speciality food magazine.com

November/December 2021 £3.25

# SPECIALITY FOOD

NEWS, COMMENT AND BUYING IDEAS FOR FINE FOOD RETAILERS

THE CHEESE ON EVERYONE'S LIPS

100% RECYCLABLE PACKAGING

CONTINENTAL IN STYLE
HANDMADE IN BRITAIN




THE CHEESE LADY
SVETLANA KUKHARCHUK: WHY WE SHOULD GIVE BACK
P.30



BIRA
ANDREW GOODACRE: HOW TO SELL THIS CHRISTMAS
P. 36



TAYLORS OF HARROGATE
HELEN BOULTER: THE COMFORT OF HOT DRINKS
P. 44



# this issue


4 **John Shepherd,** MD of Partridges

6 **Stuart Gates,** Retail consultant

30 **Svetlana Kukharchuk,** The Cheese Lady

30 **Justin Tunstall,** Cheese consultant

33 **James Grant,** No2 Pound Street

REGULARS

14 **Product News**

16 **Trend Watch: RTD Cocktails**

31 **Counterpoint: Cheese Gifting 101**

32 **Cheese Uncut**

39 **Talking Shop: Rye Deli**

46 **Last Words**

FEATURES

9 **Food and Drink for Future Generations**

13 **From the 'Orchard County' of Ireland to Your Shelves**

17 **Meet the Distributor: Il Fattore**

18 **Taste the Difference of Authentic Italian**

22 **The Evolution of Storecupboard Essentials**

24 **Mail Order Masterclass**

29 **The Icertech Difference**

34 **The Art of Selling Blue Cheese**

36 **Christmas 2021**

40 **The Biggest Trends for 2022**

42 **Christmas at Daylesford**

43 **Harnessing Community Spirit Post-Covid**

44 **Where Comfort Meets Function**



16


22


36

## EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the November/December issue of *Speciality Food* – our final publication in a year which has brought with it a heady mix of challenges, successes and about-turns.

The festive season is currently looking as though it will go ahead as usual, although – as we've all learned by now – we can't be entirely sure that Government's plans won't change between now and the big day.

What we can be sure of, however, is that independent retailers have a great opportunity in front of them. Yes, the months ahead will bring challenges, but my hope is that the consumer appreciation for the work small businesses do will lift footfall and sales this Christmas – as well as in the months beyond that.

This issue we bring you advice to help your festive season be as successful as possible – from how to make your cheese offering gift-worthy and a force for good, to how to approach the next few weeks for optimum results.

Merry Christmas to you all.

**HOLLY SHACKLETON** | EDITOR
**holly.shackleton@aceville.co.uk**







# Food should lead the way in Britain's net zero strategy

## The food and drink sector has an opportunity to be at the forefront of the UK's transition to net zero carbon emissions – and it should grab the opportunity with both hands

In October, the Government set out its Net Zero Strategy, the pathway to deliver on its commitments to reach net zero emissions by 2050. It came ahead of the COP26 gathering in Glasgow, where all eyes were on the UK as it was thrust into the centre of global sustainability conversation.

While much of the focus from the Government was on producing clean energy and technology like electric vehicles, the food and farming sectors have an important role to play in driving sustainability forwards. Accounting for a third of global emissions, the food industry is a large contributor to climate change, but as *Speciality Food* revealed throughout Sustainable Food Month in October, many players in the fine food sector are challenging the status quo by developing practices that put protecting the environment at the heart of their businesses.

"Everybody eats food, so the impacts of the food industry are far-reaching," said Megan Adams of zero waste shop Re:Store, speaking to *Speciality Food* during an exclusive webinar for Sustainable Food Month. "If we were to get to a point where it was considered sustainable, what a massive impact that would have on the planet." Food and drink is at the centre of the damage that is being done to the natural world, added Tim Etherington-Judge, co-founder of sustainable spirits brand Avallen. "Because food and drink products are closely tied to that, it's really where everything starts," he said.

### A collaborative approach

Over the course of Sustainable Food Month, *Speciality Food* revealed many ways in which fine food businesses – whether producers, retailers or wholesalers – can become part of the sustainable solution. From boosting biodiversity to offsetting carbon emissions to championing organic products, there are numerous ways that even the smallest business can make a difference.

For significant change to be made, however, Ruth Edge of the NFU told *Speciality Food* that a collaborative approach is needed. Speaking during a Sustainable Food Month webinar, Ruth said, "This doesn't need to be a competitive issue. In many cases, change can only be made by a collaborative approach. We need to invest in the research and technologies as industries to make those gains and gain that knowledge that we don't currently have, and the only way to do that is to make it a non-competitive issue."

Patrick Holden, founder and CEO of the Sustainable Food Trust, added that there is hardly a farmer or food business in Britain today that doesn't want to be part of "this great transition for the food and farming world". However, he said the Government must do more to incentivise sustainable business. "We're being held back by the lack of the business case. It doesn't necessarily pay as well to do the right thing. So what we need to do is create an economic environment through policy change, and other factors whereby if you transition to more regenerative or sustainable farming system, it pays better. And I believe that's achievable, but it requires interventions from Government, and it will require a great mobilisation of the farming community, including small food businesses and retailers that support farmers on the ground through selling their products."

NFU deputy president Stuart Roberts has also said Government support will be crucial to backing British farming to reach net zero by 2040. "It's great to see initiatives such as the Farming Investment Fund and Farming Innovation Programme which support investment in equipment and infrastructure. These will ultimately help boost sustainable food production and reduce agricultural emissions," he said. "Net zero support can and must go hand in hand with food production."

### Changing the retail landscape

Retailers can also make conscious moves towards a more sustainable food system, from supporting and stocking eco-friendly brands to implementing zero-waste standards to promoting local producers. With experts declaring that the era of cheap food is over in the UK, the fine food industry's long-time focus on artisan food producers stands it in good stead to meet consumers' expectations for better quality food that is less damaging to the environment.

Megan stressed the importance of taking a holistic approach to sustainable retailing, telling *Speciality Food*, "There are quite a few retailers now jumping on what you might call the zero-waste bandwagon, but if you're putting products that are not ethically sourced in gravity dispensers, that doesn't necessarily mean you're an ethical or sustainable retailer. It's making sure that the whole picture is looked at: the product is ethically sourced, it's sustainably delivered, and it's sustainably packaged or offered packaging-free."

While there is always more that can be done to benefit the environment, there are plenty of ways that retailers can start small and be part of a wider effort to change the industry for the better. "I do feel optimistic that we can do this," Patrick said. "Let's be honest, the transition that's required of our farming and food systems is right at the limits – politically, technically and economically – but it has a decisive advantage: there is no alternative. We've got to do this, so let's do it. And let's collaborate in a way we've never collaborated before."


SAM4S

Point of sale technology designed for hospitality.




Forza Series




S-Series

Forza series



10" Display 15" Display 15.6" Display 18" Display

SAM4S

Flat C-911, Woolim Lion's Valley. Gasan Digital 1-RO 168, Geumcheon-Gu, Seoul 08507 Korea

Call +82-2-2101-9600 e: sam4soverseas@shc.co.uk

Distributed in the UK. by YCR Distribution Ltd. e: sales@ycr.co.uk. t:01924 438238.

# *"How is it all going?"*



**JOHN SHEPHERD**
PARTRIDGES

One of the most difficult questions to answer as a food retailer, even after 50 Christmases of trading is, "How is it all going?" The commercial equivalent to "How are you?"

So often the answer becomes "not too bad, thanks". Although in reality this is a travesty of a response. One is more inclined to say in the present day, "Which crisis are you referring to?"

Because although hardly anybody wants to hear a recital of medical ailments when enquiring about personal circumstances, the same does not apply to commercial matters.

As this question will continually get asked it is quite important to get the message right when replying. It also depends of course who is asking the question. If it is a fellow speciality food colleague, a mere glimpse of body language conveys a detailed picture and often elicits reciprocal feelings.

If it is a landlord, property person, customer, journalist or competitor, the answer becomes more complicated. Unless things are really desperate, a message needs to be conveyed acknowledging the existence of profound challenges but at the same time that the difficulties are not necessarily mortal ones.

Like many a political speech, a lot of words can mean very little. To appear too much like a Victor Meldrew is a long-term vocation yet to rejoice publicly is a short-term seasonal job. There is probably not a 'best way' to respond.

This applies more than ever now. A shortage of basic food products, a shortage of staff and a shortage of fuel are creating uncertainty for Christmas. While National Insurance increases, business rate revaluations and rising prices all cause anxiety for next year.

