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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the June issue of *Speciality Food*, where summer is well and truly in full swing.

This issue we've honed in on the glory of a well-stocked pantry. A boon to both retailers and consumers, a cupboard full to the brim with an array of delicious food is a pleasure like no other; and in 2025 it offers an opportunity for fine food independents to really shine.

We all know the power of provenance, and pantry essentials are a great place to start. From pasta hailing from the heart of Italy to flour that brings local communities together, the storecupboard is a cornucopia of potential for foodies who love a story.

Speaking of which, we're proud to share the winners of our Regional Stars project in this issue, too. Alongside Speciality & Fine Food Fair, we've travelled the length and breadth of the UK to uncover 25 food and drink businesses whose locale runs through their veins. These regional stars are prime examples of what this great nation is capable of when it comes to food and drink: truly excellent produce created with love in support of their community.

I hope you enjoy.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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Should independents be worried about supermarket's 'farm shop' initiative?

Is imitation the greatest form of flattery when it comes to retail? *Speciality Food* reports

All eyes are on supermarket giant Morrisons as it enacts the next part of its 'Morrisons Magic' plan (led by new trading director Andrew Staniland) with a view to tap into the success of Britain's farm shop retailing model.

In addition to streamlining its offering by removing several hundred SKUs, the move seeks to mimic the 'feel' of an independent, with the 126-year-old business upgrading its Market Street proposition to pull focus on premium prepared foods, and produce it says will be "a celebration of the quality of great British-farmed food".

For some, this will have ruffled feathers – independent retail is hard enough without multiples and their 'bigger pockets' invading on their territory.

Others though, say they view the changes as a form of flattery, adding they're not worried, and even going so far as to reveal they think their own sales could be bolstered as a result.

Keep the 'local' message strong

A staunch advocate of championing local produce, Mark Kacary of The Norfolk Deli, said he thinks the shake-up at Morrisons has come as a result of the business being "caught somewhat in a no man's land" and doubts it will impact indies who have so much more to offer their customers.

"I'm sure they have witnessed the proliferation of farm shops and thought to themselves 'what a good idea – we could turn part of our shop into a farm shop with the appropriate twee props, add a few items that look artisan, throw the word deli at any product that looks suitable hoping it will give it extra kudos, and maybe even give the staff a straw hat and stripy apron to complete the look'," Mark said.

Farm shops are though, he points out, more than an aesthetic, they're about "being an extension of a farm, allowing the farm to sell its meat or dairy, cheese and even fruit and veg directly to the public, giving them the opportunity to buy food that is grown locally, and thereby contributing directly to the local economy. It is the food of the region, and not food of a certain type."

While those who've never set foot in a farm shop may well be fooled, Mark doesn't think Morrisons' new direction will affect regular independent customers, who are looking for a genuinely different experience when they buy their food and drink. The niche, cool, inventive small brands which thrive in farm shops and delis often can't and have no desire to expand their operations to satisfy the demands of a supermarket, he explained – especially when they can be delisted in an instant.

A question of stock

The main issue independents have, said Paul Hargreaves, CEO of Cotswold Fayre and Flourish food halls, is that sometimes products from smaller brands go into multiples so cheap that independents can buy them at a lower price in the supermarket than from a wholesaler.

However, if anything, seeing these brands in a supermarket can have a positive knock-on effect on independent sales, particularly if exclusive arrangements are put in place – ie. the multiple takes two products from a line, with farm shops given access to the rest of a range.

"The best thing for us," Paul continued, "is when a supermarket takes on a brand for six months then delists it. It does a great job of raising their profile, and when customers find they can buy those products elsewhere, it does wonders for indies."

The public won't be fooled

"All this is doing is papering over the cracks. Members of the public are more canny than we might think," Paul added, talking about Morrisons' changes, likening them to a form of farmwashing. "Customers these days are savvy enough to realise whether they're walking into an authentic farm retail business, or something that's just marketing spin."

Emma Mosey, chair of the Farm Retail Association (FRA) and co-director of Yolk Farm in Yorkshire, agrees, and actually thinks it's "great" that a larger retailer is taking inspiration from farm shops.

"But there are a couple of areas where they will never be able to offer the same things we do – they would be customer service, and changing the displays and merchandising regularly to introduce local products on a rolling basis. That retail ethos can't be achieved in a supermarket. It's fine for them to try it, but it's highly unlikely they can compete because of our ability to deal with local suppliers in a more transparent and wholesome manner," she said.

Interestingly, Yolk Farm is situated just minutes from a Morrisons superstore, and Emma finds it's a benefit. Customers will, she explained, head there to do their weekly 'big shop', knowing they can pop over to the farm shop for "nice bits" on their way home.

"My advice for others would be that we don't view the shopping experience as the same as a farm shop. We're all about being the experience itself, as well as offering local produce and really good quality products. Shopping with us is about so much more than food."

Farm shops and delis, Emma added, need to hone in on what makes them unique, and harness the power of that. "Supermarkets are good at making things look like what we're doing, but it doesn't hoodwink the customer!"



What is the future of plant-based products?

The plant-based market has been much maligned in recent years. In 2023, £1 billion was spent on meat and dairy-free alternatives in the UK – a figure that has dipped according to GFI Europe, as retailers anecdotally report a drop in sales.

Largely to blame, say experts, is greater recognition of the impact of heavily processed foods on their diets by consumers, who are looking more closely at labelling to discover how natural and 'clean' the products in their baskets are.

So, what can brands do to attract and retain the attention of the nation's 2.1% vegans, 5% vegetarians and 12% flexitarians currently shopping in Britain?

A new Consumer Horizon Report from Vypr has some answers.

The study, which analysed responses from more than 2,000 people, identified two key groups of consumers. Open Omnivores are less committed to reducing meat intake, but open to trying alternatives, while Active Meat Reducers are consciously cutting down on meat and dairy, proving to be more au fait with plant-based brands and ingredients, motivated by concerns for animal welfare and their health. These tend to be women over 25, and men between the ages of 25 to 34.

Vypr's report details that two-thirds of UK shoppers already buy plant-based products, but a huge 89% cited at least one barrier to purchase. Two of the most significant barriers were high levels of processing (mostly concerning women aged 55 to 64), and a perception of lack of flavour and blandness (cited by mostly males over 65).

Ben Davies, founder of product intelligence platform Vypr, said, "Some of consumers' concerns are perception issues and others are real product development challenges. Brands often market to all flexitarians as one group. But these two audiences have distinct awareness levels, motivations, and concerns. One group needs education and inspiration; the other is looking for better quality, less processed choices.

"Brands that succeed in this space won't be the ones shouting the loudest about being vegan. They'll be the ones who offer clarity for the two audience groups and take on board feedback about improving taste, simplifying labels or reducing processing."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In order to enhance sales and navigate changing consumer desires, plant-based brands and retailers have some work to do, Vypr says.

- To attract Open Omnivores, they must focus on improving flavour, making their products more visually appealing and vibrant.
- NPD must go into reducing heavy processing of ingredients, cleaning up labels, and making products as natural as possible to fit in with the desires of both categories of consumer.
- More should be done to capitalise on the health benefits of certain products, from promoting protein levels on-pack, to highlighting concentrations of nutrients and how they can can be incorporated into a balanced diet.

UK continues to champion Spanish food and drink



The value of food and drink exports from Spain to the UK reached €5.1 billion in 2024, making Britain the country's fifth largest non-EU export destination.

To mark this milestone, 21 Spanish producers are set to showcase their food and drink at the Taste Spain London 2025 event, hosted by Foods and Wines from Spain and Alimentos de España at The View, London on 25th June.

The trade-only event connects leading businesses with buyers from the retail, hospitality and foodservice sectors, including importers, distributors and independent specialists.

Visitors will have the opportunity to find out more about (and sample) produce including Ibérico, DOP Teruel, and other hams, a range of cheeses such as Manchego, olives and olive oils, gourmet condiments and spices, preserved vegetables, breads, sweet foods, and more.

"This is a must-attend event for UK food and drink professionals to explore the incredible range of quality Spanish products on offer," said Fernando Muñoz, director of the Food, Wine & Gastronomy Department at Embassy of Spain in London. "There is real momentum in the UK market, and Taste Spain London 2025 will allow buyers to connect with the producers who will help them bring new lines to customers and develop this business further still."

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Public demands action on plastic waste

British consumers are becoming increasingly angered by supermarkets' plastic use, according to new research from Nature 2030.

Nearly 80% of those surveyed said they felt supermarkets still have too much single-use plastic in their businesses, with 69% adding that they felt profits were put before reducing environmental impact.

It's estimated that UK supermarkets generate, on average, 30 billion pieces of plastic waste each year – more than France, Germany and Spain.

Plastic bottles account for a large portion of this figure, with Government data suggesting more than 12 billion of them were sold across the UK in 2024.

Greater scrutiny, those surveyed said, needs to be applied to retail giants to ensure they're not just paying lip service to their sustainability credentials. This comes as a study by the Environmental Investigation Agency found 70% of soft plastic collected through Sainsbury's and Tesco's take-back schemes was incinerated, rather than recycled.

A Plastic Planet and Plastic Health Council co-founder, Sian Sutherland, said our "plastic crisis" can no longer be ignored. "Supermarkets are turning a blind eye to the mountains of waste they produce each year, and they will not clean up their act alone; ministers must legislate."

While the introduction of a deposit return scheme (DRS) is welcomed, Sian thinks this is "a drop in the ocean". "Plastic production is set to rise exponentially, and beverage containers are a fraction of plastic waste. If we are to see any real change, wholesale reduction in the production of plastic is desperately needed for the health of not only the planet, but our bodies."

"For too long, we have acknowledged the plastic crisis without taking meaningful steps to address it," commented Polly Billington, Labour MP for East Thanet and Commons Net Zero Committee member. "While the public grows increasingly concerned about the health impacts of mountains of unrecycled waste, supermarkets continue to generate millions of tonnes of unnecessary plastic packaging each year, leaving it to our already over-stretched councils to clean-up our beaches and natural beauty spots."

The DRS is a start, she conceded, adding that we need comprehensive change from businesses to drive genuine reduction in plastic production.

New research shows the realities of producing more with less

European farmers can produce significantly more food for less by transitioning to regenerative agriculture, compared to average conventional practices, a new landmark study launched this month by the European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture (EARA) shows. The proof-of-concept study is funded by EIT Food – the world's largest agrifood innovation network.

It benchmarks 78 regenerative farms in 14 countries, covering more than 7,000 hectares, against neighbouring and national average conventional farmers, with researchers saying the results demonstrate that Europe's food security does not need to be dependent on high-input chemical practices.

They add that climate resilience, food security, improved economic returns for farmers and for the whole food supply chain as a whole, are not only possible through regenerating forms of agriculture, but achievable, while also supplying the crucial foundations of climate adaptation for the whole of European society.

Key findings include that between 2020 and 2023 regenerative farmers achieved, on average, 1% lower yields while using 62% less synthetic nitrogen fertiliser and 76% less pesticides per hectare, while from 2018 to 2024, 15% higher photosynthesis, soil cover and plant diversity was recorded.

"The Green Revolution can be put to the dustbin of history," said Simon Kraemer, executive director of EARA, and lead author of the study. "The fourth agricultural revolution is here, led by farmers joining forces with nature, relearning ancient wisdom and holistic world views, combined with the newest science and autonomy-enhancing technology."

Dr Theodor Friedrich, an independent review of the study, said it shows regenerative agriculture, if correctly implemented, is more than a buzzword. "Instead, it is a pathway towards an agriculture which can feed the world and be at the same time sustainable in all three dimensions – social, environmental and economic."

Brits want to shake up snack time

A recent survey, commissioned by Cheez-It, shows British snackers are keen to switch-up what goes into their baskets – though not at the expense of forgetting their favourite products.

The research demonstrated that while consumers are on the hunt for shiny new products to try, they are surprisingly loyal to the brands and products they already love.

Although three out of 10 people asked said they were bored with their current snacking situation, 24% admitted they'd been buying the same snack for at least a decade. A third of these (32%) said it was for comfort, 22% for convenience, 18% through fear of being disappointed, and 11% admitted they were in a 'snack rut'. Interestingly, 10% of those asked said they didn't waver from their usual choice because there was too much choice available to them.

Other key findings included that:

- 77% felt they were on autopilot when they buy snacks.
- 34% wanted to break free from their current snacking cycle.
- 32% admitted to eating the same snack up to five times per week, some up to seven times.
- 50% felt having a snack was something exciting to look forward to during the day.
- 16% thought it was 'cheating' to deviate from their usual snack, but it gives them a 'thrill' to try something new.
- When it comes to exploring within the snacking world, those asked were more likely to switch from their familiar favourite to sample a limited-edition flavour (22%) or products offering extra crunch (20%).

Here are just a few ways retailers can encourage their customers to get out of their snacking comfort zone:

● Sampling
Being able to sample products is the best (and most tried and tested) way of encouraging shoppers to explore something new to them . Whether it's a recent launch, an unusual flavour profile, something whacky (crunchy insect snacks) or a brand you've stocked for a long time which you feel needs a bit of promotional love, handing out testers gives your customers the opportunity to decide if they really like something before parting with their cash, giving them the confidence to buy.

● Spark up a bit of competition
Gamify snack buying by encouraging shoppers to vote for their favourites (from a chosen few) in a social poll. Putting promotions on a variety of included products is a fun way to create engagement, while shining a spotlight on the breadth of your range.

● Encourage snack switching
While some will never be fully swayed away from their most loved brands, they might be open to switching between their usual option and something different. A nice merchandising idea in store (which would also work on socials) is to bring together a few snack products for sampling, with members of staff on hand to advise customers which they might enjoy depending on their current snacking choices. This could be as simple as switching from a 'supermarket' crisp brand to an artisan alternative, or exploring texture and flavours. For example, if they love meaty crisps, would they be open to trying biltong or snacking salamis?

● Drink pairings
Matching snacks with drinks is all the rage – especially crisps and wine. Upsell in the drinks aisle by making suggestions (alongside beer, wine, cider and cocktail tasting notes) of ideal snacking partners. Posh prawn cocktail crisps with Champagne or sparkling wine, for example, anything spicy with craft lager, and cheese-flavoured snacks with farmhouse cider.

● Expand your options
What consumers want from snacking has changed. As well as the usual crisps and nuts, they're thinking more than ever before about their wellbeing, and how what they eat impacts their health. So, in addition to the usual suspects, be sure to meet their needs with an extensive array of different things to try. Popular choices at the moment include freeze-dried fruit, healthier cereal and oat bars, protein-rich snacks, individually sized artisan chocolate bars, and chocolate-coated fruit and nuts.





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A new era for British business

The Government has found itself in the firing line since coming into power in 2024, with announcements such as the removal of the Winter Fuel Allowance payment for pensioners, employer NI contribution hikes, and changes to IHT rules for farmers dominating the headlines as tensions grow.

It will have been refreshing, then, for Sir Kier Starmer and the Cabinet, to find themselves on (largely) the right side of public opinion last month, following a trio of historic trade deals, announced in quick succession – the finer details of which, could have a profound impact on the British food and drink industry.

On 6th May, the PM announced what the Government said was the biggest, and most economically significant bilateral trade deal the UK has done since leaving the EU, joining forces on a plan with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The deal should, analysts say, increase trade between the two nations by $34 billion per year from 2040. Until now, India has levied some of the highest tariffs on imports in the world – these have been slashed on 90% of British products, including chocolate, biscuits, salmon and lamb. Tariffs on whisky and gin will be halved from 150% to 75%, falling then to 40% in a decade. Mark Kent, chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association, said this was a "once-in-a-generation" and "landmark" announcement, enabling Scottish distillers to better position themselves in a market worth nearly $20 billion.

As part of the deal, Britain is set to cut its own tariffs, meaning 99% of exports from India to our shores will face no duty.

Speaking at the time, Karen Betts, chief executive of The Food & Drink Federation, said the organisation was delighted the deal had been finalised. "This is very welcome news for UK food and drink manufacturers, particularly for soft drinks, chocolates, biscuits, crispbreads and crackers, which will now all benefit from tariff-free access to one of the fastest-growing markets in the world."

ALL EYES ON AMERICA

Just two days after striking a deal with India, attentions turned to the USA on 8th May, as President Donald Trump revealed details of a new agreement with the UK alongside Starmer.

The deal was delivered after weeks of uncertainty in the markets following Trump's 'Independence Day' speech, which unleashed huge tariffs on its global partners.

This new agreement, Trump said at the time, represents "a great deal" between Britain and the USA, eliminating barriers to trade 9which he felt were unfairly discriminatory) and allowing a number of American goods to be fast-tracked through our customs.

Both he and Starmer called it a historic day and a tribute to the long history between the allies, with the PM marking the deal as a "really important" step that will boost international trade.

While details are to be fully worked out in the coming months, it has been announced that US beef will be imported to the UK, and British beef will be available to the American market.

A 'VICTORY' FOR EUROPE AND THE UK

Perhaps most significant deal of all, was the announcement on 19th May that an agreement had been reached between the UK and EU. It delivers a swathe of benefits to Britain – a major headline being cutting lengthy and expensive checks between the UK and mainland Europe, which have caused significant headaches, price hikes, and long lorry tailbacks on both sides of the English Channel.

Starmer said the deal will Britain back on the world stage. We are doing deals "that will grow our economy, putting more money in the pockets of working people," he continued.

Key takeaways from the UK-EU deal include:

• Imports and exports of food and drink between the UK and EU will be covered by a new SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary) agreement, making it easier to trade across the border.
• Some routine checks on animal and plant products will be removed, allowing goods to be moved more freely, which should lower prices and increase choice in retail.
• The EU ban on UK exports of sausages, mince and chilled meats (in place since 2021) will end.
• A new deal on fishing rights means EU boats will continue to have access to UK waters until 2038.

Karen Betts said the move was "incredibly important" for the UK's manufacturers. "Europe is our single biggest customer, and most of the food and drink we import - from ingredients to finished products – comes from Europe too. However, trade in both directions has become complex and challenging." Exports to Europe have fallen by a third since 2019, she added, saying she's pleased that a closer trading relationship has been delivered. "A high-quality agreement will have clear benefits for consumers and businesses, however, the Government must continue to work closely with industry on the detail, and ensure the UK is able to influence EU decision-making where this impacts British businesses and competitiveness, particularly where the UK aligns with EU rules."

Professor Joe Nellis, economic advisor to accountancy firm MHA, called the deal a victory, adding that the PM has been "walking a thin tightrope", balancing the UK's relationship with the EU with Trump's White House as he navigates the delicate global economy.

"The EU remains, by far, the UK's single biggest trading partner. A trade deal that removes barriers to trade will be a real boost to the UK economy, supporting UK exports, boosting lacklustre business confidence, and lowering the cost of living by for UK citizens by providing cheaper food imports," Joe said, continuing, "The deal is good for UK growth — which is desperately needed — and can be expected to bring a degree of stability for UK exporters and for businesses in general."

Tom Bradshaw, president of the NFU, said the deal has the potential to deliver a more mutually beneficial trading environment for UK farmers and growers, adding, however, that "detail is king".




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CRAIGIE'S FARM

People are at the heart of the multi-generational farm on the outskirts of Edinburgh

Like many farm shops, Craigie's Farm in South Queensferry, West of Edinburgh, has humble beginnings.

"Farmers are used to spending 18 hours a day outside on their own with just a tractor for company," John Sinclair, who operates the business with wife Kirsteen, jokes.

Initially a small PYO farm, with a supplementary shop run from the 'back door', Craigies Farm has tripled in size in the last two decades, encompassing PYO, a shop, cafe, play barn, butchery, bakery and more.

This year, John says, is one of change and moving forward, following what he reflects was a tough time during and after the pandemic.

"Like most farm shop businesses we were on the up before Covid, but that hit us really badly, both financially, and the team mentally. I would say we're just moving past that now, five years on."

Moving into the middle of 2025 feels like a fresh start, John continues, adding that introducing new head of operations Iain Fisher, who comes with bags of energy, and years of experience in big hospitality settings in Edinburgh, has already reinvigorated Craigies, just a few weeks in. "I can already see there's been a massive change in the culture of the team!"

