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SPECIALITY FOOD

CONNECTING THE FINE FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY



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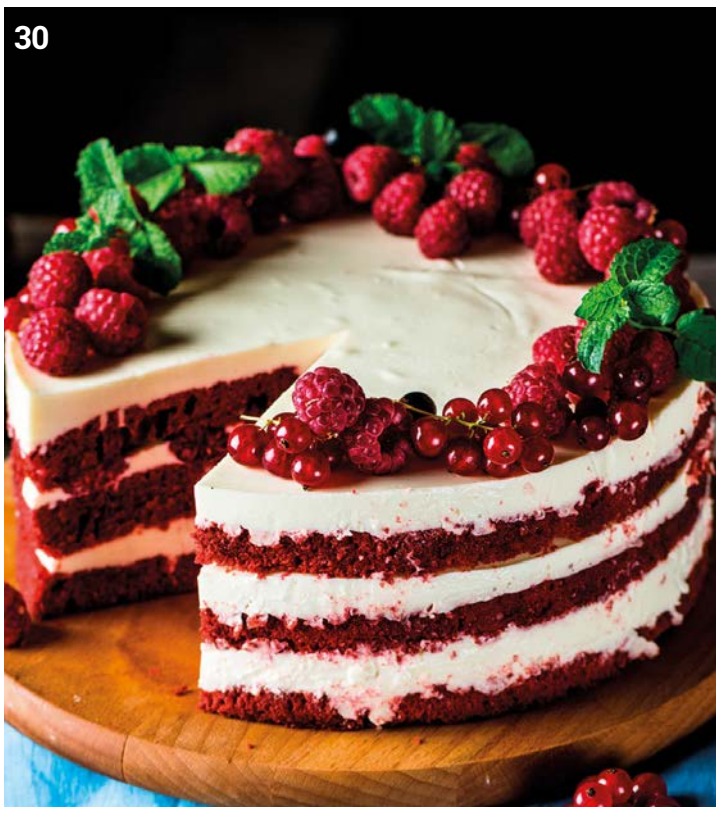
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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the June 2022 issue of *Speciality Food*. This issue has been produced during a very challenging time for the food sector and world community as a whole, as the war in Ukraine impacts many aspects of society across continents, food prices soar, and the cost-of-living crisis begins to bite.

The fine food industry has made it through a challenging two years, and it looks as though the near future is going to be tough too, so once again we must do what we do best: support our communities.

The next few months will likely be tough in many ways, but British shoppers are always keen to celebrate the summer months and so in this issue we are sharing tips and product recommendations around selling cakes and puddings, snacks, and the joys of English wine among many other seasonal indulgences.

We've also been busy putting together our annual *Drinks Buyer* guide, which I hope you will find an inspiring read.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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Queen's speech falls short for indies

The Queen's annual speech ahead of the new parliamentary year has left some small businesses feeling underwhelmed

In the midst of a growing cost of living crisis and the highest inflation rates in 30 years, Prince Charles outlined the government's priorities for the year ahead as he delivered the Queen's Speech.

The speech highlighted some of the 38 laws that ministers intend to pass in the coming year including a new Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and an Energy Security Bill.

But independent retail has been left feeling underwhelmed by some of the measures announced yesterday, and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) insisted "Words should be matched by action".

National chair Martin McTague explained, "So far, levelling up efforts have been too vague to have any meaningful impact – the time has come for flesh on the bones."

Energy crisis and costs

The FSB was pleased with the energy crisis measures promised but still felt that it fell short of what is needed.

Martin commented, "Energy security has rightly moved up the Government's agenda in recent months. On the ground, we have a situation where small firms are caught between the consumer price cap and the leverage that big corporates can yield when negotiating contracts.

"More direct financial support is what will make the difference to our members – reducing the risk that further hikes in utility bills feed through to even higher consumer prices – alongside a Help to Green initiative to incentivise on-site energy generation."

Tom Ironside, director of business and regulation at the British Retail Consortium (BRC), also called for the government to go further.

"We welcome efforts to increase the frequency and efficiency of revaluations, to allow the rateable value of properties to better reflect market rates.

"Nonetheless, the failure to reduce the overall burden of business rates means the bill falls well short of the fundamental reform that is key to unlocking retail investment across the country.

"Retailers account for 5% of the economy but pay 25% of business rates, this is neither fair nor sustainable."

Empty high street stores

The so-called 'death of the high street' is a major concern for town-based delis, cheesemongers and specialist retailers, who often rely on passer-by trade.

The new Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill announced will give more power to councils so they can take control of buildings that are standing empty on the high street.

According to Prime Minister Boris Johnson, "The move will ensure that landlords auction shops that have been vacant for over a year to prospective tenants, putting buildings to good use and create opportunities for new businesses and community groups, paving the way for new jobs to boost employment, strengthening local economies and restoring local pride."

But Charlie Hodson, owner of Hodson & Co Deli, is sceptical about these initiatives to tackle the high street issue. He explained, "The high streets are being decimated as the superstore supermarkets are being built, it's about teaching people to support local British farming.

"We need to start educating people that you can shop just as wisely from your high street as in a supermarket. I think there are many more challenges to supporting the British high street than what people think; it's about making local high streets accessible for people to shop in, such as parking that isn't overpriced.

"Governments need to speak to retailers and speak to the people because if you don't give people what they want, they aren't going to shop on it and won't support the high street. Each high street needs to suit the needs of the people.

"Everyone's paramount should be about how to get people back on the high streets, because without that footfall and income, there's no point talking about business rates."

Absence of a Food Bill

The Soil Association noted a key absence in the speech – a Food Bill that would set out a roadmap to strengthen our food system, ensuring good quality food is available for everyone as we enter the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades.

Rob Percival, head of food policy at the Soil Association, explained, "The absence of a Food Bill in the Queen's Speech is deeply disappointing.

"The government's response to the National Food Strategy is now long overdue, and a Food Bill would represent the best vehicle for delivering its recommendations. We desperately need to overhaul our food system to build resilience in the face of climate and geopolitical turmoil and spark a shift to nature-friendly, agroecological farming that supports healthy and sustainable diets. We fear a half-hearted response to the National Food Strategy represents a missed opportunity.

"The climate and nature crises are escalating, but the legislative agenda laid out in this Queen's Speech suggests our government is more interested in stamping out legitimate protests, forcing through environmentally questionable trade deals, and deregulating unpopular gene-editing technologies, than the important task of reforming our broken food system.

"As recently highlighted by the IPCC, we cannot reverse the climate and natural crises without significant changes to how we eat, which will also improve the nation's health – the government must take bold action now.

"With many families struggling to put food on the plate, the absence of a bill to make good food available to all is nothing less than negligent."

There are some aspects of the speech to be hopeful about, but the consensus is that retailers are left wanting more.





Inflation hits 9% in the UK, the highest rate in over 40 years

Rising inflation rates hit 9% in May, with further increases on the horizon.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) revealed last month that the inflation rate in the UK had jumped to 9%. This was the highest figure the UK has seen in over 40 years, marking the worst cost-of-living crisis since 1977.

Higher fuel and food prices, driven by the Ukraine war, are also pushing the cost of living up, with inflation expected to continue to rise this year.

Karen Betts, chief executive of the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), told *Speciality Food*, "This is a very worrying time for many households, and food and drink businesses are continuing to do everything they can to contain food-price inflation.

"Ingredient price rises have been relentless for more than a year now, as a result of pressures in the global supply chain caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The war in Ukraine has made the situation worse, as both Ukraine and Russia are important suppliers of commodities including wheat and food oils, as well as energy and fertiliser.

With millions of people across the UK now fighting to keep food on the table, the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira) is demanding that the government provides more aid than is currently offered. Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira, commented, "Whilst there is an understandable focus on the cost of living, we would urge the government not to forget about targeted support for businesses also struggling to deal with the extra costs due to inflationary pressures.

"Retailers are doing all they can to reduce the impact on prices for shoppers which means reduced profit margins for everyone. We would like to see this year's 100% increase in business rates reversed and some way of helping businesses manage the rising costs of energy."

THE UK NOW HAS A **HIGHER** RATE OF **INFLATION (9%)**, THAN ANY OF THE **G7** COUNTRIES, INCLUDING **GERMANY (7.4%)**, **ITALY (6%)** AND FRANCE **(4.8%)**

SOURCE: BLOOMBERG

UK government makes U-turn on HFSS, delaying restrictions on promotion

The UK government has announced that some planned restrictions including promotions on HFSS (high fat, sugar or salt) products and post-watershed advertising will be delayed until October 2023

Praising the delay was Kate Halliwell, the chief scientific officer at the FDF, who told *Speciality Food*, "We welcome the UK Government's pragmatism during the cost-of-living crisis. At a time when both families and our manufacturers are struggling with high inflation, it makes sense to delay the restrictions on volume promotions for everyday food and drink products as it risked further stretching already pressed household budgets."

But Caroline Cerny, of the Obesity Health Alliance campaign group, dismissed the idea that keeping promotions would help consumers facing pressure on incomes. She explained, "Research is crystal clear that multi-buy promotions are a false economy that do not save us money. They are a marketing tactic purposely designed to entice us to buy more and buy more often.

Barbara Crowther, coordinator of the Children's Food Campaign at Sustain, said, "People end up spending up to 20% more, not less, over the course of a year.

"The Government could consider far more effective measures to support families to access healthy and nutritious food during this cost-of-living crisis. Beyond addressing real living wage and adequate benefit levels, some specific ideas include expanding Healthy Start voucher eligibility to more families with young children, which supports them to purchase fruit, vegetables, and infant formula."

Independent fine food retailers are also understandably worried, as they will struggle to promote higher-quality food during the cost-of-living crisis while big retailers continue to offer discounts on unhealthy food and snacks.

Andrew Goodacre, CEO of the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira), explained, "This partial U-turn does not help independent food outlets that will continue to promote the benefits of fresh, better-quality food. Once again, we see the cost burden of this new legislation being passed on to businesses who are already dealing with significant increases in costs."



> "Research is crystal clear that multi-buy promotions are a false economy that do not save us money. They are a marketing tactic purposely designed to entice us to buy more and buy more often"





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"Conscious consumption"



STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE

Consumption – the most feared disease at the turn of the century'. A statement from the turn of the 20th century, when TB ravaged our shores, influencing every part of our culture and society.

Here we are, and over a century on it is still sucking the heart out of our communities, however it is a very different 'beast' that consumes us now.

You can't beat a dictionary definition for a blunt descriptive: 'Consumption: the action of using up a resource.' (In our global reality: a small part of society using up all the resources that matter.)

Here lies the problem; while I love the capitalist 'freedom' we have and have worked hard for – you graft, you get – the reality is that this is far from the complete truth. In fact, without clearer and honest objectives graft's achievements are hollow.

Children of the eighties were nourished on Hollywood dreams of having it all. No, not only could we have it all, we were duty bound to make sure we took it all. Our western sophistication predicated on being able to maximise growth through unfettered consumption and if you stood in the way? Well...

So, what to do when the world around us finally shows the strain of that consumption? When the years of taking more than we needed, the years of not caring, the years of not giving a damn start to take their toll?

Take meat, for example. For years, society has purchased its meat from supermarkets, sourced from intensive, industrial farms where grain and soy are both a key part of the animals' diets. We are well aware that this contributes hugely to deforestation, yet so it continues. Butchers like ours are pushing for change, moving to a product with pasture fed farming at its heart, but you have to be willing to pay for that quality or reduce your consumption accordingly.

I am part of it, we all are. I have to shoulder my responsibilities and direct my own change. Yes, I wear my 'infinite goal' of 'Human and Environmental Harmony' as a badge of honour, but that title, the idea that I can never personally achieve it gives me wriggle room.

The driver behind business growth has been so simple for so long: sell more. So as businesses we build the plans to deliver.

As consumers, we suck up that plan, because we love to consume. With 'right' price deals, glossy marketing, boredom, ownership, belonging, soft promises... Why would we not?

So it goes on until we decide that it can't. Until we decide that the model has to change.

Which of course, we do. We start to make lifestyle choices to take a stand, shouting into the wind "Eat less! Eat better!" But this change needs to occur at scale and we all know that the first movers, whilst noble, will perish. But do they?

The innately unachievable nature of 'infinite goals' gives us the predetermined excuse of not achieving them. But yet we need those bright guiding lights, singing to the naivety of our youth and recalibrating what great looks like.

We have to drive for something, and to think that collectively we can start to shape our communities' experiences so that consumption is not an unrestrained habit, not an incontrollable greed.

Rather it is what makes us human, how we respect our environment and precious world around us, how we define who we are, sharing our differences whilst basking in our similarities.

I imagine a time where we can explicitly illustrate the real value in a price ticket. Highlighting how the transactions feed back into multiple layers of our society, to service, to state, yes to the owners and their assets, but furthermore to the suppliers, producers, stewards, our committed teams and their families, to our community. This is long-lasting and impactful economics, not short, sharp shareholder return.

So, let's aim for that revenue growth, but let's build on the back of real quality and community engagement, and not simply on dictionary-defined consumption.

> "We have to drive for something, and to think that collectively we can start to shape our communities' experiences so that consumption is not an unrestrained habit, not an uncontrollable greed"

Nature-friendly farming on the rise as more farms convert to organic

More farms across the UK are choosing eco-friendly farming, with land going through the two-year conversion period to organic rising by 34% in 2021

Data released by Defra revealed that land going through the two-year conversion period to organic rose by 34% in 2021 compared to the previous year. UK organic land also rose by 3.6% last year, following a rise of 0.8% in 2020. This rise in organic farming is expected to continue in 2022 after the government announced in February that they would pay up to double the previous rates to farmers in England who convert to organic.

Organic Farmers and Growers CEO, Roger Kerr, was unsurprised by the increase in conversions, explaining, "There is a strong appetite from farmers to shift to more agroecological practices and the opportunity for organic and the premium gained for certified produce is clearly attractive."

Sophie Kirk, business development manager for Soil Association, told *Speciality Food*, "It is encouraging to see that the latest statistics show confidence in organic farming is on the rise in the UK. Our farming sector has dealt with many shocks over the last few years but opportunities for sustainable farming remain strong with rising consumer demand and government support for organic."







Is the UK ready to become a cashless society?

Digital payments seem to be more desirable for both businesses and consumers, but with the rise in the cost of living, more people are now relying on cash to help them budget.

A new report from the RSA (The Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce), *The Cash Census*, has proved that the pandemic has not accelerated the nation's move towards a cashless society, reinforcing the argument that cash still has a vital place in society for so many people.

The data showed that despite cash usage taking a hit during the pandemic, millions of people across the UK are still reliant on cash and even those that are not reliant still want the flexibility of choice when making payments, with most people choosing to use a combination of both digital and cash payments.

The report has warned that the sudden acceleration towards digital has – and will continue to – put the UK's cash system under extreme pressure and stated that 'without a managed transition, millions of the most vulnerable people would not be able to cope, and many more would struggle.'

This is something fine food retailers are also acutely aware of, as Jo Pacey, head of marketing at Crimple, explained. "Cash is often preferred by those living in areas with poor connectivity. A cashless society would surely alienate the country's most vulnerable."

Jen Grimstone-Jones, co-owner of the Cheese Etc, Pangbourne Cheese Shop, mirrored these thoughts. "There are people who prefer to start the week with £X in their wallet and they know that's their weekly spending money. It's an easy way to budget and I do think it is very easy to lose track of your spending when you use a card all of the time."

According to James Harris, managing director at Volumatic, "The *Cash Census* report is an important reminder to us all that the UK is a long way off being stable enough to support a cashless society. As well as these key findings it also urges the Government and the finance industry to change their existing policies by supporting and educating people who want to make digital payments, keeping our cash infrastructure viable and maintaining cash acceptance across the UK."

THE STORY BEHIND THE STATS

6.7%

Alongside an overall inflation increase to 9%, the Office for National Statistics revealed that food and non-alcoholic drinks prices have risen by 6.7%, which is slightly more than food manufacturers had feared. Karen Betts, chief executive of the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), told *Speciality Food* that the inflation figures are "very sobering".

50%

The UK government increased the Countryside Stewardship rates in January by 50%, with converting permanent improved grassland and top fruit to organic increasing to £150 per hectare. Conversion to organic rotational land, horticulture and unimproved grassland will also receive around 50% more, with new rates ranging from £76 to £602 per hectare.

5.7bn

A recent report from the FDF revealed that Scotland accounts for the largest share of UK food and drink exports, with almost 30% of total exports. This was worth £5.7bn, in 2021, an increase of 14.6% since 2020. Food and Drink Federation Scotland's chief executive, David Thomson, commented, "It's heartening to see an increase in Scotland's food and drink exports as the industry begins to recover from the impact of Covid-19 and Brexit.
"We hope that new opportunities in different markets will further increase sales of Scotland's food and drink abroad."

8.8m

There are currently 7.2 million people eating a meat-free diet in the UK, but a further 8.8 million Brits plan to ditch animal products this year, according to finder.com's annual UK Diet Trends research. But there is a clear age divide when it comes to views on eating meat. Gen Z'ers (aged 18 to 23) are the most likely to avoid meat already (25%) and plan on giving it up (30%). In comparison, just 11% of the silent generation (aged 74+) avoid meat and only 5% plan to do so in 2022. There is a huge market to sell vegetarian food to in 2022, and plenty of opportunities to cash in on the plant-based pound.

NEWS IN BRIEF

'SUPER FARM SHOP' PLANNED TO OPEN AT NORFOLK SHOWGROUND

Norfolk Showground is preparing to construct an ambitious £2.3million food hall and market garden just outside Norwich to showcase the county's celebrated food and drink producers. The new venture is set to include a shop, café, butcher and delicatessen championing Norfolk produce, along with an outdoor seating area and a two-acre market garden which will be the base for a community growing project.

PRODUCT GURU TO LAUNCH POP-UP BRAND SHOWCASE STORES

Award-winning tech platform Product Guru will be launching a series of tech-powered pop-up concept stores in London from the 11th to the 16th of September, named POP, for business owners to expose their brands to hundreds of key players in the industry. POP will feature on-shelf technology to display product data and brand videos where buyers and attendees will be able to scan products to learn more, request samples, and ask questions.

ENVIRONMENT SECRETARY TELLS CONSUMERS TO SHOP 'VALUE BRANDS'

In a recent *Sky News* interview, environment secretary George Eustice advised shoppers to buy 'value brands' in order to survive the cost-of-living crisis and rising inflation. Responding to the highly criticised comments, Rupert Evans, owner of Denstone Farm Shop and Farm Retail Association chairman, explained, "This limits the consumers' choice of local, healthy produce, which farm shops naturally promote. What is also disturbing about these comments is that local food with short supply chains is often cheaper than what is available in supermarkets."



"Royal connections"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

By the time you read this article the Platinum Jubilee Festivities will hopefully have gone very well and we have all had a very enjoyable time celebrating Her Majesty the Queen's tremendous achievement as a Monarch.

However, the Royal Family has also had a notable presence in the world of speciality foods as well. We all recognise the Duchy range, sustainability initiatives and the farm shops, but there is an area, less recognised, where we interact with another royal initiative that few of us take notice of.

According to the Royal Warrant Holders Association website there are 118 food and drink companies that hold a Royal Warrant out of 850 Warrants in total. This is a mere fraction of the business community in the UK. Yet some of them are very well known in the speciality food world.

For example, names like Twinings, Walkers, Baxters and Wilkins & Sons have been the backbone of the smaller speciality food shop for generations.

Some of the Royal Warrant Holders have amazing stories too. Angostura Bitters was founded by a revolutionary German doctor in South America. Justerini and Brooks or J&B by a lovelorn Italian young man in pursuit of an opera singer, and closer to home and less dramatically Frank Cooper's by a grocer in Oxford.

There are many iconic brands that hold a Royal Warrant – Marmite, Schweppes, Lea and Perrins and HP Sauce for example. Somewhat intrigued by this I decided to check how many Royal Warrant brands adorn our shelves in Partridges – my estimate being somewhere in the region of 25. In actual fact it turns out to be over 70! Which is quite convenient as we celebrate her Majesty's 70 years on the throne.