It is important not to forget that economic crises have become very much a part of the fabric of commercial life. Like difficult people, inclement weather or a local outbreak of a multiple supermarket.

As a matter of fact, Wikipedia actually lists UK economic crises by the century. Starting off with the Great Slump of 1430. Thank goodness we missed that one – it lasted 60 years. More relevant to Partridges, which we opened in 1972, are the crises that occurred in the late 20th century. There was one in every decade followed by the Great Recession of 2008. Shortly after we first opened in 1972, we had the energy crisis and the secondary banking crisis of 1973-1975, with a sharp drop in UK property prices. This period has been referred to as 'the collapse of the Post War Golden Age'. In 1974 there was the Three Day Week and we resorted to selling candles when the electricity was shut off in the evenings. Black Wednesday occurred in 1992 and the 2007-2009 financial crisis is still fresh in the memory. Covid-19 and its effects may yet prove to be the worst of them all.

Nevertheless, we have got through all of these, however badly shaken at times. So lucky in many ways to be food retailers and lucky to enjoy the benefits in the good times. And we have another good time coming up. Fingers crossed.

As I said earlier, this year is our 50th Christmas and Christmas is usually a bumper time. Despite short-term constraints and disappointments, as a small business over the years, we have had good support from suppliers, customers and colleagues in the trade. The fine food offer has been an enduring success through both good times and bad. Its evolution from the 1970s to the present day has been remarkable, with tremendous creativity and innovation at the forefront – as one can see through the pages of this magazine.

Perhaps the 'best way' to respond to the question "How Is it Going?", especially during the fourth quarter, is by replying in the sincerest way: "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year". At the very least this simple phrase has been integral to so much of what we all do in the speciality food world. And for us at Partridges for half a century.

So once again, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all – times 50.

> "The fine food offer has been an enduring success through both good times and bad. Its evolution from the 1970s to the present day has been remarkable, with tremendous creativity and innovation at the forefront"

# New food hall to feature dozens of producers

**Family-owned business Crimple, based in Harrogate, is set to open a new food hall featuring more than 50 specialist producers. Following a personal investment of £4m, managing director Graham Watson said the business has created a 20,000 square foot food hall incorporating a 160-seat restaurant.**



The site will also include a 12-metre-long butcher's; a juice bar; bakery; patisserie; deli and cheese counter; fresh fruit and veg; milk float; food to go; house-made ready meals, pizzas and fresh fish; a horticulture shop; and a grain store.

"My interest in building a food hall and restaurant came from the sheer success of our current restaurant and event space, which supports local and speciality producers," Graham told *Speciality Food*. "We have seen the demand and interest in this grow steadily over the years and supporting small and start-up businesses is something I have always tried to do.

"Building a food hall and new restaurant and event space to offer more has been a dream for a number of years. I have built an excellent and loyal team around me and I'm confident that Crimple Food Hall, restaurant and event space will be a fabulous destination."

Crimple will also be focused on sustainability. For example, all refrigeration equipment was designed to maximise efficiency and has been fitted with a heat recovery system, and the water from this provides hot water for the whole site. The food hall also includes solar panels, insulated windows, and shopping bags made from potatoes. "We have a responsibility to look after the beautiful area we are based in, and I believe if it can be built, and function, sustainably then it should," Graham said.






# Clemency Hall

*Expertly Hand Crafted Cheese*

# AWARD WINNING CLEMENCY HALL CHEESE

great taste® ★ 2021



CLEMENCY HALL
LE CRÊT GRUYÈRE
(AOP)



CLEMENCY HALL
TALEGGIO (DOP)

www.rowcliffe.co.uk

Exclusive to Rowcliffe

# *"The sparkle of Christmas"*



**STUART GATES**
RETAIL CONSULTANT

For as long as I can remember (and even before that), the Christmas displays, the twinkling shop windows and festive features were an exciting and key part of the whole Christmas shopping experience. Last year, with all the uncertainty and fear around Covid, all the festivities were dumbed down, or certainly reduced, so perhaps this year some seasonal "sparkle" is needed to entice people back to shops, markets or online, and it will need everybody in the food retail sector working together to achieve it.

At the time of penning this article, the news is filled with worried parents stressed about whether they will get the latest Squeakee Dino, or other most desired toy. This has meant that Christmas shoppers are out and about already, so retailers must be ready to entice and delight them to spend.

December will be as busy as ever for food shopping. We hear of anticipated shortages of certain favourite seasonal items but, if this turns out to be the case, that can create opportunities for interest in other ranges. This is where bricks and mortar shops and markets have an advantage over online shopping. Be ready to host tastings, create and share recipes, build eye-catching displays, suggest pairings, offer up your experience and create a safe and joyful space for shoppers. In short, bring some seasonal pizazz and entertainment to the shopping experience for your customers.

Entertaining at home will continue to be a trend, so people will be wanting bright ideas and solutions. Foodie cheese boards, charcuterie platters, nibbles, sweetmeats and, of course, a variety of drinks that they can impress and delight their friends and family. It will be a retailing sin to run out of these items. Producers should contact their retailers in advance to check on stocks held and to help with ideas to attract browsing shoppers. This planning applies to everybody, I always say, "success is planned, failure just happens". I once got in huge trouble as a young buyer for running out of key items in December and got some sharp, but helpful, advice from the Merchandise Director: "Can I remind you it's Christmas and I am giving you 12 months' notice to get ready as it will happen again next year". Lesson learnt!

Producers need retailers and customers and vice versa. As in all relationships the danger can be that things can get a bit too predictable. Great producers (no matter what size they are) should always put themselves in the retailers or hamper companies' shoes and look to create that key buzz – sparkle that will attract a shopper. Clever NPD, varying product size, seasonal flavours, tastings, offers, competitions, social media support, the list is endless, but my advice would be for producers and retailers to communicate and see what can work for each other. I have had both the pleasure and pain of working with hundreds, if not thousands, of producers over some 40 years. Meetings come and go, but those producers who put extra thought or planning into keeping the relationship fresh are the ones that build an enjoyable and enduring business relationship.

Christmas or holiday shopping events have always been about the customer experience, and this creates an opportunity to allow customers to meet producers from artisan food companies. The retailer can offer the space and venue, and while it is no longer a unique event to meet the maker it is one that works time and time again. Shoppers appreciate it when producers can talk to people and offer samples, and I absolutely believe it is worth the time and effort. Yes, people are busy, but I suggest producers and retailers try and factor in the time. It all adds to building the entertainment factor for the shoppers and, once again, this is an area where real-life shops and markets have an advantage over online.

Something that may not add to the magic to the customer experience, but will certainly bring joy to a business relationship, is being a good efficient partner. Take care with stocks or dates, advise of any delays or shortages and always offer solutions to problems foreseen, as this will pay dividends. Christmas Week is a long week, and nobody wants to be left with excess stocks, but nerves must be held and there will be last minute requests, so everybody needs to be prepared and ready for that Christmas Eve rush.

Lastly, do not forget about New Year. So often, producers let out a huge sigh of relief and relax after all the Christmas running around, but the period leading up to January 1st is always a busy time for food, sparkling drinks and celebrating! Producers need to be proactive about whether they plan to open or remain closed between Christmas and New Year. Do let everybody know your timings in advance, see how you can you help your retail stockists with advance deliveries and plan, plan, plan.

Have a great Christmas season, and may 2022 sparkle brightly for you!

# Hamm Tun Deli to open second premises

**A popular Northamptonshire deli, home to the award-winning Cobblers Nibble cheese, will open a new site on the grounds of Whittlebury Park countryside hotel and spa**. The second venture is set to open 13th November and will include a farm shop, deli and café serving a range of groceries and locally sourced products, as well as on-site dining and takeaway coffees.

"Our new premises at Whittlebury Park is a big step forward and will allow us to be more adventurous in terms of what we can offer," said owner Rachael Bradshaw. "The new space is large enough to include a farm shop as well as a deli and coffee shop, and our aim is to focus on good quality local produce. It's also a beautiful location overlooking the golf course, and we want to make sure that everyone is welcome, from mums to villagers, runners to dog walkers, and staff and guests of the hotel."

Charles Sargeant, the managing director of Whittlebury Park, added: "We're delighted that Gary and Rachael have decided to open their second Hamm Tun premises at Whittlebury Park. They share our ethos of championing local food and drink, and their new farm shop and deli will offer a fantastic extra benefit for guests and people living locally as well as showcasing top quality local Northamptonshire produce," he said.