A farming family

John comes from a long line of farmers. HIs great-grandfather was headhunted by Lord Rosebery of the Dalmeny Estate to work as his farm manager, with his dad, George, later taking on a farm tenancy here, landing later at Rosebery's West Craigie Farm. "I joined my father when I left college," John explains. "The farm was too small, and we needed to diversify, so we went into growing soft fruit."

When his father died, aged just 57, John says he was driven to continue his legacy. "We had a small farm shop at the back of the house, and I became increasingly aware that customers seemed to be more interested in where their food came from. At the same time, the shop was getting busier and busier, so we went to the landlord to see if we could diversify to build a farm shop and a cafe."

The venture was so successful, the cafe was quickly doubled from 50 to 100 covers in 2007. And that was just the beginning of ongoing expansion at Craigies.

The power of PYO

PYO remains a prime focus at Craigies, where 95% of produce is picked by customers or used in their own products, while the remaining 5% is sold in the shop – from strawberries, cherries and blueberries, to apples, plums and vegetables.

It's an offering that's changed dramatically in the last 30 years, John says. "In the 70s and 80s, people would go out and pick fruit to eat. That was the main driver. Now, pick-your-own is a day's experience. The fruit is almost a byproduct. The farms that have survived and are going from strength to strength are the ones that have recognised that and charged customers accordingly. So, they can come out and have a really good day, taking some fruit home with them if they want."

Craigies has noticed, John adds, a reduction in the amount of fruit picked, but an increase in visitors.

Keeping it local

Excess fruit not picked by customers, is transformed into beautiful preserves in Craigies kitchens, sold alongside produce that celebrates local makers – something John thinks is vital for survival.

"When I was at FRA council meetings, there was a lot of chat about what we're going to do about supermarkets taking our business away. The fact of the matter is, we've had over a dozen supermarkets in a short radius to deal with, and there's no way we can compete against them."

Success, for John, is "getting our customers to come to us before their supermarket shopping for a nice bit of cheese or a nice bit of beef for roasting, then going on to the supermarket to get ketchup and toilet roll."

Bestsellers (other than their jams and preserves), include local gins, Stornoway black pudding, local ice cream and (not local) orange juice, freshly squeezed through a press. "That seems to be a big hit!"

The deli counter only stocks Scottish cheese, and a range of the kitchen's pies, sausage rolls, salads and more, which are also found in the restaurant, where John insists the offering is simple, humble and traditional – the kind of thing you might enjoy at a farmer's table.

Pies were introduced at the beginning of the year, and have become intrinsic to the popularity of the butchery, which was franchised initially, but brought in-house two years ago.

"It's going really well," John says. "My son's got his own flock of sheep that he lambs three times a year, so all the lamb on the counter is our own. We also buy pigs in and fatten them up. At the moment, about 50% of the pork is from our own pigs, and we buy in Scottish pork for the rest." Beef is as local as it can be, with John working alongside their landlord, who's building up a herd of Highland Cross cattle on the estate.

Putting people first

The biggest challenge, other than the ebb and flow of seasonal trade, across retail is staffing. Labour costs increased by £150,000 this April, meaning that prices have had to adjust across the business.

Despite 2025 being a difficult year for most retailers, John says he feels lucky to do what he does. "Although I used to have more hair!"

"Farms have become very lonely places, so to have people on the farm gives me a great sense of satisfaction – seeing them enjoying their time here and buying into our values. That's something really quite special."

> "To have people on the farm gives me a great sense of satisfaction"

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PRODUCT NEWS

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Farrington's Mellow Yellow Celebrates 20 Years



The sustainable cold-pressed rapeseed oil pioneer is marking the milestone with the launch of Blackberry Vinaigrette.

This bold new addition to its dressings range combines the brand's cold-pressed rapeseed oil with cyder vinegar, mustard, garlic, sea salt and British blackberries for a tangy vinaigrette that can be served with salads, meat, cheese, bread and roasted vegetables.

Duncan Farrington MBE, founder of Farrington's Mellow Yellow, said, "We've come a long way since launching Mellow Yellow Cold Pressed Rapeseed Oil in 2005. As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we wanted to create something that honours our heritage and passion for British food. Blackberry Vinaigrette is inspired by the hedgerows and brambles of our farm, delivering a true taste of home that aligns with our commitment to great flavours, quality ingredients, and versatility in the kitchen."

farrington-oils.co.uk

New RTD innovation from Kaytea



RTD experts Kaytea are bringing 'next generation hydration' to the UK drinks sector with the launch of a range of Instant Iced Tea Powders.

The convenient new products, available in Peach & Mango, Lemon and Classic Milk Tea variants, are pre-blended and easy to enjoy by simply stirring into hot water and topping up with ice, or mixing with cold water in a blender.

Containing real fruit and tea extracts, they offer a refreshing hit of natural hydration in an exciting new format.

Kevin Tang, founder, said, "Unlike other instant powders or syrups that rely heavily on sweeteners and preservatives, our new Peach & Mango and Lemon Iced Tea Powders contain real tea and fruit extracts, with no artificial colours or flavours, to allow the natural flavours to shine through. In addition, our new Classic Milk Tea Powder is vegan and dairy-free, which is hard to find in the milk tea space, as many brands claim to use non-dairy creamers but contain milk protein derivatives. Ours is 100% free from dairy ingredients.

"For those looking to make the switch from syrups, our new Tea Powders allow for greater control over the strength and sweetness of the tea, so it can be tailored to taste. They are also fuss-free and easy to serve (no sticky spills to deal with) and they are highly concentrated, meaning a lower cost per cup.

kaytea.co.uk

Blendsmiths enters RTD market



Blendsmiths has branched out from its range of hot drink powders, creating a selection of RTD sodas and shots that combine refreshing flavour with health-boosting functionality.

The HOW GOOD! range consists of Lemon & Ginger Soda with ginseng and ashwagandha, and Mint & Thyme Soda with holy basil and rhodiola, as well as three shots: Turmeric, Ginger and Mango & Ginger.

Chris Farnworth, co-founder, said, "Blendsmiths has always been about pushing boundaries in the drinks industry – challenging the norm and delivering bold, high-quality flavours with real ingredients. With HOW GOOD!, we're taking that same passion beyond hot drinks for the first time, creating something that's not only refreshing but also packed with purpose. This range is about more than just great taste; it's about crafting drinks that make you feel as good as they taste. We can't wait for people to experience HOW GOOD! this summer and beyond."

blendsmiths.com

Belvoir Farm introduces new-format presses



Belvoir Farm has announced the launch of 275ml bottles in place of their 250ml bottles, allowing consumers to enjoy their nature-inspired beverages even more.

The larger bottles are available in Elderflower, Elderflower & Rose, Freshly Squeezed Lemonade, Ginger Beer, Pink Apple and Raspberry Lemonade.

Pev Manners, owner of Belvoir Farm, said, "Here at Belvoir Farm, we've been helping nature do its thing for over 40 years. Making premium delicious drinks on the family farm in the heart of the British countryside. Using only quality ingredients and never anything artificial – so you can enjoy a great tasting drink anytime, anywhere."

belvoirfarm.co.uk

Montezuma's taps into nostalgia trend

British shoppers have a taste for nostalgia in 2025, and Montezuma's new launch fits into the popular trend perfectly.

The brand's newly-launched Neapolitan Ice Cream Truffles combine the family favourite ice cream flavours of vanilla, strawberry and chocolate in a playful truffle format.



Each truffle features a smooth white chocolate shell infused with Madagascan vanilla, a smooth strawberry ganache centre and a generous coating of milk chocolate shavings.

Kate Whapshott, head of marketing at Montezuma's, said, "These bite-sized truffles are our twist on the classic ice cream trio – strawberry, chocolate, and vanilla all in one delicious mouthful. A true summer favourite."

montezumas.co.uk



CANS launches Mango variant

The brand continues its mission to grow the 'non-sweet' category with its fruity new creation.

Made using a combination of Alpine water, mango and effervescent bubbles – and no added sugar, sweeteners or anything artificial – the latest product in the CANS range has been produced for consumers who want to avoid overly sweet beverages with long ingredient lists.

Dominic Rice, co-founder and CEO, said, "We created CANS for everyone who wants an unsweetened refreshing drink without unnecessary additives. Mango was a clear choice – it has a rich, naturally sweet flavour that we wanted to preserve in its purest form – just a few drops of real mango, alpine water, and gentle bubbles. Nothing more."

cans.co.uk



CLAWSON
19 FARMS 12
MASTER CHEESEMAKERS

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ARTISAN BLUE STILTON® PDO

GOLD AWARD WINNING, WORLD CHAMPION

A well-balanced flavour with a rich & creamy texture & distinctive blue veins. Full bodied, complex savoury flavours and a blend of tangy, earthy undertones. Traditionally crafted, handgraded, hand-turned.

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AWARD WINNING, SUPREME CHAMPION

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From the Master Cheesemakers of Gold Award Winning, Artisan Blue Stilton® PDO



ARTISAN AGED RUTLAND RED®

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Perfected over three generations of master cheese makers

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www.clawson.co.uk



MEET THE REGIONAL STARS OF 2025

Speciality Food and Speciality & Fine Food Fair have scoured the length and breadth of the UK to discover the small businesses offering an authentic taste of their region

The British food scene is a proud melting pot of traditions and cultures, with a backbone of truly great produce. Up and down the nation, small-scale food producers are creating masterpieces that not only taste incredible but support their local food ecosystem, offer locals and visitors alike a true flavour of the area, and ultimately work to offer people a taste of better.

Regional Stars 2025 is our celebration of just that. This project, organised by *Speciality Food Magazine* and Speciality & Fine Food Fair, is our way of shining the spotlight on the businesses using traditional techniques, local ingredients and foodie heritage to wow consumers with the very best their region has to offer.

The process began in May with a call out to the industry and the shoppers they serve, requesting nominations of businesses whose stories inspire all with their tradition, taste and quality. From the sizeable list we received, the *Speciality Food Magazine* and Speciality & Fine Food Fair teams worked together to whittle down the list to just 25 producers – and we couldn't be prouder to highlight those brands within the following pages.

As well as getting their place in the spotlight within these pages, the businesses will be celebrated at Speciality & Fine Food Fair, taking place 9th-10th September at Olympia.

"Businesses like the ones featured in the following pages are the beating heart of Britain's food and drink scene, and are examples of what UK producers do best: create delicious products which combine traditional knowledge and regional flair to the delight of modern day consumers," says Holly Shackleton, editor of *Speciality Food Magazine*.

"As a nation, we have a proud heritage of excellent produce and it's exciting to see how these 25 businesses have worked tirelessly with a pure focus on quality to ensure that what they create is a celebration of the land under their feet.

"I'm proud to profile the following businesses in the pages of *Speciality Food Magazine*, and look forward to celebrating them in person at Speciality & Fine Food Fair in September."

Nicola Woods, event manager of Speciality & Fine Food Fair, said, "At Speciality & Fine Food Fair, we're constantly inspired by the dedication, creativity and resilience of regional producers across the UK. As we look ahead to this year's edition of the Fair, we're thrilled to be partnering with Speciality Food Magazine to spotlight 25 outstanding food and drink businesses making a real impact in their communities.

"This initiative is about more than just celebrating quality products, it's about recognising the people behind them who are championing local sourcing, sustainability, and a deep-rooted connection to the place they call home. These producers are the heartbeat of the speciality and fine food sector. They work tirelessly, not only to craft exceptional products, but to champion independent business, support their local economies, and build genuine relationships with their customers and industry partners.

"Their stories embody the values at the core of the Fair: passion, provenance and innovation. We're proud to share their achievements with the wider industry and to offer them a platform to connect with retailers, hospitality operators and fellow producers. We hope that by shining a light on these businesses, we can support the continued growth of a vibrant, diverse and community-led food and drink scene across the UK. Congratulations to all the brands we're celebrating as our Regional Stars this year."

> "We hope that by shining a light on these businesses, we can support the continued growth of a vibrant and community-led food and drink scene across the UK"



SCOTLAND



Matthew Kennedy

JACK & JILL'S

A love of the simple things, done well, is behind Jack & Jill's - a venture founded by Matthew Kennedy as a result of a twist of fate: a stint house sitting at a property with fruit trees and berry bushes galore, which inspired memories of his mother making jams at home when he was young.

Although the recipes his mother used were never written down, he has followed their philosophy to a 't' for his 15-strong flavour range – using prime Scottish fruit, sugar, pectin when needed and absolutely nothing else. This classic simplicity has made Matthew a culinary star in the local area, with customers regularly coming back for more, and even some being granted tailored products to suit their audiences.

Despite its popularity, Jack & Jill's is still resolutely a one-man-band – save for Matthew's wife, who helps out at weekends – and proud to champion and remain within the Scottish borders.

facebook.com/people/Jack-Jills-Jam

Pete Mitchell

THE FARMER'S SON



Black pudding may be a world-famous taste of Scotland, but not all are made equally. Thankfully, Pete Mitchell, AKA The Farmer's Son, has been inspired by 300 years of rural expertise from his family's farm to create the ultimate taste of Scotland for breakfast tables everywhere.

Bringing together produce from farmers within the local area, including oats from the family farm – now run by his parents – Pete has created a supportive network of farmers which feeds into The Farmer's Son's superb range of artisan black pudding, white pudding, haggis and traditional Lorne sausage.

The range is handcrafted in small batches every day for optimum freshness, using sustainable practices including no-waste production and fully recyclable packaging on some products, and Pete is proud to be able to bring a century-old family recipe – showcasing the very best Scotch-assured produce – to discerning tables around the UK.

thefarmersson.co.uk



Marian and Simon Kennedy

HIGHLAND BOUNDARY

For Marian and Simon, foraging is a way of life borne from the desire to support and celebrate their local environment. Both come from a scientific background, and having bought and rewilded a rural property, and recognised its rich natural bounty, decided to dedicate their knowledge and lives to sharing its joys with the public.

The brand's range of spirits offer a true taste of their local area; ingredients are foraged by hand from the couple's property and from neighbouring land, and the selection they offer is expanding – recent launches include versatile syrups made from honeysuckle, gorse and Scots pine.

Perhaps the most iconic product in Highland Boundary's range is its Scots Pine Mugolio – a complex, maple syrup-like product made using hand-foraged pine cones – which is unmistakeably Scottish.

highlandboundary.com

NORTH

Allison Raper

TEESDALE CHEESEMAKERS

Keeping things as natural, honest and local as possible is of paramount importance at Teesdale Cheesemakers. Now entering its 10th year of cheese production, and its sixth at its 20 acre smallholding – complete with purpose-build dairy made out of recycled materials – Allison and her husband Jonathan are resolutely keeping things local. The Covid-19 pandemic led to the business swiftly becoming a go-to for the local community, and its reputation for being a hub for locals still rings true. Allison and Jonathan's dedication to the surrounding region doesn't end there; they supply only businesses and customers within a tight radius, and only use cows milk sourced from the family farm six miles from the smallholding. By keeping sourcing, production, and its customer base within a carefully limited area, Teesdale Cheesemakers are offering a perfectly distilled taste of County Durham.

teesdalecheesemakers.com





Annabelle Taylor

WASS FARM

While its original mission was simply to make its excellent meat more accessible to its local community, the team at Wass Farm soon learned that charcuterie made using its premium meat was a winning formula. Despite its success in the local area and beyond, Annabelle is still passionate about using only the meat from animals raised on Wass Farm for its range, and has expanded the variety of its livestock to cater for growing demand. Mangalitza pigs, which have gained a fine food reputation in recent years, and Yorkshire-born middle whites play a vital role in the charcuterie range – as does locally-shot venison, particularly delicious served up in Wass Farm's venison salami.

By using pigs raised in nearby woodlands which are fed apple mulch from neigbouring cider-makers, Wass Farm are presenting a deliciously provenance-rich range to a hungry customer base in Yorkshire and beyond.

facebook.com/wassfarm

MIDLANDS

Tori and Ben Stanley

TORI & BEN'S

Selling optimum produce from the farm direct to consumers, Tori & Ben's mission is simple but noble: to promote a better way of eating, shopping and living, and giving local consumers an opportunity to do just that. Coming from a farming background, Ben is passionate about celebrating Longhorn cattle – not only because of their historical connection to the region, but because of the exceptional quality of their meat. Of parallel importance to the team is the environment, with responsible farming a key tenet of the business's mission. This connection to the local land rings true throughout the business; visitors are welcome to walk around the farm and get a taste for the grass roots of the produce they then enjoy in-store. Feeding local customers excellent produce from within a small radius has proven to be a huge success, but Tori & Ben's is staying resolutely small-scale to better support the local region's food sector.
toriandbensfarm.com



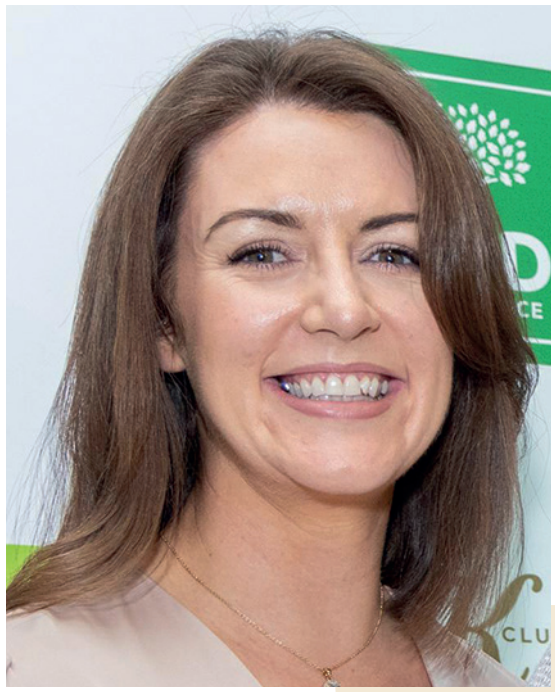


Paula Wood

HOME FARM PRODUCE

A love of honest food is at the heart of Home Farm Produce, with local meat reared with love and generations of expertise wholesomely served at its on-site farm shop and cafe. A nose-to-tail and chemical-free, grass-fed philosophy runs through the business, where simplicity rules; doing things properly – whether that be by farming responsibly, taking care of locals, and cooking up a storm for the deli counter and cafe – is as important to Paula as her appreciation for excellent tasting food.
Alongside meat reared on the farm, other staples such as vegetables, eggs and bread are sold – offering customers the opportunity to support the local food sector, all from one place.
Locals are treated like family here, with the site a welcome hub for the local community who appreciate the grass roots nature of this business which truly champions honest, home-grown Midlands food.
homefarmproduce.co.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND



Alanna Mckeever

LONG MEADOW CIDER

PGI-accredited County Armagh Bramley apple juice runs through the heart and soul of Long Meadow Cider – a proudly family-run destination for apple lovers seeking a true taste of the region from far and wide.

The business's story begins two generations ago, with Alanna's grandfather, who planted established apple trees and travelled to Dublin to sell the fruit. Just over a decade ago, with three generations of the family living on the farm, the team diversified into cider-making, and the brand's range now covers juices and a unique 0.05% cider alongside its hugely popular range.

All apples used in production are hand-picked on the farm, and this tree-to-bottle philosophy has proven popular with locals and overseas visitors alike; indeed, the farm has come to play host to special occasions – birthdays, weddings and more – alongside its tours and tastings.

A deliciously authentic taste of Northern Ireland, with family running through its core.
longmeadowcider.com

Patrick Black

CLANDEBOYE ESTATE YOGHURT

Clandeboye Estate Yoghurt is a product truly rooted to its land. Founded by Lady Dufferin, owner of the Clandeboye Estate, in 2018 as a way to add value to the milk produced by her Friesian and Jersey cows, the brand has gained followers across Northern Ireland as a result of its unparalleled quality and dedication to keeping things simple.

The range is delicious yet carefully curated. A Greek yoghurt-inspired method of straining the creamy milk, which was at that time totally unique to the region, helped put Clandeboye Estate Yoghurt on the map – and its audience keeps growing, drawn to its stunning quality as well as its beautiful provenance.

Sustainable farming and production models have been employed at the business too, meaning that customers can be confident that not only is the yoghurt they're eating providing them with an honest taste of County Down, but that it's benefiting the environment too.
clandeboyeyoghurt.com





Michelle Wilson

CRAWFORD'S ROCK SEAWEED

A 300-year-old family tie to the bay from which it sources its produce, and a passion for celebrating and supporting the environment, runs through this business's range of seaweed and storecupboard staples.

