours. Also remember no two days will ever be the same – a bit like the British weather!"

> "We still have the original brick smokehouses. It goes back to when this was a pork shop. Over 200 years ago people would have kept a pig to be slaughtered, and the meat would provide for the family throughout winter. We are lucky to have a shop with such history and heritage"



FINAL CALL

Britain's cheese industry is incredibly, incredibly special. Not only does it boast a long history, stretching back centuries (a cheesemonger recently told us he found ancient documents in Florence showing the transportation of British cheese to Italy), but it's a landscape that's constantly moving forward.

Putting together the Cheese Report for this edition was certainly eye-opening. It's clear that there's a lot of innovation happening within cheesemaking; to safeguard the future of regional varieties, to do better by the environment, and to bring new, exciting formats and flavours to consumers, all against a climate of unease created by tax reforms and extreme weather.

It's more important than ever before for specialist retailers to educate and excite customers about the absolute brilliance of our cheeses, and the job of ensuring their continued legacy and appeal lays firmly at your door. Your business is, very often, the only place many farmhouse and artisan cheeses can be found by shoppers, and you're in a unique position to be able tell them the stories of the makers, the dairies, the animals and the landscapes which culminate in the beautiful cheeses they can discover on your counters.

This is especially true of territorials, which a band of members of the Specialist Cheesemakers Association (SCA) are discussing right now, in a bid to secure their futures. There's a feeling that the likes of Cheshire, Lancashire, Caerphilly, Wensleydale and other varieties could be lost in the future if they fall out of favour with customers, who are increasingly being drawn towards bigger, bolder flavours.

Maybe give these (and other territorial cheeses) a bit of extra love this month? Display them more prominently. Signpost them more boldly in the counter. Arm your staff with more in-depth knowledge so they can better explain the nuances of these cheeses. Dare we say (and it certainly works for some) you create a bit of competition amongst staff members to see who can sell the most territorial varieties?

While it's important to embrace the new (as well as the fantastic cheeses we can source from the Continent) we mustn't forget to celebrate our cheesemaking past. If we don't use (sell) them, we might lose them.

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

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5 MINUTES WITH
PEV MANNERS, BELVOIR

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
I just love making natural, brilliant tasting drinks. It's so rewarding when someone randomly smiles when you say what you do and says, "oh, I love those drinks".

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR JOB?
Working with the clever, imaginative, entertaining and hard-working bunch of people we have here – it's energising and makes work fun.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON UK FOOD RETAIL?
It's tough for independents because of the massive economies of scale the big grocers bring. Aldi and Lidl's entry in the last decade has shaken it up hugely. We try and make a range where every retailer can find something different to their local supermarket, which is still a great seller.

TEA OR COFFEE?
Tea first thing then just one coffee then back to tea – weird I know but I like both – followed by Belvoir Farm drinks in the evening!

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO/MANTRA?
"Have a go! You'll never know if it will work until you try, and if you are going to have a go give it a full swing of the bat!"

THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EATEN?
Barramundi bugs in Australia... best not remembered.

FAVOURITE BOOK?
Too many to name one. Andrew Roberts' Napoleon biography was pretty jaw-dropping, probably the best book I've read in the last year.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Both – I'm greedy – my wife says I eat like a labrador!







For more information contact:
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The final word on fine food

TRIED & TESTED



BELVOIR
PINK GRAPEFRUIT PALOMA MOCKTAIL
The hot weather has well and truly hit, and refreshing zesty-ness is the order of the day. We love this Pink Grapefruit Paloma from Belvoir for its fruity cocktail vibes and vibrant colour, but parties in any season could benefit from this tipple. Belvoir have been extra clever by adding the essence of tequila, so you feel you're drinking a real cocktail but saving yourself the hangover.
belvoirfarm.co.uk

CARTRIGHT & BUTLER
COCOA DUSTED DARK CHOCOLATE PISTACHIOS
It's needless to say that pistachio products are everywhere right now, but all often they are sickly sweet and overly indulgent – blended with a white chocolate base for a cream, or partnered with milk chocolate for a treat that's moreish to begin with but soon becomes too much. The fact these are made using dark chocolate, with an extra dusting of bitter cocoa powder, make them much more suited to adult palates – and their subtle crunch keeps us going back for more.
cartrightandbutler.co.uk



WHITE RABBIT
ALMOND BISCOTTI
It's always a pleasure to discover a gluten-free product which is just as delicious as its conventional counterpart as it means that nobody has to miss out, and this is certainly the case with White Rabbit's Almond Biscotti. Hand-rolled and baked in Italy, with chunky almond pieces, these are rich in aromatic almond and don't have the sandiness you often get with gluten-free bakes. Just sublime with hot coffee.
whiterabbitpizza.co.uk



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Steven Smith, chef patron at KAJI Manchester



We source all our fish for KAJI from Midland Fish in Fleetwood.

Giles, my old fishmonger in Clitheroe, who I used for years when I was at Freemasons Wiswell, put me in touch with them when I moved to Manchester to launch KAJI at the end of last year. We buy whole tuna, lobster and crab, langoustine, scallops and Carlingford Loch oysters and all of our sushi fish from them.

I still source our smoked salmon from Giles in Clitheroe as I believe he offers the best in the UK.

Our A5 Wagyu beef is sourced from Japan from Tajimaya UK.

All our other meat comes from R&J Meats of Yorkshire which includes the rest of our beef, pork, chicken, lamb and game.