# NI protocol breakthrough would benefit indie retail

Food retailers and producers trading importing or exporting to Northern Ireland have struggled with increased costs post-Brexit, but a possible breakthrough would benefit small businesses

The European Union and the UK have continued to discuss the future of trade with Northern Ireland as question marks rise over the future of the Northern Ireland protocol, which allowed the country to remain in the EU's single market for goods in order to prevent a hard border with Ireland.

The EU earlier announced a plan that would cut 80% of post-Brexit checks on goods sent from Britain to Northern Ireland. However, the UK wants changes to go further.

Checks on goods have caused friction for importers and exporters, especially small businesses. The EU's proposed rules would reduce the amount of admin for importers, and businesses in the country reacted positively to the news. "There is much to recommend in the EU proposals and it is clear that they are listening to the concerns of the local business community," said Retail NI chief executive Glyn Roberts. "We will take time to examine them and consult with our members before we give a considered final view." Glyn was optimistic about a deal being achieved. "A deal is possible if the political will is there, and I would be hopeful that progress toward that can now be made."

He told *The Guardian* that small independent businesses had been hit by tough paperwork requirements, which the EU's plans would simplify. "I've had independent retailers, delis, who have been unable to get access to their products," Glyn said. "At the end of the day this is about hard-working families not having to pay more for their food and having the full range available in their local shops and online," he said.


WHOLE FOODS MARKET

**Join our Regional Purchasing Team**

**Hybrid working in place, highly competitive salaries + bonus**

Whole Foods Market are looking for experienced Buyers and Category Merchants for new roles based in our Regional Office at High Street Kensington.

If building true partnerships with our stakeholders excites you, and you want to work for a company that has a market-leading product offer and is uniquely mission driven, we'd love to hear from you.

- Specialty Category Merchandising Analyst
- Meat & Seafood Category Merchandising Analyst
- Health & Beauty Buyer
- Senior Category Merchant Meat & Seafood
- Senior Product Placement & Promotional Analyst
- Senior Buyer Future Brands & Product Innovation



Contact Regional Recruiter Charlene.Boyce@wholefoodsmarket.com
or for more information and to apply online:
careers.wholefoodsmarket.com

# Natasha's Law: A month into the new rules

**New food regulations which require more in-depth ingredient and allergen listings came into effect from 1st October. How are food and drink businesses adapting to the changes?**

### PERFECT STORM OF CHALLENGES

Natasha's Law was brought in to require businesses to provide full ingredients lists and allergen information on pre-packaged food products following the death of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, who suffered a fatal allergic reaction.

While independent businesses are keen to prevent illnesses among their customers, the rules came at a challenging time, even for those with significant resources. "Although we have known Natasha's Law has been approaching for a while now, the time of implementation has coincided with a perfect storm of external challenges," said Joleen Cunningham, group business systems manager at hospitality business CH&CO. "We are all aware of the resource crisis within our sector, particularly with chefs, and also the supply chain challenges, driver shortages and not to mention the continuing global pandemic. This has all contributed to making the obtaining of product data more challenging." The business has partnered with the platform zupaBiz, which automates allergens and nutritional data through the supply chain, to ease the transition.

### MAKING CHANGES

Larger foodservice operators have been able to introduce bespoke systems. Michael Reilly, group director of health and safety at WSH, which owns foodservice business BaxterStorey, introduced software requiring suppliers to input details of their ingredients, which are then included in a database used to create menus to ensure every allergen is listed and can be updated.

But Natasha's Law is about more than labels, he said. "It's important that labelling is part of a much broader approach to allergens. Some of our locations can utilise thousands of different ingredients daily. The farm to fork journey that leads to the final product and the conditions in which it is made, including the layout, design and construction of the premises is often outside of our control as caterers. It is for these reasons that we continue to engage our customers not to rely solely on labelling," Michael said.

### WHERE TO BEGIN

While larger organisations are better able to implement training and systems changes to cater to the new rules, smaller businesses with fewer resources have faced a challenging prospect. Joleen said any business that is struggling with the new rules should start as simply as possible. "Standardise your products and reduce ranges where possible until you are confident with the process operationally. Work with your suppliers to ensure you have all of the product data and automate the data flows if you have the capacity to do so," she said. "The data is key to making this work, ensuring you have the correct information from source eases the process end to end.

Kate Thompson, director at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), also stressed the importance of data. "Linking up a database of food products and ingredients to the way you print labels will help make sure that the correct information is transferred easily. The database could record your products, recipes and ingredients, making it easy to track what's being used and where.

> "Communicating with customers remains at the heart of managing allergens and it remains essential for customers to speak to team members when they have any questions on allergens"

## SURVEY OF FAMERS REVEALS WELLBEING CHALLENGES

"This survey of a generation has revealed that despite the many challenges facing our community, farming people continue to be incredibly resilient, and this is something we should focus on. We owe it to every farming person to use this evidence to take action to improve farmer wellbeing"
**Suzy Deeley, RABI corporate partnership manager**

**36%**
OF THE FARMING COMMUNITY ARE PROBABLY OR POSSIBLY DEPRESSED

**58%**
OF WOMEN EXPERIENCE MILD, MODERATE OR SEVERE ANXIETY

**6**
FACTORS ON AVERAGE CAUSE STRESS IN THE FARMING COMMUNITY, INCLUDING: REGULATION, COMPLIANCE AND INSPECTION, COVID-19, UNPREDICTABLE WEATHER, LOSS OF SUBSIDES

**52%**
OF THE FARMING COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE PAIN AND DISCOMFORT, WITH ONE IN FOUR HAVING MOBILITY PROBLEMS AND 21% HAVING PROBLEMS UNDERTAKING USUAL TASKS

**59%**
OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THEIR BUSINESS IS VIABLE OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS DESPITE THESE CHALLENGES

SOURCE: RABI BIG FARMING SURVEY

# New Zealand trade deal 'damaging' for farmers

**The UK has signed a free trade deal with New Zealand's prime minister Jacinda Ardern, which the Government says will cut red tape and boost British exporters and small businesses, but the country's farming union has warned that there are "huge downsides" for food producers**.

The trade agreement will end tariffs on UK exports and make it easier for small UK businesses to break into New Zealand. According to the Government, trade with New Zealand was worth £2.3bn last year, and the country's import market is set to grow by around 30% by 2030. Trade in food and drink with New Zealand was worth more than £661m in 2020, according to the Food and Drink Federation (FDF). Dominic Goudie, head of international trade at the FDF, said manufacturers would "benefit from an ambitious trade deal with New Zealand that removes a range of tariffs that currently constrain exports. Significant growth opportunities exist as UK production becomes more competitive in the New Zealand market".

However, NFU president Minette Batters said that like the Australian trade agreement, the deal could have "huge downsides" for dairy, livestock and horticultural sectors. "The announcement of this trade deal with New Zealand, coupled with the Australia deal signed earlier this year, means we will be opening our doors to significant extra volumes of imported food – whether or not produced to our own high standards – while securing almost nothing in return for UK farmers."

She said this could "damage the viability of many British farms in the years ahead, to the detriment of the public, who want more British food on their shelves, and to the detriment of our rural communities and cherished farmed landscapes". The NFU called on the Government to explain how the deals would tangibly benefit farming, the future of food production and the UK's high food standards.

> "We can see from the pandemic that people are thinking carefully about where their food comes from and prioritising choices that are good for the environment and biodiversity. Retailers can see this as an opportunity to encourage customers to 'trade up' to better quality food and drink"
>
> **SOFIA JAVED OF THE SINGING SPICE COMPANY**



# Welsh business hub to boost food start-ups

**A newly proposed Rural Economy Hub will kick-start north Wales' agri-food sector by providing food-grade units for regional start-up businesses and those expanding from home-based production.**

The site near Caernarfon is also set to feature a Knowledge Centre to benefit the broader rural economy, as well as regulatory expertise, business and innovation support and networking opportunities. It's expected that construction on the Hub will begin in late 2022.

"This is the first project under our Agrifood and Tourism programme to reach this stage, marking another important milestone for the Growth Deal," said councillor Charlie McCoubrey, leader of Conwy Council and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board's lead member for the Agrifood and Tourism Programme. "The Hub will promote jobs and productivity in a sector which is so important to this region. I look forward to seeing how the initiative will bring new opportunities as well as encourage innovation among our food producers."

The Hub is expected to deliver 96 full-time jobs in local food businesses, with a direct economic impact of £45m over the next 15 years

> "Like most industries, the rural economy is at a turning point, and we must adapt and embrace future changes. This includes strengthening and promoting local supply chains to provide more opportunities for regional farmers and food producers"
>
> PAUL BEVAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT GRŴP LLANDRILLO MENAY

# Retailers must build loyalty as confidence falls

**Loyalty and customer service are in focus as shopper confidence dropped to its lowest level in a year in September, according to IGD's Shopper Confidence Index**. The decline in consumer sentiment came alongside rises in the cost of living: the index found that concerns around food price inflation were at their highest since March 2013, with 85% of shoppers expecting food prices to get more expensive next year.