For three centuries, Michelle Wilson's family has sustainably harvested seaweed from its local waters – resolutely sticking to wild seaweed, never cultivated, in a passionate effort to retain the quality of their range as well as the health of the region's ecology and wildlife.

Foodies keen to know more are welcomed to the bay, where they will be invited to bathe in the water and cook the seaweed alongside locally-caught fish and shellfish for a truly authentic taste of the Kingdom of Mourne.
crawfordsrockseaweed.co.uk

SOUTH EAST



Keith and Katy Morrison

SOLLEY'S

Locals and visitors keen to sample an authentic taste of Kent are bound to visit Solley's, an ice cream business that has become synonymous with the region since its launch in 1985. Its story starts with Stephen Solley, who was looking to add value to the milk produced on his farm. The ice cream is made using fresh and creamy Channel Island milk delivered twice a week from the neighbouring farm's herd of Jersey and Guernsey cows – some of which are direct descendants of the original herd – and the luxurious texture of the range is boosted by the addition of double cream.

By working with local independent farm shops, pubs, attractions and other outlets, Solley's has built a reputation for being a truly local business – which is solidified by the brand's welcoming of visitors to its farm, where an on-site ice cream parlour offers a chance to see where the ice cream is made, and fans can take a tractor ride around the farm.

solleys.co.uk

Stela Tanase

BUSY BEES

A desire to create healthy food for family and a much-loved hobby of keeping bees was behind the creation of Busy Bees – a Berkshire-based honey brand that brings the natural health benefits of great quality honey to food lovers in the local area.



Entirely pure and raw, Busy Bees honey is a step above the options available on the mass market, and Stela and her husband Eduard – who looks after the bees with love, care and skills passed down through generations of his family – are passionate about keeping it that way.

The business's bees traverse a relatively wide area of Berkshire, with the starting point of some being hives in the couple's own back garden, meaning that the flavour variations present in the honey are diverse – from lavender to cherries and gooseberries, the bees are fed well and their delicious diet, an authentic representation of their region, is perfectly represented in the honey they produce.

busybeeshoneysuppliers.com



Andrew and Di Mills

NUNC DRINKS

Nestled in the rolling hills of Buckinghamshire, Nunc is a family-run brewery on a quiet mission: to craft grown-up drinks that are not only good for you — and the planet — but are wildly refreshing too. Founders Andrew and Di built their small-batch brewery from scratch, using local ingredients like raw honey from beekeepers within five miles of their brewery. No flavourings. No shortcuts. Just 100% real ingredients.

Their award-winning range includes non-alcoholic kombucha and a lighter alcoholic 2.5% alternative to sparkling brut wine. Every one of their drinks is crafted with raw honey, layered, complex, and designed with adults in mind. Cans, not bottles. Compostable leftovers. Packaging made within 10 miles. Nunc's commitment to local sourcing and low-impact production is more than a box tick – it's at the heart of everything they do. They're a proudly Buckinghamshire-born brand that's making waves (and fizz) in the world of modern adult drinks.

nuncliving.com

WALES

Joanna Morgan

RADNOR PRESERVES

An idyllic life spent in rural Wales inspired Joanna Morgan to take up preserve-making. Living in a cottage with no electricity and boasting a garden full of fruit and vegetables, she used an old recipe book passed down from her grandfather to preserve the produce from her land by candlelight. The venture soon proved popular with family, friends and beyond, and it has now scaled up to be one of the key flagbearers of the region's food scene.

Simultaneously deliciously simple and playful, the range is now impressively varied. A particularly stand-out product in the range is the Welsh Cider & Leek Chutney – an unique combination which celebrates the Welsh heritage at the heart of the business. New to the range is an attractive tin filled with Radnor Preserves sweet and savoury preserves, which boasts a stunning image of the region's famous Cambrian Mountains. Indeed, the brand is such a passionate advocate of its provenance that the images used on its packaging have inspired holidayers and locals alike to explore the area like never before.

radnorpreserves.com





Matthew Rees

CARMARTHEN HAM

A family history of butchery plays a vital role in the success of Carmarthen Ham PGI – one of the relatively few PGI-accredited products hailing from Wales. Matthew Rees is the sixth generation of his family to work in the business – with his son following close behind. The most iconic product served up by the family business, Carmarthen Ham PGI, is a cured and air-dried ham which is making the region into a destination for food lovers. The ham is still prepared in the family butchers shop, but its popularity belies the small size of the operation; the team is currently at capacity for orders, which is testament to both the superior quality and taste of the product and the artisanal techniques used in its creation.

carmarthendeli.co.uk



SOUTH WEST

Barrie Gibson

FOWEY VALLEY CIDER

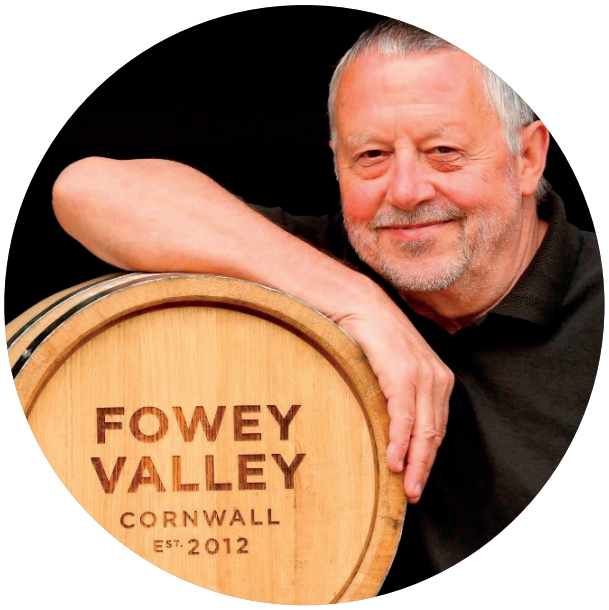
A cider-making hobby, fuelled by fruit from Barrie and Geraldine Gibson's four apple trees, soon turned into a community affair when fruit from the local area's trees was shared to be hand-pressed – and this spirit of connection still runs through the heart of Fowey Valley Cider, located on the banks of River Fowey and established in 2019.

The small team behind the business belies the quality of its flagship product: a multi award-winning Champagne-style cider, which sits alongside a carefully curated range of spirits.

While the scale of the business has certainly grown since its humble beginnings – it now offers gin and cider-making courses and tours as well as on-site and online shops – it remains true to its original ethos of celebrating West Country produce. For example, the base spirit at the foundation of its handcrafted spirits range is made by pressing and fermenting the finest regional fruit.

Time honoured skills, local produce and a love of the humble apple collide in this authentic taste of the West Country.

foweyvalleycider.co.uk





Steve Williams

GOOD GAME CHARCUTERIE

Artisanal techniques and a passionate eye for quality are the key drivers for Steve Williams and his team at Good Game Charcuterie, who produce a range of cured meat products including salamis, coppa, bresaola, chorizo, pancetta and guanciale. Traceability is also of vital importance, with only meat from locally-reared free-range pigs, and grass-fed Devon Ruby or Devon Wagyu cows, used.

This attention to detail has won Good Game a sizeable fanbase in the local area, who are also able to enjoy the team's delicious produce at their restaurant, the South West Pizza Company.

By using only native breed animals sourced from local producers and farmers – exclusively those who have enjoyed full lives outdoors – Good Game is able to guarantee optimum enjoyment and an honest taste of Devon.

good-game.co.uk



Ann and Fergus Muller

ANN'S PASTIES

The story of Ann's Pasties has humble beginnings, with Ann selling pasties outside her home in Cornwall's Lizard Peninsula, but the business has gone on to become one of Cornwall's most popular must-eat products.

Ann's son Fergus now runs the business and has grown it with aplomb, opening shops to make it even more of a destination for lovers of authentic Cornish produce.

Despite its growth, Ann's Pasties is passionate about celebrating the produce created within a 10 mile radius; not only does this guarantee quality, with the team able to keep a close eye on proceedings, but it gives them the opportunity to support local farmers and producers too.

annspasties.co.uk

Andy Venn

SOMERSET CHARCUTERIE

A family history of farming and learning butchery skills at the on-site farm shop have been key to the success of Somerset Charcuterie, which was founded when Andy and a friend – James – discovered that they were both tinkering with charcuterie-making as a hobby.

Being a farmer's son allowed Andy good access to local farmers who were willing to rear pigs for the business, and they opted for rare breeds to optimise flavour and quality. Rearing the animals slowly takes time but the perseverance pays off in the form of an exemplary selection of charcuterie, ranging from regional award-winning Black Down ham to lomo, lonzo, and free-range duck pancetta.

Partnering exceptional locally-reared meat with ingredients sourced nearby, offering an honest taste of Somerset, has proven successful; the brand is now sold at many delis, restaurants and hotels across the sector – to the delight of locals.

somersetcharcuterie.com





Bertie Matthews

MATTHEWS COTSWOLD FLOUR

Eight generations of farming and milling in the Cotswolds have firmly placed Matthews Cotswold Flour on the local food map, and the brand's now sizeable range of flours is much-loved across the UK – but especially so in its local area.

Visit any bakery within a 20-mile radius of the production site, and it's more than likely that they will be using Matthews Cotswold Produce in their baking. While artisanal bakeries are at the heart of Bertie and his team's mission, the team's shared vision to bring better flour to households across the country in order to level-up not only baking but the health of the local environment is reaping rewards across the board.

Sourcing grain from sustainably-run farms is key to this mission, as is The Cotswold Grain Partnership – a group of similarly-minded locally-based farmers who work together to create a better future for farming both in the Cotswolds and beyond.

cotswoldflour.com

EAST ANGLIA



Richard and Trudi Wild

NUMBER 18

What started out as a hobby soon turned into a way of life for Richard and Trudi Wild, as their range of premium quality honeys took off. In an area rich with fruit farms, an organic farm next door and a wildflower meadow to the back of the property, the pair are blessed with the ultimate land on which to care for bees.

There's a delicious range available, all made by the on-site bees which travel up to three miles from the site, including everything from wildflower and Suffolk set honey to cold-smoked chilli honey – which packs a proper punch – and limited edition runs of borage, chestnut and lime honey.

Being so in tune with the local environment has paid dividends for the business, with local customers appreciating the fact that the honey differs according to the time of year – as well as its entirely authentic taste of Suffolk.

numbereighteensuffolk.com

Katherine Manning

SUFFOLK MEADOW

From a family farm's diversification project to a supremely popular business adored across its county, Suffolk Meadow offers a delicious flavour of Suffolk life as well as a vital support network for farms in the local area.

Having started in 1989 as a result of the family farm producing an excess of milk for its customers, the ice cream produced by Suffolk Meadow soon became a stalwart of the local food scene. Supplied to restaurants, caterers and farm shops – a discerning clientele – the family recipe and technique, gleaned from previous generations, is still being used today.

Milk from Suffolk cows is processed as minimally as possible for the brand's ice cream, and the seasonal changes in the animals' diet is accounted for with subtle recipe changes – akin to artisan cheeses, and just as appreciated by Suffolk foodies.

suffolkmeadow.co.uk





Sarah Savage

ESSENCE FOODS

A passion for doing things properly is at the heart of Essence Foods, a preserve maker in the heart of rural Norfolk. Using real products and simple recipes to highlight the natural quality of fresh fruit has reaped rewards for the business, and their full transparency as proven especially popular with locals – who are welcomed into the on-site cafe, where a large window looks directly into the production kitchen.

The team sources as locally as possible – but never at the expense of quality. Indeed, some of the fruit used in the preserves is still grown in the family's garden, while herbs are grown on-site so the team can retain total control over its taste and quality.

Norfolk is known around the world for its mustard heritage – Colman's roots lie deep in the county's culinary history – and Monty's, sister brand, is bringing a new generation of Norfolk-grown mustards to the region: a delicious new range for locals to be proud of.

essencefoods.co.uk

SOUTH

Fatima Zaman

ZAMAN CONDIMENTS

Time-poor and discovering that the Indian sauces readily accessible from supermarkets were bland – a far cry from her the fare offered at her father's restaurants – inspired Fatima Zaman to create a product range which not only satisfied her hunger for authentic Indian flavours served swiftly, but did so by using premium quality produce sourced from the local area wherever possible. Originally from London, Fatima relocated to leafy Hampshire and was inspired to source from local suppliers – buying from farmers markets and more recently Hampshire Fare, a not-for-profit organisation that brings together and supports food and drink producers from the county. Organic, local ingredients are the name of the game at Zaman Condiments, delivering not only superior flavour and unmatched quality but also an opportunity to support the livelihoods of farmers and producers from within the region.

zamancondimentsandsauces.com





Frank Reynolds

KINGCOTT DAIRY

The Reynolds family offers an authentic taste of Kent through its two-strong cheese selection, made using lovingly reared cows whose milk is made into cheese just a few metres away from their field. Kentish Blue, originally created 15 years ago by his parents, Karen and Steve, is a young, firm-textured blue cheese with bite, while Kingcott Blue – its best-seller and created by son Frank – is soft-centred and lightly veined. Both cheeses are made optimum by the family's dedication to taking care of their land and animals, and the small scale of production; Frank and his brother Archie milk the cows then transport it 10 metres into the cheesemaking facility, where they go on to create Kingcott Blue and their parents make Kentish Blue. Nothing is mechanised, and a natural affinity with the milk produced on the farm – unpasteurised for optimum flavour and connection to the land – is key to its success.

kingcottdairy.co.uk





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LOVE YOUR **PANTRY**

A well-stocked pantry is at the heart of every home; these are the products to sell to optimise the category's popularity in your store



There are some food products that we all rely on in our day-to-day lives. Pasta to whip a quick weekday meal – partnered either with a speedy sauce, a low and lovingly-slow ragu or a ready-made sauce from the shelf – rice, flour... the list is almost endless, but one thing's for sure: these products form the backbone of our culinary lives, whether we're after a satisfying meal or an indulgent treat.

As a fine food retailer, your role is to keep your customers inspired to level-up these staples; offering examples which showcase high quality texture and taste, proven provenance, and the versatility that we all appreciate in a good pantry hero.

Read on to discover the pantry products to stock now, and why, plus how to sell them for maximum sales success.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com

WHEAT FLOUR IS AN **IMPORTANT** BEDROCK OF THE UK **DIET**. THIS SINGLE **INGREDIENT** IS IN ABOUT A **THIRD** OF ALL **GROCERY** PRODUCTS ON **SUPERMARKET** SHELVES AND PROVIDES **20%** OF THE **ENERGY** AND **PROTEIN** CONSUMED BY THE **UK** POPULATION

UK FLOUR MILLERS

IN 2020, **LONDON** EMERGED AS THE LARGEST **PASTA** AND **NOODLES** MARKET IN THE **UK**, FOLLOWED BY **MANCHESTER** AND **GLASGOW** RESPECTIVELY, IN THE SAME **YEAR**

GLOBALDATA.COM



RETAILER INSIGHT



Laura Roberts, owner of Laura's Larder, shares her take on the pantry category

We stock a small, thoughtful range of pantry staples – grains, pulses, lentils, risotto and paella rice, pearl couscous, and great-quality eggs like Cacklebean. They all elevate a simple meal. Customers come to us for staples that feel a bit different to what's on supermarket shelves –better quality, a bit more interesting, and often with a story behind them.

People are more confident with basics now and are looking to upgrade what they already use – whether that's a nuttier grain, a better-quality lentil, or something new like jollof rice. They want ingredients that taste better, work harder, or tell a more interesting story. We also see more customers asking about sourcing and sustainability – they want to know where their food comes from and how it's made.

We look for transparency, flavour, and proper sourcing. Brands like Zaytoun, Perelló, Bold Bean Co, Brindisa, Nice Rice, and Belazu – all have clear values and consistently brilliant products. They're not over-processed or over-packaged – just high quality from the start.

There's a growing appetite for unprocessed, ethically sourced alternatives – whether that's fair trade grains or high-welfare eggs. It's not just about filling the cupboard anymore – people are more intentional with what they buy and how it fits into their wider food habits.

STOCK CHECK

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE · 2025



BIONA GINGER & TURMERIC PASTE

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banhoekchillioil.com



THE BAY TREE PERFECTLY PUNCHY PICCALILLI

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thebaytree.co.uk



COTTAGE DELIGHT MOROCCAN SPICED COUSCOUS

Combining dried vine fruits, pepper, cumin, garlic, citrus peel, coriander, turmeric, cassia and ginger, this is ready in just 4 minutes.

cottagedelight.co.uk



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tracklements.co.uk



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hawksheadrelish.com



DRIVERS PICKLES PICKLED ONIONS

Selected hand peeled onions in a traditional spicy vinegar.

driverspickles.co.uk



SNOWDONIA HOT HONEY

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snowdoniacheese.co.uk

COMMENTATORS



MONIKA LINTON
BRINDISA



BERTIE MATTHEWS
MATTHEWS COTSWOLD FLOUR



CLARE MARRIAGE
DOVES



ON THE **PULSE**

Far from being basic, flour and pulses offer an opportunity to get creative

While fine food favourite like cheese, charcuterie and flavoursome, provenance-rich sauces will always be popular at fine food establishments, smart buyers are stocking up on high quality staples such as flour and pulses – and exciting adventurous shoppers as they do so.

Gone are the days of customers choosing between white and wholemeal flour for their baking, or tinned chickpeas or kidney beans for their cooking; in 2025, there's a raft of high quality, taste-packed, hugely versatile and eye-catching products on the market to delight both retailers and fine food shoppers.

The increasing appetite for international cuisine, as well as the hunger for simple pleasures such as home baking, have meant that British consumers are on the hunt for new takes on their store cupboard stalwarts – and *Speciality Food* retailers are in prime position to benefit. By seeking out products with clear markers of quality such as provenance, and sharing inspiration for how to utilise these ingredients – think salads and stews bolstered by rich jarred butter beans, and gut-friendly sourdough loaves laced with rye and seeds – retailers are onto a winner.

"Shoppers are looking for alternatives for either a healthier version of something or a more flavourful version of something, plus culinary adventure," says Monika Linton, founder of Brindisa. The thousands – if not more – of recipes available on social media and the wider internet are no doubt inspiring this hunt for better. "With the access of more info online, people want to experiment and learn," she says.

The rise of quality flour

While classic white bread flour seemed a major winner of 2020, with the Covid-19 pandemic inspiring consumers across the board to dip their fingers into home baking, today's fine food shopper is looking for something a little more flavourful and adventurous.

Options abound, from flours made from ancient grains to trending rye and seed-studded mixes, but ultimately it all comes down to the end result; a good, reliable rise underpins what bakers are looking for right now.

For Bertie Matthews, MD of Matthews Cotswold Flour, consistency is key to ensuring the rise of quality flours – and bakes. "Consumers are very interested in quality and consistency," he begins, "and having great flour will make your baking results better in every conceivable way – from taste to nutrition and everything in between. Consistency is a great driver too – making sure that your ingredients produce repeatable results has always been vital for professional bakers but, as more people start baking at home, consistency has become a more important factor for everyone."

Stocking up on a cheap supermarket white flour might seem the natural first step for many shoppers, but by inspiring them to buy better you are strengthening the case for repeat business. Bonus points if you can inspire them with simple recipes, then offer them the opportunity to level up and experiment with more adventurous bakes based around great quality flour.

"Quality makes a huge difference – the results you can achieve at home with just a little knowledge and some great ingredients will always impress and can make a huge difference to the way you approach food in general," explains Bertie. "The benefits of knowing exactly what's in the food you're eating, not to mention serving to your friends and family, are many."

Thankfully, Matthews is available to support retailers keen to up their flour game. "We're always looking for new and engaging ways that we can collaborate with retailers to help inspire home bakers everywhere. We work with our online baking community, collaborating with content creators to develop new recipes, sharing innovative baking tips and techniques as widely as we can!"

Provenance, a key point of difference for fine food retailers and their customers, also plays a role here. "We also work with our suppliers and retailers to help tell the full story of our food, from farm (to mill, to shop) to fork, with special focus on the sustainability benefits of Organic and Regenerative farming models where relevant," says Bertie. "Movements like the Real Bread Campaign are also a great resource for building awareness, and we work with UK Flour Millers on industry wide initiatives at every opportunity."