In truth, having an alcohol license helps to bump up the figure. For example, there are eight champagnes, five whiskies, two gins, two ports, Pimms, Dubonnet and certainly one brandy on the list of Warrant Holders.

There are also some large companies too such as Nestles, Britvic, Hellman's, Colmans, Heinz and Weetabix.

But smaller companies hold their own too such as Rhug Estate, Musk's, Maldon Sea Salt, Montmartre Patisserie, Denhay and Baxter's Potted Shrimps.

How much these 70 products contribute to the overall sales mix I have not calculated, but they would certainly be regarded as indispensable by many of our customers and visitors.

In 1994 we were very fortunate to have been granted a Royal Warrant by HM the Queen and it has been a very helpful and pleasant benefit in many ways. Helpful because of the Sustainability Audits we carry out every few years and the access to training it brings and also the influence on our small export trade. Pleasant for social reasons and the opportunity to support various charities.

So over the Platinum Jubilee weekend I will be raising a glass or two to Her Majesty.

Make mine a Big Tom with Tabasco followed by a swig of just one of the eight champagnes and a Walker's Biscuit. God save the Queen and cheers!

> "Make mine a Big Tom with Tabasco"

What does the future of seasonal eating look like?

With growing climate disruption causing early harvests and milder winters, seasonal eating may look very different in the near future – but is seasonality really over?

Climate change is wreaking havoc on our seasons in the UK, and it may have a significant impact on the way retailers sell sustainable produce. "Mild winter brings British asparagus to shops eight weeks early," was the headline in a national newspaper at the end of February, and such headlines are likely to become more commonplace in future as climate change takes hold.

In the past, Britain's weather patterns produced reliable seasons that enabled farmers to predict when to plant and harvest indigenous crops. But with climate change wreaking havoc on our natural world, the seasons have become unreliable.

As Lee Holdstock, senior supply chain manager at the Soil Association explains, "Climate disruption is causing some seasonal produce to 'shift' so [crops are] coming into season earlier and perhaps ending sooner than expected or for that matter continuing longer - but local markets and local supply chains are adaptable and will showcase what is currently in season and at its freshest."

It is possible that in the near future, produce that was previously unable to grow in the UK may flourish in the changing climate. According to Lee, "Milder winters will have an impact and we may see in time different produce coming onto the market that perhaps wouldn't normally be available."

This is something that Rob Brown, technical and sustainability manager at SunFresh Produce, has also identified. "Seasonality will still remain a phenomenon [in the future], but the crops traditionally produced in one geographic location may shift to a neighbouring region as climatic conditions change."

Vicki echoed the idea of adapting to the changing seasons, adding, "With climate change kicking in hard everywhere we need to support farmers who will have to change growing patterns, varieties and rotations to cope with the instability. Seasonality and variety may become even more critical – buying what the grower knows they can cope with will be ever more important and that will include seasonal produce alongside different crops. We all need to share the burden of the ever more challenging food system."

WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE **SEASONALITY** OF CERTAIN **BRITISH** VEGETABLES, **CONSUMERS** WERE MOSTLY **UNAWARE** OF WHEN THEIR **FAVOURITE** PRODUCE WAS AT ITS BEST. **COURGETTES** HAD THE **HIGHEST** LEVEL OF SEASONAL **AWARENESS**, WITH **39%** ANSWERING **CORRECTLY** (JUNE TO SEPTEMBER), WHILE JUST **3%** KNEW THAT **TOMATO** SEASON WAS APRIL TO DECEMBER

SOURCE: VEG POWER CAMPAIGN

British government delays import checks for the fourth time since Brexit

The UK Government has announced a fourth delay to the introduction of new checks and requirements for imports from the European Union

New checks at the British border for EU imports were scheduled to be implemented on 1 July 2022, but they have been delayed for the fourth time to 2023.

Ian Worth, customs director at Crowe, commented, "The repeated failure to implement controls delivers nothing more than an erosion of confidence from businesses who have been led down a very costly garden path too many times already.

"For some UK importers, [the delay] may be welcome news and could offer some relief from the spiralling cost of living increases impacting them. Other businesses, however, have spent considerable time and money in preparing for these changes, which had already been pushed back three times."

This is something the British Retail Consortium is also conscious of, as Andrew Opie, director for food and sustainability, explains. "Retailers have been working with their European suppliers for many months to help prepare them for the incoming border checks in July.

"The staggered introduction of checks proposed was workable, provided UK ports were ready, and exporting suppliers received the support needed to complete the required checks. While any delay is welcomed by retailers, given the added costs to the supply chain and the level of friction anticipated, the postponement of border checks will only prolong the inevitable."



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The Life & Soul of the Pantry



NEW **MEXICAN** WAVE

Go Mexican to maximise profits says Sally-Jayne Wright. This eating style is enjoying a resurgence

Noticed how Old El Paso's yellow packaging dominates the World Food shelves of Sainsbury's? Whether consumers are buying fajita kits for home loading, a takeaway from Chiquito, or sharing carnitas, the famous Michoacan pork dish, at El Pastor taqueria, they can't get enough of south-of-the-border cuisine. In a social media survey of the 32 most viral food trends, Birria tacos (Google them) came fifth, (YOY to end April 2022, Beanies Coffee). Waitrose offered masterclasses in margarita-making at its cookery school this spring, and in hipster Peckham there's a two-day festival of all things tequila with Mexican street food.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE TREND?

The arrival of premium tequilas as opposed to nasty, adulterated ones. The manager of 1910, a Mexican cantina in London's Balham, explained: "Cheap tequilas had a rep for giving you a hangover and people made an association: dirty drink, dirty food." Tequila has moved from being a stag night staple to a sophisticated sipping serve and is now the top trending spirit for 62% of bartenders globally (Bacardi report) and the second fastest growing spirit category in value around the world. Hand-held, spicy food is a crowd pleaser and after lockdown, we're overdue a party. Self-assembly fajitas with choice of filling suit omnivore and vegan alike.

I GET TORTILLAS AND TACOS MIXED UP. CAN YOU HELP?

Taco means 'sandwich', a tortilla wrapped around a filling. Tortillas are the wheat-based wraps found in northern Mexico, the US and the UK. In southern and central Mexico, tortillas are made of masa harina – white (sometimes blue) corn flour.



SUPERMARKET-STYLE TORTILLA WRAPS SEEM A BIT DOWNMARKET FOR FINE FOOD RETAILERS. GOT ANYTHING SUPERIOR?

How about ready-made, genuine corn tortillas from the Mexican grocery wholesaler, the Cool Chile Company. Charlotte Pike, who teaches the popular Mexican cookery course at Harborne School in Birmingham, has a gluten-intolerant partner and makes her own fresh corn tortillas with a press. "I tried making them from scratch using a rolling pin but the dough is hard to roll out." She reckons demand will grow. If your customers include keen home cooks, offer masa harina (not polenta) flour and tortilla presses.

WHAT ARE BURRITOS AND CHIMICHANGAS?

The different names denote how a tortilla is filled, folded and cooked. For example, a burrito is a stuffed, flour envelope; the same burrito deep fried is a chimichanga.

WHY IS MEXICAN CUISINE PERFECT FOR PLANT-BASED EATING?

The flour used to make traditional corn tortillas is treated with calcium hydroxide. This adds calcium, essential for those on a dairy-free diet. Traditional Mexican cooking celebrated beans, chillies, seasonal veg and corn long before the meat-heavy dishes of Tex Mex. Classic recipes call for nutritious nuts and seeds as thickeners in place of flour.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN TEX-MEX?

It's Americanized northern Mexican cuisine. Just as we Brits created spaghetti Bolognese, so Texan ranchers adapted dishes they'd enjoyed down south. The rigid Taco shells sold in supper kits are a Tex-Mex adaptation. So are fajitas and chilli con carne.

HOW DO WE GET THE PARTY STARTED?

Kick off with bar-strength, canned tequila margaritas from Cutwater Drinks. Xochitl and Manomasa are two delicious corn snack brands. Introduced to fine food retailers in August 2021 after success in the hospitality sector, Blanco Nino tortilla chips won Gold at the Free-From Awards 2022. Variants include Chilli and Lime and Sea Salt (both white corn). Our favourite was the deep-purple Ancient Grain (blue corn) – sublime eaten with prawn cocktail. There's profit in freshly made guacamole and tomato salsa. Whole Foods Market offers guacamole for £13.99 a kilo and reassures customers that its avos are responsibly sourced.

I KNOW TEQUILA CAN BE DRUNK ON ITS OWN OR IN COCKTAILS. WHOSE SHOULD WE STOCK?

Look for those containing 100% agave. *Drinks Retailing News* reports that customers still prefer blanco or silver – the type used in margaritas. Diageo's Don Julio is a bestseller. Bacardi-owned, super-premium Patron ranks well as does Ocho 8.

HOW ELSE CAN WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE TREND?

- Display cookbooks such as Thomasina Miers' new *Meat Free Mexican* with ingredient bundles such as ready-mixed Mexican seasoning, tomatillos and refried beans.
- Customers can't get enough of chipotle chillies (smoked jalapenos). Try Rubies in the Rubble or Hunter and Gather Chipotle Mayo, or the award-winning Chipotle Sriracha from My-Chilli.

SHOULD WE PUT BURRITOS ON OUR BRUNCH MENU?

Of course, and how about summer tacos, filled with courgettes, corn, mint and green chili alongside Mexican beers like Sol or Modelo Especial? Dulce de leche desserts and cinnamon-scented Mexican hot chocolate will lure sweet-toothed customers.

WILL THE TREND LAST?

Absolutely. Healthy and varied, there's more to Mexican than melted cheese and chilli dumped onto nachos. London even has a Michelin-starred Mexican restaurant, Kol. If we're to eat less meat in future, we'll need to use imagination. Across the Pond, chefs are redefining plant-based Mexican cooking with such upmarket dishes as tacos filled with marinated hibiscus flowers, and carnitas made by frying enoki mushrooms until crisp. What happens there, comes here.



"**TEQUILA** HAS MOVED FROM BEING A STAG NIGHT STAPLE TO A **SOPHISTICATED** SIPPING SERVE AND IS NOW THE **TOP** TRENDING SPIRIT FOR **62%** OF BARTENDERS **GLOBALLY** (BACARDI REPORT) AND THE SECOND **FASTEST** GROWING SPIRIT CATEGORY IN **VALUE** AROUND THE **WORLD**"

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MEET THE PRODUCER

At The Precious Pea, no effort or expense is spared when it comes to producing the fine food market's best houmous

While houmous is not – yet – described as a staple product, there can be no doubt that it is a must-buy product for shoppers in their droves. Millions of fridges up and down the country will host the chickpea-based dip, but all too often consumers must make do with the additive-packed, often low-quality options available in the multiples. While supermarket houmous is available in an impressive variety of flavours – from the classic, composed of chickpeas, tahini, olive oil, lemon juice and seasoning, to roasted onion and Morroccan-spiced – none offer the taste sensation that freshly made houmous produced from the very best of ingredients can boast.



Enter The Precious Pea, a team dedicated to bringing discerning consumers an exceptionally healthy and delicious range of houmous. Run by Mark and Ayleen – who bought the business in 2014 – and based just outside the city of Bath, the team is small and intends to stay small, producing low-quantity batches of organic houmous with an impressive 12-day shelf life. This feat is managed by the team using blast chillers at different stages of production – a much more time-intensive preserving method than the use of preservatives all too often used in larger-scale brands (even those masquerading as artisanal).

With a motto of "good people, doing good things, makes good business," the team is passionate about doing the best work they can to satisfy discerning consumers' appetites for truly great houmous. "There is something very satisfying about doing something, however simple, exceptionally well," explains Ayleen, co-owner at The Precious Pea. "We are delighted that our present customers appreciate our efforts."

By taking the time to do things properly, using top quality organic ingredients and the care and attention they would apply if making the product for family and friends, each pot of The Precious Pea houmous is second to none – and this attention to detail certainly pays off. "Our flavours are fresh and subtle," continues Ayleen. "Compare our smoked houmous to another brand and you will see for yourself. We use 50% cold smoked chickpeas, smoked on the premises, and blend with these with 50% unsmoked. It's mouthwateringly good!"



Indeed, every part of the process is started from scratch at The Precious Pea premises, from sorting, soaking and boiling the chickpeas to creating their own ultimate spice mixes.

An authentically flavour-packed range

With a selection of flavours in The Precious Pea's roster – the range currently consists of Classic, Smoked, Turmeric, Red Pepper, Rose Harissa, Organic Kalamata and Beetroot options – every houmous-lover's appetite is sure to be satisfied.

"Turmeric is our best-selling flavour," says Ayleen. "It is delicately spiced and subtly sweet with an aromatic finish." This sweetness comes from organic dates and apricots, chosen for their natural and complex sweet notes.

"Our Kalamata Olive houmous is another no expense/effort spared product," continues Ayleen. Made using plump, whole, single estate olives which are checked for stones then chopped and added to the business's classic houmous recipe, the high percentage of this high quality ingredient (each pot contains 10% Kalamata Olive) "takes the houmous to a different level."

Also in The Precious Pea's range is Organic Aquafaba – an increasingly popular egg substitute. "This 'magical' substance is the thick water we are left with after boiling chickpeas," explains Ayleen.

Optimum retailer service

As well as producing The Precious Pea-branded pots of houmous, Mark and Ayleen are proud to offer white label houmous to retailers. With its customer base already boasting high-level businesses including Riverford Organic and Abel & Cole, interested readers could be in great company in their quest to offer next-level houmous to their customers. "We prefer to ship direct, so you can increase your margin and benefit from a significantly improved shelf life," explains Ayleen. "We make fresh every day and ship on the same day."

No stone unturned

As well as being confident that they are stocking the very best houmous on the market, The Precious Pea's retail partners can rest assured that the business is run conscientiously. "We are Soil Association and SALSA-approved," says Ayleen, "and have just been certified as B Corp. We pride ourselves on treating our staff with respect and are a Living Wage and Disability Aware employer, and we eat together every day – a hot meal is particularly appreciated by the early shift, especially on cold days. It's not a house rule or compulsory, but houmous is added to plates most days by most staff!"

This considered approach to running a business is not just a box-ticking exercise; it's a long-term approach for Mark and Ayleen. "We pride ourselves on being an ethical business and constantly strive to minimise our carbon footprint," says Ayleen. "This year we are having solar panels installed, thanks to Green Business Grants for their support." For The Precious Pea, their use of plastic pots is their "biggest embarrassment," and they are keen to explore alternative options. "Ours are the 'friendliest' you can buy but they are still plastic," she says. The team welcomes suggestions for alternative packaging options.

From its dedication to producing the fine food market's best-ever houmous to its constant desire to "be good people, doing good things", The Precious Pea offers a delicious taste of things to come.

> "By taking the time to do things properly, using top quality organic ingredients and the care and attention they would apply if making the product for family and friends, each pot of The Precious Pea houmous is second to none"



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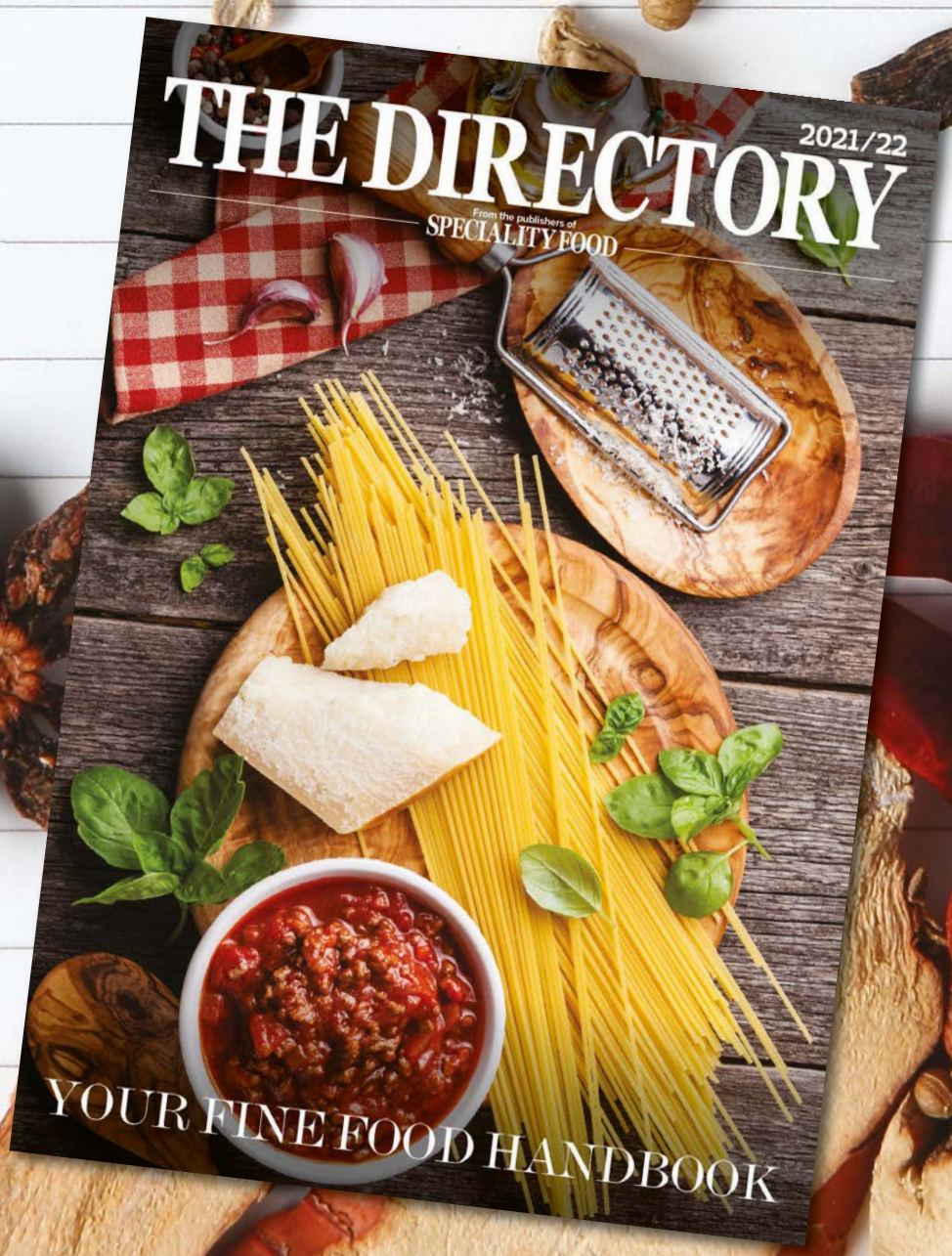
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CALIFORNIA: PRODUCE OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY

Where quality ingredients are of the utmost importance to a business, it does not get higher than California Raisins. Here's why...

The California name evokes a feeling of trust in customers that competitors lack, and with good reason. The raisin industry in California is far more in depth than the average consumer realises. The growers and packers of California Raisins pride themselves on producing the finest quality fruit to supply both at home and across the globe. Numerous quality checks are conducted by packers, and extensive inspections are conducted by the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) to ensure that only the best quality dried fruit is delivered.

Whether you're a chef, food manufacturer, baker, confectioner or ingredient buyer, California raisins are the perfect choice. New products containing dried fruits are constantly being created and revised for the UK market as they are the perfect option, as they are completely natural and add a number of beneficial attributes to products. They are healthy, low in fat and high in fibre, can act as a sweetener or flavour enhancer, and the fruit acids found in raisins can act as a natural preservative to extend the shelf life of baked goods.

When is a raisin not a raisin? When it's a sultana

You would be surprised how few people know the difference between a raisin and a sultana. They are both dried grapes, true, but that is really where the similarities end.