"Shopper confidence will remain very fragile for the foreseeable future, so retailers and suppliers will need to focus on building loyalty by supporting their customers' needs by offering value for money," said Simon Wainwright, director of global insight at IGD. A renewed focus on discount food among many consumers means fine food retailers will have to continue driving home their key messages about quality, sustainability and provenance.

Confidence fell to -9 from -4 in August, marking the largest recorded monthly decline. By the end of the month, confidence had fallen as low as -14. "This month's Shopper Confidence Index is a sobering read and we anticipate it will be a similar story next month, following the steady decline we've seen throughout September," Simon said.

According to the research, 42% of lower income households expect to be worse off in the year ahead compared to 26% in August. Confidence amongst higher income households also fell, with 30% expecting to be worse off in 2022 versus 22% in August.

# Recyclable pouches join the family of McCoos




How can a recyclable pouch possibly do justice to Steven Brown Art's, the McCoos? When Dean's of Huntly wanted to launch their range of cookies in a recyclable pouch, they approached National Flexible for ideas. They were worried that a recyclable laminated pouch wouldn't do them justice as some recyclable materials can have a dull finish like polyethylene.

The pouches needed to have intensity of colour not only in the main design but also in the photographs of the small packs on the front. "We needn't have worried. National Flexible understood exactly what we wanted to achieve," said Michael of Dean's of Huntly. "We are extremely happy with the pouches; they look amazing!" **Contact National Flexible Ltd at carol@nationalflexible.net or visit www.nationalflexible.co.uk.**

# Lifestyle changes alter shopping behaviour

**While the home working boom has been good news for more rural and town centre-based retailers, the shift to office working is benefitting sales of ready meals and food to go.**

A transition to office-based working which boosted footfall for retailers in city centres in September has slowed. Footfall across all retail destinations declined by 1.5% mid-October, according to data from Springboard. At the same time, the group's Back to the Office benchmark fell by 4.2%, suggesting that rising Covid-19 cases has led more consumers to work from home.

The data points to changes not only in where consumers are shopping, but which products are selling. "It seems that the drift back to the office has also slowed with an even larger drop in regional cities outside of the capital, and in Springboard's Back to the Office benchmark (those parts of Central London dominated by offices rather than retail)," said insights director Diane Wehrle.

## Convenience on the rise

Despite this slowdown, a recent analysis from Kantar reveals how changing working habits have already altered shopping behaviours. "There are big lifestyle changes on the horizon with commuters heading back to the office and the return to school this autumn, and we'd expect this to impact how people shop," said Fraser McKevitt, head of retail and consumer insight at Kantar Worldpanel Division, UK.

Consumers already appear to be making more frequent top-up shops to food retailers, and there are signs of fatigue when it comes to home cooking, with demand for convenient ready meals growing by 11%. Independents can also expect sales at their cafés to pick up steam in the coming months.

Fraser doesn't believe shopping habits will return to what they were in 2019, however. "We shouldn't expect to shift from habits learned in lockdown straight back to pre-Covid patterns overnight. It's most likely that the needle will settle somewhere in between," he said.

Indeed, a survey by YouGov has revealed that one in four businesses intend to allow all workers to work from home at least some of the time. Only a fifth of business decision makers say their company will require workers to come into the office five days a week after the pandemic, down from one in three before.

> "Like-for-like grocery prices rose by 1.7% in the past four weeks compared with last year. In real world terms, the average household had to spend an extra £5.94 on groceries last month than they did at the same time last year. The typical household spends £4,726 per year in the supermarkets, so any future price rises will quickly add up"
>
> FRASER MCKEVITT, HEAD OF RETAIL AND CONSUMER INSIGHT, KANTAR WORLDPANEL DIVISION, UK









# Food and drink for future generations

## BlasCymru/TasteWales, Wales' largest international food and drink event, has returned for 2021, held under strict Covid-19 guidelines

BlasCymru/TasteWales, staged for the third time by Food and Drink Wales, the Welsh Government's food division, brought together buyers, food industry professionals and a broad range of Welsh producers – from large-scale companies to artisan brands to showcase world-class produce and help open new markets and trade relationships. A virtual meet is also being arranged with the international buyers following the event.

One of the main draws of the event was the conference, titled 'Food and Drink for Future Generations' which primarily focused on sustainability and climate change and inspired delegates to take action in their organisations and their lives to address the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change.

Key themes that were highlighted at this year's conference included 'how Wales is addressing the sustainability challenge' and 'making food manufacturing more sustainable', with keynote addresses from Adam Henson, Countryfile presenter and farmer, and Professor Mike Berners-Lee, author and leading expert in sustainability and carbon footprinting.

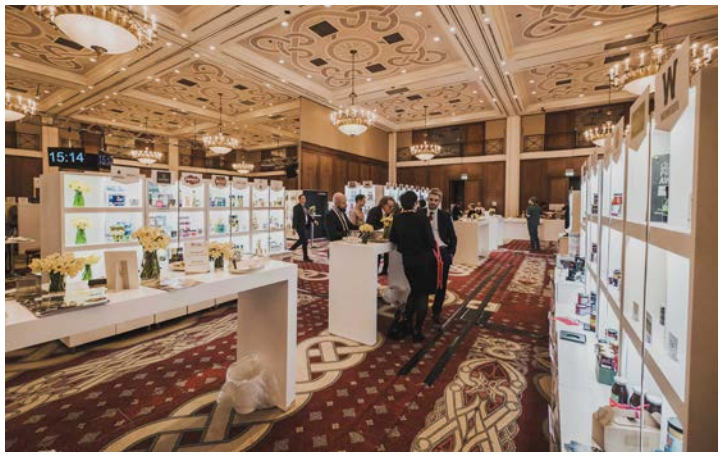
### Product showcase

During the event, over 1,000 products were showcased, highlighting some of the best from across the industry. Products ranged from plant-based desserts to the UK's first carbon-neutral potatoes and alcohol free botanic drinks.

The number of products developed during what has been an incredibly challenging year is clear proof of the resilience and innovation within the sector in Wales.

Further new products, which have been produced over the last 12 months, include new yoghurt flavours, seasonal craft ales, a range of flavoured oat crackers, organic fermented smoked kraut and Beet Slaw packaged in sustainable, fully recycled packaging.





### A hub of innovation

Food and Drink Wales along with Food Innovation Wales have played an important role in supporting businesses to develop these products including bringing companies together to share and develop new ideas. This has been boosted further by a wealth of support on offer including start-ups through Cywain and training and skills development through Food Skills Cymru.

One of the companies showcasing their new range of vegan potted plant based desserts was Daffodil Foods.

Director Lynne Rowlands said: "We have a range of plant based chocolate truffle desserts, which taste fantastically rich and indulgent with a melt-in-the mouth silky texture. Made to a vegan recipe in Wales to reduce food miles.



"Potted Plants desserts are naturally better for you and better for the environment. Their specialised heat treatment extends the shelf life to reduce the risk of contributing to food waste. The desserts are packed in glass ramekin jars with metal caps, which are currently more effectively recycled in the UK than most plastics.

"BlasCymru/TasteWales provided us with a great opportunity for us to showcase our sustainable chocolate desserts as well as our wider offer."

Other companies at the event with new products include Puffin Produce and their 'Root Zero', the UK's first carbon-neutral potatoes, and Old Coach House Distillery with the world's first alcohol free distillery.

Huw Thomas, chief executive officer of Puffin Produce said, "The food system contributes up to 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, which are causing the planet to heat up faster than ever before. We have to act now, so we're on a mission to become carbon neutral and farm in a way that protects and regenerates our land, plants and wildlife.

"Root Zero potatoes are certified carbon neutral and grown using sustainable farming practices to remove carbon dioxide, create healthy soil and increase local biodiversity. We are hoping that these sustainably packed products will start to tackle the huge impact of the food industry on climate change."

Old Coach House Distillery director, Cameron Mackay said, "We are a family run business, handcrafting Stillers – an award winning range of alcohol free botanical drinks which are copper pot distilled using the finest organic grade herbs and spices, blended with Welsh spring water.

"Our cutting edge products are a perfect fit for anyone looking for a healthier lifestyle, adventurer or just a food and drink lover. We are looking forward to attending TasteWales to meet with buyers and retailers which will hopefully lead to new business for us."