Bread-making offers the most valuable opportunity for *Speciality Food* readers, says Bertie. "We have the largest range of speciality flour in the UK, and it is continuing to grow – with brand new regenerative lines coming (very) soon! Bread flour represents our strongest selling product group as a whole, with eight out of ten of our top selling flours being best for baking bread and rolls. Our best-selling flour is Cotswold Crunch, closely followed by Eight Grain in second place, and our premium Strong Bread Flours are always tied for a very close joint third (Strong White, Churchill, Canadian Great White, Strong Wholegrain and





Organic Strong White).

"We think this reflects the fact that more and more people are baking bread at home, with the rise in bread maker technology (both in terms of improving results and wider availability), as well as the growing interest in sourdough baking in recent years."

It's time to consider stocking organic

Organic products are also a valuable option for discerning retailers and customers. "With health and sustainability continuing to be key drivers for consumer purchase, organic flour with its 'better for me and the planet' proposition is leading the way in meeting this demand, says Clare Marriage, founder of Doves Farm. "Whilst there has been an emergence of brands making green claims, organic is recognised as the authentically (and only legally defined) sustainable option in the market: shoppers realise that buying organic has a positive outcome for nature, soil and the health of our planet with proven benefits, whilst also enabling them to reduce their own exposure to a potential cocktail of chemicals."

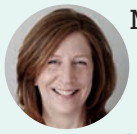
The hot topic of ultra processed foods feeds into this, too. "The ongoing conversation surrounding UPFs is also fuelling a trend towards cooking and baking from scratch," says Clare. "Consumers are becoming more aware of product ingredients, their overall nutrition and how they are made, which again plays in organic flour's favour, as it is always made with fully traceable ingredients grown to the toughest and independently verified, organic standards and with no artificial additives, pesticides and fertilisers.

Next-gen pulses

Far from supermarket scenes of row upon row of tinned pulses, fine food independents can offer pulses in an appetising cornucopia of jars and rustic bags to bring them into the foodie gifting market as well as store cupboard stockers. Alongside this attractive new appearance, the flavours showcased by high quality products is better than ever before and opening shoppers up to their culinary potential.

"I think the shopper got used to quite one-dimensional flavours and now sees that these foods, if selected well, contribute to the flavour of a dish in their own right," explains Monika. "They are food and gastronomy in one."

MUST-STOCK **PULSES**



Monika Linton of Brindisa shares insight into the pulses category gleaned from 30 year of selling them in the UK

- Lentils are the most popular because they are easy to cook from dry (no soaking needed and cooking time quite short) and have been around for years at a level of quality that is very respectable thanks to the Puy variety from France. They are also super full of iron so very healthy. Pre-cooked lentils have added convenience.
- Chickpeas would be the biggest seller of all thanks to the Eastern Mediterranean influences and humous that has taken over every party in town.
- White beans of varying shapes and sizes come next, with the plump Spanish Judion butter bean being quite a revolutionary item. This was the bean that blew our chef's minds in the 90s, a butter bean that was 3cm long by 1cm by 1 cm plump. Despite the high price they attract they never stop selling, but they have to be good.

STOCK CHECK

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE • 2025 •



MATTHEWS COTSWOLD CRUNCH FLOUR

A speciality blend of strong bread flour, malted wheat flakes and malt flour with a nutty taste and a signature darker colour.

cotswoldflour.com



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suma-store.coop



DOVES FARM WHOLEMEAL RYE FLOUR

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dovesfarm.co.uk



BOLD BEAN CO QUEEN BUTTER BEANS

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boldbeanco.com



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favouritfood.com

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honed-flavours.com



5 POCO PICANTE
SALSA

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pocopicante.co.uk

6 HOLMES BAKERY
BISCUITS

If it is luxury you are looking for do not skip the page. Holmes Bakery's decadent range of products will tick all the boxes, from rich Butter Shortbread to nutty Florentines. The range caters for all tastes. Holmes Bakery uses traditional methods and recipes to ensure that home baking comes through in every product they make.
holmesbakery.com

7 CAPPERELLI
ARTISAN PASTA

Capparelli Artisan Pasta offers bronze-drawn, slow-dried pasta made in Belfast using 100% Italian wheat. From the sauce-catching Classic Radiatori to award-winning, protein-rich Einkorn and nutrient-dense Wholewheat, each variety is crafted for exceptional texture, flavour, and digestibility. Inspired by Italy, made for modern kitchens seeking quality, nutrition, and real character in every dish.
capparelli.com

8 ISPINI
CHARCUTERIE

Ispini Irish artisan charcuterie offers premium cured meats crafted with traditional techniques and local ingredients. Delicacies like lomo, coppa, and bresaola boast rich, complex flavors, while salami, Nduja, pepperoni, and Wee Nibbles snacking chorizo bring spice and depth. Each product showcases Ispini's dedication to quality, ensuring a gourmet experience for charcuterie lovers.
ispinicharcuterie.com

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CHILLIES

Modern consumers are spicing up what lands in their store cupboards

Chillies are hot right now. The exotic fruit – whose varieties range from sweet bell peppers, to scorching Scotch Bonnets – really is having its day, as consumers continue to up the ante in the kitchen, taking their taste buds to the next level.

They're inspired by social media, which puts a cultural melting pot at their fingertips. By new generation artisan condiments (especially Asian-inspired products). And by chefs, who're being more experimental than ever before with spices and heat in their kitchens.

WHY ARE SHOPPERS BUYING MORE CHILLI PRODUCTS?

Spicy condiments are riding a wave of cultural and culinary momentum, says The Woolf's Kitchen founder, Dominique Woolf. "Shows like Hot Ones helped spark early interest, introducing hot sauce to the mainstream. Social media continues to drive trends with hot honey, chilli crunch and spicy noodles regularly going viral."

Shoppers are seeking bold, exciting flavours that transform everyday dishes into gourmet experiences, adds Rumble Romagnoli, founder of Chilli No 5. The ingredient's versatility "means it can be used in everything from sauces and oils, to snacks and sweets, offering a sensory adventure with each bite. But it's not just about flavour – there's an addictive quality to chilli that keeps shoppers coming back."

WHAT'S THE HOTTEST CHILLI IN THE WORLD?

Until 2023, it was the Carolina Reaper, developed by Ed Currie in South Carolina in 2013. Ed continues to hold the title with his newest breakthrough in cultivation – Pepper X, which has a Scoville Heat Unit (SHU) rating of 2.69 million. It's been named the hottest chilli on the planet by Guinness World Records. As a guide, jalapenos typically score 2,000 to 8,000 on the SHU. Quite a difference!

ARE CHILLIES GOOD FOR HEALTH?

Yes. They're packed with Vitamin C and capsaicin, which has powerful antioxidant properties. Some say they feel chillies help boost their metabolism too. Approach the extremely hot chilli peppers with caution though – they have been known to hospitalise 'chilli heads'.

ARE BRITISH CONSUMERS GETTING USED TO EATING HOTTER CHILLIES?

Xiaoxiao Wang, owner of Soho eatery, Noodle & Beer, certainly thinks so. "Over the past few years, we've noticed British diners becoming increasingly adventurous – not just tolerating spice, but seeking out complex, layered heat," he says. "It's no longer about the burn, it's about the balance, aroma and depth that chillies bring."

Customers, both Chinese and international, he adds, are asking for extra heat, or choosing specific dishes for their punchy nature.

WHAT ARE THE MOST POPULAR CHILLIES?

Fresh green chillies with floral heat are having a moment, says Xiaoxiao. "As well as dried Sichuan chillies and the iconic Sichuan peppercorn. We've also seen interest in fermented chilli pastes that carry both heat and umami."

Interest in South American cooking is leading customers out of their comfort zone of the usual supermarket offerings of jalapenos and Bird's Eye chillies. Fruity Amarillo – the yellow variety used in multiple Peruvian dishes – is hot on the scene, as are dried chillies typical in Mexican cooking such as Ancho, Guajillo and Pasilla.

Basque-style pintxos are capturing the imaginations of home cooks at the moment too, especially gildas (green pepper, olives and anchovies), so the typical Guindilla is well worth having in your stable.

WHAT ARE THE MUST-HAVE CHILLI-BASED PRODUCTS AT THE MOMENT?

Hot sauce and hot honey are definitely firmly in consumers' sights, but chilli oil and chilli crunch are also continuing to fly off shelves.

"Our chilli-infused extra virgin olive oil and superfood-packed world chilli sauces are in high demand," Rumble reveals.

Liz Cuff at Tracklements says chilli jam is a must for any speciality retailer. The brand's version (sold for nearly 25 years) has been its bestseller for a long time, and data from Blue Marble Research recently revealed that 28% of shoppers surveyed said they eat chilli jam at least once a week.

Nearly half (44%) of shoppers, Liz continues, use hot sauce to go with everyday meals at home, and 46% said they use them at least once a week. Tracklements launched three hot sauces last year in response. "Our latest Special Edition also packs a punch of heat – Pineapple & Chilli Relish. It's perfect for summer, and shoppers looking to try something new."

IS THERE ANYTHING RETAILERS NEED TO KNOW WHEN BUYING CHILLI PRODUCTS?

Xiaoxiao says to look out for Chinese cult favourite chilli condiment brand Lao Gan Ma, which is becoming mainstream in home kitchens. "Their popularity lies in their versatility. A spoonful can instantly elevate fries, pasta or noodles with layers of heat, umami and complexity. For retailers, expanding in this category means meeting the demand for flavour-forward ingredients that make everyday cooking more exciting and effortless."

Focus on offering a balance of chilli-infused products across your range, Rumble advises – from mild to intense. Ensuring products are made with clean, natural ingredients and free from artificial colourings and preservatives is also important. "Shoppers today are more aware of what they put in their bodies, so transparency is key. Retailers should also ensure their chilli range reflects global flavours, allowing customers to experience the world without leaving their kitchens."

"Products that bring real flavour (not just heat) tend to perform better long-term," adds Dominique. "Balancing trend-led products like hot honey with established staples helps create a well-rounded offer."

Prioritise quality as well, says Sanjay Aggarwal, founder of Spice Kitchen. "Shoppers are becoming more discerning about this."

CAN YOU RECOMMEND ANY PRODUCTS?

Sublime, maker of flavoured butters, has recently launched an XO sauce and The Other XO (a vegan version) under its Creations line. Both have a rounded, umami taste with a hit of fragrant chilli.

Chili Maven's authentic Mexican-style Salsa Macha goes with everything. And we really like Big Ginger Sauce's sweet, garlickly Angel hot sauce.



THE GLOBAL HOT SAUCE MARKET WAS WORTH $3.3 BILLION IN 2024

FORTUNE BUSINESS INSIGHTS

> "For retailers, expanding in this category means meeting the demand for flavour-forward ingredients that make every day cooking more exciting and effortless"
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PANTRY **HEROES**

True store cupboard stalwarts, pasta and rice, are primed to delight fine food shoppers in 2025

Like many pantry favourites, pasta and rice have been given a new lease of life in 2025 thanks to the growing consumer demand for higher quality, better flavour and sustainable credentials.

While premium options which demonstrate the above attributes necessarily come at an added cost, many shoppers do not consider this to be off-putting – indeed, if a pasta or rice product comes wrapped in premium quality, attractive packaging it can even be suitable for gifting. Provenance plays a role, of course, with pasta hailing from – or inspired by – the grand heritage of Italy a delicious proposition for shoppers, who are coming to recognise the value of paying a little more for, for example, pasta made using bronze dies to improve its cohesion with sauce. Sustainability is also a key consideration for customers of *Speciality Food* readers; while cheap supermarket-shelf options are readily available, by checking out the options offered by delis, farm shops and food halls they are proactively seeking something beyond the basic – a product which will not only feed the appetites of their friends and family quickly, but will also support the environment and people from the place it hailed from.

Sophie Ziegler-Jones of Suma agrees that eco-friendly options are the way forward when it comes to pasta and rice. "We're seeing a continued shift toward conscious consumption," she begins. "Shoppers are increasingly looking for pasta and rice products that align with their values – whether that's organic certification, sustainable sourcing, or ethical production practices. There's also growing demand for products that support healthy lifestyles, including wholegrain, high-protein, and gluten-free options. Convenience is important too, but not at the expense of quality or provenance."

Travel the world from your storecupboard

With social media, online content and television shows rich with culinary inspiration, it's only natural that many shoppers are looking to expand their repertoires. Plus, the Covid-era trend for travelling from the comfort of your kitchen is still going strong, and levelled up for fine food with an interest in products from specific geographical areas. "Consumers are exploring beyond the basics. There's a noticeable increase in interest in regional and heritage varieties – such as



2025 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE
STOCK CHECK



BIONA PUMPKIN RISOTTO

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biona.co.uk



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A heritage variety with a nutty flavour.

wearenicerice.com



GAROFALO FUSILLI LUNGHI

Made with superior durum wheat and bronze drawn, this is a distinctive long spiral shape with Pasta di Gragnano IGP status guaranteeing its quality.

pasta-garofalo.com/uk



WAVENEY MILL SPATZIOLA

This rarely seen pasta shape brings excitement to the dinner table. It's bronze drawn in the heart of the Norfolk Broads, using the finest wheat.

waveneymill.co.uk



CAPPARELLI RADIATORI

A premium pasta, made in Belfast using high quality Italian durum wheat, grown in Puglia, Tuscany, Sicily and Campania.

caparelli.co.uk



SEGGIANO ORGANIC ANCIENT GRAIN WHOLEWHEAT BUSIATE

Produced using sustainably grown ancient grains for health and flavour. Sold in 100% recyclable plant-based packaging and produced using renewable energy.

seggiano.com



EMILIA'S CRAFTED PASTA RIGATONI PGI

A slightly curved, tubular-shaped pasta with square ends, made using traditional techniques and PGI-certified.

emiliaspasta.com



PASTAFICIO CARLESHCI EMMER & FAVA BEAN SEDANI RIGATI

This pasta is a collaboration between the British brand and Hodmedod's in Suffolk, made with healthy Emmer cereal and high protein fava beans.

carleschi.co.uk



FILOTEA CALAMARATA DURUM WHEAT PASTA

Made with 100% Italian durum wheat, bronze drawn and slowly dried. This high protein pasta's shape lends itself particularly to seafood dishes.

justgourmetfoods.co.uk



SUMA ORGANIC GLUTEN FREE OAT RIGATONI

A versatile, delicious gluten-free and organic pasta, crafted in Italy. Sold in 100% plastic-free, sustainable packaging.

suma.coop

the ancient wheat varieties in our organic pasta range," says Sophie. "They're drawn to unique textures and flavours, especially those with a story behind them – including the people behind the farming co-ops we source from. The appetite for global food influences continues to grow, and pasta and rice are an ideal canvas for that experimentation at home."

With rice a vital part of cuisines all over the world, it offers a valuable opportunity for some culinary exploration. "Ready to heat pouches remain popular due to price and convenience factors, however shoppers are looking to purchase rice types to match the cuisine rather than long grain fits all meal solutions, begins Claire Harcup, head of sales and marketing, Europe & Africa for Sun Valley Rice – a five-generation, sustainably-minded family rice farming and production business in California. "Medium Grain rice is growing in popularity, especially for Korean cuisine which is on trend."

As with many foodie trends, the seeds of shoppers' rice experimentation began as a result of the pandemic. "Since Covid, travel has picked up and shoppers are wanting those dishes replicated when back home," says Claire. "Pubs and restaurant chains are therefore increasing their offering across world cuisine, so menus have continued to expand away from traditional favourites."

In terms of trending rice, Claire recommends stocking options that are traditionally used in Asian cuisine. "Short and Medium grain rices are increasing in popularity, often used as a base for Asian rice bowls, Jasmine rice with continued growth of Thai/ Chinese dishes," Claire says. "Basmati remains strong as the UK still loves an Indian curry... and don't forget these options in brown!"Foodies are increasingly aware of the potential for rice; rather than being a plain side dish to a star-player main, it's deserving of its own time in the spotlight – and the challenges of cooking rice well are being overcome thanks to practice and new technologies. "More consumers are using rice cookers or are more confident to cook rice from scratch, whether it's a side dish or main dish such as risotto, paella, sushi or fried rice."

Shoppers are shape-shifting

Some cupboards are never without a pack of penne or spaghetti, but Sophie is seeing a boom in interest for more adventurous shapes. "While classics like penne and spaghetti remain firm favourites, we've noticed a surge in demand for more artisanal shapes – such as Orecchiette, Orzo and Strozzapreti. These are not only visually distinctive but also pair beautifully with premium sauces, which appeals to customers seeking a restaurant-quality meal experience at home," she says.

"Pasta buyers in 2025 are becoming more adventurous with their choices," agrees Sally Assinder of Garofalo. "The most popular pasta shapes continue to include long-standing favourites like spaghetti, penne, and fusilli, but consumers are showing interest toward more distinctive and regional varieties. Shoppers are showing a growing interest in distinctive, regional, or artisanal varieties such as Paccheri, Mafalda, Fusilli Lunghi, Spaghetti Alla Chitara, Orecchiette and Radiatori. Visual appeal and novelty, often driven by social media, play a big role, particularly among younger consumers who are interested in discovering something different."

Sophie puts this down to the rise of picture-perfect pasta dishes on Instagram et al: "social media has also played a part in this trend – shoppers love sharing dishes that look as good as they taste."

Sally has also found that the social media realm has impacted the tastes and inspirations of British shoppers when it comes to pasta dishes. "This shift reflects broader consumer trends, people are looking for inspiration, and social media has made unusual or photogenic shapes more desirable. TikTok and Instagram have played a major role in spotlighting pasta dishes that look and feel a bit different from the everyday."

A healthy opportunity

While a steaming bowl of pasta has historically been seen – to those of us based outside of Italy – as a

> "Whether it's exploring a unique pasta shape or discovering a regional Italian speciality, today's shopper wants more than just a meal – they want an experience"





carb-heavy indulgence, good quality pasta offers health benefits as well as comfort. "In 2025 shoppers are seeking more from their pasta choices than ever before, says Sally, "and health is a top priority, with consumers gravitating toward options like wholewheat, high fibre and high-protein pasta."

There's a growing appetite for products based around legumes rather than the traditional durum wheat, particularly from shoppers keen to enjoy the taste and texture of pasta but wanting to up their protein levels or avoid gluten. "Legume-based varieties made from chickpeas, lentils, or peas continue to grow in popularity, especially among those following gluten-free diets or looking to boost their protein intake," explains Sally. "There's also rising curiosity around more unusual bases like chestnut, spelt, or even seaweed-infused pasta. This interest isn't solely driven by dietary needs; it reflects a broader desire for variety and experimentation.

"Clean labels are also critical, shoppers want minimal ingredients, no additives, and full transparency from brands. At Garofalo we have just launched in Italy, soon to be coming to the UK, a high protein, high fibre pasta with no additives thanks to a groundbreaking production method using only the heart of the wheat."

While health is a key factor in today's consumers' purchasing choices, that's not to say that they're happy to forgo inspirational meal ideas; fine food retailers would be well placed to position recipe cards in their pasta and rice sections, alongside other suitable products, to offer customers a one-stop-shop for a great pasta or rice-based meal in minutes. This POS also provides a chance for retailers to tell the stories of the products on their shelves.

"Beyond nutrition, consumers are looking for inspiration," agrees Sally. "They want pasta to feel exciting again, turning to brands and retailers for pairing ideas, creative recipe suggestions and content that introduces new shapes, sauces and cooking techniques. Social media, food influencers and strong brand storytelling play a crucial role in guiding these choices and encouraging experimentation. Whether it's exploring a unique pasta shape or discovering a regional Italian speciality, today's shopper wants more than just a meal – they want an experience."

How to stock better

The language used around better quality pasta and rice will be familiar to fine food retailers – provenance and traditional skills reign supreme.

"Nothing has changed here, fine food retailers should be looking for several key indicators when it comes to sourcing and stocking quality pasta, starting with the ingredient list," says Sally. "High-quality wheat pasta should be made from 100% durum wheat semolina with a high protein content of 13% or above, which contributes to an al dente texture and the best cooking performance."

"For both pasta and rice, provenance and process are key indicators of quality," explains Sophie. "Retailers should seek out products made from high-quality raw ingredients – like Suma's bronze-die cut pasta made with Italian durum wheat or traditionally grown rice varieties."