The difference between a raisin and a sultana begins with how the grapes are dried. California Raisins are produced using only natural sunlight. The grapes can take up to three weeks to dry in the hot California sun, during which time the Maillard reaction converts the grape into a raisin. The skin acts as a cooking vessel, retaining the juices inside while the sugars slowly caramelise. This lengthy process creates the beautiful dark colour a California Raisin is known for, and a rich taste that makes them ideal for use in a wide range of applications, from snacking and baking, to sauces, fine dining and even beer!

Sultanas are also produced from white grapes, but native to the Caspian Sea, Turkey – the world's largest producer of sultanas. Sultanas are often referred to as 'White Raisins', but it differs from a true raisin in two ways. Firstly, and most apparent, it is lighter in colour, although the colour ranges from exceptionally light to deep brown. More importantly though, and a lesser-known fact, it undergoes a different drying process. The drying period for sultanas lasts approximately 1 week, then the mature grapes are dipped in a potash solution, making the skins supple and reducing the drying time significantly.

Sultanas tend to be slightly sweeter than raisins quite simply because the effects of sun drying are much less pronounced. The two are often confused with each other. Some people even call sultanas as 'sultana raisins' adding to the existing confusion.





Availability and storage

When stored in a controlled, cool environment bulk California raisins can be stored for up to 12 months; retaining their colour, flavour, and nutritional value. Small snack packs can be stored for up to 18 months.

They should be kept below seven degrees (45° Fahrenheit) and to maintain optimum freshness they should be sealed in an airtight container.

OUR COMMITMENT

The Raisin Administrative Committee is committed to supporting the trade with new product development and promoting value for money in the consumer market. Our marketing strategy covers a wide range of activities from advertising to PR.

BENEFITS

From their consistent colour and flavour, to extending product shelf life, there are many advantages to using California raisins in many products.

FLAVOUR STABILITY

- The sweet and fruity flavour develops during two to three weeks of sun-drying
- A natural flavour that consumers recognise and value in food products
- Does not change during storage
- Not affected by manufacturing processes
- Naturally Sweet. California raisins growers pick natural seedless grapes when they have a high Brix of 20/23 percent sugar, at the very peak of ripenessk

When dried, raisins contain natural fruit sugars and are plump and chewy. California raisins do not require sugar infusions for weight like some speciality variety fruits.

TEXTURE/SKIN INTEGRITY

- Their skin is not damaged by processing aids or by other processes. California raisins retain their shape and integrity during manufacturing processes
- Are not easily damaged during mixing
- Fruit plumps and keeps its integrity during microwaving and baking
- Will not collapse, builds volume

COLOUR

- California Raisins are naturally brown due to the Maillard reaction that occurs after picking and as they dry
- The deep brown colour is fixed and will not bleed or discolour food products
- No artificial food colourants or additives are used in production

For further information on how we can support you in your business, please contact

info@ukraisins.com

THINK RAISINS, THINK CALIFORNIA

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Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Summerdown adds to award-winning tea range

Summerdown has announced two new additions to its tea range, both using produce grown on its farm in Hampshire. The new blends complement the business's Two Star Great Taste Award-winning peppermint tea.

The new Camomile tea is designed to be floral, mild and calming, and is made from milled camomile flower heads grown on the Summerdown farm. This blend contains a considerably higher petal content than other camomile teas on the market, highlighting the quality of the Summerdown terroir and single-estate herb.



Peppermint & Camomile Tea is made from Black Mitcham peppermint oil and camomile, both of which are grown by Summerdown, for a uniquely restorative and relaxing blend. For this tea, camomile flower heads are dried, milled and infused with peppermint oil from Summerdown's distillery.

Jo Colman, head of sales at Summerdown, said, "Launching these two new teas is beyond exciting. We know our customers already love us for our punchy peppermint and we're now delighted to share our home-grown camomile with them too. Many won't have tasted English-grown camomile before, so what we're bringing to the market is unique and something which we're incredibly proud of. You really can taste the difference."

summerdown.com

Skoulikas Bedford launches Cannoli in five flavours

Cannoli, a traditional Italian sweet treat, has been added to the range offered by Skoulikas Bedford.

The authentic Italian dessert takes the form of pastry tubes filled with flavoured cream, and is typically enjoyed as a snack or after-dinner confection.

There are five flavour variations in the Skoulikas Bedford range: Hazelnut Cream, Gianduja Chocolate Hazelnut Cream, Pistachio Cream, Lemon Cream, Salted Caramel Cream. All of the flavours are ambient and suitable for vegetarians.



Halima Markey, business development manager at Skoulikas Bedford, said, "A traditional sweet Sicilian style delicacy available in four delicious flavours. Typically enjoyed as an early morning breakfast treat or an after dinner dessert, our range of Pasticceria Venezia Crunchy Cannoli offers an innovative nutty twist with its crunchy shell covered in chopped hazelnuts and peanuts."

skoulikasbedford.co.uk

Celebratory new release from Hawkshead Relish

Lake District-based fine food business Hawkshead Relish has released a limited edition Cherries Jubilee Jam to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

The new addition to the range has been inspired by a dessert created by renowned chef Auguste Escoffier in tribute to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, and is delicious served with scones and clotted cream.



Maria Whitehead, owner of Hawkshead Relish, said, "We spent some time researching possible recipes for limited edition products we could create as a fitting tribute to the occasion of Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee, but we kept coming back to Auguste Escoffier's recipe created to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee – Cherries Jubilee.

"We felt that would be a fitting tribute to take that recipe and enhance it to create something very special that hopefully everyone who tries it will enjoy."

hawksheadrelish.com

New Right Royal Pickle from Tracklements

High quality condiment specialists Tracklements have launched a limited edition pickle to help fine food retailers make the most of the ongoing Platinum Jubilee opportunity.

The new launch, Right Royal Pickle, is a classic 'all-rounder' pickle, made using a selection of vegetables including Lincolnshire onions, Muscovado sugar, malt vinegar, tamarind paste, chilli, allspice and lemon juice.

It has been designed to be a must-have flavour booster for sandwiches and picnics throughout the Jubilee bank holiday weekend and beyond.

Becky Vale, marketing director at Tracklements, said, "This special, eye catching jar eptiomises Tracklements' love of being a British Brand: it's playful, fun, idiosyncratic, made with British ingredients, and reflects the great British determination to enjoy a picnic whatever the weather."

tracklements.co.uk/trade



D'Amazonia packaging goes eco



D'Amazonia is launching its range of teas in recyclable cardboard packs this summer, following the success of its Sleep Tea and Digestive Tea in their original pouches.

The brand's Sleep Tea contains hibiscus, apple, camomile, rose petals, lemongrass, rosehip, lavender, lemon balm, linden blossom, orange peel, cherry and cranberry, while its Digestive Tea is made from turmeric, fennel, lemongrass, rosemary, sage, thyme, lemon, pineapple and apple.

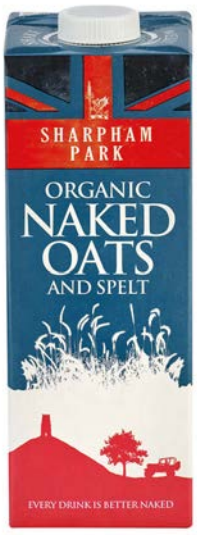
Also in the three-strong range is the Health and Fitness Tea, which combines hibiscus, peppermint, ginger, guarana, acai berries, cinnamon, yerba mate, green tea, lemongrass, dandelion and raspberry.

Made using only 100% natural ingredients which contain high levels of antioxidants, anti-inflammatories and natural caffeine, the teas offer rich flavours and healthier living benefits within planet-friendly biodegradable tea pyramids.

Marcela Tupinamba, co-founder of D'Amazonia, said, "Having realised that traditional gym beverages (coffee and energy drinks) only gave short bursts of amplified energy before we hit a brick wall mid-session, we set about creating our own blends of 'substance over image' functional teas, which combined fulsome flavour palates with added nutritional benefits."

damazonia.co.uk





Sharpham Park launches spelt milk

British spelt experts Sharpham Park have launched a range of organic spelt drinks to cater for the growing consumer demand for plant-based alternatives to dairy milk.

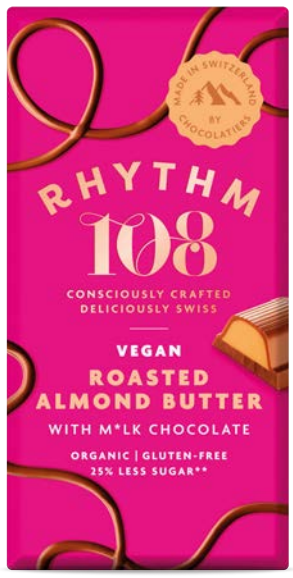
There are two new products in the range: Spelt Barista, which has been specially formulated to create foam that will satisfy the requirements of discerning coffee-drinkers; and Organic Naked Oats & Spelt, a blend which is ideal served with cereals, used as an ingredient in baking, or enjoyed on its own.

Spelt is a sustainable alternative to dairy and other plant-based milks, having a third of the impact of dairy milk farming and using 42% less water than other grains.

Roger Saul, founder of Sharpham Park, said, "Our Organic Spelt drinks are sustainably grown and proudly produced – all within 15-miles of Somerset countryside. A delicious alternative milk, our Barista Blend has already received a 2* Great Taste Award."

sharphampark.com

Almond Butter m'lk chocolate bar from Rhythm 108



Switzerland-based vegan confectionery company Rhythm 108 has added a new Almond Butter variant to its range of filled vegan chocolate bars.

The new release joins the brand's stable of filled chocolate bars, available in flavours including Dark Cocoa Orange, Hazelnut Truffle, and Mint Fondant.

The 100g bar consists of a smooth and nutty almond filling generously coated in Rhythm 108's signature vegan m'lk chocolate, and is vegan, organic and gluten-free.

Siddhi Mehta, founder of Rhythm 108, said, "We believe our signature Swiss 'mylk' chocolate is some of the best out there. Great product #innovation is in our Swiss DNA, and so, we've added one more to our range! Introducing our all new..... Roasted Almond Butter. Made with deep roasted organic almonds, ground into a creamy nut butter – then coated with our signature Swiss chocolate – this tablet is like no other you have seen on the market."

rhythm108.com



Two new soups from Mr Organic

Plant-based producer Mr Organic has added two new soups into its range: Tomato & Lentil Soup and Spicy Mixed Bean Soup.

Containing high levels of protein, the soups are made using sun-ripened tomatoes and specially selected beans, both grown on Mr Organic's own Italian farm.

Maddie Grinham, brand manager at Mr Organic, said, "We created our range of soups to provide quick, nutritious, and plant-based meal options. This range is part of a larger focus for us on communicating the quality of our tinned bean range, all of which are carefully selected and cooked in house. This new product innovation is protein-rich and low in fat, and therefore provides a full meal solution for our convenience customers."

mr-organic.com

"Talk your talk"



LAWRENCE BARNETT
WONDERLAND DESIGN

If you think about packaging design, most of us picture logotypes, colours, imagery and pack shapes and formats. But not necessarily language.

Language can play a huge role on pack. It has the ability to not only reinforce your brand's personality but also to help present all sorts of product messaging in a clear and logical way.

The use of language and how it works on pack is shaping how products are positioned to consumers. Our own work with Planet Organic and their packaging is a good example. Whilst pack graphics can provide a sense of what the brand feels like, language can be far more direct as a means to communicate with consumers.

Consequently, language should be considered as a key brand equity – in the same way that more graphical assets work for a brand. Inspired by what a brand stands for and its personality, the brand's language should develop its own tone of voice. This gives it huge flexibility, not only to deliver engaging product messaging but it can also use a recognisable typographic treatment.

Language can work to support a range of different brand and product characteristics. Some of the following might be useful considerations:

THINK OCCASION

Your product might be highly convenient or perhaps perfect for sharing or wonderfully indulgent. Language can work well to reinforce how you want your consumers to see the product.

SO TASTY

Tell them about the taste. Product descriptors don't have to be bland and functional. By injecting the brand's tone of voice into describing tastes, textures, even perfect pairings can create that all important appeal.

BEING HEALTHY

Healthier eating and drinking trends, natural or free from certain ingredients and provenance stories are all adding more to what product packs need to say. Instilling your brand's personality in to how your claims are presented will not only create differentiation but avoid claims working more like tick lists.

ALWAYS SUSTAINABLE

Sustainability messages are becoming increasingly more important. By using your own tone of voice can help sustainability messages fit more seamlessly with the brand, rather than a looking like an afterthought or something quite detached.

AND THERE'S MORE

Back of pack is often neglected. Yet this provides a further opportunity to expand your brand story, present the craft behind the product or talk recipes. Again, your brand language will add interest and reinforce your difference.

Language is not something that can be created overnight. But you will be able to set its direction so that it will evolve into something unique over time. And it is not a brand asset that should be reserved just for your packaging. It has as much of a role to play across your website, social media activity, point of sale, exhibitions and even presentations to your customers – all of which perhaps offer even more scope to use it to its fullest potential.

> "Language should be considered a key brand equity"



COMMENTATORS



DANIEL SMITH
STAG BAKERIES



MASH CHILES
GOURMET PARTNERS



HELEN YATES
ROOTLES



DAWN READE
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THE PERFECT DUNK

With a raft of innovative, consumer demand-led and utterly delicious new products on the market, now's the perfect time to refresh your biscuit shelves



In a door-to-door survey of the British public, you'd be hard pushed to find a single consumer who doesn't love a good biscuit. Of course, all shoppers are looking for different things – while some are seeking out a chocolate-topped indulgence to dip into their cuppa, others are looking for that treat 'moment' minus the guilt, or a perfect pairing for their favourite cheese – but that's what makes the UK's biscuit market such an exciting place to be, not least if you're at the fine food end of it.

Post-Covid, the opportunities for biscuit consumption are opening up. With consumers returning to offices – having developed a habit for eating a biscuit with their morning coffee or afternoon tea – individually-portioned packets of biscuits are a safe stocking choice, especially when positioned next to a to-go coffee station.

The savoury route

Of course, biscuits provide occasions beyond the classic afternoon cuppa. Cheeseboards and platters would be bare without the addition of a savoury biscuit or two, and for the savoury-toothed among us they offer a salt/crunch balance that hits just right come snack time or alongside a drink.

Speciality Food readers are rightly famed for their kaleidoscopic cheese counters, but a perfectly-paired savoury biscuit to accompany these should not be forgotten – in fact, they offer a great opportunity to upsell and make these cheeses sing. "One thing that has always excited us is the diversity and variety of the cheeses offered by fine food retailers across the UK," begins Daniel Smith, sales and marketing manager at Stag Bakeries. "With so many flavours and textures on offer, and the brilliant heritage and provenance of all our regional cheesemakers, there has never been a more exciting time to be working on biscuits to pair with cheeses."

"The sheer breadth of cheeses now available also means that there are tremendous opportunities as biscuit makers to be creative and find all sorts of new flavour combinations. To that end, we are really encouraged by the incredible variety of savoury biscuits from a wide range of producers that are now available to consumers nationwide as people look to create and curate their own personalised cheeseboards. We feel there is a real appetite for new product development in savoury biscuits, whether that be using different flour types or trying out new flavours, thanks largely to the way fine food retailers and in turn their customers have embraced the choice available."

For Daniel, it's a smart move to stock innovative, flavour-first savoury biscuits alongside the simpler, classic options. "We have found that while there are staple cracker types that consumers love and will always go back to, there is also plenty of room to experiment with ingredients, textures, and cracker types as there is a real enthusiasm to experiment and try new things," he explains. "An example from our own experience was using seaweed in two of our traditional biscuit types, water biscuits and oatcakes, on paper an unconventional decision but something customers really took to as they looked for something unique to pair with cheese or use as a canape base.

Healthy innovation

An important consideration of the independent retailer has to be catering to customers following restricted diets, as well as those looking for healthier options, and thankfully there's a raft of delicious free-from biscuits on the market. Based in Melbourne, Australia, Olina's Bakehouse has become a popular supplier of crackers to the UK's independent trade and is a trusted brand for consumers on the hunt for quality free-from products without compromise. Seven of their 14-strong range of crackers are certified gluten-free, and four of those also vegan and keto-friendly. "The gluten-free products have really delighted the free-from community and provide the same

> "The Covid pandemic has brought health into sharp focus and although consumers are keen to treat themselves, they are mindful of nutrition and calories"



RETAILER INSIGHT



Laura Roberts, owner of Laura's Larder in Orpington, talks us through her must-stock sweet and savoury biscuits

WHAT ARE THE BEST-SELLING BISCUITS - SWEET AND SAVOURY - AT LAURA'S LARDER?

We have a large family base where we are and everyone loves to chat over drinks and biscuits! We have stocked Frank's since day one and love the range, especially the dipped chocolate variety. Frank's Chocolate Orange Dipped is our best seller, hands down. Although savoury are second place in revenue, Miller's toast are becoming a firm favourite as work well with both our cheeses and pâtés.

WHAT DO YOUR SHOPPERS LOOK FOR WHEN BUYING BISCUITS?

We have four large primary schools in the area and this means young families and busy parents. For sweet biscuits this is a treat with friends or me-time, so indulgent grown up biscuits sell well and of course we must always stock the fun gingerbread characters for the kiddies.

In terms of crackers we sell a wide range to match our cheeses and I think the cracker is a part of the "cheese and crackers combo" which is growing in importance massively. On this side people are asking more and more about crackers which match what they are eating, for example Peters Yard Peppercorn with soft creamy cheeses and Millers Fruit Toasts with a blue. Shoppers are also more and more interested in where things are made so we try to buy British almost entirely and share stories about who makes the products and where.

DO YOU HAVE A GLUTEN-FREE/FREE-FROM RANGE? IF SO, WHY, AND HOW POPULAR IS IT?

Yes we do, and it's certainly one that's growing. Miller's offer great gluten free crackers and toasts. And for sweet biscuits, The Zingiberi Bakery's Captain's Crackers make a gluten-free cookie which is universally liked, they are made in Kent too which our shoppers love as not too far away. When we buy not British we buy quality and of course Seggiano's Gluten Free Amaretti are extremely popular with those who can and can't eat gluten.

DO TRENDS AFFECT YOUR BISCUIT RANGE AT ALL?

For us it's events such as Valentines and Mother's Day. But one that took me by surprise being a newbie was teacher gifts. All these are massive drivers for selling sweet and savoury biscuits. We sell Simon's Shortbread - which is delicious, as light as air, and looks great in glass jars. They absolutely fly out for teacher's gifts at the end of every term and year.

HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY OTHER TRENDS ON THE HORIZON?

The growing base of customers who are not eating gluten or dairy is truly apparent across the board. One thing that is going to come into question as things are becoming expensive everywhere is why is it so much more expensive to be dairy or gluten-free?

I think as well we need to consider other health factors which are not addressed at all; about half of all grown adults over 50 develop diverticulitis and should be careful about eating nuts and seeds, and yet this is never considered. There's definitely room for improvement here and I would suggest a missed revenue opportunity. It all fits into gut and digestive health, a growing trend, which should be easy, and delicious.

STOCK CHECK

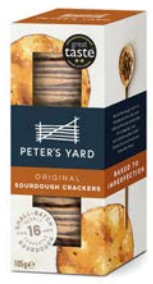
SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE · 2022



ISLAND BAKERY BLONDE CHOCACCINOS

Coffee and cinnamon biscuits with lashings of white chocolate.

islandbakery.scot



PETER'S YARD ORIGINAL SOURDOUGH CRACKERS

Made in small batches with Peter's Yard's signature starter, Shipton Mill flour and organic fresh milk.

petersyard.com



SKOULIKAS BEDFORD CROSTINI

Versatile bite-sized rustic Italian crackers ideally suited for dips, spreads, salads, soups or simply on their own for snacking.

skoulikasbedford.co.uk



PRODIGY PHENOMENONS CHOCOLATE OATIES

A plant-based, wheat-free and low-sugar alternative to conventional chocolate oat biscuits.

prodigysnacks.com

Olina's
-Bakehouse-

WONDERFUL WAFERS
TERRIFIC TOASTS
SIMPLY SEED CRACKERS
& FLATBREADS



Delicious great tasting crackers for all occasions

olinasbakehouse.co.uk



RETAILER INSIGHT



Debbie Jones, co-owner of Coleford's Forest Deli

WHAT ARE THE BEST-SELLING BISCUITS?