Vegetables come from Ribble Farm Fare. Andy McGregor, one of my previous chefs from Freemasons Wiswell later joined this company. They source specialist vegetables, herbs and products from the finest places in Paris, Italy and across Europe. Their strawberries come from France, along with stunning white asparagus and wild garlic. Their mangoes and limes are imported from Mexico.

We use Cacklebean eggs at KAJI which are superior in taste and colour. Their orange egg yolks are our preferred eggs to use on top of our beef tartare.

For specialist Japanese ingredients, we use Japan Food Express for condiments, vinegars and soy. We source our sushi rice from them too.

When it comes to wines, I use my trusted wine supplier Miles Corish who is a NW master of wine and has been supplying wines for me for over two decades. Miles has become a personal friend over the years, and he's been eating my food for so long that he knows exactly the right wines to pair with it. I trust his wine selections implicitly and I know he will always suggest the best accompaniments to my dishes.

> "My wine supplier has been supplying wines to me for over two decades"

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo



THE POWER OF LA FAMIGLIA

Family plays a vital role in Italy's culture, and it's time to bring that love to UK tables too

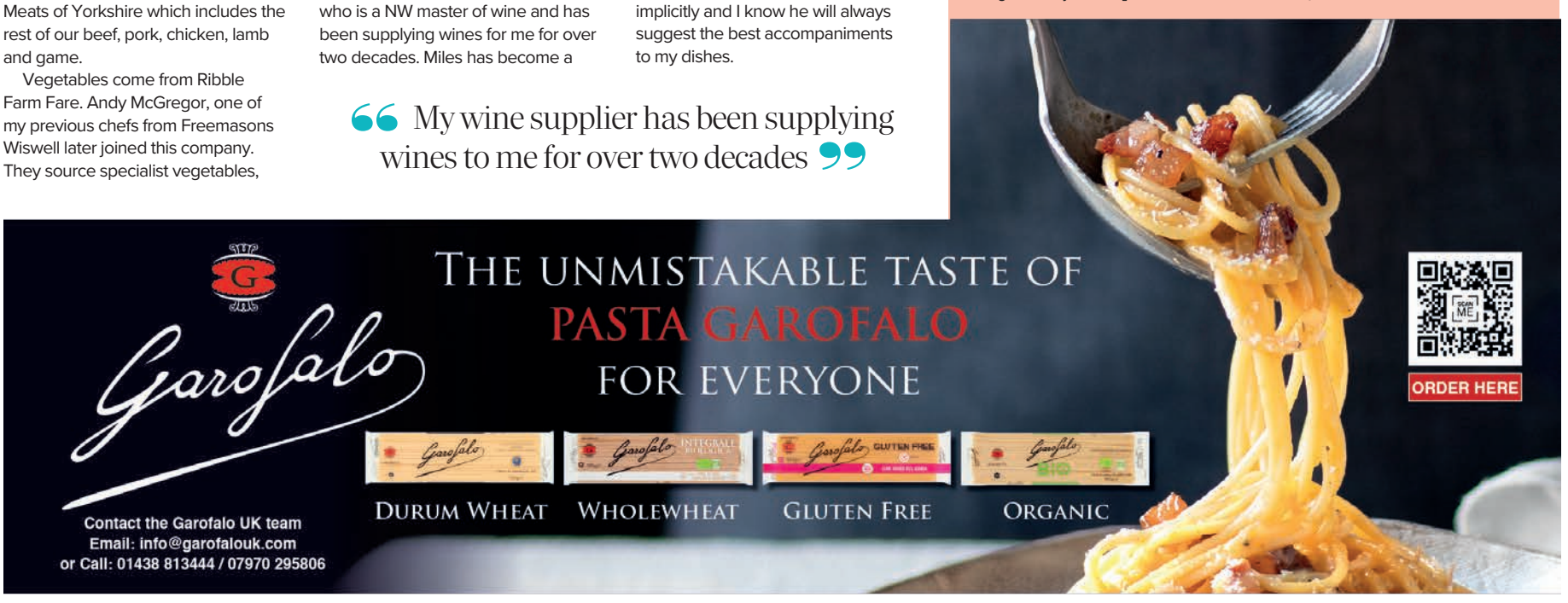
If there's one thing missing from mealtimes in Britain, genuine family connection is a real contender. We're a nation of on-the-go snackers, meal deals and breakfast/lunch/dinner with only our laptops for company, and while this is all well and good in the context of a busy day, is it leading to a lack of appreciation and love for what we're eating?

Taking the time to slow down and relish a meal with family and friends is something Italians mastered long ago – and we could all benefit from learning from their approach. They have a saying, 'a tavola non s'invecchia', meaning 'at the table one does not grow old'. Time stands still when you gather around a table with loved ones, no matter how simple or grand the fare.

Consider the types of foods that would suit being shared at the table: big serving bowls of pasta, a pan of risotto or a large dish of lasagne ready to be spooned onto plates. Generous salads, and dishes of antipasti to be nibbled when the mood strikes. Italian food is perfect for sharing, and it doesn't take a raft of ingredients and grand budgets to do just that.

Perhaps consider displaying a range of large serving dishes alongside your Italian food and drink if space allows, or recipe cards for meals that are ripe to be shared. Snacks alongside Italian drinks – aperitivos are becoming increasingly popular – to inspire shoppers to bring together friends for an impromptu gathering.

Pasta and the ingredients for a simple sauce, salads and great olive oil and vinegars, tarralini, bruschetti or crostini, and fabulous Italian wine... All staple items in the fine food shoppers' culinary arsenal, but rethinking your approach to promoting them could inspire your customers to relish them like never before – powered by the love of good family and friends.



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