Clarity around production is also appreciated by conscientious shoppers,says Sally. "The production method is critical. Bronze drawn pasta gives the rough surface that helps sauces cling better. Slow drying at low temperatures is another important factor, as it preserves the flavour and structure of the pasta. Garofalo pasta is both bronze drawn and slowly dried to keep the structure and prevent breakages. We wrap or pasta in transparent packaging inspired by the philosophy that there is nothing to hide and everything to share, and high-quality pasta is beautiful to look at!"

"Transparency in sourcing, certifications (Organic, Fairtrade, etc.), and environmental credentials are increasingly important to consumers," concludes Sophie. "And of course, the story behind the product – its heritage, method of production, and the people who make it and their working conditions – can be a real point of difference in the fine food sector. We call it food done fairly."

A TASTE **OF THE FUTURE**



Al Overton, UK advisor for IBIS Rice, explains how the brand is helping the category move towards a sustainable future for farmers

IBIS Rice is a conservation project based in Northern Cambodia growing heritage rice and creating a sustainable future for small-scale farmers while protecting threatened forests and endangered wildlife. Each pack of IBIS Rice sold has a measurable impact for both farmers and wildlife, is proving that a different food system is possible and that it does not need to cost more for customers.

IBIS farmers grow a heritage variety of long grain rice known locally as Phka Rumdoul, which has been voted best rice in the world six times at the International Rice Forum. It is a once-a-year crop, grown with the seasonal flooding from the monsoon, which means no artificial irrigation or the accompanying methane emissions and significant pesticide use that comes from intensive rice cultivation. This low impact growing method together with avoided deforestation means a net saving of 250g of carbon dioxide per kg of rice sold through.

The product development for its range started at the soil. By having their farmers intercrop with beans before and after the rice season, it regenerates soil health and supports the food chain of the forest ecosystem from the ground up. It also means that their farmers have three commercial crops a year, rather than just one, further improving farmers' livelihoods and giving greater climate resilience. It then adds extra nutrition for IBIS Rice customers in additional plant-based protein in their rice cakes. It is a win, win, win for wildlife, farmers and customers, which is possible when a brand operates from paddy to plate and has a 360 view of their product impact.

PARTNER CONTENT

Emilia's
CRAFTED PASTA



CRAFTED WITH LOVE

Fine food shoppers are hungry for better, and Emilia's Crafted Pasta is ready to deliver





With inspiration hailing from Italy's gastronomic heartland – Emilia Romagna – Emilia's Crafted Pasta offers something truly authentic to discerning fine food lovers.

Having honed the craft of pasta making in the region, founder Andrew Macleod was inspired to bring the Italian values of real food made with love to the UK market, and the resulting range has consumers hungry for more.

Made in small batches by a family-run pasta workshop in the small Italian hill town of Gragnano, using techniques that larger-scale production simply cannot replicate, Emilia's pasta contains 100% Italian durum wheat sourced from local farms, ensuring optimum traceability, quality and craftsmanship from grain to plate.

Indeed, Emilia's pastas are so authentic that they are PGI-certified, meaning that retailers and consumers alike can be confident of their no-holds-barred quality. This accreditation is a mark of trust from the Gragnano Consortium, whose strict production criteria are at the heart of Emilia's Crafted Pasta's ethos.

The range is perfectly curated to please 2025's shopper; the three-strong selection of bronze die slow-dried pastas includes Bucatini, Casarecce and Rigatoni and is designed to suit both everyday and fine dining occasions – offering exceptional quality at an accessible price point.

Quality-conscious foodies will appreciate the pasta's porous texture – a result of the bronze dies used in its production – thanks to its ability to hold onto sauces unlike poorer quality varieties. What's more, its 9-18 hour drying period results in an easier-to-digest product which appeals to shoppers looking to boost their gut health.

Emilia's carefully crafted philosophy doesn't end there; its 100% recyclable packaging is both beautifully designed and rustic, making it an eye-catching addition to fine food retailers' shelves.

For further information contact: becky@emiliaspasta.com



THE PANTRY
Stocking Essentials



Grumpy Mule

KICK-ASS WHOLEBEAN HOUSE BLEND

With rich notes of dark chocolate and spice, this full-bodied roast is perfect for those who like their coffee with character. Responsibly sourced and roasted with attitude, it's proof you can enjoy top-notch taste without compromising on ethics. Just seriously good coffee that does what it says on the bag. Available in Wholebean and Ground.

grumpymule.co.uk



Yau's

NUT-FREE SATAY SAUCE

Award-winning Thai satay sauce using organic pumpkin seeds – not peanuts – packed with fresh, nutty flavours. A versatile sauce for your cupboard. Use in traditional satay dishes or as a marinade, dip, or simply spread on toast! Free from nuts, MSG, soy and gluten. Suitable for vegans.

bramblefoods.com



Suma

STROZZAPRETI

Strozzapreti is a hand-rolled pasta with a rustic, twisted shape that clings beautifully to sauces. Made from organic heritage wheat and traditionally slow-dried, this white strozzapreti has a delicate bite and full-bodied flavour. Made by an Italian co-operative, it's produced with care, using 100% renewable energy. Its plastic-free, paper-based packaging comes from sustainably managed forests, making it a responsible choice for foodies who care.

suma.coop



Potion De V

VANILLA EXTRACT

The only artisanal vanilla extract company in the UK to make extract by hand and organically age them for over a year. Potion Dev select only the finest organic Grade A Vanilla beans sustainably sourced directly from farms in Madagascar. Their vanilla extract come with Vanilla beans inside them, resulting in a complex depth of flavour that only gets better with time.

potiondev.co.uk



Zaytoun

ZA'ATAR

Za'atar is an aromatic and zesty mix of thyme, sesame, sumac, sea salt and olive oil that's delicious as a dip, and on salads, roast vegetables or meats. Grown, harvested and mixed by a women's co-operative in Palestine's West Bank, and brought to you by Zaytoun, established in 2004 to support the resilience of Palestinian communities through fair trade.

zaytoun.uk



Mellow Yellow

COLD PRESSED RAPESEED OIL

Mellow Yellow Cold Pressed Rapeseed Oil is a versatile choice for cooking, frying, drizzling and baking. Made sustainably in Northamptonshire, it has a subtle, nutty flavour and is gently pressed to retain nutrients. A good source of Omega 3 and Vitamin E, whilst being low in saturated fat, it's the perfect cooking companion.

farrington-oils.co.uk



Union Hand-Roasted Coffee

REVELATION

Union's most popular espresso coffee, a bold one – with hints of chocolate and treacle. Dark-roasted for a rich caramel finish, without bitterness. A complex blend of coffees from family farmers in Guatemala, Rwanda, Burundi, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Round and full body. As filter, enjoy dark chocolate and gentle cherry notes.

unionroasted.com



Fish4Eva

CORNISH SARDINES

Supporting British Fishers. Fish4Ever has lead the way in responsible fishing, supporting local boats and precise methods, helping to ensure that fishing communities are supported in making a fair living. They have been working with a British cannery for more than 20 years, selling Scottish mackerel and locally caught Sprats. New for 2025, the team is excited to launch Cornish Sardines, supporting the very best of British.

organicorealfoods.com

THE PANTRY
Stocking Essentials



Realfoods by Organico

BORLOTTI BEANS

Discover the joy of real food and get your 'pulse' racing with our new range of beans and pulses. Organically sourced, preciously jarred and hand-sorted to make your recipes sing and your guest smile. Specially chosen for culinary perfection, these lovely borlotti beans are produced in the province of Turin in small batches.

organicorealfoods.com



Punjaban

MADRAS & BALTI CURRY SAUCES

Two new family favourites from the Punjaban kitchen to spice up your shelves. Made with the same care and attention to authentic flavours as the existing homestyle curry sauce range. Free from added sugar, wheat, dairy, gluten and nuts. Suitable for vegans.

bramblefoods.com

Fudge Kitchen

VANILLA CRUMBLY FUDGE

Savour the sweet simplicity of tradition with Fudge Kitchen's Vanilla Crumbly Fudge. Handcrafted using time-honoured techniques and sustainably sourced ingredients, this delicious treat offers a melt-in-the-mouth texture alongside the rich flavour of vanilla. A nostalgic delight, perfect for to have on standby for gifting or sweet self-indulgence. Rediscover the comforting charm of classic British confectionery with every bite.

fudgekitchen.co.uk





Just Live A Little

GRANOLA

Just Live a Little gluten-free granolas and porridges are rich and beautiful combinations of colours, tastes and textures, using wholegrain gluten-free oats and nature's finest nuts, fruit and seeds. Just Live A Little then bake in small batches for you to enjoy a better breakfast by the spoonful, bowlful or even by the handful.

justlivealittle.com

Garofalo

WHOLEWHEAT PASTA

Garofalo wholewheat pasta is made with 100% organic, unprocessed durum wheat semolina, high in fibre and an excellent source of protein. Our specialised milling process removes the gritty texture often found in wholewheat pasta, while preserving the bran, fibre, vitamins, and minerals of unrefined grains, vital for gut health that many consumers want. Garofalo's whole wheat pasta offers a smooth, enjoyable taste, ideal even for the most discerning palates!

pasta-garofalo.com





Union Hand-Roasted Coffee

TIMANA

Named after a warrior tribe, Timana is a rich, balanced coffee with notes of plum, molasses, and Turkish delight. With milk, expect dried fig and fudge. Grown by ASPROTIMANA, a cooperative we've partnered with since 2003, this coffee reflects community, quality, and progress – including a women's group supporting leadership and business training for female farmers.

unionroasted.com

Olives Et Al

SPICE BLENDS

There's nothing like cooking over charcoal—the crackle, the smoke, the flavour. Inspired by travels through the Med and Middle East, Olives Et Al hand-blended spices bring bold, honest flavour to every dish. From Turkish Adana heat to sun-soaked Mediterranean herbs, each jar captures the spirit of street food, open fires, and shared meals. Every blend tells a story.

olivesetal.co.uk





Zaytoun

MEDJOUL DATES

Nothing compares to the rich caramel succulence of Medjoul dates – a delicious healthy kitchen-cupboard standby to satisfy sweet cravings, whether straight from the pack, or in favourite bakes. Harvested on Palestinian farms around Jericho in the West Bank, and brought to you by Zaytoun, established in 2004 to support the resilience of Palestinian communities through fair trade. 250g & 500g.

zaytoun.uk

COMMENTATORS



GIANFRANCO PERRI
JUST GOURMET FOODS



MARIA WHITEHEAD
HAWKSHEAD RELISH



CARMEN FERGUSON
BIONA



LAURA STRAPP
COTSWOLD FAYRE



BRENDON AND JAYDON MANDERS
LUMBERJAXE



FLAVOUR BOOSTERS

Our time is more precious than ever, so flavour-packed shortcuts are the order of the day

We've all been there. The end of a long working day, hungry, and without the energy or wherewithal to whip up a tasty feast for the family. Thankfully, there's a wide array of flavour-packed culinary shortcuts on the market right now – so you can help your customers to satisfy their hunger while ensuring that your shared love of quality and great taste is never sacrificed.

While cooking sauces have previously worn a reputation of being bland, watery, and poor quality, there's a new generation of sauce-makers turning this on its head – and bringing taste explosions to cupboards up and down the country. When shoppers turn to cooking sauces, they're tight on time not appetite, so it's important to offer them something which not only aids them in their mission to get something on the table pronto but tempts their tastebuds and keeps them coming back for more.

"Consumer interest in cooking sauces continues to rise in 2025, and the reasons are clear. Today's shoppers are juggling busy schedules with high expectations around what they eat," says Gianfranco Perri, CEO and founder of Just Gourmet Foods – a curator of outstanding Italian produce. "They want more than just convenience – they want authenticity, traceability, and exceptional flavour. Cooking sauces have evolved into a smart shortcut to real home-cooked meals, with no compromise on quality."

Provenance is a strong selling tool across the fine food sector, and this is very much the case in the cooking sauces category too. ""Fine food shoppers are increasingly looking for sauces that tell a story – products that reflect care, provenance, and craftsmanship," says Gianfranco. Fine food markers can transform a humdrum weeknight speed-supper into an indulgent treat – without eating into tight timescales – he says. "They're seeking the kind of detail that turns a meal into an experience: regional origin, traditional methods, clean labels, and standout ingredients."

Hawkshead Relish's new range of slow cooker sauces offers just the solution for shoppers seeking time-saving meal solutions without sacrificing on quality or flavour. "The idea was to offer consumers the flavour of something they have cooked themselves at home, without all the chopping and prepping," explains Maria Whitehead, director. "We want to make people's lives easier, and so these sauces can be used in a wide range of ways – from adding flavour to meat in a slow cooker or air fryer or as a marinade."

There are four products in the range – Honey Mustard, Sticky Chilli, Lemon & Garlic, Bloody Mary – and a time-saver these sauces most certainly are; there's no need to brown the meat or to season the end result – all that's required is a little time for the flavours to mellow and mingle.



A taste for Asian flavours

For Carmen Ferguson, brand manager at Biona (parent company, Windmill Organics), South East Asian food has proven particularly popular. "At Biona we offer a range of organic cooking sauces which really hit the mark for healthy scratch-cookers who are looking for exciting ingredients to include in their repertoire," she begins. "One area where we are particularly seeing increased consumer interest, and where we have recently introduced two new products, is South-East Asian cuisine. According to Mintel's 2024 World Cuisines report, over half (54%) of British consumers say they're cooking from scratch more than they used to, and South-east Asian cooking sauces in particular are in strong growth, surging in both value (by *28.4%) and volume (up *11.9%), to cement themselves as the current fastest-growing cooking sauce type."

A bright future for cooking sauces

As shoppers' spare time continues to tighten, "the future is bright – and delicious" for the cooking sauce category says Gianfranco – and this offers a rich opportunity for indies. "UK shoppers are moving away from generic, mass-produced sauces and gravitating towards depth, character, and provenance. Cooking sauces are no longer simply a "helping hand"; they're becoming centrepieces of the meal.

"We expect continued growth in sauces that reflect specific regions, feature seasonal ingredients, and cater to evolving dietary trends, especially plant-based and flexitarian. There's also room for more adventurous flavour profiles—something we're exploring across our portfolio," he says.

Retailers who support this shift with strong in-store storytelling, pairing ideas and thoughtful merchandising will see customer engagement grow. Whether it's a quick meal or a curated gift box, sauces are becoming essential to how people experience food at home.

WHY YOU SHOULD STOCK SEASONINGS

"The UK public as a whole are getting more and more into using seasonings within their cooking," begin Brendon and Jaydon Manders, founders of Lumberjaxe. "Gone are the days of bland chicken, sugary marinades or beige meals. Sweet and spicy meals are becoming increasingly popular within the UK and people are looking for low salt, low sugar alternatives. Shoppers are using seasonings for super quick, super tasty midweek meals. With the rapid rise of airfryers, seasoned chicken cooked in an airfryer paired with rice and veg is a speedy way to get wild flavoured meals quickly."

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE * 2025 * STOCK CHECK



BIONA
RED THAI CURRY PASTE
This vegan medium-hot paste features organic ingredients including chilli, garlic, ginger and lemongrass.
biona.co.uk



GARLIC FARM SEA SALT WITH GARLIC & CHILLI
The perfect way to add savoury and spicy flavour, with none of the fuss.
thegarlicfarm.co.uk



HAWKSHEAD RELISH BLOODY MARY SLOW COOKER SAUCE
A flavourful gluten and nut-free timesaver. Delicious with pork.
hawksheadrelish.com



FIELDBLENDS
LEMON, SUMAC & GREEN HERB
Tart and zingy, this seasoning combines dehydrated lemon peel, sumac berries, herbs, and hand-harvested Yorkshire sea salt.
fieldblends.club

DISTRIBUTOR INSIGHT



Laura Strapp, head of buying at Cotswold Fayre, shares her take on the growing cooking sauce and seasonings sector

Shoppers are looking for quality restaurant standard meal solutions so they can replicate at home. It's all about convenience but not compromising on taste. We have seen growth in meal kit solutions, spice sachets and sauces in jars from all different cuisines growing with new challenger brands.

It has really evolved from the flavours from traditional Indian/Italian/Chinese being the well-known cuisines to more specific regions with growth in Thai/Japanese and Malaysian flavours.

With more challenger brands entering the market, and with cooking trends and shows, shoppers are looking to experiment more with flavours. Shoppers are scratch cooking but looking for ease when it comes to the important ingredients and this could be a chilli crisp oil that adds the perfect flavour!

Ultimately, this is an exciting category as shoppers are more educated in what goes into cooking sauces and finding that perfect brand that can simplify and add the flavours they need for a quick meal solution.

> "Shoppers are looking to experiment more with flavours"

SWEETEN YOUR SALES

By offering consumers an affordable treat, cakes and traybakes provide a valuable opportunity for retailers

COMMENTATORS



SAMANTHA HARVEY
CAKEHEAD



LAURA ROBERTS
LAURA'S LARDER

The nostalgia trend is still going strong, and with most shoppers still penny-pinching – but excited to treat themselves when they step through the doors of fine food establishments – it's a smart move to stock a range of comforting treats for customers to indulge in when the mood takes them. Bonus points if they, as Samantha Harvey, marketing and social media specialist at Cakehead, suggests, "combine quality ingredients, artisanal flair, visual appeal, and a point of difference - cakes that not only satisfy a sweet tooth, but also tell a story worth sharing."

A slice of something sweet with a cup of tea can cure all manner of ills, and a teatime treat is still a daily (or regular weekend) occurrence, but don't feel that you have to stick to the classics – Victoria sponge, chocolate fudge cake or flapjack – to get mouths watering and tills ringing. Healthier options are proving increasingly popular, as shoppers opt for better-for-you options to satisfy their cravings for something sweet without blowing the budget.

Indeed, at Laura's Larder, owner Laura Roberts has found that her customers switch their allegiance as the week continues. "During the week, there's a definite lean toward 'healthier' bakes — fruit-based cakes, lower-sugar options, or something with oats and nuts. But by Thursday or Friday, it's full-on treat mode. That's when the nostalgic bakes come out: Crunchie brownies, gooey traybakes, and anything indulgent."

Buying better

Cakes don't need to be piled high with buttercream to be considered a treat, particularly earlier in the week says Laura; there are plenty of less saccharine options to satisfy a customer's sweet tooth. "Healthier options absolutely have their moment, especially earlier in the week. Customers often pick up something lighter for themselves – a fruit-and-nut bar or naturally sweetened cake – and save the richer stuff for later." Free-from options are worth stocking too. "We're not a 'free-from' specialist, but people appreciate having a couple of naturally gluten-free or dairy-light options, as long as they're still delicious," she continues.



"In 2025, shoppers are seeking cakes and bakes that balance indulgence with mindful choices," agrees Samantha. "Vegan and gluten-free friendly options are in high demand, reflecting a growing preference for inclusive and health-conscious offerings, something that Cakehead feels very strongly about and is one of few in the market that caters 100% gluten-free options."

As well as free-from and generally healthier ingredients lists, "Consumers are also increasingly drawn to clean-label ingredients," says Samantha, "favouring natural alternatives over artificial additives. Just like using hand-squeezed fresh lemons for our Lemon & White Chocolate Blondies, and fresh eggs from a local farm in Oakham in every recipe."

Hungry for 'homemade'

Busy consumers who want to present something crafted with love but don't have the time to bake at home are well catered for in 2025. "There's still a strong love for the handmade, home-style look and feel. People want a slice that feels a bit special but still familiar," says Laura. "We also get birthday orders and 'I'm not baking, but I want it to feel homemade' moments.

These 'homemade' moments are also popular with Cakehead's customers. "We bake all our cakes with a focus on local, artisanal craftsmanship. Every cake is made with care by our skilled bakers, using traditional methods and quality ingredients to ensure they deliver the authenticity and homemade feel our customers value in every bite."

Weekday treats may be just as delicious, if a bit healthier, but weekends are when Laura sees a sales boost. "Mostly people buy cakes for sharing – a treat when people visit or when they're visiting others. We definitely see a Friday afternoon spike – that 'you survived the week' school pick-up treat."

The rise of traybakes

"Traybakes and slices remain top choices, thanks to their versatility and shareable format," says Samantha. "Our secret-recipe Caramel Shortbread is a standout favourite, combining rich, buttery shortbread with smooth caramel and a thick layer of chocolate for timeless appeal. Meanwhile, our range of Brookies – including the gooey, chocolatey S'mores Brookie, the indulgent Kinder Brookie, and the ever-popular Cookies and Cream Brookie – captures the demand for hybrid bakes that offer texture, novelty, and serious indulgence."