Best-selling sweet biscuits at the moment are the Island Bakery range, they definitely look luxurious without being overly expensive. For savoury biscuits our best-selling range is split between Peters Yard original sourdough crackers in three different sizes, and the Fine English Cheese Co flavoured ranges. We also produce our own brand small batch shortbread, which generally sells out within a few days of it being on the counter.

WHAT DO CUSTOMERS LOOK FOR FROM BISCUITS?

Flavour profiles seem to be one of the most important purchase decisions for both sweet and savoury, for example Dark Chocolate & Ginger seems to be a best seller irrespective of brand. For savoury biscuits, the conversation is usually around what cheese they are going with, consumers definitely look for complementary flavours to match their cheese purchases. The Peters Yard original recipe sells really well in all different size formats, the primary purchase decision is definitely based on form factor rather than flavour with this range. Customers also like a homemade option such as our shortbread.

HOW POPULAR IS YOUR FREE-FROM RANGE?

Our GF range has been key as long as we've been open. It's a great addition to have for bespoke gifts and hampers. For sweet we stock the Prewetts range of GF which seem to sell well because of their flavour and packaging. We often sell them to non GF consumers, which means they can cover a wider range of consumer rather being "specialist". Our best selling GF savoury biscuits are the EasyBean range, they are really eye-catching on the shelf.

DO TRENDS AFFECT YOUR BISCUIT RANGE?

There's a clear seasonality for savoury biscuits, which correlates to the increase in purchases of lighter cheeses in the summer, whereas biscuits such as oat cakes or ale crackers tend to be reserved for heavier/winter fayre. Media influence is also significant, especially with sweet biscuits.

quality [as the rest of our range] without compromise", explains Mash Chiles, UK and EU sales manager at Gourmet Partners. With the range including Fig & Sunflower Seed and Cranberry & Pumpkin Seed Toasts, as well as Wafer Crackers and Flatbreads, customers following a gluten-free diet are sure to be delighted. "In reality, the products taste so good that they really merge the core range biscuit category and the free-from categories together, and in many cases the free-from products happily sit on the same shelf as the core range biscuits," says Mash. "This is good news, especially as it introduces Olina's Bakehouse's healthy alternative products to the everyday grocery cupboard, proving consumers don't need to compromise on flavour, quality or product usage should they switch to free-from biscuits."

It's not only free-from options that health-conscious shoppers are keeping an eye out for these days. The Covid-19 pandemic has made UK shoppers more conscious than ever of what they're putting in their bodies, but that's not to say that they're willing to sacrifice indulgence for health benefits. Biscuits that offer healthier alternatives to conventional products are in big demand, and even more so if they offer an indulgent experience that comes without the 'guilt' which so often accompanies conventional sweet treats. For Helen Yates, founder of Rootles, the answer was to be found in vegetables. Rootles' biscuits are naturally sweetened by root vegetables including carrot, sweet potato and beetroot, and are available in Dark Chocolate (which is vegan), Milk Chocolate, and White Chocolate & Beetroot varieties. With a high percentage of nutritious vegetables in every pack of three chocolate-coated fingers – an impressive 35% – the brand is proudly proving that indulgence and nutrition can indeed be combined. "Rootles was launched to satisfy the demand for indulgent, guilt-free treats," begins Helen, adding that the consumer appetite for 'better for you' snacks is booming. "The demand for vegan and plant-based options has been increasing across all sectors, including the biscuit and snack sector, which is why we've recently modified our dark chocolate Rootles flavour to make it suitable for anyone who is vegan. Consumers are also seeking controlled portions – they want individual packs. Biscuits that are indulgent but aren't as calorific or have a perceived health benefit or are in some way 'better for you' than traditional confectionery and snacks are proving to be popular.

"The Covid pandemic has brought health into sharp focus and although consumers are keen to treat themselves, they are mindful of nutrition and calories," she continues. "Clean label, recognisable ingredients, and healthier ingredients are all important factors, but the biscuits must still taste good! We're finding that people would rather have 'proper ingredients' which may be more calorific i.e. chocolate but have a smaller portion or a controlled portion."

While the use of root vegetables in biscuits is a genuine innovation, it makes sense. With their natural sweetness and bulk a great stand-in for sugar and conventional flours in cakes and bakes for years – think carrot cake – it was only a matter of time before this mindset was applied to biscuits. "There are many benefits to adding vegetables to biscuits," explains Helen. "They are high fibre, all natural and recognisable ingredients, and thanks to their inclusion Rootles have a crunchier, more satiating texture and are quite moreish."

A conscientious approach

Another high quality biscuit producer who has been innovative in their approach is Dawn Reade of Island Bakery, the Isle of Mull-based biscuit baker with an eight-strong range of all butter sweet biscuits, five gift tins, three savoury biscuits and three organic oatcake varieties to its name – not to mention the freshly-launched Sweet FA gluten-free range.

"We began with a range of just



four organic, sweet biscuits back in 2001: Shortbread, Lemon Melts, Oat Crumbles and Chocolate Gingers. We added Apple Crumbles and Lime Melts a few years later, but were reaching capacity in our starter premises (a bijoux converted garage) so it was a few years later before we added our offerings," begins Dawn. The range extension came hand in hand with the move to an eco-friendly way of working. "In 2012 we moved into a purpose-built bakery with wood fired ovens and renewable energy generated locally by wind and water turbines. Our capacity increased hugely, coinciding with orders to supply British Airways and Marks & Spencer. Once we got the new bakery running smoothly, we added Blonde Chocaccinos and Orange Melts to the Sweet range."

It's not for nothing that Island Bakery's biscuits have become a mainstay of independent retailers over the years. "Their lovely packaging with the characterful illustrations make Island Bakery appeal from the shelf," says Dawn, "But really, if the biscuits inside were not memorable to the consumer there would be no repeat purchases and we wouldn't still be here. You need shelf appeal, of course, but the products have to be good. We use organic ingredients, our recipes are simple and taste like homemade – that also makes them stand out from some of the rest."

The business's sustainability focus has brought trust from environmentally-conscious shoppers – and the retailers who service them. Sustainability has always been high on our priorities," explains Dawn. "We are organic, which has a lot of sustainability principles baked into the food production regulations. We use local, renewable sources of energy – wood, wind and water. We've reduced plastic as much as we can, replacing our plastic trays with lovely paper boats. We still seal the biscuits in a plastic film, but we haven't found a compostable cellulose film that performs as well. The production of these films is hugely energy intensive, and they don't break down unless they are collected and handled properly in composting facilities. If they litter the environment they are just as dangerous to wildlife as any other plastic."

While hurdles still exist for producers working to provide eco-friendly alternatives to mainstream food production, stocking considered choices like Island Bakery's range is bound to keep conscientious shoppers coming through your retail doors.

The value of heritage

Of course, fine food consumers are looking for story and provenance alongside environmental and health considerations when shopping for biscuits – and Peter's Yard, producer of the instantly recognisable discs of crispbread with a whole stamped out of the centre, has proven that a great story is worth its weight in gold.

Peter Ljunquist's vision to revive traditional baking methods in his rural Swedish bakery, returning to slower sourdough baking techniques and natural yeasts, is the start of the brand's story – and the business' origins remain directly connected with Peter's Yard today through the 45-year-old sourdough starter and its 16-hour fermentation. Matthew Hodgetts, Peter's Yard's UK & export sales manager, explains, "For Peter's Yard, the brand's heritage has remained central to how the business has been managed and grown. The original Swedish recipe is still used to make the original crispbread and forms the base of what has since been developed further into a wider range of sourdough crackers, flatbreads and snacks.

"Our partners and suppliers have also been carefully chosen, using ethically produced and sustainable ingredients such as Shipton Mill flours, Hillfarm Rapeseed Oils and Halen Mon sea salt. This all contributes to ensuring that Peter's Yard's products come from businesses that share the same values as us."

The communication around Peter's Yard products is also carefully considered to ensure that it upholds the story. Clare Stiles, head of marketing, explains that its heritage is evident in the relationships with people connected with the business – everyone from shoppers to retailers to wholesalers, food service and hospitality. "The message 'good things take time' is communicated at every occasion," she says.

Whether you opt to stock biscuits from bakers based in your local area or further afield, by clearly communicating their credentials around quality and provenance, offering environmentally-considerate and free-from options – and never compromising on quality or flavour – you will be satisfying the year-round demand for great biscuits.



PARTNER CONTENT

FOREST FEAST: WHERE CONSCIOUS SNACKING MEETS INDULGENCE

Introducing the latest launches from this ticks-all -boxes snacking brand

Perfectly suited to the healthy indulgence snacking trend making waves across the fine food sector, Forest Feast's Chocolate Dipped fruit range is sure to be a sales sensation with discerning snackers.



Hailing from a globe-trotting team of dedicated foodies who forage the best ingredients from around the world, this new selection of grown up snacks is ideal for all snacking occasions – from picnics, celebrating with family and friends, to desktop pick-me-ups.

The latest addition to Forest Feast's range of high quality snacks – Peanut Butter & Milk Chocolate Dates – are not only deliciously indulgent, but they're suitable for vegetarians and gluten-free.

With the 60% Cocoa Dark Chocolate Sour Cherries available in 40g and 120g packs, and the rest of the range in 100g-140g pouches, these products are perfectly placed to maximise the latest evolution of consumers' demands around snacking – clean treating. Bronagh Clarke, marketing director at Forest Feast, described the trend as consumers seeking out "permissable treats – something indulgent but with a healthier and more conscious slant."



The healthy-indulgence trend has well and truly taken hold in the US, and the movement is already making waves across the pond in Great Britain.



"At Forest Feast we are all about creating the most delicious flavours, textures and tastes," continues Bronagh. "The range takes the best of our dried fruit dipped in-house in rich, indulgent 60% dark chocolate."

There are three variants in the current range, says Bronagh. **60% Cocoa Dark Chocolate Sour Cherries (vegan and gluten-free):** "We've taken the most amazing, super-sour whole cherries and completely immersed them in 60% cocoa dark Belgian chocolate to create a sweet and sour contrast that's a full-on decadent delight"; **60% Cocoa Dark Chocolate Mango (vegan and gluten-free):** "Our sweet and juicy, sustainably-sourced dried mango strips are fully submerged in 60% cocoa Belgian dark chocolate to create a treat so incredible it's like a symphony for your taste buds"; **60% Cocoa Dark Chocolate Mountain Figs (vegan and gluten-free):** "Our figs come from rugged mountains and are gently sun-dried to lock in their goodness and juicy-sweet taste. Each piece is then drenched in 60% cocoa dark Belgian chocolate for a marriage made in the heavens". Soon to launch are **Peanut Butter & Milk Chocolate Dates (vegetarian and gluten-free):** "Our North African Deglet Nour Dates have a delicious chewy sweetness, which combines perfectly with creamy smooth peanut butter and a generous drenching of Belgian milk chocolate for a double-dipped delight."

Post-lockdown, consumers are still on the lookout for high quality and indulgent snacking options and the Big Night In snacking occasion still looms large in many shoppers' calendars. "The strong growth we have previously seen in sharing snacks is set to continue," explains Bronagh. "Whether it is slow roasted and seasoned nuts or something sweeter, Forest Feast's handcrafted and deliciously distinctive snacks will appeal to everyone."

Indeed, the range more than caters for the discerning independent shopper: "All our products are handcrafted, seasoned and baked in-house with real care and attention by our brilliant team for the ultimate taste and experience," explains Bronagh. "The Forest Feast Signature chocolate range brings something different to the confectionery category for consumers by reconciling the goodness of nuts with the indulgence of Belgian chocolate."

Offering the perfect balance of quality, indulgence and natural goodness, the Forest Feast range is a must-stock selection for retailers looking to cash in on the demand for conscious snacking.

> "Forest Feast's handcrafted and deliciously distinctive snacks will appeal to everyone"

CENTRE



Excite your customers' taste buds with these flavour-packed barbecue picks

1 ENCONA
BBQ MARINADES

Iconic hot sauce brand Encona has launched its first-ever range of marinades just in time for barbecue season. The new marinades include Mexican Adobo, Moroccan Harissa, Korean Bulgogi and Jamaican-style Jerk – the perfect complementary marinades to meats, fish, vegetables and plant-based protein.
enconasauces.co.uk

2 ATKINS & POTTS
MAYONNAISE

Traditional mayonnaises proudly made in the Hampshire countryside with British free-range egg yolks. Perfect to dress potato salad and also to add a finishing touch to a sandwich, wrap or burger. Atkins & Potts have just introduced a refreshed brand look with a new DINE brand name and a more contemporary style.
atkinsandpotts.co.uk

3 ROUGETTE
MARINATED GRILLING CHEESE

This delicious savoury semi-soft cheese comes in a convenient aluminium tray and is ready to grill. Pre-prepared in two tempting flavours – Bell Pepper or Herbs – this really is a crowd-pleaser. The cheese can be cooked to your liking – simply warm on both sides and then dice into a salad or heat over a BBQ.
rougette.com/en-gb



4 BELVOIR FARM
SPARKLING ELDERFLOWER

Belvoir Farm Sparkling Elderflower is made using a traditional family recipe blending hand-picked elderflowers with lemon juice and pure spring water for a delicately refreshing taste. Alternatively, mix with white wine for a spritzer or use as a mixer with vodka or gin.
belvoirfarm.co.uk

5 THE SAUSAGE MAN
AUTHENTIC GERMAN SAUSAGES

Premium quality, authentic frozen sausages from award-winning German butchers. The Cheese Käsekrainer Frankfurters offer a balanced blend of beechwood smoked pork and creamy Emmental cheese. While one of the most famous German sausages – Bratwurst – has a natural casing that gently snaps and a delectable seasoned pork filling.
sausageman.co.uk

6 ESSEX SPIRITS CO
CITRUS DRY GIN

As with any great gin, juniper leads from the front in this citrus dry gin, closely followed by lime and grapefruit and balanced with nutmeg and cinnamon. Finally, it's rounded off with traditional botanicals, lemon verbena and bay leaves. It makes the perfect refreshing spirit for any BBQ, served with a high-quality tonic and a slice of fresh lime.
essexspiritsco.com

7 ROWCLIFFES
ANTIPASTI

The Clemency Hall collection boasts a selection of the finest antipasti which has been hand-selected from artisan producers in the beautiful Mediterranean regions, including a range of olives, semi-dried tomatoes and artichokes. These delicious vegetables make the perfect addition to any summer BBQ and offer a true taste of the Mediterranean.
rowcliffe.co.uk

"An evolving landscape"



LISA KERR
ROWCLIFFE

Following an extremely challenging last few years, businesses have relooked strategies and plans regularly to allow for continued changing consumer behaviour, driven by the pandemic, and ensuring that they are able to adapt to the ever-changing landscape.

One of the noticeable trends during the pandemic was the experimentation with different food types and the exploration of home cooking to create restaurant quality meals and gourmet in-home snacks. Because of this, the food industry mostly thrived during a really tough trading period for other industries, and we have seen that not only has behaviour not shifted back to pre-pandemic, but consumers haven't lost their lust for life or their desire for decadent indulgences. Even though this may be the case, customers have also had the chance to re-evaluate their lives, the choices they make, and the values they hold. Through this, they have become more demanding, and look for products and brands who hold the same values as them, seeking quality, value for money, product availability, a wide range to choose from, whilst always being fresh, and ensuring seamless efficient execution.

Cheese is widely seen by consumers as healthy, which is an attribute which has become very important post-pandemic. Not only is it a healthy choice, it also has a flair for indulgence and can be seen as a 'treat'. Its natural role in home-cooked meals and multiple meal occasions provides a simple purchase choice for the consumer when planning their shop.

Taking into account what our customers and the consumer has experienced over the last few years, what we believe is fundamental to the Rowcliffe success is the relationships we have with our suppliers and producers. These relationships ensure that we not only hold the best quality artisan fine food products within our product range, but that we maintain our stock levels to ensure consistent supply to our valued customers. Our team are constantly looking at what trends will be driving the next product development and innovation, and engaging with our suppliers on how we can ensure what the consumer wants, we can supply our customers.

In order to fulfil our customers' needs, we are also constantly looking for ways to streamline our operations, becoming more efficient in our offering and our delivery. The introduction of Rowcliffe delivery vehicles has added to our outsourced fleet, enabling us to be more adaptable, and the innovative changes we have made to our operational functions have created an improved product offering. Our e-commerce website offers our customers the opportunity to explore our full range and place their orders through this online channel. This not only offers those customers who prefer online shopping the facility, but also allows our telesales personnel and area sales managers to focus on enhancing the customer experience with Rowcliffe.

A trend which has been growing over a number of years, but was enhanced during the pandemic, was the need for a consumer to not only know all about the origin of the food they eat, but also that a brand is looking after the environment. Rowcliffe has always been transparent and proud of where our products come from, and telling these stories is vital to the marketing of our product range. Our integrated communication strategy ensures we marry consumer-relevant special days and seasons with the promotion of our producer's products. Addressing the need and importance for brands to show their commitment to the global environmental crisis has been the recent introduction of a recyclable pack to the Rowcliffe cut cheese offering.

What we at Rowcliffe have learnt through the pandemic, and what we have adopted as a strategic directive, is that that we should continue to maintain and grow our valuable supplier relationships, have consistent integrated marketing communications, and ensure we offer a high level of quality, choice and efficiency to our customers.

> "Customers have had the chance to re-evaluate their lives, the choices they make, and the values they hold. Through this, they have become more demanding"

Virtual Cheese Awards crowns its winners in a marathon live final

Britain's only virtual cheese awards, the VCAs, announced the best British cheesemakers last month in an exciting five and half hour long live final, hosted by BBC broadcaster Nigel Barden.



The wait was finally over on Friday 13th May as the acclaimed winners of the seven Virtual Cheese Awards were announced. The date may be unlucky for some, but it wasn't for Keens Cheddar's traditional raw milk extra mature Cheddar which went through three separate judging rounds to be named the top cheese of the year.

The Virtual Cheese Awards was co-founded in 2020 by cheese and dairy consultant Sarah de Wit to celebrate and support Britain's world-leading cheese industry during the pandemic. The judging process is completely transparent and open to everyone. The unique process helps celebrate creativity and gives cheesemakers valuable feedback from some of the most influential cheese experts in the country.

Sarah commented, "It was such a thrilling final and it was wonderful that Keens Cheddar won Supreme Champion and Best of British cheese with its iconic extra mature Cheddar.

"We only started the Virtual Cheese Awards as a one-off in the pandemic so it's so amazing to see how it has grown in its third year. The passion, prowess and perfectionist nature of the British cheese industry was woven into every aspect of the 2022 awards and was a showcase for how our industry is the best in the world bar none".

James Keen, head cheesemaker at Keens Cheddar was ecstatic about the win, as he explained, "Winning the prestigious Supreme Champion Award at the 2022 Virtual Cheese Awards has, without a doubt, made our year!

"The concept of having live virtual judging is simply a genius idea. It creates a unique opportunity for anybody to peak behind the curtain and learn the intricacies of the industry from a first-class line up of judges who know their curds from their whey."

Turn to page 25 for further information.