### Expert advice on-hand

There was also a chance to meet with industry professionals who were able to advise businesses on how to grow and accelerate with on-hand expert advice and knowledge at bespoke zones which included Innovation, Skills and Business, Cluster Network, Tourism, International, Sustainability, Investor, and Advanced Manufacturing.

Welsh Government Rural Affairs Minister, Lesley Griffiths said:

"BlasCymru/TasteWales presents a great opportunity for Welsh businesses to showcase the very best food and drink products made right here in Wales.

"I am incredibly proud of our fantastic food and drink sector and for over 200 new products to be developed, as we have dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic, clearly shows the resilience and innovative spirit which runs throughout Welsh producers.

"It has been been a challenging time for everyone in the industry, but the response of our businesses has been nothing short of magnificent.

"The Welsh Government will continue to support the food and drink sector as we recover from the pandemic and I look forward to seeing more new products being made in Wales and enjoyed around the globe."

The two-day event, with key sponsor being Princes Limited, took place at the International Convention Centre (ICC Wales), adjacent to the world renowned five-star Celtic Manor Resort in Newport, south Wales on 27th and 28th October 2021.

**For information about Food and Drink Wales visit gov.wales/foodanddrinkwales**

> "The Welsh Government will continue to support the food and drink sector as we recover from the pandemic and I look forward to seeing more new products being made in Wales and enjoyed around the globe"

# Brexit and Covid: the opportunities for sustainability

**Each of these monumental events has transformed the food industry. But what impact are they having on the industry's move towards a more sustainable future?**

## Brexit's pros and cons

"There are some potential adverse effects of Brexit on food security in the UK," said Adele Jones, deputy CEO of the Sustainable Food Trust (SFT). "From delivery drivers to abattoir operatives to fruit pickers, Brexit has shown the extent to which we rely on migrant workers for the UK's food system to function sustainably."

The most recent example is the lack of skilled butchers in the UK, which is causing a so-called 'pig pile-up'. "The chronic labour shortage has led to an estimated backlog of 85,000 pigs on farms, with an extra 15,000 being added per week. This is not sustainable or healthy for farms, animals, humans, or the planet." However, these issues are not without sustainable solutions. "The SFT and Abattoir Sector Group launched a Campaign for Local Abattoirs to encourage upskilling of butchers in the UK and empowering small-scale abattoirs. This will enable local food systems to function more sustainably and improve UK self-sufficiency," Adele said.

Ben Black, head of European food and beverage at the investment firm Verlinvest agrees that more self-sufficiency is on the cards. "On one hand we see supply chains shortening as many companies target domestic manufacturing, which is generally positive for sustainability." However, he added that "the increase in political, administrative and cultural hurdles post-Brexit, creates inefficiencies and reduces scope for trans-national cooperation, and economies of scale – which has the potential to fragment and dilute sustainability efforts".

While there are certainly negatives that the industry must consider, Brexit also brings a chance for change. "Brexit offers an opportunity for us to re-shape the way our food system works," Adele said. "Through new trade deals, we could ensure that for what can't be produced in the UK, only the highest quality foods, with the highest welfare standards, are imported. The UK could be the home of sustainable foods. We need the policy makers to ensure that high food standards remain at the heart of any future trade deals."

## Covid-19 sparks reconnection with food

"It is hard to imagine something more disruptive than Covid when it comes to changes in consumer behaviour," said Ben. "Arguably, it is the most significant wholesale change in everyday life since the Second World War, and therefore many of us are experiencing this degree of threat and vulnerability for the first time. It has made many aware of the fragility of our planet and everyday life, which is why sustainability has risen so quickly to the fore of consumer consciousness."

Adele agreed that the pandemic has had a significant impact on how consumers view the food industry. "Covid has re-connected people to their food. The outbreak has changed how people value food as an essential," she said. "The pandemic encouraged more people to cook from scratch and throw away less. Due to the situation in the supermarkets, lots of people also tried veg box schemes or ordered food from a local farm for the first time. Not only does this show the resilience of local food systems, but also demonstrates a willingness from both the producers and consumers to engage with more sustainable practices and foods."

What's more, the pandemic encouraged consumers to see the impact of the food they eat – both on their own health and on the health of the planet. "Covid has also encouraged people to observe the link between leading healthy lifestyles and boosting immune system health," Adele said. "If we understand what goes into the food we consume, we understand the system it is produced in, and we better understand our own health. Smaller, independent, local retailers can guarantee local, seasonal and organic foods with far fewer additives, much better for both human and planetary health.

# What's next for plant-based protein?

Experts in the vegan food industry tell *Speciality Food* what the sector can expect from plant-based food and drink.

### ANDY SHOVEL
CO-FOUNDER OF THIS



"Demand for plant-based products has increased hugely over the last couple of years, with the top drivers being increased environmental and health concerns. We've seen year-on-year growth of 200%, which is more than six times the retail category growth rate.

"What we'll start to see more of is a consumer demand for a broader range of plant-based options and for a variety of eating occasions. Innovation is at the heart of the plant-based industry. We'll continue to see some really exciting developments when it comes to the ingredients we're using and how the products are being made. We have, for example, developed a new patented plant-based fat that promises the same succulence, texture, and satisfaction of animal-based fat, without any of the downsides. To drive mass change it's so important we create products which are hyper-realistic to their meat equivalents."

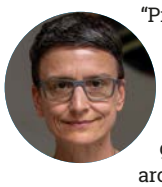
### JORDI BARRI
FOUNDER OF FLAX & KALE



"I believe that there is still a lot the sector can do to continue to appeal and convince new consumers of the benefits associated with plant-based diets. Better and clearer communication, for example, can help boost the already existing appetite for plant-based food. Companies like ours, and the sector as a whole, should pay more attention to communicating the value of our plant-based offering by stating the positive impact it has on nature. While society seems to be ready for a change in consumer habits, the sector can respond with good quality, tasty products and a depth of information of what consuming them (or not) will do to the planet.

"We need to move beyond our comfort zone and not just talk to our vegan/vegetarian/flexitarian supporters, but to the wider population."

### LOUISE PALMER-MASTERTON
FOUNDER OF STEM & GLORY



"Producing vegan food has significantly less impact on emissions down to procurement. Meat and dairy can produce up to 50 times more emissions. So, by eating plant-based you are having significantly less impact. But there is so much that is broken in the global food chain, getting back to a meaningful relationship with the land around us is urgently needed. Vegan food can play a big part in this, but plant-based processed food isn't the answer either. Natural wholefoods grown in the climate where we live is the right direction for us all to move in as the predominant food culture."



# Why we need to use eco-friendly food deliveries

**Lasse Hansen explains why 'slow food' is a winning formula for conscious consumers.**



"The need for same-day delivery when it comes to fresh food results in a woefully wasteful industry, with chilled goods being kept in bulk in huge warehouses awaiting orders – meaning when the goods get to the customer they have a significantly reduced shelf life, and many products simply never make it out of the warehouse before going out of date.

"There's no way to cut corners with good food. We want to re-educate our customers about the fact that good food is not a quick, cheap, throwaway commodity but is often the product of months of hard work, with real people in the background, struggling to make a living with prices squeezed down in a highly-competitive industry. Consumers have become used to buying fresh produce, meat, fish and dairy products for low or 'special offer' prices, without giving a second thought to where the food has come from, how it's got onto the shelf and how it's being sold for such a low price. This in turn leads to little value being placed on the products by the consumer, who often don't think twice about throwing away spoiled food that they've not had the time to use. We're proud to say we have a four-day order time for our deliveries to reach our customers. This allows the farmers and producers we work with to carefully select the best, freshest goods as and when they are ordered, meaning customers get the best shelf life possible on products.

"It also means we've not got delivery vans roaming the country seven days a week, needlessly adding to carbon dioxide emissions, and we've not got fresh food hanging around and spoiling in a warehouse."

DESPITE A **DIP** IN TAKE-HOME **GROCERY** SALES, **SALES** REMAIN **8.1% HIGHER** THAN THEY WERE **PRE-COVID**

**SOURCE: KANTAR DATA FOR 12 WEEKS TO 3RD OCTOBER**

> The impact of the food industry on planetary health is shocking. With the UK's food choices alone leading to the deforestation of four trees per year, per person, that's 272m trees lost every year. Global food systems are also responsible for a third of greenhouse gas emissions and 70% of biodiversity loss on land. The scale of the global climate crisis is something that is deeply affecting us. In whatever way we can, we feel we must be doing something that is constructively part of the solution
>
> **RICHARD TURNER, FOUNDER OF OMBAR**




PARTNER CONTENT



# NI SHINES AT NATIONAL AWARDS

## The stars are out above Northern Ireland as pastures, mountains and sea deliver truly Great Taste

Invest Northern Ireland has congratulated the Northern Ireland companies which racked up 215 product awards in this year's annual Great Taste Awards, which were announced recently by the Guild of Fine Food.