While well-known and undeniably delicious, products such as these offer a taste of something new too. "These products reflect a wider trend: consumers want familiar favourites, but they're increasingly open to creative twists and bold flavour combinations," explains Samantha.

WHAT TO STOCK IN 2025

"Seasonal fruits and anything with nuts always go down well," says Laura, "and pistachio is consistently popular. Nostalgic flavours do brilliantly too, especially anything inspired by classic chocolate bars or old-school puddings. Jammy, spongy things also have a loyal following. It's all about that small moment of joy with a coffee or tea."

"Nostalgic, retro-inspired flavours like Cherry Bakewell, Lemon Drizzle and Victoria Sponge remain popular, especially when combined with multi-textural experiences- such as crunchy nutty toppings, creamy fillings, and gooey jam centres, all enhancing the sensory appeal," says Samantha.

> "Consumers want familiar favourites, but they're increasingly open to creative twists and bold flavour combinations"





COMMENTATORS



ROBERT BOWDEN
THE FINE CHEESE CO



HELENA WRIGHT
JACKSON'S BAKERY



CHARLOTTE SMITH
IMAGE ON FOOD



MASH CHILES
GOURMET PARTNERS



ZINEB FARESS
RAPHIA



DANIEL SMITH
STAG BAKERIES



A CANNY **CRUNCH**

They may be a staple of shoppers' baskets, but there's more to the humble biscuit than meets the eye

Some baking is still a key trend in 2025, but with fewer consumers finding the time to bake biscuits from scratch there's a valuable opportunity for independent retailers to cash in on their desire for homespun-tasting biscuits. After all, shoppers' time might be tight, but their appetite for quality sweet treats is as strong as ever.

"In 2025, shoppers are seeking far more than just a quick sweet fix – they're looking for biscuits that deliver a sense of occasion, comfort, and genuine delight," begins Pat Bills of Fiona Cairns. "Taste is of course paramount. People want biscuits that are rich in flavour, beautifully balanced, and made with real, familiar ingredients. There's a return to proper baking – where the quality of butter, the warmth of spices, or the brightness of citrus really shines through."

Speciality Food readers will be all too familiar with the consumer hunger for provenance, and this rings true in the biscuits sector too. "What we're seeing is a growing desire for authenticity and provenance. Consumers want to know where their ingredients come from – they value traditional baking methods, natural flavours, and a clear story behind the product," she continues.

Shoppers' love of great biscuits isn't simply about a sugar fix any more – especially in the world of fine food. "Today's fine food shoppers want their biscuit to do more than crunch. They want it to tell a story, support the planet, and taste like a nostalgic hug or bold adventure," says Robert Bowden, UK sales manager at The Fine Cheese Co. "It's about indulgence with a conscience, featuring standout flavours, top-tier ingredients, and eco-friendly packaging. Bonus points if it pairs well with coffee, tea or cheese and makes a charming gift. Because nothing says 'I care' like a biscuit that is both delicious and ethically sound."

Nostalgia is trending

"The nostalgia trend that continues to thrive across food and drink is just





as relevant in the biscuit category," begins Helena Wright, marketing and NPD director at Jacksons Bakery, which acquired Lottie Shaw's in 2024. "We're seeing fine food shoppers, just as in other demographics, seeking flavours that evoke feelings of comfort and simpler times. Lottie Shaw's is a brand that has always stayed true to its roots, baking family recipes that have either been passed down through generations or inspired by old family favourites. Flavours such as ginger, all-butter shortbread and oatmeal and raisin have been staples in the Lottie Shaw's biscuit portfolio for years and perfectly fit the bill to lean into the nostalgia trend. In fact, Lottie Shaw's Yorkshire Parkin Biscuits continue to be an all-year-round best seller."

That's not to say that biscuits need to be entirely traditional to tap into the nostalgia trend, as Helena explains. "It's all about nostalgia, or 'newstalgia', products with a new twist on old favourites. Tapping into those familiar, comforting flavours whilst adding an additional, more modern element is something that we'll start to see more of across food and will really pique the interest of fine food consumers."

For a taste of tried and true tradition, not much beats Billington's Gingerbread. "With roots stretching back over 200 years, these delicately crisp delights are made using one of the oldest surviving gingerbread recipes in the UK," explains Charlotte Smith, marketing assistant at Image On Food. "Infused with a secret blend of spices, golden syrup, and a subtle splash of rum, they offer a flavour that's as nostalgic as it is indulgent. "Once a beloved biscuit of farmers' wives, Billington's Gingerbread has long held a place at the heart of teatime rituals. Their firm texture makes them ideal for dunking – which further enhances the delicious flavours. However, enjoyed, these timeless fingers bring a spiced richness to any spread."

Creating an occasion

Biscuits are a natural fit for 'the lipstick effect', whereby consumers purchase a premium version of a food product rather than reaching for more pricey investments. This trend for self gifting – and food as gifts generally – has been noted at Fiona Cairns. "We feel that indulgence and gifting have become central pillars of the premium biscuit sector" Pat says. "Biscuits are no longer just pantry staples – they're seen as small, thoughtful luxuries. That moment of indulgence, whether it's a buttery shortbread with a morning coffee or a delicately spiced gingerbread shared in the evening, offers a sense of comfort and pleasure that people really value in today's world.

"Gifting, too, has grown significantly. A beautifully presented box of biscuits speaks to a desire for more personal, meaningful gestures – whether as a thank-you, a celebration, or simply to brighten someone's day. It's about more than just the product inside; it's the experience, the thoughtfulness, and the story it tells. When something looks beautiful, tastes exceptional, and is crafted with care, it becomes a gift in every sense."

A beautifully decorated biscuit is a favourite with all the family, and Original Biscuit Bakers' range of handcrafted designs is suitable for any occasion. "These biscuits offer a unique way to elevate any table – whether for a picnic, party, baby shower, or simply an afternoon indulgence," says Charlotte. "Each biscuit is made using their signature gingerbread or scrumptious sugar







DISTRIBUTOR **INSIGHT**



Helen Wallace, senior buyer at Cress Co, shares her industry intel

WHAT ARE FINE FOOD RETAILERS/SHOPPERS LOOKING FOR FROM BISCUITS IN 2025?

Whilst we're aware that there is growth in healthy biscuits in the grocery market as a whole, we're still finding that consumers in our sector are still looking to treat themselves (or loved ones) to a little indulgence. As ultra processed foods come under increasing scrutiny, I believe that brands with clean and high-quality ingredient declarations will have an opportunity to capitalise. In a crowded market driving interest with innovation around product formats and flavours is important and promotional activity will continue to be an important driver of sales.

WHAT ARE YOUR BEST-SELLING BISCUITS, AND WHY DO YOU THINK THIS IS?

Some of our top sellers are sharing packs which is reflective of the fact that many consumers are picking up biscuits to give as a gift. Christmas is un-surprisingly a critically important trading period for the category and chocolate biscuits topped the sales charts for us over the festive period in 2024. It will be interesting to see what impact cocoa price inflation will have on sales of chocolate biscuit lines this year.

HOW IS THE BISCUIT CATEGORY EVOLVING – WHAT DO YOU THINK IS TO COME?

We're seeing an increasing number of suppliers focusing on offering 14 allergen-free products and I anticipate we'll continue to see development of increasingly indulgent vegan and free from biscuits. Flavour diversification will continue to be important and I'm most definitely expecting to see a rise in pistachio varieties. I anticipate we'll see an increase in development of lines of products drizzled with chocolate rather than dipped or fully enrobed in response to chocolate pricing challenges. I also expect to see exciting biscuits and confectionery enter the market that are traditional in other parts of world but unfamiliar to us in the UK.

Biscuits drive significant sales in our sector so whilst this is a well-established market there is most certainly opportunity for new entrants offering something different to what's already out there.

> "Some of our top sellers are sharing packs which is reflective of the fact that many consumers are picking up biscuits to give as a gift"

cookie recipe and are carefully hand-iced by a talented team of artists for that special personal touch. A feast for the eyes as much as the taste buds, these biscuits promise to bring a smile to every guest."

Health sells

Biscuits can offer the epitome of indulgence if that's what your customers are looking for – chocolate-dipped, butter-rich and sticky with caramel, for example – but they can also bring a way to add nutrition to their diet.

"In 2025, your customers are expecting more from their biscuits and crackers. They're looking for snacks that feel indulgent but are made with health and wellbeing in mind," explains Mash Chiles of Gourmet Partners. "Products that are gluten-free, low-carb, plant-based, or keto-friendly are no longer niche – they're the norm. But it's not just about what's in (or not in) the ingredients – it's about the experience."

Texture is trending

Sometimes the simple, crumbly texture of a classic shortbread biscuit is just what the doctor ordered, but in 2025 texture is trending. "Shoppers are drawn to texture—they want crunchy, layered flavours, and a satisfying bite," says Mash. Versatile biscuits that can be enjoyed in a myriad of ways, and partnered with other delicious foods, are a great option, he continues. "They're also seeking interactive snacks – those that pair beautifully with cheeses, dips, or toppings, allowing them to create personalised, gourmet moments. You'll also notice a growing appetite for global and gourmet flavours – think aromatic herbs, bold spices, and premium inclusions like nuts, seeds, and dried fruit. Olina's Bakehouse delivers across all of these fronts, offering a range of Seeded Toasts, Wafer Crackers, Flatbreads, and Seeded Snackers that bring together flavour, function, and sensory satisfaction."

International inspiration

With shoppers travelling via their food and drink choices more than ever, it pays to offer something a little more exotic than the expected cookies and classic bakes. Zineb Faress, founder of Raphia, says, "There's a growing appetite for internationally-inspired biscuits as consumers become more curious, discerning, and globally minded in their tastes. What was once a humble teatime treat is now a gateway to world flavours, with brands and artisan bakers drawing on culinary traditions from across the globe. From aromatic spices to fragrant florals and unexpected textures, biscuits are being reimagined through a multicultural lens that blends authenticity with modern indulgence."



Aromatic ingredients hailing from distant shores hold significance for British shoppers in 2025, and are able to transport them to fond memories or wish list destinations, says Zineb. "As a brand rooted in Moroccan heritage, we've seen a real shift in the appreciation of ingredients that carry cultural weight. Flavours like cinnamon, almonds, orange blossom and rosewater are resonating strongly, not just for their taste, but for their ability to evoke a sense of place, memory and warmth. These elements lend both depth and narrative, elevating a biscuit into something experiential. A single bite can transport you to the bustling souks and sun-soaked kitchens of Morocco."

Seeking out new experiences is one of the key tenets of shoppers' appetites this year, says Zineb. "This trend also speaks to a wider movement: consumers are no longer satisfied with the ordinary. They're seeking out premium, meaningful products that offer more than just a sugar hit. Biscuits inspired by global traditions are no longer niche, they've become a symbol of how everyday rituals, like a tea or coffee break, can become rich, sensory moments. It's about slowing down, being present, and tasting the world, one bite at a time."

Choosing what to stock

There's a raft of boxes to tick when it comes to stocking your biscuit shelves, but quality is the key driver here. "Quality is non-negotiable," says

DISTRIBUTOR **INSIGHT**



Justin Burbage, commercial director at RH Amar shares his thoughts on what shoppers are seeking from biscuits in 2025

Fine food shoppers are drawn to products that feel crafted, with clear attention to detail, premium ingredients, and a story that reflects heritage and authenticity.

With consumers spending more time entertaining at home they are looking to add interest to eating or drinking occasions and savoury biscuits can join the party. They can be the side show, or indeed star of the show, when served with wine, charcuterie, or cheese boards. Biscuits that can complement social occasions or seasonal entertaining are always an attractive purchase.

Quality is more relevant than ever. Shoppers are interested in where their food comes from and how it is made. Shoppers want to see the use of quality ingredients - such as real cheese, alongside traditional baking methods and an unmistakably artisanal or handcrafted appearance. Often biscuits are seen as a treat purchase and so consumers are rightfully demanding.

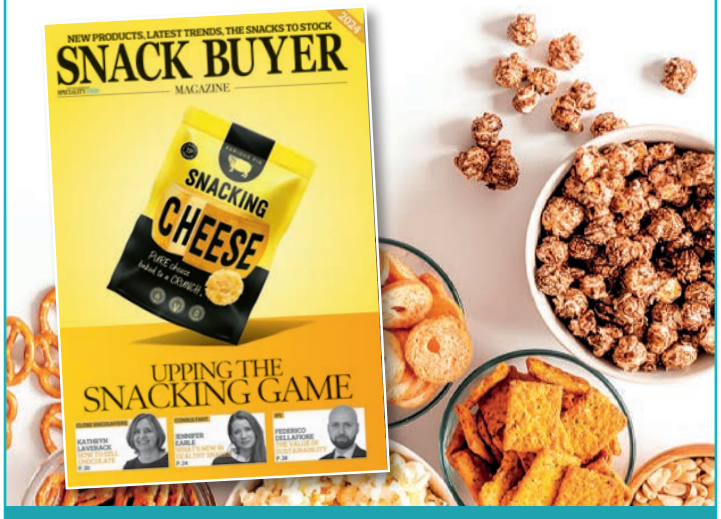
Retailers should be looking to offer a range that includes the classic crowd pleasers, seasonal offerings that add a sense of occasion, gifting-led formats, and interesting and innovative flavours that pique shopper curiosity.

Showing shoppers how savoury biscuits can be part of the occasion, or offering serving suggestions and ideas, will help bring all corners of your range to life. Try introducing shoppers to the idea of pairing a specific flavour biscuit to their favourite wine - Buiteman's Swiss Gruyere Biscuits are a delicious nibble to serve with a chilled glass of Sauvignon Blanc before dinner.

> "Retailers should be looking to offer a range that includes the classic crowd pleasers, seasonal offerings that add a sense of occasion, gifting-led formats, and interesting and innovative flavours that pique shopper curiosity"

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE

SNACK BUYER 2025
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TRENDING IN BISCUITS



John Hawes and Kris Biggs, co-founders of KNEAD Bakery, tell *Speciality Food* what's flying off their shelves

At KNEAD, we've noticed a real evolution in how people enjoy biscuits, not just as a tea-time treat, but as an all-day indulgence or a clever way to elevate cheese boards, gift boxes, and even lunch plates.

On the sweet side, it's all about nostalgia with a twist. Classic biscuits like custard creams and bourbons are back in fashion – but not as you remember them. We bake thousands of our hand-pressed custard creams and bourbons each week, made with real butter, proper cocoa, and a generous pinch of joy. Customers are craving those comforting flavours, but with a premium, handmade edge. Add in a rise in plant-based and gluten-free options, and it's clear people want their biscuit fix – without compromise.

Meanwhile, savoury biscuits have gone gourmet. Our standout? A polish bread-based savoury biscuit, developed specially for Christmas, which we bake by the thousand to accompany cheeseboards. With its deeply fermented flavour, it's a natural partner to punchy cheddar, local brie, or even a spoonful of chutney. We've seen these fly off shelves over the festive season - not just as crackers, but as snacks in their own right.

And across both sweet and savoury, one thing holds true: texture matters. Our customers are looking for that satisfying snap, that soft crumb, or that perfect crisp to complete the bite.

> "Across both sweet and savoury, one thing holds true: texture matters"

Robert. "If your biscuit cannot deliver on taste, ethics, and premium quality, it is not making the cut. Shoppers expect flavour that sings, packaging that impresses, and sourcing that does not come with a guilty conscience. A great biscuit should be traceable, trustworthy, and possibly the only thing stopping someone from skipping dessert."

"Quality remains absolutely essential," agrees Daniel Smith, sales and marketing manager at Stag Bakeries. "Given the economic climate, it's so important that when consumers purchase fine food products, they get value for money. We have noticed in recent years that our customers have a real appetite for finding out how we make our biscuits – the ingredients we use and where they come from, and the methods and processes we use to turn these into the final product. The hands-on craft element in what fine food producers do on a day-to-day basis is such an important asset. Ultimately though, the biggest marker of quality remains taste and flavour."

While time is undoubtedly tight for buyers, it pays to put a little extra thought into your biscuit selection these days. "Refreshing your biscuit range does not mean tossing in a new flavour and calling it a day," Robert says. "It is about selecting with care and flair. Go for indulgent treats with eye-catching packaging and an excellent brand story. A lean, quality-driven range says, 'we know what we're doing', while an overcrowded shelf just says, 'we panicked'.

"I think when looking to strike the balance between reliable best-selling favourites and biscuit varieties that customers may be less familiar with, brands with an interesting origin story always help in getting consumers on board to try something new," advises Daniel. "There are so many excellent sweet and savoury biscuits in the speciality market now that it can be difficult to narrow it down, but we have noticed an appetite among our customers for trying something out of the ordinary in the last year or two."





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Award-winning biscuits for cheese from the Outer Hebrides
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STOCK CHECK



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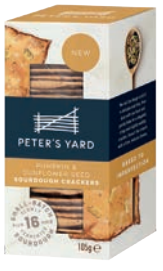
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10 TIPS FOR **IN-STORE CHEESE TASTINGS**

Why does sampling matter in fine food retail? Cheese experts share their thoughts

A huge part of the pleasure of visiting a cheese specialist or independent deli counter is being able to 'try before you buy'.

While the range of cheeses available in some upmarket multiples today is impressive, customers have nothing to go on when it comes to texture, flavour or punchiness, bar the small label beside each variety – largely limited to price, milk variety and a very short description.

As the average British shopper is notoriously cautious about deviating from their usual basket, this environment does little to inspire them to step out of their comfort zone. This is where you come in.

Your role, as a fine food retailer, is to make ingredients (and not just cheese) come alive. To help consumers to interact with and appreciate them. That is the magic of the speciality world – seeing someone's face light up as they experience their first taste of authentic farmhouse Red Leicester, or as they take a leap of faith (under your guidance), delving further into the world of washed rinds and decadent blues.

If you're an indie that's perhaps been a bit more cautious of sampling since Covid (when it was a no-no) here are just a few of the reasons it should become a larger part of your offering, and how you can get the most out of offering tastings.

1 STRIKE UP CONVERSATIONS

Cheese expert Ned Palmer, of The Cheese Tasting Co, says tastings are a vital way to capture shoppers' imaginations while fostering a sense of comfort. "The whole point is to make people feel comfortable," he explains. "Most people haven't been into a cheese shop before. They look at us in our little uniforms and feel intimidated. The more comfortable they are, the more likely they are to buy something," he adds. Offering something to try, and asking questions about what customers do and don't like gets the conversation flowing, and should immediately put most people at ease.

2 SHOW YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Simon Jones at Forest Deli sees sampling as a way to share his expertise. To offer nuggets of information that go beyond what shoppers can see on packaging or a counter label. That could be telling the story of a maker and their land, or something more informational. For example, "We'll talk about the importance of taking cheese out of the fridge quite a while before eating. A really sharp Cheddar straight from the fridge does not give all of its flavours up," he says. Use tastings as a way to demonstrate your understanding of the seasonality of some cheeses, Ned adds. "So, things like the fact you won't get a lot of fresh goats' cheese in winter, but will in summer."

3 CONTROL YOUR STOCK

Though most cheesemongers are led by 'what's best' or the cheeses they love the most, another reason for offering tastings is to help with the flow of cheese through your stock room. If you've got a surplus of a certain variety about to 'peak', make a show of tasting it, offering it in myriad interesting ways, and making cooking and usage suggestions in person and via your social accounts to gently nudge shoppers into giving it a go, freeing up space for your next delivery.

4 ENCOURAGE ADVENTURE

You will definitely have customers who are nervous about veering away from their regular Cheddar, but Mark Kacary of The Norfolk Deli says using your expertise (and charm) goes a long way to shifting shoppers' perceptions and helping them try something new (for them). If someone says they don't like blue cheese, for example, he might suggest, "You haven't tried the right blue cheese", before discovering what they didn't enjoy about the types they've eaten previously, and encouraging them to try varieties more aligned with their palate. "What's the worst that could happen?"

5 BE BOLD

Some cheesemongers will only offer samples when asked, but Mark thinks pre-cutting and displaying a few cheeses on the counter has its merits. There are disadvantages, "in that it encourages the 'I haven't had lunch yet, but I'm hungry' brigade, but does allow for some others to taste and ask about the cheese and, more often than not, if you combine sampling with customer engagement, then a sale is the net result".