WINNERS

The winners of best of British cheese across the final seven categories were:

BEST ENHANCED
Hartington Creamery
Peakland White with Chocolate and Chilli

BEST SPECIALITY SPONSORED BY SPECIALITY & FINE FOOD FAIR
Blackwoods Cheese Company
Edmond Tew

BEST TERRITORIAL SPONSORED BY BOOTHS
Mrs Kirkham's Lancashire
Mrs Kirkham's Tasty Lancashire

BEST ARTISAN HARD SPONSORED BY NEALS YARD DAIRY
Lynher Dairies
Traditional Cornish Yarg

BEST CHEDDAR SPONSORED BY HARVEY & BROCKLESS
Keens Cheddar
Traditional Raw Milk Extra Mature Cheddar

BEST BLUE SPONSORED BY THE CHEESEMAN & THE CHEESE HUT
Cropwell Bishop
Classic Blue Stilton

BEST ARTISAN SOFT SPONSORED BY NEALS YARD DAIRY
Tenacres Cheese
Hebden Goat





Carron Lodge raises money for Ukraine appeal with heart-shaped cheese

Cheesemaker and wholesaler Carron Lodge has created a unique blue and yellow heart-shaped truckle with £1 from every sale going to help Ukrainian.

Over the past few months, a worldwide effort has been made to show support to Ukraine in the face of the current crisis, both physically and financially. Nearly five million people have fled the conflict in Ukraine since Russian forces invaded in February, and a further 7.7 million people have been displaced within the country.

Speaking to *Speciality Food*, Michael Harrison, branding and marketing director at Carron Lodge, explained the process behind their efforts to help Ukraine. "We felt it was important to try and help. Through some development, we created a special edition 'Stand with Ukraine' Cheddar heart truckle. Using the Ukrainian flag colours, this waxed cheese shaped heart is decorated to represent the Ukrainian Flag.

"We were so happy at the positive feedback from the independent retailers that we supply and we have seen these truckles displayed in many farm shops across the country. For every truckle that we sell, we donate £1 to the Ukrainian humanitarian appeal.

"There was a great deal of support across the UK and in the month of April alone we have raised £2125.00. Carron Lodge was particular that the donation would be used to help meet the immediate humanitarian needs of those affected by this crisis, who are vulnerable, frightened, and uncertain about the coming months. Therefore, the Ukrainian humanitarian appeal was the perfect charity for us. All our employees and customers came together to do their part for Ukraine, and we were overwhelmed by the response."

Carron Lodge is selling their Ukraine truckles to continue raising money for such an important appeal, and any support for the campaign is welcomed.

NEWS IN BRIEF

THE CHEESE LADY PUBLISHES HANDBOOK FOR CHEESE LOVERS

Award-winning cheesemonger Svetlana Kukharchuk, aka The Cheese Lady, has recently published her own book, *The Cheese Connoisseur's Handbook*. It is the perfect guide for a novice or for anyone who loves cheese. In the handbook, Svetlana shares the fundamentals around how cheese is made, seasonality, and what to look out for when purchasing. This is a solid addition to any retail offering, providing a great upsell opportunity and another way to increase your cheese sales.

INTERNATIONAL CHEESE AWARDS ANNOUNCES NEW AWARD FOR 2022

This year's International Cheese Awards has a new home at Staffordshire County Showground. After a difficult couple of years for small producers, there is a new award for 2022 – the Supreme Artisan Producer of the Year Award, sponsored by Rowcliffe. This award is important to the industry as it supports and creates awareness for smaller artisan cheesemakers. The winner will receive a Key Sponsor Package for 2023 and a stall at next year's awards.



"Wholesale truths"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

Recsently I did a spot of restaurant consultancy in the north at the newly refurbished Ye Horns Inn based in Goosnargh, Lancashire. My column this month is about how cheese is sold to restaurants and presented to guests. It also highlights how greedy a few of those giant wholesalers can be.

Wholesalers of cheese to the on trade should be properly advising restaurants about their cheese choice. They should be sending in samples or meeting at the customer's site for tastings. Regular discussions with the restaurant/hotel/farm shop about cheese seasonality and provenance should be the norm.

Sadly though, it appears that when large wholesalers bag new customers via their huge sales teams, the communication (after the commissions are paid off) very quickly drops off. Of course, there are some great wholesalers out there. Today good large wholesalers are few and far between. A lot of the wholesalers needs seem purely based on making money as quickly as possible, by whatever means.

I was recently in discussions with a huge and very well-known wholesaler. I was the agent connecting a fabulous producer of raw milk cheese to this giant London wholesaler and front-facing cheese shop. The product I was recommending is sublime. The work that goes into producing this cheese is unending. It is a pity that the conversation with this particular global and national distributor of cheese was centred around getting the lowest price from the producer.

Reassuringly this cheesemaker, with advice, dug his heals and said no to dropping the price of his cheese. The spiralling costs associated with cheese production today is especially being felt by artisan cheesemakers. Producers are being continually bullied to lower prices, so that the wholesale giants and large online cheese shops can reap the dividends, without getting their hands remotely dirty.

As a wholesaler and a cheesemonger I offer a bespoke service to new customers and onward advice. We offer training courses to hotel and restaurant staff that I foot the bill for. As far as cheese is concerned, I readily accept the price from the producers for onward wholesale and shop sales. We charge a fair price for our artisan cheese. We are always there for the customers and regularly check in with them to ensure that they are happy with the product and service that they receive.

One other such wholesaler that I should mention is The Crafty Cheese Man. Jonathan (originally from Bushey) settled in Lancashire several years ago with his Northern Lass. He is a wholesaler of cheese but like me he is different. He is passionate and gives a damn. Jonathan will travel miles, like we do at No2, to find exceptional cheese made by wonderful caring people. Yes he is a business, but like No2 the foundations of his company are based on ethical and sustainable practices. His work ethic and care for the produce he sells is ingrained. This knowledge and passion are shared with all of his customers. This is something that good wholesalers and cheesemongers do naturally.

As a result of consultations with great restaurants such as Ye Horns Inn, with wholesalers like The Crafty Cheese Man and No2 Pound Street we are beginning to see great eateries understanding how cheese should be served. Importantly wholesalers like No2 Pound Street offer honest training for those teams that are stages, showcasing the greatest food on the planet.... namely cheese.

Check out Ye Horns in Goosnargh, Lancashire, where you will find an awesome cheeseboard. Last week it included Mrs Kirkham's, St Jude and Stichelton, how delicious! The best thing is the cheese served here is provided by a small and passionate wholesaler, who also helps provide the script for the team to upsell brilliantly.

> "I readily accept the price from the producers for onward wholesale and shop sales. We charge a fair price for our artisan cheese. We are always there for the customers and regularly check in with them to ensure that they are happy with the product and service that they receive"



HOW TO SELL CHEESE ALFRESCO

Warmer weather brings new opportunities to take your cheese offerings outside and cash in on picnic and BBQ trade

With summer on the horizon, it's time to start thinking about picnics and BBQs. These communal occasions can be the perfect upsell for top-quality artisan cheeses that make time together special, so it's worth investing time into it.

Selling and promoting alfresco

Selling cheese for outdoor occasions requires a bit more practical planning than your average cheese and wine night in.

As Stephen Fleming, owner of George and Joseph, explains, "You need to think about how people are going to eat things outdoors. We have a park close by, so we sell a Ploughman's Picnic pack which in addition to the food items includes wooden knives, paper napkins and (for a small extra charge) a George & Joseph tote bag to carry it all in. It's also good to think about drinks – we've added a small selection of soft drinks to our wine and beer offering so customers can add on these extra items too.

"The key for us here is thinking about how easy a cheese is to eat outside – a super-runny Brie isn't going to work very well. We slice cheeses into either small slices or cubes which work better outside and provide wooden cutlery.

"For accompaniments, we have catering packs of crackers and chutneys so our picnic offerings give customers just enough of everything in a format they can use up easily – rather than just selling a jar of chutney which would be too much and potentially a pain."

When it comes to promoting cheese for outdoor eating, Gemma Williams, owner of The Little Cheesemonger, relies on her creativity. "Personally, I start by imagining myself in the situation, it's a lovely day, the picnic blanket is out and we are feasting on... then I start to fill in the gaps", she explains.

"What I do next is test run my idea and see how we get on. For instance, if I'd thought it would be a lovely idea to take some fresh Stinking Bishop and in reality, it attracted every fly in a radius of 10 miles, it would make me think differently about my offering and how I'd present the outdoor eating suggestion. Once you're confident in what you'd like to offer take some lovely photos and get it on social media. This way you can see if people like the idea."

Stephen also utilises visual stimulus for his promotion technique. "We have an A-board outside our shop with our 'Chunch' menu on it, and posters in the shop of the Ploughman's Picnic bag – taken in an outdoor setting so customers can see it in it's intended surroundings. We also promote on social media – keeping an eye on the weather forecast so we can really shout about it when there's good weather ahead."

Gemma Akroyd, owner of The Cheeseboard of Harrogate, also champions inspiring the imagination, "We sometimes have themes and promote cheeses from Spain inviting the customer to imagine they are sipping a cool glass of White Rioja and eating a 12-month Manchego in the warm sunshine of Seville or a glass of Chianti while tasting Italian Pecorinos from Italy!"

Hitting your target market

If your usual trade is families with children, there's no point creating romantic cheese hampers with perfectly paired Champagne and strawberries. As Gemma Aykroyd explains, "Getting the market right is really important to maximise sales. We've included soft drink options in our shop now which will appeal to both non-drinking adults and children alike.

"Customers can also change up the cheeses in our lunch offering more child-friendly choices, but in our experience, most of the children who come to our shop are fans of "grown-up" cheese and have very well-developed tastes!"

One idea that Stephen uses to get the offering right is to give his customers the chance to try cheeses before they buy their picnic hamper. But as he explains, "If they don't want to try, we will make sure we put a variety in so there is something for everyone, i.e. a milder Wensleydale perhaps or a Cornish Yarg, and then something punchier like a Leeds Blue. We want to get it right so that customers return and recommend us to their friends and family!"

Finding something that works for all the family can be difficult, and is something Gemma Williams is well versed in. "Depending on what you currently provide this can be a tricky offering for families with young children. I know because I'm in that season of life myself, and although I seem to be raising a little curd nerd myself, my Niece and Nephew aren't so interested in trying artisan cheese. A plain ham sandwich for them ticks the box with no fuss."

The bottom line

Independent cheesemongers are in a unique position to use their expert knowledge and skill to upsell the perfect outdoor cheese selection.

> "The key for us here is thinking about how easy a cheese is to eat outside – a super-runny Brie isn't going to work very well. We slice cheeses into either small slices or cubes which work better outside and provide wooden cutlery"

As Gemma Aykroyd explains, "A cheeseboard is a perfect end to a meal at any sociable occasion with friends and family wherever you are. Perhaps customers don't want a full-on menu at a picnic so why not tempt them with cold meats, cheese, pickles and fresh bread? Perfect for alfresco dining.

"They can be as basic or as fancy as they like, but all mouth-wateringly delicious. A Yorkshire pickle or truffle honey, a good mature Cheddar or goat Gouda, we have it all to fit any budget and tastes."

Gemma Williams concludes, "It boils down to convenience. If a customer can pick up a gourmet picnic off the shelf or can book one to collect with limited effort the deal will sell itself. Create your offering with a nice photo, clear pricing and an easy call to action (telephone, web or message) you should soon see some orders rolling in."



PETER'S YARD

NEW ROSEMARY & SEA SALT PACK NOW AVAILABLE

GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME

THE VIRTUAL CHEESE AWARDS **2022**

The Virtual Cheese Awards 2022 crowned winners across the UK in a celebration of Great British cheesemaking

This year's Virtual Cheese Award winners were announced during a five and a half-hour long live final where viewers could watch the judges evaluate the cheese entries. Taking place live across the award's social media channels, the final was hosted by cheese consultant Sarah de Wit and BBC broadcaster and local food and drink champion, Nigel Barden, with guests such as *Speciality Food* editor Holly Shackleton making guest appearances to announce some of the winners. Judged blindly by cheese experts with decades of experience between them, the transparent judging sessions were recorded live for the industry and cheese lovers to enjoy from the comfort of their own homes. There was a total of 16 winners across the categories including regional and excellence awards, but only one cheesemaker was crowned the Supreme Champion and Best of British.



SUPREME CHAMPION AND BEST OF BRITISH 2022

Stealing the crown for Supreme Champion and Best of British was Keens Cheddar with their Traditional Raw Milk Extra Mature Cheddar, handmade on their farm in the West Country. Based in Somerset, with a climate that is perfect for growing luxurious and fresh grass, the cows are free to roam the lush pastures at Moorhayes Farm, making the perfect raw milk for their Cheddar.

The Keen family moved to Moorhayes Farm in 1899 and have been making unpasteurised Cheddar ever since. Five generations on, head cheesemaker James Keen is still continuing the family cheesemaking tradition to create top quality raw milk cheese.

When tasting Keens' entry, the judging panel were delighted with the taste and quality of the cheese, commenting, "Fantastic example of a mature Cheddar, ticks all the boxes. Beautifully balanced with complex flavours. Superb job."

Speaking about the process, James explained how his cheese came to be crowned the cream of the crop, "Our flagship mature Cheddar is aged for 12 months in our cheese stores to produce a smooth creamy cheese. It carries a multitude of delightful flavours that develop into a cacophony of savoury, grassy and herby notes, and sometimes into a wonderfully surprising fruity flavour. As skilled artisans, we can spot which cheddars have the potential to become outstanding when aged for longer.

"However, Cheddar cheese in its cotton cloth needs care to bring out the best characteristics, and this is where the skill of the affineur comes to play. We use our five generations of experience to ensure our Keen's Extra Mature Cheddar maintains the smooth texture and the flavours grow to an almost-lost-forever traditional Cheddar experience. Lingering for a long while on the tongue but lasting forever in the memory."

A well-deserved Silver was awarded to Blackwood's Cheese Company for Edmund Tew, a washed rind raw milk soft cows cheese made with organic milk farmed on a regenerative system, and Cropwell Bishop's Classic Blue Stilton scooped up Bronze.

> "We use our five generations of experience to ensure our Keen's Extra Mature Cheddar maintains the smooth texture and the flavours grow to an almost-lost-forever traditional Cheddar experience. Lingering for a long while on the tongue but lasting forever in the memory"

CHEESE HERO



A cheesemaker who has promoted a cause, and continues to support, innovate, and inspire.

The winner of the Cheese Hero award for 2022 was Rhonda Grant from Dale Farm. With a passion for cheese, Rhonda Grant has worked within and supported the dairy industry for over 20 years, championing innovation in crafting naturally matured cheese and promoting new product development. The Dale Farm group is a cooperative, owned by 1,300 dairy farmers across Northern Ireland, England and Scotland, with the aim of supporting the current generation of dairy farmers and the next.

Highly commended: **Chiswick Cheese Market**

YOUNG CHEESEMAKER



A cheesemaker under 28 who is an emerging talent in the British cheese industry, recognised for their passion for cheese.

Sam Guinness from Four Brothers was crowned the winner of the Young Cheesemaker award at the age of 27. In 2019, Sam converted a garden shed into a cheese room and created two cheeses, Pippin and Bryony, made with milk from the Ayrshire cows on the farm surrounding his cottage. He operates a one-man show and does all the cheesemaking, selling, wrapping, delivery and invoicing. He also champions zero-waste cheesemaking by feeding leftover whey from the process to his pigs. Sam is a real inspiration for all creatives who really care about ethical and sustainable produce.

Highly commended: **Heather Taylor, Nettlebed Creamery**

SUSTAINABILITY TROPHY

sponsored by **Wyke Farms**



An industry member who champions sustainability and has revolutionised the cheese industry.

The Ethical Dairy was dubbed joint winner for the Sustainability Trophy, alongside Sharpham Dairy.

Prioritising environmental sustainability in all activities, The Ethical Dairy's founders Wilma and Dave Finlay are passionate about increasing biodiversity, tackling climate change and plastic, and achieving net-zero. In the past year, The Ethical Dairy has participated in several COP26 events, published thought leadership responses to the IPCC report, worked with Pasture for Life to raise awareness of biodiversity in pastoral farming, participated in a video for Scotland's Climate Week with South of Scotland Enterprise and promoted soil organic matter data that demonstrates the farm sequesters substantially more carbon than it emits.



Joining The Ethical Dairy in its glory as sustainable champion is Sharpham Dairy. Celebrating 40 years of cheesemaking in 2021, Sharpham Dairy handmakes a small range of award-winning English cheeses in a beautiful valley overlooking the River Dart in South Devon. The dairy's sustainable endeavours began when the original estate owner and environmentalist, Maurice Ash, decided to find a way to make his favourite cheese – Brie – using up surplus milk from his Jersey herd during the slump in milk prices in the 1970s. From there, Sharpham embarked on a mission to develop an ethical business that champions sustainability by embracing community, staff, animals, farmers, supply chain and retailers as well as the environment. In April 2022, current owner Greg Parsons and his wife Nicky became the first UK cheesemakers to be B Corp Certified.

Highly commended: **Godminster**

NEW CHEESEMAKER

sponsored by **The Newt in Somerset**



An emerging talent in the industry who has started making cheese within the past three years.

Jenny Lee started her new cheese business, The Torpenhow Cheese Company, in 2019 on her family farm. Unfortunately, her first cheese matured just in time for the start of the first lockdown which saw all the traditional markets and outlets for their product shut down. Undeterred, Jenny used village WhatsApp groups and local butcher shops to grow the business, delivering cheese door to door on foot, bike and van, with children in tow for their homeschooling lessons. Three years on, Jenny has mentored and employed new cheesemakers, providing training and new jobs for local people.

Highly commended: **Juan Regatti, The Buffalo Farm**

INTERNATIONAL CHEESE & DAIRY AWARDS **2022**

2022 is a special year for the International Cheese & Dairy Awards, as they celebrate 125 years of excellence







This year the International Cheese & Dairy Awards is celebrating its 125-year anniversary, and the team behind it are taking the opportunity to celebrate its history and culture, and sharing plans to secure the longevity of the awards for the next generation.

Since the move to Staffordshire County Showground, the ICDA team are building on this foundation and constantly looking at ways to grow and evolve the awards.

This year see the introduction of a trade hall for companies wanting to attend for one day, and a Judging Experience for Love Cheese Live visitors to understand the process and experience behind judging award-winning products.

There will also be the introduction of Dairy Retailer of the Year – sponsored by Infor – who are supporting the latest drive to broaden the awards and recognise dairy companies who are an important part of the industry.

The Awards have appointed seven ambassadors who are the next generation of the cheese and dairy industry. Nicola Beardmore, Laura Billington, Joe Bangles, Jonathan Broomfield, Daniel Williams, Amy Salisbury and Kay Legge will be appearing on the Love Cheese Live stage educating consumers on everything from cheese judging to preparing the perfect cheese board.

Also new to this year is the Ambassadors Consumer Choice Award, where consumers will have the chance to judge and vote for each ambassador's favourite past champion cheese. The winner will be announced at the event.

Education is key to consumers understanding what it takes to make an award-winning product, what judges look for and examples of how products can be enjoyed at home – by working with the team they have identified their chosen subject and will be bringing a fresh approach to cheese and dairy education.

ICDA SUPPORTS ARTISAN CHEESE PRODUCERS WITH NEW KEY SPONSOR, ROWCLIFFE

The Awards are proud to support UK and International artisan cheese and dairy producers. It has been a difficult couple of years and as an industry we need to continue to buy and support the smaller producers and recognise the quality and effort they put into their products.

This year ICDA is introducing the Supreme Artisan Producer of the Year Award which is sponsored by Rowcliffe and will be presented during the trade lunch. This award is important to the industry as is supports and creates awareness for the artisan producers.

The winner will receive a Key Sponsor Package for 2023 and a market stall at next year's awards.



LOVE CHEESE LIVE 1ST-2ND JULY 2022



The launch of Love Cheese Live – taking place 1st-2nd July 2022 at Staffordshire Showground – will host renowned chefs Marco Pierre White, The Hairy Bikers and Matt Tebbutt before showcasing over 150 well-known cheese and dairy producers from across the UK.

The event offers an enjoyable experience for all the family, with cooking demonstrations, chef's table, cookery schools for all ages, live music and outside attractions. A key highlight is the Cheese Judging Experience – an educational session that will teach consumers what it takes to produce award-winning cheeses. Leading experts will be giving talks and making pairing suggestions, while some of the finest food producers in the country will host demonstrations.