Products from every corner of Northern Ireland's natural landscape feature on this year's list of Great Taste award-winners.

Seven local companies were awarded the much coveted '3 Stars' accolade this year including:



- Caramelized Hazelnut Ice Cream from Portstewart-based Morelli's Ice Cream, which was also awarded the Great Taste Golden Fork from Northern Ireland, sponsored by Invest NI
- Lisdergan Butchery's Murley Mountain Rack of Lamb, produced in Omagh
- Millbay Oysters from Rooney Fish in Newry, Down
- Craigavon-based Hannan Meats for its Sugar Pit Bacon Rack
- Lisburn's Pure Roast Coffee Valentia coffee beans from Brazil
- Musgrave Retail Partners Signature Tastes Riojan Chorizo Cular
- Kilkeel-based Crawford Rock Seaweed Co for their Seaweed Salt






Congratulating the companies, Invest NI's director of food & drink, John Hood said, "Northern Ireland's success at this year's Great Taste awards demonstrates the outstanding commitment of local companies to innovate and produce delicious food and drink, especially during what has been a difficult 18 months for the industry.

"We are punching above our weight in a renowned global competition with the excellence of our food and drink being showcased, in particular by the companies achieving the highest accolade of three gold stars. The two and one star winners also deserve praise for their creativity, hard work and dedication.

"I am confident that our businesses have what it takes to continue to grow against the background of the pandemic and I would like to congratulate all of those who have been recognised by the Guild of Fine Food, an immensely important stamp of excellence."

**buynifood.com**

> We are punching above our weight in a renowned global competition with the excellence of our food and drink being showcased



## Consumers hit the shops early this Christmas

**With reports of shortages across the UK's food and drink supply chains, consumers are responding by getting into the shops much earlier than usual for their Christmas purchases. A survey by Lumina Intelligence revealed that a third (34%) of consumers either had or considered purchasing food and drink for Christmas before the end of October. The research also found that 55% of consumers were worried about shortages following media coverage on stockpiling of food and drinks.**

The categories that consumers were most likely to stock up on before the end of October were confectionery (66%), crisps and snacks (57%), tinned and packaged products (55%), and alcohol (55%). Soft drinks (51%) and frozen food (45%) followed closely behind.

Waitrose also reported that shoppers who celebrate Christmas were prepping earlier than ever before, with searches of 'Christmas' up 50% on the supermarket's website compared to last year. Searches for Christmas cake and Christmas pudding were both up 46%, while panettone searches rocketed 103%. Shoppers also appear to be preparing for a digital Christmas shop, with searches for Christmas delivery up 124%.

"Retailers need to be prepared for Christmas preparations to start early this year and should expect a bumper year for sales, but also need to communicate clearly with shoppers to ensure purchasing behaviours do not hit the extremes of April 2020 when the pressures on the supply chain peaked," said Blonnie Whist, insight director at Lumina Intelligence.

Further research by retail intelligence firm Springboard supports expectations for a boom in early Christmas shopping. The firm forecasts that consumers will be anticipating supply issues, which will cause the greatest increase in footfall over the six-week period to occur over Black Friday (week 47), with a predicted boost of +7.9% from the week before. This will be a greater rise than the increase of +6.5% in the final week of Christmas trading (week 51), the group predicts.

And while footfall is expected to be a whopping 80.8% stronger than in 2020, when the UK was forced into lockdown 2, Springboard expects footfall to be 17% lower than in 2019 across retail destinations.

**449,000** SHOPPERS BOUGHT THEIR CHRISTMAS **PUDDING** IN **SEPTEMBER**, WITH **SALES 76%** HIGHER THAN IN THE **SAME** MONTH IN **2020**

**SOURCE: KANTAR**

# 4 ways shopping habits will be different for Christmas 2021

**Will holiday buying habits look different this year? We take a closer look at four behaviours that retailers should be aware of.**

### 1 ENGAGE CUSTOMERS WITH AN 'EXPERIENCE'

Consumers will be looking to inject Christmas cheer into their shopping trips this year, meaning that bricks and mortar stores will be the perfect venues for engaging experiences – whether through Covid-safe tastings, interactive displays or other bespoke shopping experiences.

"For many, the fun of holiday shopping is found in those experiential moments and the allure of the 'treasure hunt' for the perfect gift," said data analytics business NielsenIQ in a recent report. "When holiday shoppers are engaged, they are more likely to explore new information, consider new products, and complete purchases," the group continued. "The past two years have shown that driving massive traffic doesn't necessarily translate to higher conversion any longer. The relevance of standalone sales events is dwindling in favour of developing platforms and communities centred around exclusive shopping experiences, across both e-commerce and brick and mortar storefronts."

### 2 IN-STORE VS ONLINE

The multiples have lately shown mixed messages around their approach to e-commerce. For instance, while Morrisons prepares to axe home delivery services from 50 stores, Sainsbury's has launched a same-day delivery option while expanding a partnership with delivery service Chop Chop for even quicker orders.

Although the latest data from Kantar revealed online grocery had reached its lowest market share since May 2020, Sainsbury's director of e-commerce Nigel Blunt said customer demand for getting groceries quickly and conveniently online had "grown significantly". For independents, e-commerce still appears to be offering opportunities, so investing in a strong digital offering while consumers are gearing up for Christmas is a good way to maximise sales.

But online is not the be-all and end-all anymore, as post-lockdown consumers are growing more confident to browse shops. "Shoppers aren't limiting their browsing time and brands should take full advantage of the opportunity to inspire new or added buying occasions to supplement holiday meals or celebrations," NielsenIQ said. "Despite the considerable disruption to shopping norms, recent measures indicate that many shoppers' attitudes toward in-store engagement and impulse buying haven't changed. In fact, more than half of surveyed shoppers feel equally likely to take their time browsing the store and are just as likely to be swayed to buy more in-store, despite planning their purchases ahead of time." This means indies can target upselling in their physical stores this holiday season, as well as supplementing sales with online ordering options.

### 3 SHOPPERS CRAVE LOCAL, SUSTAINABLE AND HEALTHY PRODUCTS

As well as the ordinary demands of tradition and indulgence, retailers must now contend with newfound desires for locally made, sustainable and healthy food and drink options. Luckily, as Edward Berry, consultant at The Flying Fork, told *Speciality Food*, these qualities "feed very well into our world" as fine food retailers, "because quality of product is one of the drivers".

Edward added that promoting quality will be an important way to attract customers this Christmas and showcase the point of difference between independents and the multiples. "A discounted piece of beef that says it's British is not the same as something which has been reared across the road and loved which costs more. So it's very much about communicating quality," he said. With a quarter of respondents to eBay's survey saying Christmas will be more exciting this year, and three in five feeling more optimistic, upselling with quality products is a no brainer.

### 4 SHOPPERS ARE PREPARING TO SPEND MORE

While retailers have likely been warned about consumers tightening their purse strings amid the Covid-19 fallout, a significant number of shoppers saved up money during the pandemic. And even for those who are feeling the pinch, NielsenIQ said the holiday shopping period will be the "exception to the rule of conservative spending".

"Shoppers who have been more financially stringent are likely to crave and explore ways to splurge on a variety of holiday-inspired needs this year," the group said. Meanwhile, eBay's research also found that 30% of consumers plan to spend more this Christmas than they did in 2020, and only 15% said they will spend less, down from 31% last year. Fine food retailers can offer those little luxuries that consumers crave during the festive period – from a fantastic bottle of wine served with a generous hunk of artisan cheese to a hamper filled with little sweet treats that are packed with provenance.



# From the ‘orchard county’ of Ireland to your shelves



A family farming background and desire to ‘spread a little happiness’ saw Alastair Bell named the Irish regional winner of the Great British Food Awards 2021. Here, he shares his story



While I never set out to produce Irish Black Butter, I have enjoyed it and appreciated its heritage throughout my life. My real passion was for tractors – I used to collect toy tractors and organise related events, and was even preparing to release a book: Jake the Tractor – but 2016, the Northern Ireland Year of Food & Drink, inspired me to delve deeper into the history of Irish Black Butter.