6 WARM IT UP

The golden rule when serving cheese, says Laura Billington, founder of Graze Cheshire, is always to bring it to room temperature – something that can be forgotten when running a busy shop. Ideally take cheese from the fridge and prepare it 30 to 60 minutes before popping it on the counter for sampling. "Cold cheese hides its aroma and softens its character," she explains. "A ripe Brie eaten straight from the fridge will taste bland and feel too firm – but give it time to breathe and it becomes silky, aromatic and utterly irresistible."

7 CONTRAST

When you're serving up your samples, always think about contrast, Laura continues. "Add something crunchy (crackers or toasted nuts), something sweet (figs, honey or grapes), or something acidic," to match what you're offering and provide a source of inspiration for shoppers.

8 LOOKS MATTER

An effective way to draw customers towards your tasting tray (other than your sparkling personality, of course) is to make it feel like a mini cheeseboard, thinks Laura. Don't just 'throw' things onto a platter as an afterthought. "Use small wooden or slate trays to keep things clean and elevated. Top up cheese regularly so it never looks tired or picked over. And a small garnish – like rosemary, thyme or even a few grapes – adds seasonal colour and visual appeal, especially when swapped out through the year." In spring and summer she suggests strawberries, mint, edible flowers and herbs, switching to dried fruits and ramekins of chutney for richness in autumn and winter.

9 PLACEMENT IS EVERYTHING

Always place your tasting trays at the front of the counter, never hidden behind, Laura continues. "Add a small sign suggesting pairings or flavour notes. It only takes a few words to make it irresistible. And encourage staff to interact – 'Have you tried this one before?' or 'Would you pair this with something sweet or savoury?'.

10 UPSELL

Don't waste the opportunity sampling gives you to gently remind customers of the other good things you have to offer. Let them know, as they taste the cheese, which crackers (if any) the samples are paired with, and the wines, chutneys, relishes and pickles on your shelves that would be ideal partners.

> "Add a small sign suggesting pairings or flavour notes"

PETER'S YARD
NEW OREGANO & OLIVE OIL SOURDOUGH CRACKERS
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GREAT YORKSHIRE SHOW READY TO HOST

CHEESE AND DAIRY AWARDS 2025

More than 100 classes will be judged at the event this July

The leafy town of Harrogate will once again become a hive of activity this summer, as the annual Great Yorkshire Show (organised by Yorkshire Agricultural Society (YAS) takes place from 8th to 11th July.

One of the largest county shows in the UK, the event attracts around 35,000 visitors each day, positioning it as a prime destination for makers to showcase their wares.

That includes cheese and dairy folk, who will once again have the opportunity to demonstrate just how fantastic British produce can be, by taking part in the Cheese and Dairy Awards.

In 2025, 107 dairy classes will be judged, spanning traditional milk, cream and butter, yoghurt and ice cream, alongside a huge array of cheese classes (from Yorkshire icon Wensleydale, to blue cheese, soft cheese, reduced-fat cheese and speciality cheese). There are classes for a variety of milks, including cow, buffalo, goat and sheep.

Even if you haven't entered this year, the cheese and dairy section's chief steward, Caroline Bell, says it's a fantastic event to attend. It's thrilling, she thinks, to watch the expert judges as they taste and assess the classes, and it's a superb way to engage consumers with the faces behind the brands.

The awards remain, she adds, an important part of the dairy scene, especially in the North of England. "I think it's fantastic to have an event that brings the industry, farmers and consumers together," she says. "The show has got a really long and established history, having been started after foot and mouth by Sir Ken Morrison OBE, the Wensleydale Cheese team and Great Yorkshire Show, to support the resurgence of the industry after that challenge."

It's "a massive honour" to have been at the helm as chief steward for the fourth year (following in her late mum, Judy Bell's, footsteps), and Caroline says there's a great sense of pride amongst all those involved, with strong ethics and integrity throughout the process.

This year, Nigel Barden hosts the stage, while the expert judging panel is formed from the great and the good of the British dairy world. "That's why we attract so many entries," Caroline thinks. "This year we've got Mary Quicke MBE, Catherine Mead OBE, Sarah Miness from Waitrose, Mark Chaddock from Sainsbury's, Amy Chandler from M&S, Simon Ferro from The Courtyard Dairy, Jon Thrupp from Mons, and, of course, chief judge Terry Hudson, who's been in the industry for nearly 50 years.









"Every single product gets feedback," Caroline continues. "That's an extra special reason to enter."

Nigel says it's a delight to be back at the show this year, "with the entries reflecting the amazing diversity of cheeses made in this large and bountiful county. The variety of cheeses produced from different milks; sheep, cow, goat and water buffalo, is testament to the skill of cheesemakers in the region. Combine that with a phalanx of expert judges gathered from all over the UK, who blind taste the entries, and provide a reassurance that any cheeses picking up accolades are very worthy."

Entries will be judged on Tuesday, with both the dairy and cheese Supreme Champions announced.

Caroline, co-director sister Katie, and the rest of the Shepherds Purse team were overjoyed to win Supreme Champion Cheese last year with their Organic Yorkshire Blue. "We've never won before," Caroline beams. "To win this award, especially with the calibre of judges and on home turf, was a phenomenal experience and a great credit to the team. To win anything at the show is fantastic. The quality of the cheeses that end up on the top table is phenomenal."

Ryeburn of Helmsley won Supreme Champion Dairy with their Mango Ripple Ice Cream, and production manager, David Otterburn, says they're already planning their 2025 entries. "Entering shows is a good way of ensuring we are keeping our production standards high and maintaining our high levels of quality," he explains. "We know our products are enjoyed by our customers, but being judged by our peers is also important. There are a lot of great producers taking part in the show, including artisans like us, so it is really nice to get that acknowledgment."

On Wednesday the Consumers' Choice classes (when 50 volunteers from the audience are invited to choose the best from two types of cheese and one type of ice cream according to judging criteria) will be selected.

And Thursday is one of the most hotly anticipated days of the event, with the annual Cheese Auction being held. Visitors are invited to bid for their cheeses of choice from the entrants. In 2024, £8,530 was raised for the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI), taking the total raised to date to £50,000.

The proceeds from this year's auction, which starts at 3pm, will be donated to the Samaritans and Yorkshire Air Ambulance.

As well as the competitive classes, there will also be an opportunity to hear from a cast of amazing cheese experts on the Cheese and Dairy Stage, including finding out how Wensleydale cheese is made, and which beers work with cheese, as well as tutored tastings.

"Come and take a look. There's plenty to see and so much to do at the show," Caroline adds. "You can easily fill two days with fun. And the Cheese and Dairy section is a great area for networking."

VISIT THE GREAT YORKSHIRE SHOW

The show takes place at Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate from 8th to 11th July. Find out more at **greatyorkshireshow.co.uk**

CHEESE AND DAIRY STAGE SCHEDULE

Tuesday: International cheese judge Nigel Barden will interview cheese judges and cheesemakers to reveal what makes great cheese great and bad cheese bad.

Wednesday: Master-Rind – the ultimate cheese quiz – takes place, with prizes up for grabs.

Thursday: Homage2Fromage's Nick Copland interviews some of the prize winners.

Friday: A Blind Mice Cheese Tasting. Taste five cheeses blind, then discover how to use all your sense to solve the mystery of each cheese.



CHEESE UNCUT

New retail perspectives from industry experts

"Cheese a maize's me"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

Recently I have been carefully considering the cheese in my shop. Nutritional wellbeing is driven by the food and beverage that we consume. I want to start a trend by repping those great cheese farmers who genuinely listen and work with nature.

Nature is brilliant and I am reassured to see that more people are beginning to listen and learn from it. For far too long humanity has worked against nature, starving the planet of precious resources. One of the largest contributing factors for the world's health issue has been brought on by industrialised farming, not working in harmony with our planet.

Since the World Wars we have been spraying our fields and crops with toxins derived from bombs and orange gas. We foolishly believed that we could produce healthy and nutritious food by using chemicals to suppress weeds and kill insects. By growing monocrops in lands that must be manipulated by human interventions in order to grow these crops is wrong. We need to become regenerative with our arable and livestock farming. By bringing all elements together, we can create nutrient dense soils, and healthy crops and meat. We should be concentrating in reengaging nature not increasing the size of our bank balances.

Maize/corn is one of the world's most commoditised foods being traded globally and at the detriment of our planet. Cows do not naturally eat maize – it is a food source that was largely introduced to the commercial cow diet in the 1940s. Like soy, another food that cows' diets have been substituted with, maize also contributes to methane release – belching. This is nothing to worry about because DSM-Firmenich came along and invented 'bovaer' to suppress the emissions... really!

There continues to be global deforestation making way for more soy and maize. If you are a trader, this is great news for futures in maize and soy commodities. Aren't traders lucky that there is now bovaer to help supress methane emissions from cows being fed on grains that largely contribute to the methane issue and global deforestation.

The world has gone stark raving mad. Supermarkets are chucking out over 350 million meals a day while the average UK household wastes 140 meals a year contributing to 4.5 million tons of edible food waste. There are almost 300 million people being challenged with climate change and facing food insecurity such as Sudan and other hotspots including Gaza, South Sudan, Haiti and Mali.

Now is the time to wake up and buy our food properly from local producers, small passionate businesses and those that are truly working with nature. As a human it is in our interest to protect the environment from harm. We are in possession of the answers but sadly our voice is not being heard over the commercial capitalist regime.

As a consumer you have the right to healthy food as it was intended without chemical and genetically modified intervention. Why should real cheese only be afforded by the wealthy? It is our divine right to eat properly. Promoting the benefits of real artisan cheese over cheap supermarket alternatives could attract more people. If everyone buys at least one piece of artisan cheese a month the impact on industrial cheesemakers will be felt.

Historically, cheese was always made in spring and throughout the summer until autumn. Milk was preserved into cheese as a nourishing meal during the leaner months, with softer and crumblier cheeses being enjoyed through spring and summer. I am so pleased to see more cheese farmers working with natural pasture, mixed farming systems and avoiding maize and soya, plus saying no to the use of fertilisers, pesticides and the suppressant bovaer.

Nature looks after itself, we are nature, and we need to learn from our animals and plants to be able to help revitalise and sustain our planet's health. Cheese amazes me and should not a maize me.

> "Now is the time to wake up and buy our food properly from local producers, small passionate businesses and those that are truly working with nature"



Truer Kaas unveils spicy new addition

Family run cheesemaker Truer Kaas (producer of Weydeland), has just launched Villa Jalapeno – a farmstead cheese with a bite of warmth. Made from thermised cow's milk, it contains jalapeno chilli, pepper, garlic, coriander seeds and tomato and is aged for around eight weeks, resulting in a creamy, soft texture.

It makes a fiery, interesting addition to the cheeseboard, but also taps into consumer interest in spicy flavours and Mexican tastes, being an ideal melting or accompaniment cheese for tacos, burritos, tostados and more.

It's available now.

Fen Farm Dairy working on its third cheese after Raedwald success

Following the enormous success of its first seasonal cheese (Reblochon-style Raedwald), Fen Farm Dairy is already thinking about the next addition to its stable, says founder and farmer Jonny Crickmore.

There was lots of excitement at the beginning of the year with the limited batch launch of Raedwald, particularly as the farm's take on a Brie (Baron Bigod) is recommended and enjoyed widely across the UK and the rest of the world, held up as one of the finest modern artisan cheeses in Britain. Jonny is looking forward to seeing where the journey takes them next.

"I was so chuffed with how well Raedwald went," he said. "The cheese just got better and better. I think the last batches we made were really good. And it was quite fun doing it, really – a seasonal cheese. The pressure is off with it."

Raedwald will be back in January, Jonny confirmed, hopefully with bigger capacity to fill the orders that flooded their books this winter. Trials are underway for the third cheese, due to be ready next summer.

While his lips are sealed for now, Jonny will confirm it's going to be a small, soft, square-shaped lactic-style, around 200g in size. "The name will have a Suffolk link to it – but it won't be predictable!"

It's been an interesting few months for the dairy, he added. "I just loved the idea around developing a seasonal cheese and people reacting to it and celebrating it. I'm really quite proud of how Raedwald went, and at how people embraced it. We saw it through exactly as we said we would – we made it for three months, and now it's gone. The funny thing is, we could take the opportunity this Christmas to sell loads of it, but for me, this is about the bigger picture, using the milk when it's available, and fitting it in with the time of year. It's something to look forward to."



Nominate the best cheese retailers in Britain

***Speciality Food* is searching for independent cheesemongers to feature in the 2025 edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*, and readers are invited to share their nominations online now.**

The last 12 months have been difficult for the retail sector, with new challenges to face including the rising price of energy, staffing and stock (with milk and dairy prices especially impacted), as well as the trickle-down effect of the cost-of-living crisis on customers.

However, we've also seen incredible tenacity and innovation in this sector over the past year, with our independents battling on, weathering the storms, and coming out fighting. It's with a great sense of pride that *Speciality Food* can continue to support and shine a light on some of the best of the best.

The 2024 edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers* featured profiles of some of the UK's most exciting and successful cheese shops, as chosen by professionals and cheese-loving consumers. Each one was hand-picked from dozens of nominations, selected for outstanding performance in a particular niche, such as 'Expert Affineurs', 'The Educator' and 'The Experimenter'.

Steve and Caroline Ward, founders of St Giles Cheese in Northampton, were delighted to be included, having founded their business on a shoestring budget in the midst of a recession. "We were doomed to fail," Steve said, revealing they were, at best, enthusiastic amateurs when they opened their doors.

But that enthusiasm has translated into a raft of customers who adore visiting their shop to explore the wonderful world of artisan cheese. "Over the years we have become friends with many of our customers," Steve continued. "Each week, we remember what each of our regulars was up to last week, and what they like or are not fond of – one finds oneself building a mental flavour profile for each of these customers. There then comes a point when you can recommend a cheese without even given a taster, such is that customer's confidence you'll pick the right one."

It is passion like this that makes the speciality food sector such a rewarding environment, and we want to shine a light on retailers upholding these values.

In the 2025 edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*, we will be showcasing a new batch of worthy winners who are champions of their local region and the very best cheese from around the world; and we want you to have your say!



If you know an independent who deserves to be named an Inspirational Cheese Retailer, head to specialityfoodmagazine.com, search for Inspirational Cheese Retailers and nominate your winners.

> "Head to our website and nominate your winners"

Makers unite for collaboration

The folk at Lincolnshire Poacher and Trethowan Brothers came together recently at The Kernal Brewery in London for a one-of-a-kind event – Poach-Fork – The Tasting.

In the spirit of collaboration, teams from each cheesemaker swapped locations (but not recipes), making their signature cheeses on-site with their own starter cultures and methods, using the host's milk and maturing environments. These cheeses were then matured for between one and two years, resulting in Lincolnshire Pitchfork Cheddar (made at Poacher's Dairy by the Trethowan team) and Somerset Poacher (made by the Poacher's Team at Trethowan's Dairy).

The tasting event, hosted by food writer Patrick McGuigan, allowed attendees to explore and taste the experimental batches for the first time ever, reflecting on the nuanced impact of milk, microflora and maturing conditions. It was more than a simple dairy swap, they said – it was a statement about what's possible when artisan producers step beyond tradition to learn, experiment and innovate.

"We wanted to see what would happen when you take the essence of one cheese and place it in another landscape," said Todd Trethowan, from Trethowan Brothers. "It's about curiosity, experimentation, and learning from each other."

Tim Jones from Lincolnshire Poacher added, "This is about curiosity and shared learning. We wanted to see how much of a cheese's identity comes from recipe and culture– and how much comes from place, milk, and people."

The teams explained some of the challenges they faced in preparing and then making their cheeses. Aspects such as size of vat, amount of milk, and starters used were generally expected to make a difference. More unexpected was the impact of the head cheesemakers in having to adapt and change their recipes and processes as the make progressed – something most would find challenging.

Ben Ticehurst, dairy manager at Trethowan Brothers noted, "For cheesemakers, their own cheese is a testament to their knowledge, experience of many years and a rigid (some would even say obsessive) need to follow the established recipe. Here, decisions had to be made as the make progressed to accommodate the different milk, kit and environment, which gave us all a few uncomfortable moments!"

What started as a fun challenge also stands as a testament to the dynamism of the British cheesemaking scene and its capacity for creativity through cooperation. The event highlighted the broader potential of collaboration within the artisan food world.





Try new Buffalo Halloumi

The Buffalo Farm in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, has forayed into the world of grilling cheese, launching Buffalloumi. Fashioned on a halloumi-style recipe, it's crafted using a blend of Scottish cow's milk and creamy buffalo milk from their own herd of water buffalo.

This twist, they say, brings extra depth and a luxuriously creamy texture to the mouthfeel of the cheese, which is at its best pan-fried or grilled, developing a golden crust and signature squeaky, soft centre.

Like the maker's Buffalo Mozzarella, Buffalloumi is made on-site at the dairy. Initially, it's available as a catchweight product – the average block weighing 250-350g.

The Buffalo Farm's managing director, Steve Mitchell, said, "We are delighted to bring our new product to market, allowing buffalo milk and it's benefits to be enjoyed by even more people. Buffalloumi is versatile, making it a great addition to summer menus up and down the country."

Charles Martell launches blue cheese

There seems to be a lot of development in the blue cheese arena at the moment, and amongst the innovators is Stinking Bishop producer Charles Martell & Son, which has recently revealed Hulla Baloo. When first made, Charles said, the cheese was heralded with the words 'helluva blue', morphing into its final, commercial name.



Charles (whose range also includes Single and Double Gloucester and Hereford Hop), said the cheese is "fresh" and "zesty", taking those who try it on "a new flavour adventure".

Made in the heart of Gloucestershire, using traditional methods and the finest local milk, Hulla Baloo strikes a balance between being creamy and indulgent, and intensely tangy, while its marbled appearance, he adds, gives it presence on the cheeseboard.

"Whether melted into a gourmet sauce, crumbled over a salad, or enjoyed on its own with our Poireau, Hulla Baloo is a showstopper that will delight both connoisseurs and the curious alike."

Annual SCA farm visit heads to Manor Farm

The Specialist Cheesemakers Association is giving its members insight into low-input, organic, regenerative agriculture practices this month as part of its annual farm visit.

Members are travelling to King Stone Dairy at Manor Farm in Chedworth, Gloucestershire, where David Jowett (whose cheese Burford recently won Supreme Champion at the 2025 British & Irish Cheese Awards) will play host.

King Stone Dairy is a small operation with a strong focus on improving soil health and biodiversity through careful land management, while crafting artisanal cheeses by hand, using single herd organic cow's milk, directly from the farm.

Members will learn more about the set-up and facilities, and join in 'cheese speed dating'. "It's a nice social event," a spokesperson said, adding that its just one of the benefits of joining the organisation, which is dedicated to championing British speciality cheeses.



IMAGES: NICK JONES





INTERNATIONAL CHEESE & DAIRY EXPO **2025**

Cheesemakers and judges to converge at prestigious awards event in Staffordshire

More than 2,500 industry professionals from across the cheese and dairy sector will join forces at Staffordshire County Showground on 25th and 26th June, 2025, for The International Cheese & Dairy Expo.

The leading global event brings together technical specialists, marketers, buyers, retailers, and category managers, offering an unparalleled platform to showcase innovation, forge new connections, and gather valuable industry insights.

This year's extended format allows for a more immersive and accessible experience for all attendees say organisers.

At the heart of the event are the prestigious International Cheese & Dairy Awards. Judging will take place on Wednesday, 25th June, with the eagerly anticipated results unveiled, for the first time ever, during the official prize presentation on Thursday, 26th June.

Attendees are also invited to join the Trade Lunch, generously sponsored by Fayrefield Foods. This informal networking event will feature street food, live music, and a relaxed festival-style atmosphere - the ideal opportunity to connect with peers and celebrate the industry.

Organisers are proud to welcome their 2025 event partners: the Brewing, Food & Beverage Industry Suppliers Association (BFBI), the Society of Dairy Technology (SDT), and the Academy of Cheese. Each will play an integral role in shaping this year's programme- bringing expert insight, educational content, and sector-wide collaboration to the heart of the Expo.