> This year the awards are celebrating its 125-year anniversary. We are taking this opportunity to celebrate our history, our culture and plans to secure the longevity of the awards for the next generation

ICDA: A RICH HERITAGE



Ian Luxton, chairman of the International Cheese & Dairy Awards:

The International Cheese and Dairy Awards started in humble beginnings during 1897 in the heart of the central milk field of Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire. Every year has seen it building on the success of previous years to become the world's largest competition of its kind in the world today.

2022 celebrates our very special anniversary of 125 years and as we approach the second year of our Covid-19 and weather related recovery plan at our new weather-proof location, the committee have again been working tirelessly to deliver a successful awards and consumer event.

With some exceptional local initiatives involving local retail and groups we are raising awareness of the ICDA and Love Cheese Live in the region.

We have reached this important milestone as a result of generations of volunteers before us, who have committed their time to create the foundations and put in place the building blocks to enable the committee today to continue the good work and protect the rich heritage of the awards.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the key sponsors, the retail and trade community, everyone participating in both the competition and those who have taken stands, the ambassadors, the judges and of course the voluntary stewards and many other volunteers who have given their time to help make the show what it is.

The exceptional committee we have today, have the youth, acumen and energy needed to continue our journey and provide the security of the show for years to come.

We all look forward to welcoming you this year and to share this special occasion with you.

> Every year has seen the ICDA building on the success of previous years to become the world's largest competition of its kind in the world today

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THE STORECUPBOARD GOES PREMIUM

Consumers will continue to cook at home in 2022, looking for 'premium convenience' and ethical credentials when it comes to pasta, rice and cooking sauces

COMMENTATORS



CLARE HARCUP
SUN VALLEY RICE



IAN BUTT
POTTS PATERNERSHIP



LOUISE WYMER
THE SIMPLE ROOT



MADDIE GRINHAM
MR ORGANIC



SALLY ASSINGER
GARAFALO

Restrictions may now be over, but Covid-19 had a significant effect on all aspects of the food industry, and pasta, rice and cooking sauces were no exception.

As Maddie Grinham, brand manager at Mr Organic, explains, "For a category that had stagnated pre-pandemic, Covid-19 and the subsequent national lockdowns triggered a sharp rise in sales of pastas, rice and cooking sauces in conjunction with the increased popularity of home cooking and supply chain pressures.

"This increase has generated opportunities for brands to capitalise on the momentum and respond to consumer demand for health, convenience, and sustainability, as well as the need to differentiate and bring innovation to the category."

Rising costs across the board are also evolving consumer trends as we embrace the new normal, with customers choosing to dine in and save money on petrol and restaurants. But premium quality, provenance, health and sustainability continue to be the key drivers of consumer choice in 2022.

'Premium convenience'

With the cost-of-living crisis forcing consumers to cut down on spending, a new trend has arisen where customers are now looking for premium ingredients and cooking sauces as an alternative to dining out. As Sally Assinder, UK marketing manager at Garofalo, explains, "An appetite has arisen for more speciality shapes and consumers trying different shapes and more premium brands and tasting the difference over standard pasta.

"With less time post-lockdown and consumers looking for quicker recipe solutions sales of meal kits for home delivery with premium ingredients have increased. Premium pasta with a premium sauce makes the ultimate quick, easy and tasty meal solution and we have seen our pasta sauces and pesto continue to grow post lockdown. While consumers have always wanted to see pasta from Italy they are now looking for quality sauces and pesto to be made in Italy."

Louise Wymer, CEO of The Simple Root, agrees, "The cooking sauce sector is a traditional category which has mastered convenience; however, over the last few years consumers are expecting more than just quick dinners and demand a focus on great tasting sauces which use simple, sustainable ingredients.

"Consumers are wanting to see more premium, restaurant-inspired flavours which are accessible to any diet but also add that treat element to their midweek dinner."

In fact, a move toward 'premium convenience' has been a major customer trend in the new normal as hybrid working continues and consumers choose to eat out less. As Ian Butt, commercials director at Potts' Partnership, explains, "Where people may have eaten out multiple times per week, they are now staying in more and cooking at home.

"However, people are still looking for that quick and easy dinner solution that eating out provided which means they are turning to our convenient sauces. We have coined the phrase 'premium convenience' because that's what Potts' customers are looking for."

When it comes to cooking at home, Claire Harcup, head of sales and marketing at Sun Valley Rice, believes that consumers will be continuing the lockdown trend of recreating their favourite restaurant dishes or takeaways, and rice will be a big feature of this. "Rice is the 'go-to' side for an Indian, Thai or a Japanese Katsu curry or Mexican Chilli, stir-fries and nourish bowls as well as a vital ingredient for sushi, burritos, and risottos as rice acts as an excellent flavour carrier for cuisines across the globe.

"It is a UK store cupboard essential along with pasta, and consumers are now more aware of pairing different rice varietals with cuisine type. This trend has increased during the Covid-19 period when cooking from scratch at home accelerated, and more people re-created favourite meals from restaurants and takeaways."

Focus on health

Aside from quick and easy meals that feel indulgent, consumers are also still looking for higher nutrition options after the pandemic caused the public to consider their health. As Maddie explains, "This hyper-focus on health and specifically sugar content can be said to be driven in part by the pandemic, and greater consumer awareness of health.

"The pandemic increased consumer focus on 'aspiration needs', which involves a focus on preventative care and taking proactive actions to maintain specific health goals or avoid illness/ailments over the long term. We see this in particular in cooking sauces, with more and more brands catering to health-conscious consumers."

For Louise, "The global pandemic has only acted as a catalyst in shaping consumers' dietary and lifestyle choices. The most notable consumer change is the boom in plant-based eating, where consumers are making conscious decisions to increase their intake of vegetables based on a renewed interest in healthy eating."

Increased demand for free-from is something Sally has also experienced. "Our extensive range of gluten-free pasta continues to grow faster than any other type of pasta. The quality of gluten-free is becoming better and better and with more people moving to a gluten-free diet it has been vitally important to ensure that taste and quality were not compromised."

Free-from is somewhere that rice excels as it is naturally gluten-free and fits into plant-based diets, and as Claire suggests, retailers should be incorporating "dual merchandising where possible so that rice sits within gluten-free fixture to maximise sales potential."

Provenance and sustainability

As well as a focus on healthier choice lines, provenance is also a growing consideration to consumers and ensuring that your products champion this is key for store cupboard staple success.

For Claire, "Knowing where your rice comes from is important. Like wine, different regions of the world, due to their climate and soil type, will produce different varieties and the quality can vary. California, like Japan, is known for growing the best short grain and medium grain rice varieties in the world; the Sacramento River Valley is one of the most fertile agricultural regions on the globe."

Provenance is also tied closely to





sustainability, as consumers look for ingredients from sustainable sources. "With more focus on a fundamental understanding of where our food comes from and the environmental impact, we have noticed a marked increase in demand for organic agriculture for cupboard staples such as rice and pasta", Maddie explains.

"Organic provides dual reassurance to the consumer of being free some any harmful chemicals or pesticides, as well as environmental benefits such as the preservation of habitats and promotion of biodiversity. As brands compete to differentiate in an ever-competitive sector, these credentials will become more and more vital in attracting and retaining consumers, something retailers are taking note of," she adds.

This is something Louise took into account when creating The Simple Root. "Over recent years, sustainable living has become a key consideration for many households and is one of the most important purchase criteria across any sector.

"Using root vegetables as the base of our cooking sauces guarantees we have a low carbon footprint and low water intake, we also happen to be pretty good at growing root veg in this part of the world, which means they're easier to get hold of and have fewer food miles."

Keeping these considerations in mind when looking at store cupboard staples such as rice, pasta and cooking sauces to stock will ensure your shelves are bang on-trend.

Looking to the future

The current situation in Ukraine and the difficulty with Brexit have resulted in ever-growing concerns around global supply chains.

As we move into the second half of 2022, supply issues may shape the future of the sector.

Maddie adds, "The future of rice, pasta and cooking sauces remain uncertain. With prices of durum wheat rising and global political unrest leading to knock on packaging and transportation costs increasing, brands are looking to USP around sustainability, province and quality to justify increasing prices."

When it comes to innovation in the future, Ian believes sustainability is now a major driver. "Consumers are far more aware of their impact on the environment and how their purchases play into that. They are now met with a sustainability dilemma every time they enter a shop and consumers want to be able to choose convenience and flavour without the guilt of buying products with unsustainable packaging."

Louise echoed these thoughts as she concluded, "With consumer decisions being made increasingly around wellness and sustainability, we will likely see the continued shift to plant-based eating with heightened demand for premium flavours and core sustainable values.

"For retailers to ensure they're on trend and maximise their potential in the category, they need to pay attention to these category drivers and savvy innovation."

> "An appetite has arisen for more speciality shapes and consumers trying different shapes and more premium brands and tasting the difference over standard pasta"

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE 2022 STOCK CHECK



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latuapasta.com



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pasta-garofalo.com/uk



PLANET RICE CALIFORNIA BLONDE

This easy-to-cook, nutritionally-dense brown rice has all the deliciousness of white rice. It is quick to cook for busy customers and makes a great addition to a variety of dishes for easy weeknight dinners.

planetricefoods.com



MR ORGANIC ROASTED GARLIC SAUCE

With a new recipe, this Roasted Garlic pasta sauce is now made with no added sugar, only natural sweetness, using their own grown sun-ripened tomatoes and fragrant garlic.

mr-organic.com



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Premium rice harvested on small farms in the Punjab. With an eco-friendly ethos, the rice is packaged in compostable, biodegradable and recyclable paper bags.

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COMMENTATORS



LISA SMITH
GINGER BAKERS



KATE TYNAN
LITTLE BUTTON BAKERY



SOPHIE BUTLER
SUGAR TEA ROOM



BEKI VALLANCE
BEKI'S BROWNIES



HAVE YOUR CAKE & EAT IT

Post-pandemic, consumers are all too happy to create occasions to celebrate with cakes and puddings, finds Ellen Manning

Birthdays, weddings, baby showers. A sneaky slice with a cup of tea, an indulgent treat with friends, or a warming full stop to a meal. It's hard to find an occasion where it doesn't seem right – or even obligatory – that cakes or puddings are involved. They're synonymous with special occasions, with celebration, or with that edible bit of comfort when you need it most. When it comes to serving up cake for celebrations like birthdays, the tradition dates back to the ancient Egyptians, who are credited with the idea of celebrating 'birthdays'. They believed when pharaohs were crowned, they became gods, making their coronation day their 'birthday' as a god and therefore worthy of celebration. The Ancient Greeks are then believed to have adopted the same tradition but, needing something to offer up to Artemis, the goddess of the moon, on their birthdays, they started baking moon-shaped cakes and decorating them. Fast forward to the 18th century when children in Germany would receive a cake with candles on their birthday, known as Kinderfest. Over centuries various other factors have played their part, from the expense associated with sugar, making them 'special treats' predominantly for the wealthy, as well as various cultural associations with sweet stuff and comfort or celebration, making them popular for all sorts of occasions across the globe.

For Lisa Smith, founder of Ginger Bakers, which produces a range of cakes and bakes for both the wholesale and retail markets, it's simple. "Cakes and puddings aren't what you might describe as a life essential," she told *Speciality Food*. "They aren't a vital part of our diet, which means we tend to associate them as something we enjoy more occasionally, as treats to be indulged in as part of the multitude of milestone celebrations and special occasions we experience, from birthdays to anniversaries and everything in between. You could even argue that this rich association gives cake 'superpower status.' After all, as soon as you think 'celebration', a cake of some description just pops into your head. It's the go to statement piece when you want to make a celebration truly memorable and that's the lure of cake."

A focal point for the big day

Nowhere is that 'statement piece' moment more obvious than at weddings, where the cake is often one of the stars of the show. From simple creations to multi-tiered extravaganzas designed to wow the guests, they are a focal point for the big day and a tradition that shows no sign of waning. For Kate Tynan, owner of Little Button Bakery, a creative wedding cake studio near Manchester, what couples want out of wedding cakes may be changing, but it remains a key part of their day. "I'm sure there are some couples who don't want a cake or perhaps want something different like a cake of cheese or a pork pie cake," she told *Speciality Food*. "But for all of my clients, the cake is a very important part of their wedding day." Tynan started 10 years ago making a wide range of cakes, but soon found her heart didn't lie in more traditional designs, and nowadays she specialises in modern, unique creations. "I like to think outside the box and create something really special for my couples – real focal point on their wedding day – almost a piece of edible art." Her design style means using a lot of textures, bold colours, metallics and interesting detailing inspired by nature, ceramics, architecture and interior design trends. But her cakes – which come in more than 20 different flavours ranging from traditional lemon and raspberry to 'Pina Colada' – are far from style over substance, made from top-quality ingredients like organic eggs, British butter, Belgian chocolate and high quality professional fondant icing. "My clients are generally couples who appreciate high quality, both in the taste and look of their cake. The cake to them is a really important part of their day and they want it to have the wow factor to amaze their guests."

Child's play

Children's cakes may have a different target audience, but that need for a 'wow factor' is just as key, says Sophia Butler, who runs a London-based mobile tea room and cake making company, Sugar Tea Room. Butler, who was a 2020 regional winner in the buttercream category of the Cake Professional Awards, says children's cakes have become more sophisticated, moving away from character cakes to rainbows, animals, trains and cars, as well as simple, stylish 'drip cakes' that are popular with older children. "Cakes are very much still part of parties, with some parents opting for two-tier cakes so they can have two different flavours," she said. "Parents love to match the cake with decorations and I'm often sent photos of the decorations so I can match the colours. Instagram plays a big part of this trend – the look of the cake is just as important as the taste, everything has to coordinate and look good for photos." Despite people's quest for increasingly extravagant cakes, some things haven't changed, said Butler. "Chocolate and vanilla are the most popular and this hasn't changed in many years!"

> "The growing enthusiasm for independent businesses seen of late is ideal for boosting sales for things like cakes and bakes"

Cake for comfort

They may be the go-to for special occasions, but our love of all things sweet isn't limited to the set-piece moments. Whether it's an afternoon tea full of decadent, dainty cakes and patisserie, a slice of fruit loaf from a farm shop or deli, or a big slab of sticky toffee pudding smothered in custard, few of us are strangers to cakes and puddings and don't have to search hard for a reason to try them. Beki Vallance,

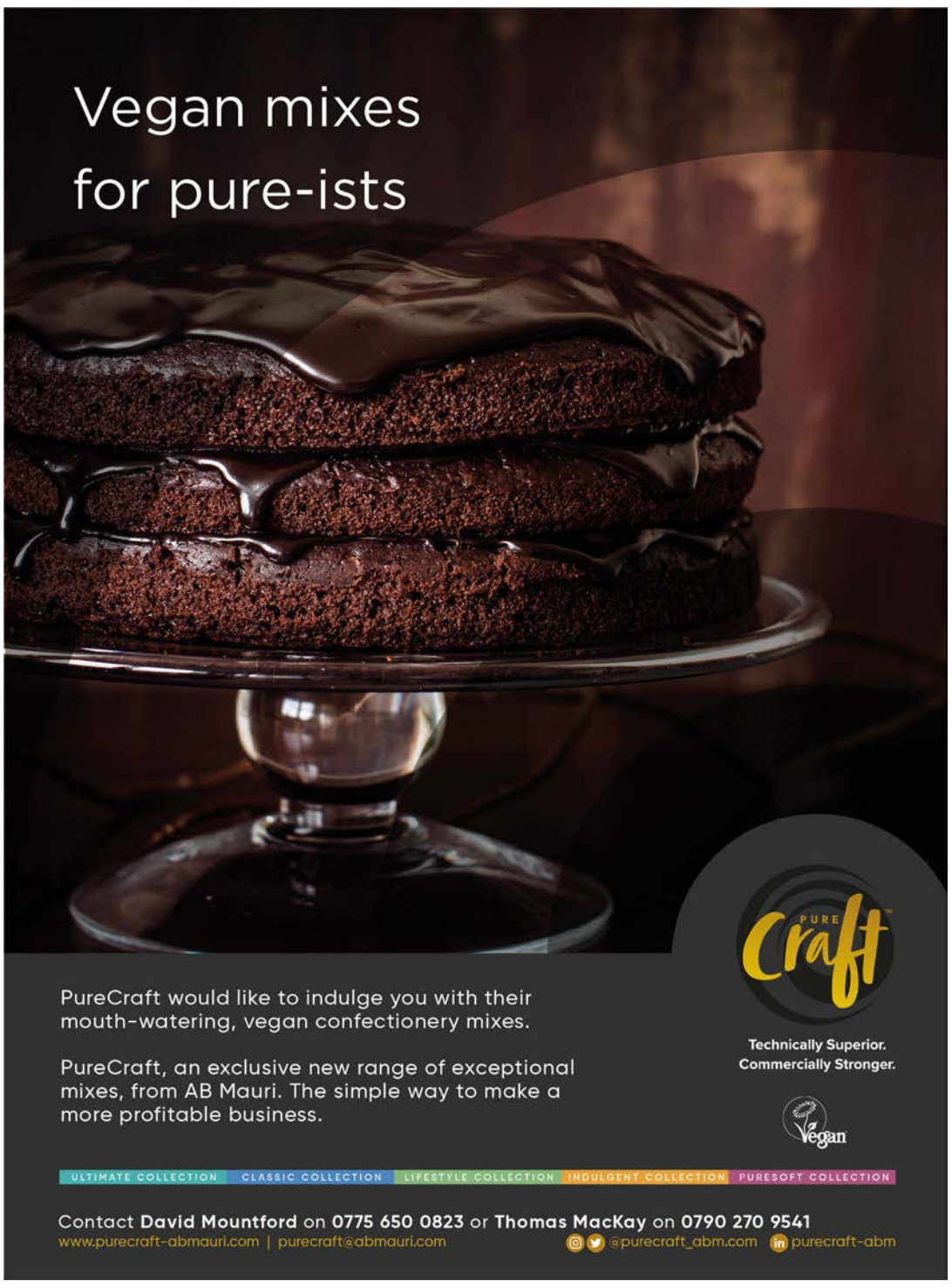
> "While some of the enthusiasm for home baking that we all found during lockdowns in 2020 has remained, for many the way we spend our leisure time affects whether we choose to make our sweet treats ourselves – or buy them from the experts"

founder of Warwickshire-based Beki's Brownies, sums it up.

"I believe brownies are perfect for every occasion! Need to celebrate? Brownie and a glass of bubbles! Catch up with a friend or relative? Brownie and a cup of your favourite brew. Going through a difficult time? Indulge and immerse yourself in a delicious brownie. Missing out on a friend's birthday? Send them a box of brownies, bespoke to them to let them know that you miss them and can't wait to see them again soon! There is something so special when you give a box of brownies as a gift, it makes them feel loved and brings a little bit of happiness into their lives." Vallance, who launched her business in November 2015 now supplies her brownies wholesale to independent businesses across the West Midlands, from cafés and coffee shops to restaurants, street food venues and a local farm park, plus offering online ordering for delivery nationwide as well as local food festivals.

Vallance offers over 40 flavours of brownies, blondies and brownie-based products, offering what she sees as something for everyone, and thinks the growing enthusiasm for independent businesses seen of late is ideal for boosting sales for things like cakes and bakes. Smith agrees. When it comes to her Ginger Bakers' creations, each has a unique story attached to it, she says, whether that's about the provenance of the ingredients, links to an historical recipe or direct links to the surrounding community or the local charities the team supports. Smith has noticed the post-pandemic appreciation of all things artisan and homemade. While some of the enthusiasm for home baking that we all found during lockdowns in 2020 has remained, for many the way we spend our leisure time affects whether we choose to make our sweet treats ourselves – or buy them from the experts. "Some of the interest in baking from the pandemic has remained, with some people choosing to create their own foods at home, but ultimately people want to spend their time doing other things now that there's no need for them to be stuck indoors, as a result other dynamics have developed. Subsequently, aspects of that lockdown interest in where our food comes from, the stories behind what we buy, who makes what we consume and ultimately what it is made from, have remained. Especially, as a result, many consumers are consciously choosing to buy their food from people that they've developed relationships with, that they trust as a result and ultimately share the same values with."