I discovered that black butter, often known as apple butter, is said to date back to Medieval times, that Jane Austen made reference to it in the 18th century, and that there was a black butter-making history here in Ireland. Essentially people were preserving locally-grown fruit, with the ‘butter’ element of the name linking to the consistency and spreadability of the end product. To produce Irish Black Butter, we take locally grown Armagh Bramley Apples, cider, brandy, treacle and spices. The apples are gradually reduced down and then cider, brandy, treacle and spices are added. As the cooking process continues a warm intoxicating aroma of apples and spices fills the room.

Making good use of local produce is something which strongly resonates with me, and I was keen to do justice to the phrase, ‘do what you can with what you have where you are at’. The knowledge that we had a source of high quality local apples and a world class food industry, as highlighted by the 2016 Northern Ireland Year of Food & Drink, affirmed my decision that the time was right for Irish Black Butter.

Underlying this initial idea was my personal desire to spread a little happiness – to create something particular and positive from Ireland, which anyone could enjoy and which would evoke warm memories of this place wherever people may be in the world.

## Hailing from the ‘orchard county’ of Ireland

At the core of Irish Black Butter is the Armagh Bramley Apple. This is the predominant apple variety grown in County Armagh. The temperatures are lower and there would be fewer invasive insects attacking the fruit. In these cooler conditions the Armagh Bramley apples grow slowly, giving the apples a unique taste and texture.

This area has been synonymous with apple growing for hundreds of years and there is historical evidence of apple growing dating back much further. In excavations at Navan Fort near Armagh, a large apple believed to date from 1000BC was found. Legend tells that St Patrick planted an apple tree at Ceangoba an ancient settlement near Armagh, and historical records tell of monks at Culdee Monastries in the 9th century using apples as treats at festivals. Apple growing was widespread in County Armagh by the 12th century. The predominant variety nowadays is the Armagh Bramley which arrived in the area in 1884 and today accounts for 90% of the apples grown and processed. In 2012 the Armagh Bramley was accorded EU PGI status and this was formal recognition of the cleaner, sharper and slightly tarter taste of the Armagh Bramley which distinguishes it from apples grown in other orchards across the United Kingdom and Ireland.




### HOW TO SELL: IRISH BLACK BUTTER

Irish Black Butter is an incredibly versatile all-rounder for end users. However, when it comes to store placement there are distinct areas where it sits best, explains Alastair

Irish Black Butter is fantastic with cheese and has won awards at the Nantwich International Cheese Awards for cheese accompaniment in 2019. Accompanying cold meats is another core use, so I suggest that independent retailers position it alongside their chutney and pickle selection. Some stores will place Irish Black Butter on their counters to upsell along with cheese and cold meats.

As this is a unique and intriguing – not to mention award-winning product – it is a great conversation piece, and as good deli owners will know, engaging and maintaining rapport with customers helps sales. Essentially it is best to tell then to sell, as when people buy Irish Black Butter they will share the product and tell their friends about it. This will lead to customers experimenting and discovering that the fantastic product they purchased can be enjoyed with even more products which they can purchase at their local deli.

> “Irish Black Butter is a licence to upsell even more produce”



Take stock with our new food and drink round-up




# Divine releases three new bars

**Fairtrade chocolate maker Divine has launched three new bars into its range, all of which are palm oil-free and made using natural ingredients.**

There are three new additions: Dark Chocolate Pretzel & Caramel; Milk Chocolate with Almond & Salted Caramel; and Milk Chocolate With Orange Crisp .

As well as being Fairtrade-certified, the bars are packaged in plastic-free packaging which uses only recyclable foil and paper.

Caitlin Horner, communications manager at Divine said, "These three new flavours aren't just delicious, they are also palm oil-free, plastic-free and Fairtrade. And to top things off, they are also helping to fight exploitation in the cocoa industry – because every bar of Divine Chocolate purchased has a positive impact on farmers' lives."

**divinechocolate.com**




# New vodka trio from Yorkshire

**Yorkshire-based distillery Masons of Yorkshire has launched a trio of flavoured vodkas which will sit alongside the business's award-winning range of gins.**

Available in Espresso, Citrus and Classic flavours, the new spirits have been created with versatility in mind and have all been distilled slowly for optimum quality.

Karl Mason, co-founder of Masons Yorkshire Gin, said, "We were the first distillery in Yorkshire to start making gin and this spirit of innovation has been our driving force ever since. We wanted to create a range of vodkas with versatility, perfect for a simple serve or for whipping up into cocktails.

"Consumers are looking for easy ways to recreate their favourite cocktails at home and this new range makes it easier than ever, with flavours that pack a punch. Whether you're a fan of a classic martini, a simple vodka tonic or a trendy coffee cocktail, there's something for everyone."

**masonsofyorkshire.com**

# Pico Sauces unveils unique chilli sauce

**Indian spiced condiments brand Pico Sauces has launched a new sauce set to showcase the authentic flavours of modern India.**

Suitable for vegans, the new Maha Green Chilli Sauce offers a unique taste experience; the residents of the Maharashtra region of India eat their chillies green, fresh and crunchy rather than leaving them to ripen to red, which brings a different flavour profile to those usually found in chilli sauces.




Arjun Gadkari, founder of Pico Sauces, said, "Each one of our sauces gives you a window into the exciting innovation that is happening in India right now – traditional Indian cuisine is being redefined by chefs and entrepreneurs, and our brand is a good example of where Indian food is going, not where it has come from.

"By focusing on condiments rather than cooking sauces, our customers can overlay our Indian flavours regardless of what they are eating, so they can now enjoy the taste of India even if they aren't sitting down for a full-blown curry."

**picosauces.com**




# Sustainable water on-the-go

**Sustainable British water brand, Water in a Box has relaunched its five-strong range of flavoured waters with a new-look branding and 100% British-sourced water.**

The business has been passionate about reducing the use of PET and offering beverages in a sustainable format.

As well as containing a plain spring water in a 500ml combidome from SIG, the range offers four 330ml Tetra cartons in Plain Spring, Lemon & Lime, Orange & Peach and Strawberry flavours.

David Grannell, MD of Water in a Box, said, "We've always stayed close to our mission to provide a range of truly sustainable boxed water which is renewable, environmentally friendly and has a lower carbon footprint than PET. The life cycle of our packaging is important which is why our cartons are now both SIG and Tetra, two of the most forward-thinking sustainable packaging companies in the world.

"We believe this focus on sustainable packaging, 100% British water, and a powerful new brand that emphasises our environmental credentials will help transform the bottled water category for the better."

**waterinabox.co.uk**



# Festive food gifts from Scottish Bee Company

**The family-owned Scottish Bee Company, producer of ethical bee products, has launched a range of gifting options ahead of the festive season.**

The Pure Scottish Honey Duo contains two 340g jars of Heather, Blossom or Signature Blend Honey presented in bespoke gift packaging, and comes with a pack of wildflower seeds for the recipient to sow in order to help boost pollinator populations. 10p from each jar purchased will be donated to the business's sister charity, RePollinate.

Suzie Millar, co-founder of Scottish Bee Company, said, "A lot of people throughout the UK still haven't tasted Scottish Heather Honey, so it's a great choice for the foodie in your life," she says. "It's quite different to some of the milder varieties – rich, full-bodied and luxurious. It also has its unique wellbeing benefits, with manganese being an essential nutrient, and includes a donation to RePollinate, which goes towards protecting the bees, along with other much needed pollinators."

**scottishbeecompany.co.uk**




# Stokes releases new mayonnaises




**Suffolk-based condiment producer Stokes has expanded its range with the launch of two new mayonnaises.**

Habanero Chilli Mayonnaise is hot and spicy, and showcases deep flavour from fermented Red Habanero Chilli and fragrant coriander.

Sicilian Lemon & Dill Mayonnaise combines zing from Sicilian lemon juice with aromatic chopped dill.

Both new launches are gluten and dairy-free and suitable for vegetarians.

Rick Sheepshanks, founder of Stokes Sauces, said, "We are excited to introduce these NEW 'twists' to our amazing mayonnaise family. Hot and spicy with habanero chilli, and zesty with Sicilian sunshine."

**stokessauces.co.uk**

# Holy Moly announces new salsa variant




**All-natural dips brand, Holy Moly has added a new Smoky Red Pepper & Tomato Salsa to its range.**

A vegan-friendly and gluten-free combination of fire-roasted peppers, chilli, onions and black garlic, the new launch is the brand's answer to the consumer demand for smoked and spicy condiments during the colder months and includes spices such as chipotle, smoked paprika, cinnamon and cumin.