With an expanded programme and a growing global audience, 2025 is set to be the exciting edition since the Expo relocated to the showground in 2020.

Chairman, Ian Luxton, says, "The International Cheese and Dairy Awards has completed its transition to an expo, and moved from a one-day to a two-day trade event in response to the growing demand for a more comprehensive and engaging experience. This move reflects feedback from participants and stakeholders, and this change allows exhibitors and visitors to maximize their networking opportunities, explore a wider range of products, and participate in more educational sessions and workshops."

By extending the event duration, Ian says the aim is to enhance the overall experience for attendees, ensuring they can fully immerse themselves in the diverse world of cheese and dairy, while fostering stronger connections, as well as



exploiting business opportunities within the industry.

"The positive response to feedback illustrates our commitment to continually improving the event and meeting the needs of its developing audience. The event would not be possible without the continued support of our sponsors, the tireless work of the committee, the many volunteers and all our attendees. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone as we move forward together to cement this important and historical event on the dairy calendar."

Academy of Cheese

Education plays a central role at the International Cheese & Dairy Expo, and in 2025 organisers are proud to partner with the Academy of Cheese to deliver a dedicated educational platform.

This engaging session will introduce attendees to the Academy's Structured Approach to Tasting Cheese - a foundational framework for understanding and articulating flavour, texture, and aroma. Participants will delve into the principles of sensory analysis, take part in a guided blind tasting of five carefully selected cheeses, and develop confidence in using professional tasting terminology.

The session will be led by acclaimed industry experts Noemie Richard-Stein and Tracey Colley, offering an unmissable opportunity to learn from two of the sector's most respected voices.

BFBI

The Expo is delighted to partner with the Brewing, Food & Beverage Industry Suppliers Association (BFBI) to create fresh opportunities for cross-sector collaboration in 2025. This partnership opens the door for the trade audience to connect with beer producers whose processes share many synergies with dairy manufacturing.

As part of this collaboration, BFBI has enlisted Tom Walker & Sons to present a series of cheese and beer pairing sessions, hosted by industry expert Alex Barlow. These tastings will explore the art of pairing flavour profiles, providing both inspiration and insight for producers and retailers alike.

GET IN TOUCH

Tickets and further information are available at **internationalcheesedairyexpo.com**

EXPO LOUNGE

This year marks the debut of the Expo Lounge - a dedicated space designed to enhance your experience at the International Cheese & Dairy Expo. Sponsored by Fayrefield Foods, the lounge will offer complimentary refreshments and a curated grazing board, providing the perfect setting to recharge, hold informal meetings, or simply catch up with colleagues in a relaxed and comfortable environment.



SDT SUMMER SYMPOSIUM AND ANNUAL DINNER

The Society of Dairy Technology (SDT) is delighted to host its 2025 Summer Symposium, sponsored by Diversey, on Tuesday, 24th June in the Members' Pavilion at Staffordshire County Showground. This free-to-attend event will feature four expert speakers presenting on key topics within the cheese and dairy sectors, offering valuable insights and discussion points for professionals across the industry.

Guests are encouraged to arrive early to explore the trade stands, connect with peers, and enjoy a complimentary buffet lunch, generously sponsored by Faedah Solutions.

The annual dinner will take place the following evening, also at Staffordshire County Showground. Open to both members and non-members, the evening will include a guest speaker and promises to be a fantastic opportunity for networking and celebration.

Tickets and further details are available online at sdt.org







STRIVING FOR BETTER

Consumers are increasingly conscious of the power of their choices, and the dairy sector is primed to benefit

COMMENTATORS



LEONA MCDONALD
GOLDEN HOOVES



DAVID FINLAY
THE ETHICAL DAIRY



HENRY COOKE
CLOTTON HALL CREAMERY



ANNE-LAURE FARRAR
THE KNOWLEDGE BANK



WILL LUKE
PORSHAM FARM

While milk and dairy products are a key example of staple products becoming commoditised, a growing number of shoppers – and conscientious farmers and producers – are taking great strides in making options available for those who have a thirst for better.

Fine food shoppers are a key audience here, meaning that by stocking ethically-produced, high quality dairy products, you can be confident that you're not only giving your customers what they want but supporting the future of dairy farming, too.

What are shoppers looking for in 2025? "In short; nutritious, nature friendly and British without compromising on taste and quality!" says Leona McDonald of Golden Hooves.

"Shoppers are looking for more sustainable foods, but in particular for brands that demonstrate sustainable practices such as regenerative farming, transparent supply chains and ethical sourcing. From our recent survey, biodiversity and animal welfare came out on top for what really matters to consumers when considering the environmental impact of their food. That's why our farmers are working with nature and creating homely habitats to help nature thrive above and below ground. They are nature's heroes!"

"Fine food shoppers want to feel good about the purchases they make, so they're looking for good animal welfare and produce that has positive benefits for their health and the health of the planet," says David Finlay of The Ethical Dairy. "Obviously, they're looking for dairy products that taste great too, but we are very much finding that fine food shoppers are also driven by values. The story behind the product matters a great deal, and that story must be simple yet powerful."

Telling the story of farm to fridge has proven successful across other fine food sectors – cheese being a clear example – bringing an opportunity to support local businesses doing things right as well as supporting retailers' bottom lines; taking spend away from mass-produced dairy products and towards positive change. "People are much more knowledgeable about the impact their purchases have on the environment and on the animals within food systems. Social media has pulled back the curtain on industrial farming practices, showing shoppers realities they never previously knew existed," he continues.

While steps in an eco-friendly direction are certainly to be celebrated, all in the sector need to be conscious of exaggerated claims and the impact they have across the board. "With that awareness comes, for many, a desire for the impact of their purchases to be positive. But people have a healthy degree of scepticism too, they are increasingly wary of greenwashing," says David. "So, I think the onus is on us as food producers to demonstrate integrity and transparency in the claims we make, to build trust and to build relationships with the people who buy our products."

"Food miles and provenance is a huge selling factor for the modern customer, and we focus a lot of our time telling our customers that about how we produce our products all on our own farm within 24 hours and we strive to provide the highest quality and fresh products available," begins Henry Cooke, founder of Clotton Hall Creamery – producer of a range of dairy products, including a uniquely Northern clotted cream, based on a dairy farm in Cheshire.

With long, unpronounceable ingredients lists becoming

STOCK CHECK



DELAMERE DAIRY SALTED CARAMEL FLAVOUR MILK
A smooth and delicious milk suitable for all the family.
delameredairy.co.uk



BIO & ME VANILLA KEFIR YOGHURT
Tangy, gut-friendly kefir yoghurt with 18 culture strains for immunity support, and with no added sugar. High in fibre and protein.
bioandme.co.uk



LONGLEY FARM COTTAGE CHEESE WITH CHIVES
An award-winning natural, low fat, high protein cottage cheese filled with the flavour of chive.
longleyfarm.com



ALL THINGS BUTTER GARLIC & HERB BUTTER
British dairy butter churned with parsley, garlic, mint and lemon for a flavour experience.
allthingsbutter.co.uk



> Shoppers are clearly looking for more sustainable food options such as regeneratively produced products, but they don't want to compromise on taste

increasingly unappealing to today's shopper, the simplicity of the range ticks fine food shoppers' boxes. "Simplicity can be overstated at times when looking at a lot of products on the market," says Henry, "and we make our products with only a few simple ingredients – no nasties! Consumers also want to know where their food comes from so we try to be as transparent as possible as we certainly have nothing to hide and I think that really resonates with our customer base."

The health benefits present in quality dairy also offer a sales tool for retailers. "It feels there's been a real re-awakening of the natural benefits of dairy, which is full of nutrients and natural protein that helps support bone health and overall wellness," says Leona. "Plus, it tastes delicious! This desire for natural, minimally processed foods is driving an increase in sales of whole milk, full fat products and block butter as consumers re-evaluate the health benefits of the right dietary fats.

"Consumers are becoming bolder in knowing what they want and ultimately less is more. They want to go back to foods that are higher in nutrients, minimally processed and produced in the right way while not degenerating the earth."

How retailers can support a positive future for dairy

Speciality Food retailers can help "by stocking the products, even when they command higher price points or lower margins, and by helping customers connect with the story behind the produce," says David.

"Independent retailers hold a powerful position because they bridge the gap between conscious consumers and responsible producers. They can help customers understand value and see beyond the immediate transaction to the broader impact of their choices. In doing so, retailers become partners in creating more sustainable and ethical food systems."

The greatest challenge faced by many dairy farmers is the changing price of milk, but by stocking artisanal products and educating consumers about the positive work they do, retailers can help in the fight towards a more sustainable future. "The dairy industry is predominantly ruled by the big players who trade the commodity of milk which means the price can massively fluctuate – this is our biggest challenge at the moment as we try to reduce the customers RRP whilst still trying to maintain set margins across our range," explains Henry. "We really appreciate our farm shop and deli stockists who help us to promote our range in their stores, whether that is by providing in-store tastings so we can physically talk to customers or by using graphics to show how far the products have travelled to get to the shelf. We encourage our retailers to do this as it a good talking point between the shop staff and customers."

"Fine food retailers need to be looking out for what is important to the end consumer," says Leona. "Shoppers are clearly looking for more sustainable food options such as regeneratively produced products, but they don't want to compromise on taste. Both need to come hand-in-hand. In a survey we carried out this April with Ayton Research on 1,000 respondents, 95% said that they would like to see more regeneratively farmed food and drinks products where they shopped."

YOGHURT: A PRIME OPPORTUNITY

Anne-Laure Farrar, UK market insight manager at The Knowledge Bank, explains why yoghurt is worth a fresh look in 2025



The dairy sector is facing a number of challenges, from shrinking margins to heavy in-category competition. It's also long been a sector where shoppers are more likely to base purchasing decisions on price, making it even harder to win them over.

However, there is real opportunity for growth in the market, especially in yoghurt. New product development in this category now accounts for 52% of dairy innovation in the last year. The sector has also grown nearly 7% in volume sales year-on-year [Nielsen]. For retailers looking to stand out, yoghurt offers a strong proposition.

The shift in shopper values is already impacting sales. There has been a noticeable increase in luxury branded yoghurts across the UK, indicating consumers want quality yoghurt. They want a thick texture (36% of shoppers) and all natural ingredients [Mintel]. Fewer, simpler ingredients is also appealing to those shoppers pushing back against ultra-processed foods. This is all encouraging news for luxury producers, especially those who can tie into other trends such as sustainable packaging.

A FARMER'S PERSPECTIVE



Will Luke, who is the fifth generation of his family to run Porsham Farm, Devon, believes that the indigenous knowledge of previous generations have a lot to offer for him to be able to farm in a responsible and sustainable way

"I like to describe my forward progress as a spiral. I'm always revisiting practices and techniques that have been used on our our farm over the last 100 years, and viewing them with today's latest thinking and knowledge to gain improvements to cow health, soil biology and yield.

"When I originally learned dairy farming at agricultural college 30 years ago, what we were taught then was completely at odds with how we now know is best to do it," he begins. "Back then, we were taught that bugs were bad, weeds were bad and crop fertility and protection came in the form of chemicals. But after re-educating myself in farming, this time at The Apricot Centre (Biodynamic farm and college) in 2021, the terminology used was 'microbes' and 'herbs' instead of 'bugs' and weeds', and nutrition and protection was provided by nature."

Will's father, under the advice of successive Governments and agricultural advisers, spent most of his farming career using ever more chemical fertilisers and sprays, ripping away the farm hedges and nature habitats, laying concrete and building sheds. Production increased in line with the then policy but at a cost to soil and animal health and biodiversity loss. Will believes that the knowledge of how to farm for the best of animals, people and planet skips a generation. "I'm farming how my grandfather used to; seeing the farm as its own ecosystem and working to the benefit of the whole farm, rather than solely for cows to produce more milk."

While Will learned the science behind regenerative farming when he retrained, he discovered that he was naturally going down that path just by following his gut instinct. "My wife Tanya and I wanted to take the farm in a different direction and although in those early days we often didn't know the science or logic behind it, we just knew that it was the right thing to do. In effect we've farmed by mimicking nature and doing what felt right."

Ruminants (cows, sheep, goats, deer and so on) should be seen as the solution to raised atmospheric carbon levels, not the cause of this ecological issue, says Will. "Farming and forestry are the only two sectors that have the ability to remove carbon from our atmosphere and sequester it back into the ground, but over the past 25 years ruminants have been portrayed in a negative light. By rotationally grazing diverse pastures ruminants have an ability to pump huge amounts of carbon back into our soils. Instead of being seen as the destroyers of our planet, they are actually going to be its saviour."

> Instead of being seen as the destroyers of our planet, ruminants are actually going to be its saviour





FINAL CALL

What a funny old time it's been recently in the food industry. One of the most prominent discussions has centered around Trump's tariff announcement, and the following trade deals with the UK, China et al. India has also struck a deal with Britain.

While it's a positive step to do business with other nations, these so-called 'historic' partnerships have some within the food world questioning the long-term agenda of our Government.

How does importing and relying on food from far away nations play into the UK's Net Zero narrative, for example? We've spoken to farmers and producers who feel left behind by Labour. Sidelined by 'shiny and new' imports from foreign climes, when (they say), the Government should be paying attention to improving food security and mitigating the impact on climate change on home turf.

As the details of both America and India's deals are ironed out, one thing's for certain – a large number of consumers are questioning in greater depth what goes on their plates. Younger shoppers, especially, want to understand the environmental impact of their food, demanding cleaner labels, and full traceability of products and ingredients.

This can only be a good thing for independent retailers like you, who champion the local, the artisan and the unique. There's never been a more important time to have conversations with shoppers (in person, via social media, your website and signage in-store) about the provenance of your stock.

The British flag or products marked as 'British' tend to encourage sales, so use the Union Jack proudly throughout your business where it makes sense.

Encourage producers to visit for samplings and tasting sessions more regularly too. Being able to 'meet the maker' face to face is incredibly engaging and, more often than not, will lead to a sale.

As you'll have read in the Regional Stars section of this magazine, there's a lot to celebrate and enjoy across our counties and nations.

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

5 MINUTES WITH

MEGAN TAN, FOUNDER OF HOMI KITCHEN

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
So much. I've met such a diversity of people since beginning Homi Kitchen, and I'm always inspired by everyone's journeys and unique talents. Living in London and the UK, I've met so many people driven by passion, and it inspires me to follow mine.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR JOB?
That moment when I see someone's face light up after trying our Giga Chilli Sauce, and meeting so many lovely new people every day through my work.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I love how passionate people in this space are. I think you have to be, as creating the best products requires so much hard work. The growing diversity of the UK's food scene is incredibly exciting to me, as someone who grew up abroad but has spent my adult life almost entirely in the UK. I love Asian and British culture, and am so delighted to see both thriving.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
A Singaporean dish, Bah Chor Mee, which translates to 'minced meat noodles'. It was the dish that started my journey in food, as I couldn't find it anywhere in London during the pandemic and was craving it. I made it in my own kitchen, and after sharing it on Instagram began getting requests to sell it. Next thing you know, I was cooking and cycling across London weekly to deliver my noodles, while juggling my full-time job in corporate law. It was hectic, but one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
When life gives you chillies, make chilli sauce.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
It may be controversial, but I LOVE having sweet popcorn with nacho cheese in the theatres.





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The final word on fine food

TRIED & TESTED



S'MORE 'A' LICIOUS
DUBAI CHOCOLATE BAR

The newest addition to this rapidly expanding gourmet marshmallow brand's range. Dubai Chocolate is everywhere, but many of the types we've tried have been too sweet or artificial tasting. This, though, is dreamy. Belgian milk chocolate, tempered beautifully, is filled with a crunchy pistachio cream and piped with ribbons of S'more 'a' licious' ethereally light handmade marshmallow fluff. Very indulgent indeed.
smorealicious.com

EAT REAL, LENTIL CHIPS
GREEK CHEESE, TOMATO & HERB

Eat Real has had a facelift, launching several new products alongside the brand refresh, including these tangy, tart little nibbles.

Plant based, gluten-free, and made with only natural ingredients, not only do they deliver on today's consumer's conscious buying credentials, but they pack a punch. Despite containing no cheese whatsoever, these really do emulate the flavour of a Greek salad, being piquant, sweet and a touch creamy. They've got a great crunch, too.
eatrealsnacks.com





FOREVA FARMERS
SPICED APPLE COLA

We sampled the whole Foreva Farmers range at Farm Shop & Deli Show this year and were blown away by the quality of their tonics and sodas. Sustainably made, and naturally lower in sugar than conventional soft drinks, they might be crafted with less impact on the environment in mind, but they absolutely deliver on taste. This variety particularly struck a chord, combining the unmistakeably warm profile of cola with tart, sharp, sweet apple. Fabulous alone or mixed over ice with rum.
forevafarmers.com

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Liam Dillon, chef patron, The Boat, Lichfield



Over the last eight years we've transformed what was a pub into a restaurant and micro-farm, with much of the produce used in the kitchen grown on-site.

The farm is my ode to sustainability and is constantly evolving to make our business more self-sufficient. In its current iteration, it includes give beehives to provide honey and help pollinate the rest of the garden, pigs reared for their meat and to reduce food waste, 24 hens providing a plentiful supply of eggs, vegetable patches and polytunnels, where produce is grown year-round, including unique crops such as cicely and wasabi.

Additionally, our aquaponics project has been a long time in the making – it's a full ecosystem that farms trout/carp, using the bi-product to feed and grow crops. In a totally landlocked county, The Boat now plans to grow trout to use in the restaurant that is fed with organic feeds.

We work with as many local suppliers as possible too. New Farm Produce, just down the road, specialises in growing premium quality berries, cherries and asparagus. It's an amazing addition to Lichfield, and only a 15-minute drive away!

Different meat suppliers cater for different needs. When the lamb is not our own, we use Aurox at Lyon Hill Farm in Dorset, which focuses on traditional breeds and regenerative farming. Chicken and pork are purchased from Packington Free Range, whose animals enjoy the best possible welfare. For the chicken and pork, I buy from Packington Free Range, whose animals enjoy the best possible welfare and who are committed to providing high animal welfare and have a genuine care for the environment.

On the drinks menu, we stock some of Pattingham Vineyard's wines. Situated just 40 minutes from the restaurant, the vineyard is nestled in the lush, picturesque patchwork of the Staffordshire countryside. The wines are the result of a passion for creativity, the great outdoors and a love for wine. It's a relatively new vineyard, having only started winemaking in 2018, but what they're doing is excellent and it's great to be able to offer wines on our menu where the vines are grown so locally.

> "Much of the produced used in the kitchen is grown on-site"

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo



IT'S THE SEASON FOR SAUCE

Quick, simple and delicious. A plate of pasta is the key to easy summertime entertaining

It's the summertime, when the weather is fine and there's nothing more special than being able to kick back, relax, and sink into a lazy, long, lingering evening.

For many, intrinsic to the experience is being more hands-off in the kitchen – after all, who wants to slave away at the stove for hours when there's sunset-watching to be had?

Salads are, of course, a go-to. But when something more substantial is required, you absolutely cannot beat a bowl of pasta. The beauty of pasta is not only its versatility, but the speed with which you can have it on the table.

Most varieties take around 10 minutes or less to cook – the sauces that go with them whipped up in roughly the same time.

As we move into the high summer months, it makes sense to prepare sauces that reflect the beauty of the season. Pesto, heady with peppery, sweet basil and oodles of sharp, tangy Parmesan, is not only easy to whizz up from scratch in a food processor, but delivers a flavour far beyond the sum of its parts. There's been a craze in recent years (fuelled by Tik Tok) for tomato sauce infused with vodka.

Home cooks, inspired by actor and devout foodie Stanley Tucci's Italian TV odyssey have been rustling up Campania-style Pasta alla Nerano using homegrown or seasonally-bought courgettes, which are fried until golden, and turned into the dish with lashings of Parmesan and butter.

Then there's Pasta alla Norma – the Sicilian classic, cooking aubergines until yielding and silky, letting them melt into a tomato sauce and topping with umami ricotta salata.

Nduja – the fiery, spreadable Calabrian sausage that's everywhere – endures too, making a sprightly addition to a classic tomato sauce.

Of course, the beating heart of any of these dishes is great pasta. That means varieties made with the finest wheat, processed through bronze dies, which give a porous surface, ensuring not a single drop of that precious sauce is wasted.



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