> "Cakes aren't a vital part of our diet, which means we tend to associate them as something we enjoy more occasionally, as treats to be indulged in as part of the multitude of milestone celebrations and special occasions we experience"



STOCK CHECK

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True German marzipan with almond pieces, lower in sugar and higher almond content.

lemke.de



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With the perfect crumbly biscuit base, tangy cream cheese and a sweet strawberry sauce, it's no surprise this moreish dessert is also a Great Taste award winner.

blasarfwyd.com



JUST DESSERTS LOTUS BISCOFF® GATEAU

This handcrafted dessert is a collaboration with the world-famous Belgian biscuit brand.

just-desserts.co.uk



BONNE MAMAN TARTE AU CITRON

Made to an authentic French recipe, combining rich and zingy lemon crème with soft and buttery pastry.

bonnemaman.co.uk



GINGER BAKERS GIN, CLEMENTINE & CRANBERRY FRUIT CAKE

Packed with plump fruit with the tang of cranberries and clementine all soaked in Shed 1 Festive Tipple Gin.

gingerbakers.co.uk



BOTHAM'S OF WHITBY DATE & WALNUT SPELT BRACK

A superbly full-bodied and nutty cake made without fat in the recipe.

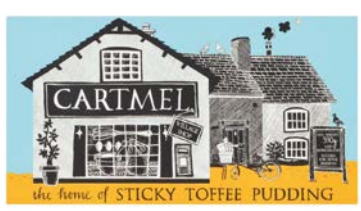
botham.co.uk



NUSH CHOCOLATE FUDGE POT

Smooth, creamy and thick, this a blend of Belgian chocolate, cocoa and coconut caramel.

nushfoods.co.uk



CARTMEL STICKY TOFFEE PUDDING

A rich and indulgently sticky sponge pudding hailing from the home of this traditional dessert.

cartmelvillageshop.co.uk



FIELDFARE APPLE STRUDEL

Apples, juicy raisins and a hint of cinnamon, deliciously wrapped up in a light puff pastry.

field-fare.com

CONSCIOUS
SNACKING TRENDS

From health to sustainability and the return of on-the-go, snacking is back in a big way for 2022. Here's how to ensure your selection is hitting the trends

Snacks were a big part of lockdown comfort, as days dragged into weeks and into months, and we were restricted to our own four walls and a daily walk. There was plenty of time to binge-watch during those months of restriction, and indulgent snacking became part of the ritual. As Aline Burgmann, co-founder of dried fruit snacks Kooky puts it, "During the pandemic, snacking was seen as one of life's biggest indulgences and one thing we relied on to break the monotony of lockdown life."

But as we enter the new normal, consumers are purchasing snacks more intentionally and looking for brands and experiences that align with their values without compromising on top-quality taste. This evolution of snacking has sparked innovation across the industry and created new stocking opportunities for indie retailers. It's time to take a fresh look at conscious snacking to discover the products that will keep you bang on trend in the coming months.

Post-pandemic snacking

Coming out of a pandemic that forced everyone to evaluate their health and take precautions to protect it, healthy snacks and challenger brands boomed in popularity, with consumers seeking out more nutritious options.

As Vivien Lambe, co-founder of lentil crisps brand Source of the Earth, explains, "Consumer habits have changed as the pandemic has developed. Access to healthier foods during the pandemic was often not available and while the supermarkets were able to supply the majority of products, many independent outlets were unable to open.

"We saw a massive shift from individual bags to sharing bags, but this has now gone full circle. Coming out the other side of the pandemic, we've seen a shift in consumers being more focused on their health, but they're also price-sensitive due to rising costs."

This is something Aline is acutely aware of in her business. "The pandemic has shifted the spotlight on the importance of health and healthy snacking. Now more than ever, consumers are on the lookout for snacks that are not only delicious, but also high in vitamins, nutrients, and antioxidants, as well as no-added sugar options."

In fact, according to Julia Azevedo, founder of cacao cashew brand KARU, healthy snacks have evolved to become an easy meal for the younger generation. "There is a strong interest in better-for-you snacks which have healthy qualities, such as plant-based protein, minerals, and no allergens, with 65% of consumers saying they make better choices when buying food and beverages (Gutcheck, 2020).

"The pandemic accelerated healthy snacking trends, as well as snacking as a meal replacement. Research published by The Harris Poll/Mondelez shows that 64% of consumers replaced a meal for snacking in 2021. These numbers are even higher if you look at Gen Z and Millennial responders. Having nutritious and indulgent snack options is here to stay.

"That's central to how KARU was developed. Our cashew snacks are meant to be better for you and the planet – while always prioritizing taste and the overall experience."

While fine food is all about quality and taste, consumers are hunting for something nutritious after the pandemic, so hitting the right balance between health and flavour is key when considering brands to stock.

Return of on-the-go

With the world opened up for travel-starved consumers to visit far-flung places once again, the opportunity for snacking is widening. Long journeys require exciting and delicious snacks to ease boredom and provide easy, on-the-go fuel.

According to Vivien, this means "We should also see an increased demand for convenient on-the-go snacks as consumers make short or long-haul trips, hit the gym, resume face to face meetings and eat on the move. Snack packs are handy on-the-go options and while they may have been shelved (literally!) for the past two years and replaced by family packs, they are likely to see a revival of demand."

The return of on-the-go is something Julia expects to see for the foreseeable future, "We believe that after a few years of being at home, cooking and baking, people want to return to the collective experiences, concerts, parks, sharing, and travelling. They are looking for something tasty and innovative in snacking to go with it."

Scott Cooper, managing director of Chika's snacks, adds, "We can already see a clear rebound in convenience channels and on-the-go pack formats. Brands will be redoubling their innovation programmes and extending their on-the-go offerings."



Sustainable credentials

A new sustainability study from Kantar, found that almost half of households (49%) said the Covid-19 pandemic has made sustainability even more important to them. In fact, Kantar predicts that over half of UK households will be eco-actives by 2029, meaning they are shoppers 'highly concerned about the environment' and acting accordingly.

"Conscious consumption is more relevant than ever and many consumers are increasingly educated and are more intentional when it comes to their purchases, aligning consumption patterns with their values", Aline explains. "They are more discerning when it comes to what ingredients are used, where they are sourced from, as well as how they are produced. We believe that people now make concerted decisions to purchase from companies with similar values."

She continues, "Being a member of 1% for the Planet is extremely important to us and our commitment to our children and our customers that we care. We pledge to give 1% of our total sales (not profits) to help fund the many diverse environmental organisations so that collectively, they can be a more formidable source in solving the world's problems in six core areas that include climate, food, land, pollution, water and wildlife."

Vivien also champions creating eco-friendly snacks for the conscious consumer. "We didn't want our snacks to leave a mark on the planet. Single-use plastic is a scourge on our world. Plastic packaging used to be the only available option but







thankfully there are other options available now.

"Consumers are rightly demanding more from the products they purchase, and we wanted to give them a way to make a difference to their health and the planet."

When it comes to who can provide this, consumers trust independent retailers stocking smaller ethical brands with purpose more than larger chains, according to the lastest *EIT Trust Report 2021*. Scott explains, "Consumers are increasingly seeking brands they can trust to deliver on taste, with wholesome, healthier credentials, made with good ingredients, and with a good ethos – a social purpose. Consumers no longer trust large corporate legacy brands to deliver on this, and instead are turning towards authentic and passionate challenger brands."

The future of snacking

The pandemic changed the food industry forever, but great taste was never off the agenda (unless, of course, you experienced loss of taste as a result of contracting Covid-19). As Julia puts it, "The definition of snacking has evolved significantly, and we believe it will continue to change. Snacking is no longer limited to unhealthy foods or consumed only on-the-go."

Aline agreed, adding, "The ever-discerning consumer will be on the lookout for more healthy snacks as opposed to those that are laden with sugar, trans fats or empty calories. They will also be more mindful of the brand's ethics and companies' identities and will take these into account when making decisions, whether shopping online or in-store."

"The long-term trends towards snacking, driven by less formal meal occasions and on-the-go lifestyles, will continue unabated in the years to come", Scott predicts. "We can expect to see continued diversification in brands, increased polarisation across healthier to indulgent brands, and growing premiumisation as consumers demand more from snacks, and brands build 'worth paying more for' credentials. The days of the dull, middle of the road, corporate legacy brands are numbered!"

Vivien concludes, "Consumers are more aware of their health and the planet, and they want to reduce the amount of plastic used in their households. Taste is always going to come first when choosing a snack, but we believe consumers want to know their products come from socially conscious brands who are investing in making a difference."

With consumers already convinced of the benefits of conscious snacking, it's up to retailers across the UK to stock the right products to satisfy the demand.



SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE 2022 STOCK CHECK



PETERS YARD SOUR CREAM & CHIVE SOURDOUGH BITES

Crunchy sourdough bites, made using Peter's Yard's signature sourdough starter, hand-baked and generously seasoned with sour cream and chives.

petersyard.com



PLANT POPS SMOKED CHILLI POPPED LOTUS SEEDS

Hand-harvested and hand popped lotus seeds, roasted in small batches to create a gluten-free and vegan crunchy snack.

plantpopssnacks.com



FAIRFIELDS BACON & TOMATO CRISPS

These Bacon & Tomato crisps are suitable for vegans and gluten-free. Hand cooked using skin-on potato, they have a deep flavour and sweet, tangy finish.

fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk



FOREST FEAST DARK CHOCOLATE MANGO

Forest Feast takes sustainably sourced sweet and juicy dried mango, and fully submerges it in 60% cocoa dark chocolate to create a rich and indulgent treat.

forestfeast.com



FIDDLERS LANCASHIRE CHEESE & ONION CRISPS

A classic combination using genuine Lancashire cheese matured for three months. Delicious on their own or as an accompaniment to a Lancashire cheese ploughman's.

fiddlerslancashirecrisps.co.uk



CAMBROOK SWEET CHILLI PEANUTS & CASHEWS

Deliciously moreish baked peanuts and cashews with a mild spice and sweetness. Now available in fully recyclable packaging for eco-conscious retailers.

cambrookfoods.co.uk



BITES WE LOVE SMOKED PAPRIKA CRUNCHY PEAS

Moreish roasted green peas packed with plant proteins and rich in fibre. The smoked paprika variety is coated with sweet and spicy red pepper for a full, savoury taste that has 60% less fat than vegetable crisps.

biteswelove.com



JOE & SEPH'S WHITE CHOCOLATE AND RASPBERRY POPCORN BITES

An amazing pairing of creamy, melt-in-your-mouth white chocolate, with the fruity zing of gourmet raspberry popcorn. An exceptional combination with a satisfying popcorn crunch.

joeandsephs.co.uk



KARU CACAO CASHEWS

Karu adds a sweet and crunchy twist to your snacking game with hand-roasted cashews coated in cacao and a delicate layer of salted caramel.

karu.co



KOOKY GENTLY DRIED DRAGON FRUIT

This gently dried dragon fruit uses the red variety for its colour and intense flavour and is nutritious as a source of carotene, vitamin C and anthocyanins.

iamkooky.com

COMMENTATORS



SAJID MANZOOR
IMPERIAL FOOD PACKING



SIAN SUTHERLAND
A PLASTIC PLANET



ROB JANERING
CROWE



LEX THORNELY
BLUE GOOSE COFFEE



CATHERINE CHONG
CLEAR



FIDELITY WESTON
CLEAR

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

From greenwashing to sustainability, packaging has certainly experienced challenges over the past few years, but getting it right is fundamental to every sale you make

Packaging and labelling. It's the first thing consumers notice when they look at a retailer's shelves. As Sajid Manzoor, founder of Imperial Food Packing, explains, "Packaging has to attract consumers and give them confidence in the quality of the product inside."

Creating packaging that stimulates the consumer in a visual, auditory and tactile manner is a difficult feat, but it is what fine food is all about. It doesn't just show the customer brand values, it helps a premium product jump off the shelf regardless of the price tag.

But the sector is facing a plethora of new challenges, bringing sustainability, provenance and transparency to the forefront of packaging and labelling considerations. Where does this leave retailers looking to provide their customers with top quality products that also benefit the planet?

The sustainability question

The food industry is undeniably reliant on plastic. From wrapped fruit and vegetables to bottles of juice and sauces, and snack packets, there is plastic everywhere.

As Sian Sutherland, co-founder of A Plastic Planet, explains, "Plastic is the default material for packaging because it is so cheap, the most subsidised material in the world, derived from the most subsidised industry in the world, Big Oil."

It is estimated that five million tonnes of plastic is used in the UK every year – nearly half of which is packaging. In fact, plastic packaging in the UK accounts for nearly 70% of our plastic waste. Plastic doesn't decompose and can last for centuries in landfills, or end up as litter which can pollute rivers, seas, oceans and the land. As a result, the food and drink sector is keen to develop more sustainable options.

In order to tackle a growing tidal wave of plastic, the UK Government introduced the Plastic Packaging Tax (PPT) on 1 April 2022, which is designed to give companies a financial incentive to clean up their act and meet worldwide environmental targets. According to Rob Janering, VAT partner at Crowe, "PPT is a new tax but it hasn't been introduced with an aim to raise significant amounts of tax. Instead, it is a tax that is designed to change behaviours, to help with pushing a green agenda whereby fewer plastics are used to package items.

"We have been helping lots of clients across a variety of industries get to grips with PPT. It has wide-ranging impact because it is taxed at both the stage of final production in the UK and also when imported. This means that manufacturers who make the packaging need to register but also, anybody who imports it – and that, we have found, captures a large number of businesses including lots of retailers."

The government has also passed legislation (Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)) which adds all of the environmental costs associated with a product throughout the product life cycle to the market price of that product. Therefore, the cost of collecting, reprocessing and recycling food packaging waste will be shifted from consumers onto producers themselves. This legislation was recently delayed until 2024 due to producers claiming they would not have enough time to prepare for the changes – much to the dismay of environmental groups such as A Plastic Planet and WRAP.

But despite the delay, EPR will still go ahead alongside PPT, and packaging manufacturers are now facing the challenge of innovating more sustainable packaging. As Sajid explains, "The journey to Net Zero means that packaging has to have as small an environmental footprint as possible. But it is a journey. Our customers are seeking better ways to pack food as they become affordable. More importantly, they need to have the security of a supply chain that complies with any organic or similar provenance requirements promised to the consumer. Our processes are very secure to guarantee that."

Looking to the future

Innovation is ripe in the packaging industry, with inventive eco-friendly alternatives to plastic rising in popularity. As Sian explains, "Plant and fibre-based packaging is an exciting new technology. Packaging by Xampla uses innovative plant protein as an accessible plastic film alternative that is fully degradable with no waste infrastructure needed. Moulded fibre trays and punnets can replace billions of pieces of plastic packaging instantly.

"Algae, natural materials like rubber, cork, rice husk, new fibres like elephant grass and hemp, mycelium – all these natural materials will become part of our packaging future. And yes, they are available today. These material makers now need big brands and retailers to partner with them to accelerate adoption.

"But it is not just technological innovation that will make a difference, we really need to take a step back and reframe how we think about packaging. The 'grab and go' mindset must shift to acknowledging that nothing should be created to be used just once and thrown away."

Aside from sustainable solutions, Sajid believes that brands need flexibility. "The future of retail is hybrid, with consumers buying in-store, wanting delivery from a local store or simply picking out a product on their phone. Light, robust, environmentally friendly and affordable solutions are what everyone is seeking." As retail evolves, so will the packaging industry.



One brand that was founded to tackle the problem of environmentally unfriendly packaging is Blue Goose Coffee. "The business was born in 2017 having seen first-hand the horrific amount of waste being created by aluminium and plastic coffee capsules", says co-founder Lex Thornely.

"We wanted to create a more sustainable alternative for British coffee pod lovers so our packaging has been plant-based and plastic-free from the start, with no aluminium either due to the environmental







damage that mining Bauxite causes and the subsequent carbon cost in transforming it into aluminium.

"Highlighting our sustainability credentials from launch was, therefore, an absolute must, to achieve standout and a formidable USP. Little did we know David Attenborough's *Blue Planet* was just around the corner, with the resulting awareness of the global plastic problem helping supercharge our efforts and totally justifying our commitment to plastic-free pod alternatives", he adds.

The issue with labelling

There are perhaps even more issues at play when it comes to labelling. In October 2021, new legislation came into force, requiring food businesses and manufacturers to include a full list of ingredients on pre-packed food to better inform and protect allergy sufferers. Dubbed 'Natasha's Law', it followed the death of teenager Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, who died following an allergic reaction after inadvertently eating undeclared sesame seeds in a Pret a Manger sandwich.

Adjusting to this new labelling law has been difficult for both producers, and retailers with on-site bakeries, restaurants or delis as it requires full ingredient lists to be provided with the 14 major allergens highlighted on food that is packaged on the same site where it is sold to customers, according to the Food Standards Agengy. But it is vitally important to safeguard the two million people in the UK living with a food allergy, especially as allergy-related hospital admissions are on the rise.

But allergen labelling isn't the only thing that consumers are looking for in 2022. They want clearer labelling that informs them of the environmental and social impact of the product, as well as the story behind the brand. As Catherine Chong, ESG expert and communications and engagement strategy lead for CLEAR, explains, "We are seeing different market forces affecting the labelling industry. Two particularly strong ones are consumers demanding more sustainable products and being more aware of greenwashing, and interest groups including investors asking for environmental, social, and governance (ESG) information and demanding food companies to communicate their plans and actions to join the net-zero greenhouse gas commitment. These forces are driving an increasing interest in environmental impact information on food labels."

Fidelity Weston, the chair of CLEAR, added, "The confusion to the customer caused by the proliferation of voluntary labels, many of which are not audited or backed up by real-life data, causing mistrust and cynicism from many consumers. We need one common standard based on data from the farm right through the processing system to point of sale."



SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING FAQS



Jack Wallman, food innovation technologist at The Food Innovation Centre at the University of Nottingham, shares his labelling and packaging tips

WHAT OPTIONS ARE THERE FOR INCREASING SUSTAINABILITY?

It's not always straightforward. Often the packaging option with the lowest carbon footprint is a plastic, which we know isn't the most sustainable option. If you want to reduce the environmental impact of your packaging, you can reduce the packaging size, set up a packaging return scheme and use materials that are recyclable or biodegradable.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING?

The cost of adoption of the new generation, or greener, packaging is one of the big challenges for manufacturers, who might potentially need to invest significantly in new machinery and production facilities. Consumers generally want reduced or more sustainable packaging and the majority are willing to pay more for those options, according to numerous studies. Research also indicates that sustainable packaging is now a major factor when making a purchasing decision for many consumers. Another barrier is the trade-off between sustainability and other concerns including shelf life and aesthetics.

HOW ARE PRODUCERS REDUCING THEIR PACKAGING?

In the past, larger packet sizes were attractive to consumers but now consumers care more about sustainability, so many producers tend to make the packaging smaller while keeping the contents the same quantity or size. One way to remove packaging entirely is refill. Consumers take their own tubs into a shop to fill from a hopper – this is growing in popularity. Prefill is another option where consumers take packaging back to the shop which then gets returned to the manufacturer for reuse.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF PACKAGING?

Smart food packages are being developed with the potential to offer active solutions to keep food safer, high-quality and to reduce waste. Active components, such as moisture absorbers or antioxidants for example, are being incorporated into the packaging to maintain or extend product quality and shelf-life. Intelligent packaging to monitor the condition of the food during transport and storage is also being developed. Current cutting-edge packaging concepts include paper bottles and edible packaging made from products like seaweed.

Greenwashing is something Sian has also recognised in the labelling sector. "'Recyclable' has to be the weasel word of the 21st century. It gets the brand off the responsibility hook – 'but we make it from a technically recyclable material – it isn't our problem really that the infrastructure is not there'.

"Selling something that is made from 'recycled plastic' is equally misleading. And then what? Back in the bin, back in the broken recycling system? When you know that less than 10% of our plastic is recycled in the UK and over 60% is exported to other countries, you realise that something made from recycled plastic is actually just another version of greenwash."

In order to truly have ethical credentials, retailers need to be vigilant about the labelling of the products they stock and the claims they make. According to Sian, "To identify greenwashing, the question retailers need to ask themselves is, "what is the second life of this product/packaging? How is this going to be disposed of?" When products are wrapped in single-use plastic, for example, and created to be thrown immediately in the bin, they can never honestly be labelled as environmentally friendly.

"Retailers have enormous power and they need to use it to accelerate change. It is not good enough today to expect your customers to try and discern a better thing to buy. People buy what they are sold. It is the retailer and brand's job to sell them something different. And of course, it is our government's job to mandate that they do that fast."

The value of provenance

Labelling that tells the story of the food product is so important for independent retail because, according to Catherine, "Provenance is synonymous with fine food." The prospect of a story behind a product is something that entices a customer into aligning with the brand, and could make all the difference when it comes to sales.

Catherine concludes, "People are increasingly aware that place-of-origin does not tell the full story of provenance. We are seeing a great interest in information on the issues of soil health, ecosystem biodiversity, community regeneration and more are part of the fine food storytelling.

"So, there are still a lot of growth opportunities for the voluntary labelling industry. What we really need now is the government sending very strong signals to the market that there will be cross-department policies that encourage traceability, transparency, and innovation across the food supply chain."





THE RISE OF ENGLISH WINE

With its quality and sustainable credentials, the British wine scene is a ripe opportunity for indies, finds Samantha Priestley

COMMENTATORS



CHARLES AND RUTH SIMPSON
SIMPSON'S WINE ESTATE



JACKIE WILKS
TERLINGHAM WINES



JONICA FOX
FOX & FOX



HENRY CONNELL & ALEX THRAVES
THE UNCOMMON

It's not that long ago that English wine was thought of as being below the standards of European wines, and those wines from other sunnier climates. People in England didn't really buy or drink English wine because, well, surely we couldn't make decent wine on this cloudy island.

But all of that has changed. Part of this is down to customer perception. Years ago, British people simply didn't think of trying English wine, but overtime more and more people have been giving it a go and finding out it's actually really good. This shift has been especially weighty since the pandemic. The emphasis on buying and staying local has prompted people who usually look to the Continent to look to home instead. Customers have become more interested in sourcing locally produced food and drink in order to contribute to a healthy climate. Which brings us to the irony of the climate issue where wine is concerned.

A double-edged sword

Those preconceived ideas of English wine as being difficult to produce because of our climate weren't completely wrong. Though most English wine grapes are grown in the south where the weather is much sunnier, it is still difficult at times.

"The British climate is the biggest challenge," say Charles and Ruth Simpson, of Simpson's Wine Estate. "We always knew that the biggest hazard for our vineyards is frost, the devastating effects of which were experienced in 2017 and 2020, when we lost a significant percentage of the expected crop. On those occasions, the warmer spring temperatures brought forward bud burst on the vines, however it then gave way to cold weather fronts and hence the frost, burning and irreparably damaging the buds. In contrast, the wet and humid summer of 2021 provided a different challenge, that of mildew, which can be equally devastating if not kept under control."

The recent warming of global temperatures is, of course, a bad thing and something those ethically minded consumers are trying to address by buying locally, but it has also meant English wine can be produced with a little less of those weather barriers. This is especially true for red wine, which was once too difficult to produce in our colder climate, but is now really taking off, being produced more frequently and to a much higher standard.

"In recent years, average temperatures have risen which increasingly allows us to make great still wines, as well as the more traditional sparkling wines," says Jackie Wilks, co-founder of Terlingham Wines. "We grow cool climate Bacchus, Rondo and Dornfelder grapes, and if we get a very hot summer we can make a red such as our 2018 Caesar's Camp – this is always very exciting!"



The Simpsons agree, but also see other reasons for the rising popularity of English wine. "A lot of people talk about climate change as being the only reason that any wine can be successfully produced in the UK. There has undoubtedly been a slight shift in temperature, which means that England now has similar temperatures to that of Champagne 60 years ago, however successful wine production is still only possible on very specific sites within the UK as we are still on the very fringes of viable viticulture. We would put England's recent wave of winemaking success more down to the move towards the more noble grape varieties (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir & Meunier) in addition to increasing expertise of how to grow and make wines in this challenging climate."

This ability to adapt, not only to a changing climate, but to other grape varieties that might suit our land better, has certainly been the key to success in British winemaking. But there has been one curve ball that vineyards in the UK are still grappling with. Brexit has caused a shortage in labour.



> “English winemakers are passionate about producing top quality wines that give British people the option to buy British. In the year of the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations, there’s perhaps no better time to be making and drinking English wine”

> “The rise in popularity of natural wines and pure wines has shifted winemaking to a place of being much more organic, which seems to suit English winemakers very well”

“Weather and labour costs and labour availability are top of our list of issues,” says Jonica Fox from Fox & Fox. “The usual challenges of business, regulation and compliance come behind them.”

But wherever there is a cloud there is a rainbow, and winemakers have a lot of sunshine coming their way in the form of increasing demand.

“Over the past few years, the sales of English wine have skyrocketed,” Charles Simpson says, “with an increase in interest attributed to supply shortages and rise in price and complexity of EU wine importing costs due to Brexit and also the global pandemic. Conversely this has presented opportunities for the domestic export market and English wine is now making its mark across the globe, including Scandinavia, Japan, Canada and Australia.”

Sustainability is key

As consumers try to source their food and drink more locally, they also want to know products are being made as ethically and sustainably as possible. At The Uncommon, Henry Connell and Alex Thraves have made their wines available in cans only. A bold move, and one which speaks to a generation of recyclers. If you thought glass was more recyclable than cans, it turns out it isn’t.

“There is a common misconception that glass is recyclable,” says Henry. “It is not. It’s only recyclable a maximum of 2.5 times and degrades easily because it’s so fragile. Glass is made from sand, one of the most abundant compounds on the planet, so it’s very cheap and very easy to make. The issue is that it’s far easier and far cheaper to make more glass than it is to recycle existing glass. That explains why about 65% of all glass made ends up in landfill and it takes one million years to break down. Glass is heavy, breaks easily and it takes a long time and a lot of energy to cool down. If you do away with the bottle you can also do away with the bulky single use materials used to protect it.”

Their cans of wine are beautifully designed and appeal to younger customers who also buy cans of G&T and sip them at picnics and barbeques. But it’s not only because they look pretty and reduce our carbon footprint. Henry explains there are taste benefits to producing these wines in a can.

“Our sparkling wines are fresh and aromatic and made to be drunk young. The can keeps out air and light so that they are fresher for longer.”

When it comes down to it, it is the taste that really matters. English winemakers are passionate about producing top quality wines that give British people the option to buy British. In the year of the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations, there’s perhaps no better time to be making and drinking English wine. Charles and Ruth Simpson note that British winemaking and viticulture now employs more people than arable farming, making this industry a truly British one. It’s also an industry that is still very much hands on.

“We do an immense amount of work by hand,” says Jonica Fox, “positioning the vine leaves and fruit to get the best sunlight and air circulation. We take off all the small bunches early on to drive the vine’s energy into ripening the fruit we leave on the vine. It’s painstaking work.”

There’s also a drive to go through each process as naturally as possible, which is challenging at times, but also vitally important to most English winemakers. Jackie explains: “As we’re a natural vineyard, we have the added challenge of not using chemical fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides etc. We also don’t use ripening agents, so we really are at the mercy of mother nature. Sea breezes help to manage disease, particularly mildew, but at the same time they can also lower our average temperatures, so they can slow the ripening down if we have a period of very cold weather.”

It’s something Jonica Fox understands well. From their vineyard in east Sussex, Fox & Fox focuses on vine nutrition and keeps the use of protective sprays to a minimum. “We encourage insect and birdlife by leaving headland grasses and wildflowers to bloom,” she says.

“Our vineyard year starts with bud formation in March, moves through first shoots in April, followed by flowering, and fruit-set around the same time as Wimbledon. Harvest varies according to the year but is typically early to mid-October.”

It’s a process and a mindset that travels all the way through the winemaking process, from start to finish. “Just as we take care in the vineyard, we do the same in the winery,” says Jonica. “We believe in minimal manipulation to let the grapes speak for themselves. That means we use time instead of mechanical processes like filtration, we avoid what is known as malolactic fermentations which can reduce the acidity and we don’t filter our wines either.”

Keeping those ethical consumers in mind, all of Fox & Fox’s wines are vegan and certified as such by the Vegan Society. They do this particularly to be inclusive and see this as ensuring all consumers can enjoy their wines, no matter where you stand on diet. The rise in popularity of natural wines and pure wines has shifted winemaking to a place of being much more organic, which seems to suit English winemakers very well.

“For us, our whole focus is to make the wine that mother nature allows us to make each year,” says Ruth. “We’re not trying to create perfect consistency year after year, but rather we want to put the year we had in the vineyard in a bottle. So, we love the fact that some years are warmer, some are rainier, some favour some varieties of grape over others, it makes each of our vintages special and unique.”

Every wine tells a story

There’s certainly something about the stories being told by English wine that is capturing the imagination of customers.

From The Uncommon’s uncommon cans of wine, that fit beautifully on the shelves of any small business, to the growing range in English wine varieties. Jonica Fox recommends a selection based on style – table wine, dessert wine, speciality wine, and sparkling wine – as well as a selection based on grape or blend.

She also notes that wines in clear bottles are more vulnerable to light, while those in green or black bottles are better protected.

This fascination with the details of how our produce is made and stored is perhaps a sign of a return to simpler times for many people. Following the pandemic, paying attention to our local area and what happens there has shifted into the forefront of many people’s minds, and this net is cast to all areas of our lives.

“Since 2020, consumers have shifted their focus to supporting local, with a greater interest in understanding how products are made and the ethos of their associated brands,” says Ruth Simpson.

“This has filtered through to the hospitality industry, who are keen to stock English wines and with such a diverse range on wines on offer, there are many different styles to pair perfectly with local produce.”

The range in English wine is only going to keep growing, as producers win awards for their wines and prove that the old days of English wine being below par are well and truly over. English wines can now compete all over the world, and they do, and it’s the right time for them to be loved the most in the place they were born.

“The wonderful thing about English wine, in addition to the incredible quality, is that it is so varied,” says Jackie, “and most of the producers are small, independent companies with a real passion for what they do. So you have the opportunity to find producers with very special and unique stories which will really resonate with customers and create an unbeatable USP.”

Most of all, the rise of English wine is a very English story. A story of working with our hands, using the ingredients that grow on our land, and adding a touch of quirkiness here and there. And it’s a story that’s only just beginning.



FINAL CALL

I had hoped that by the time I would write my second column, the devastating war in Ukraine would be resolved, but unfortunately, I am once again expressing my compassion for those seeking refuge and laying down their lives to defend their country.

Britain is facing a growing cost of living crisis, with inflation rates confirmed today as 9%, the highest they have been in 40 years. Independent retailers are simply unable to absorb these increased costs so something has got to give – either consumer prices go up or the government gives aid.

The cost-of-living crisis is set to affect us all, regardless of income, but those less fortunate and small independent businesses will need all the help they can get. The government is simply not doing enough and we all need to band together, both as an industry and as local communities, to get through the coming months.

Brexit is still wreaking havoc on the entire supply chain, as a fourth delay to import checks was announced in May, with intent to implement new checks at the end of 2023, in line with its plans for a new digitized border control strategy. Businesses have spent countless amounts on preparing for the implementation of these new checks, so the continual delays have been a significant blow to importers.

But there is a literal patch of green on the other side of the fence, as Soil Association has announced that nature-friendly farming is on the rise in the UK, with land going through a conversion to organic rising by 34% in 2021. With 75% of Brits motivated to live a more sustainable life, this is good news for fine food retailers championing eco-friendly produce and of course, for the state of our planet.

As we all metaphorically hunker down over the summer, we need to find reasons to be cheerful and make sure we are supporting each other. Check-in with your customers this month to see how they are doing – you never know who could be struggling and what difference a smile makes.

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

5 MINUTES WITH

NIDHI VERMA, FOUNDER OF FOOD PLATFORM AND RECIPE BOX BRAND THE COOKAWAY



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I guess if it wasn't for my exciting food career then I would have been pursuing my marketing career.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
One of my earliest jobs was working within the loans department for a bank before I went on to pursue my masters in marketing.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Meeting and following people's fascinating culinary journeys as chefs, restauranteurs, writers, and experts on cuisines is awe inspiring and electrifying. Exploring all the possibilities for telling these stories as part of The Cookaway offering, planning and launching new cuisines and offerings and thinking about all the exciting things I want to do next.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
When I graduated as a mechanical engineer, I landed a job working at a fridge manufacturing company. To be the only female working on a shop floor with hundreds of men was a very interesting experience to say the least.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
I love that it combines two of my greatest passions – people and food!

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
Tracking CPA/CPM/SEO and digital marketing analytics are not my strengths.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
With new trends, technologies and innovations happening constantly, the food industry really keeps you on your toes.

TEA OR COFFEE?
I'm a chai addict and can't go without a cup of masala chai on any given day, so I'll have to say tea.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
I am a true Punjabi (North Indian) and would love to be served one of my favourite comfort foods 'Kadhi Chawal' i.e., Yoghurt Turmeric Curry served with rice.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
Keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground!

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
Ice-cream with Coca Cola is probably the strangest – and not for me!

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
I'm currently enjoying discovering Greek food through MasterChef Winner Irini Tzortzoglou's *Under the Olive Tree*. Irini has just come on board to develop the Greek recipes for The Cookaway.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Savoury for me please!



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TRIED & TESTED



SHARPHAM PARK ORGANIC NAKED OATS AND SPELT DRINK

We've had almond milk, pea milk, cashew milk and even potato milk emerge over the past few years. But have you tried spelt milk yet? Sharpham Park has recently launched a duo of spelt milks perfect for any milk occasion including tea and coffee, porridge, cereal and smoothies. My favourite of the two, Organic Naked Oats and Spelt, is a combination of oats and spelt which creates a naturally sweet and creamy dairy-free milk alternative for those with dietary needs or lifestyle choices.

sharphampark.com

OATSU OVERNIGHT OATS

Anything that makes my morning routine a bit simpler gets a thumbs up from me, and if it adds a level of deliciousness even more so. With full-on weekdays the norm and being office-based more than I have been for two years, tasty and convenient are the buzzwords I look out for on a daily basis – and Oatsu delivers both with style. Available in four flavours: Choc Peanut, Blueberry, Apple & Cinnamon and Banana Biscoff, these overnight oats pack a flavour punch with zero effort. Perfect for professionals returning to the office, as well as porridge-lovers prepping for the summer.



oatsu.co.uk

PEAK NOOTROPIC DRINKS

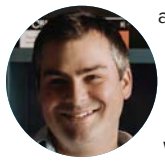
Functional drinks have had a bad rap in recent years, and for good reason. Powered by high levels of sugar, the energy drinks of old contain little to no nutrition of merit, which is why the functional evolution of energy and moost-boosting drinks seen today is so exciting. PEAK is the perfect example. Fuelled with botanicals and recognisable functional ingredients such as black pepper, turmeric and ashwagandha, its two variants – Pink Grapefruit Mint and Raspberry Lime – are not only filled with natural lift but are gently carbonated for extra refreshment. Perfect for the warmer months ahead.



peakmoods.com

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Tom Tsappis, chef patron of Killiecrankie House



Killiecrankie House is a fine dining restaurant with rooms located in Highland Perthshire, on the edge of the picturesque Cairngorms National Park. The property is set in four acres of woodland, with a kitchen garden supplying the restaurant with seasonal produce. The restaurant serves a tasting menu of innovative Scottish cuisine that celebrates the cultural and gastronomic bounty of the country. There are also five beautiful bedrooms for those looking to stay the night, with guests receiving a gourmet breakfast in the morning.

We make full use of the produce that is available locally and are constantly looking for new producers with interesting things we can use in the kitchen and bar. In Perthshire there is a huge directory of makers and producers whom we have visited and forged relationships with since we opened last year.

We change our menu to utilise the very best seasonal produce and ingredients. We partner with Perthshire Wild Food for foraging various produce such as herbs and mushrooms found in the surrounding woods. We've even found ways to incorporate foraged ingredients into our drinks offering, for example we have a Bramble cocktail that makes use of the Ribena-like flowering currant that's growing in the garden. The various bread and pastries that guests eat for breakfast are from Wild Hearth Bakery in Crieff. We use Perth-based George Campbell for our Scottish seafood, with Argyll oysters being used in our Drunken Oyster dish (itself inspired but the repopulation of oysters in the Dornoch Firth by Glenmorangie Distillery), and wild halibut caught off the Shetland isles for our Shetland Skink dish. A neighbouring estate supply us with trout and game.

We have also found some brilliant drinks producers nearby. For example, the local brewery Wasted Degrees, based in Blair Atholl. We've partnered with them to create our very own beer that can only be found at Killiecrankie House and paired with our Squid Cooked in its Own Ink dish. The spent grain from the beer-making process is also used to make buns to go alongside our beer-poached asparagus dish on the menu currently. All our coffee is from the award-winning Glen Lyon Roastery in Aberfeldy. We also stock some wonderful kombucha from Bad Gal Boocha, who are based in Cupar and which features in our non-alcoholic drinks pairing. A lot of these connections have come through word of mouth, and it is wonderful to be a part of the burgeoning foodie scene in the area. The next step for us in terms of produce that demonstrate a real sense of place is to get our kitchen garden bearing fruit (literally) – you can't get much more local than that!

> "We make full use of the produce that is available locally and are constantly looking for new producers with interesting things we can use in the kitchen and bar"

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Garofalo



A SUMMER TWIST ON ITALIAN CUISINE

Showcase the freshest vibrant dishes this summer and your customers will be enjoying alfresco Italian meals at home

After two years of restrictions, the nation is ready to embrace the outdoors and share food across social occasions again. Food is the language of love, and according to history, so is Italian. From pizzas cooked outdoors in brand new pizza ovens to fresh pastas whipped up with speciality sauces, the pandemic offered a chance for many Brits to remember what it is they love about Italian food.

No one does summer with quite so much sophistication and flair as the Italians, so it's the perfect time for independents to stir up this passion for Italian cuisine once again. Just the thought of summertime in Italy conjures up images of pastel-coloured houses along azure seas, bustling markets with seasonal produce, aperol spritzes being enjoyed in sun-trap piazzas and windows full of rows of gelato.

Revitalising your Italian offering for summer can help bring vibrant sauces and fresh ingredients back to the fore. As soon as the sun emerges, your customers will be looking for refreshing, summer flavours, like nutty basil pesto and creamy mozzarella. Sourcing local seasonal veg grown in the UK such as courgettes, aubergines, tomatoes and rocket will also help customers add a local British twist to their favourite Italian dishes.

For those particularly hands-on customers, why not sell pasta kits complete with everything they need to craft their own alfresco pasta dinner from scratch, such as Italian 00 flour and semolina, a pasta maker and ravioli stamps. Moreover, providing all the ingredients needed to create authentic wood-fired pizzas in their gardens will have customers flocking to your store. For the more time-conscious, take a fresh look at your dried pastas and risottos as well as flavour-packed, stir-in sauces to ensure your shop offers something different to the multiples this summer.

The warmer months are a great time to fall in love with Italian cuisine, as simple, fresh and vibrant ingredients are at its core. Feel the warm embrace of pizza, pasta and risottos and get ready for a summer of love.

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



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Frederick Kampman | Lowlanders Botanical Beers Co

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www.specialityandfinefoodfairs.co.uk