Tom Walker, co-founder of Holy Moly, said, "We see a huge untapped opportunity for category growth in chilled dips via multiple usage occasions, driven by the health and taste consumer drivers within the fresh chilled segment.

"The versatility of a chilled dip format means that it also works as a healthier sandwich filling or a more wholesome, nutritious, alternative to ambient condiments and spreads. The Holy Moly principles around natural ingredients and homemade taste gives us a genuine point of difference across these multiple categories and occasions as well as our chilled dips heartland.

"The Smoky Red Pepper & Tomato Salsa will take your favourite feasts to the next level – whether drizzled on grilled halloumi, adding a twist to tofu or a bolder 'statement' in your bacon sarnie."

**holymolydips.com**

# New gift options from Tracklements

**Fine food stalwart Tracklements have launched three new gifting options for the upcoming festive period.**

The Festive Four gift pack contains Spiced Plum Chutney; Christmas Spice Chutney; Cranberry, Port & Orange Sauce and Sticky Fig Relish. The Cheese Collection brings together Apricot & Ginger Chutney; Apple & Cider Brandy Chutney, Caramelised Onion Marmalade and Green Tomato Chutney; and the Tongue-Tinglingly Hot Trio offers Fresh Chilli Jam, Smoky Chilli Sauce and Spitfire Chilli Mustard.

Guy Tullberg, managing director of Tracklements, said, "One in five shoppers trade up at Christmas and people want to give gifts of things they love so we've created these fantastically festive gift packs filled with bestselling Tracklements to suit every recipient and every price point."

**tracklements.co.uk**




# Nonsuch Shrubs launches gift box

**Nonsuch Shrubs, the Suffolk-based producer of shrub syrups which are suitable for use in hot and cold drinks and cocktails, has released a gift box of mini bottles in time for gifting season.**

The range currently consists of four variants: Blood Orange & Bitter Lemon; Bittersweet Apple & Cardamom; Caramelised Pineapple & Ginger and Wild Hedgerow & Rose, and the new gift box includes 50ml bottles of each flavour plus a recipe book containing three ideas containing alcohol and two without.

Henry Chevalier-Guild, founder of Nonsuch Shrubs, said, "The Nonsuch mini gift box is a perfect gift for non-drinkers, aspiring cocktail makers and mindful drinkers who are both conscious about their alcohol consumption and keen to explore new drinking experiences. An easy and gentle entrance into the intriguing world of shrubs, possibly the most versatile, adaptable and useful drink on the planet!"

**nonsuchshrubs.com**






Sponsored by
Tracklements
The Life & Soul of the Pantry



> UK consumers spent £412m on ready-to-drink beverages in 2020 – up 23% from 2019. The increase nearly doubles the £234m value of the category five years ago according to The Wine and Spirit Trade Association

# READY-TO-DRINK COCKTAILS

The number of canned cocktails and G&Ts bought from supermarkets and stores surged last year. With the right stock, this is happy hour for profits, says Sally-Jayne Wright

**WHAT'S NEW FOR CHRISTMAS?**
Gift bottles of pre-mix. In September, Marks & Spencer launched The Marksologist brand. For £18, shoppers can buy a 50cl bottle of Golden Negroni. Aldi so rates the cocktail trend they're offering espresso martini-flavoured Wensleydale for cheeseboards.

**IS OUR ENTHUSIASM FOR MIXING LOCKDOWN 'QUARANTINIS' BEHIND THE COCKTAILS TREND?**
Partly. In lockdown, cocktail-making became both solace and pastime. We liked smaller formats because we could pocket cans for picnics; and online retailers such as Lockdown Liquor & Co – launched April 2020 – got us used to quality bottled cocktails for group Zoom meetings.

**I FIND PRE-MIXES EASIER, CHEAPER AND QUICKER THAN JUGGLING 19 DIFFERENT BOTTLES IN THE CUPBOARD.**
We agree. Hilary Whitney, co-founder of Sacred Spirits, the company which beat Campari by a year in launching a pre-mixed Negroni, says it not only saves bar staff and home consumers time, it guarantees consistency and quality. She adds, "It's a great alternative to wine to take to a party." Sacred Spirit's new Dry Martini launched in October and there's a ready-mixed Gimlet planned.

**WHY ARE THERE SO MANY SWEET, FRUITY COCKTAILS?**
"Escapism," explains drinks flavour guru, Pritesh Mody of World of Zing. "They're seen as holiday cocktails you enjoy on a beach. Cocktails are about indulgence which is why the sweeter Pornstar and Espresso martini continue to grow [in popularity]."

**SORRY, WHAT'S A PORNSTAR MARTINI?**
Also known as a Passionfruit martini, it comprises vodka, passion fruit liqueur, lime juice, prosecco and fresh passion fruit.

**BUT CUSTOMERS HAVE BECOME SUGAR, CALORIE AND ALCOHOL CONSCIOUS, HAVEN'T THEY?**
Yes, and one advantage of small cans and bottles is portion control.

**WHAT CAN I OFFER TEETOTAL CUSTOMERS?**
Belvoir has a new non-alcoholic Peach Bellini or how about Square Root's 200ml bottles of alcohol-free Negroni Spritz, mojitos and G&Ts. Sold at Fortnum & Mason, the canned Virgin Mary by Longbottom & Co would enhance any brunch table or try Bloody Ben's Bloody Mary Mix, which can be adapted for drinkers and non-drinkers alike.

**WHOSE FULL-FAT COCKTAILS DO YOU LIKE?**
We loved the genuinely pocket-sized, 100ml Pocket Negroni made by Edinburgh-based newcomer Whitebox Drinks. The can tells you just how many units you're imbibing – 2.1 – and there's Drinkaware.co.uk warning not to exceed 14 units a week.

**ANY OTHER FAVOURITES?**
Sold at Liberty and The Conran Store, Lockdown Liquor & Co's range of cocktails in 200ml bottles include the Picante – a bracing mix of tequila, lime, chilli and Agave nectar. The packaging is modern, and the owners are exploring refillables, a plus point for conscious consumers.

**HOW CAN WE MAKE THIS TREND WORK FOR US?**
- Just as packs of two or three chocolates are portion-controlled treats, so are pocket-sized cocktails. Position them with your impulse buys near the till
- Drinks call for snacks and ice. So upsell truffle crisps and hickory-smoked nuts. Display Bloody Marys with brunch goods.
- If you have freezer capacity, stock ice – easy and profitable. In October, Trend Watch's local Rason's store was selling 2kg bags of Eskimo ice for £2.99.
- Know your customer. It's pointless offering 'vibrantly vegan' mocktails if your core customer is 60-plus and likes to taste their gin.
- Looks matter. Three-fifths of Millennials want drinks that look good for Instagram (Franklin & Sons survey, 2020).

**WHAT ARE THE TRENDS WITHIN THE TREND?**
Bar staff report that after lockdowns, consumers returned to bars more knowledgeable about what to order and with a tendency to drink 'less but better'. Experts think low ABV drinks will continue to trend which explains a rise in demand for highball cocktails or 'short drinks served tall'. Mindful drinking will be key. Look out also for functional, non-alcoholic wellness beverages with cocktail flavours, such as those offered by Crave Drinks.

**WILL CONSUMERS CONTINUE TO BE STIRRED AND SHAKEN?**
We think they will. Former cocktail columnist, Polly Vernon, declared in *The Times* that cocktails are 'a liquid expression of a tentative return of consumer confidence'. Cheers to that.




Tracklements –
The Life & Soul of the Pantry

ORDER AT TRADE.TRACKLEMENTS.CO.UK OR CALL:01666 827044

THE LIFE & SOUL OF THE PANTRY · THE LIFE & SOUL OF THE PANTRY ·
Tracklements

# MEET THE DISTRIBUTOR

## With an expertly curated range of Italian food and drink, lockdown start-up Il Fattore shines a spotlight on authentic artisan products




**SPOKESPERSON**



**ANTONIO ZOCCOLA**
DIRECTOR

During the Covid-19 lockdowns of the past two years, most businesses battened down the hatches to ride out the storm, minimising risks and cautiously putting any big plans on hold. Others took a bolder approach. Fine Italian food distributor Il Fattore set up shop during the first lockdown – and director Antonio Zoccola hasn't looked back since. "Italian food was our first great passion, and our curiosity and love of provenance and traditions of food making has helped us to develop fantastic relationships with our producers: traditional cheesemakers, olive growers, artisan curers and food innovators," Antonio says.

### Highlighting artisan producers

Il Fattore's expert know-how stems from the relationships it has built with producers of some of Italy's finest food and drink. Masterfully sourcing these products is the result of an intimate connection with the country. "We work with producers and growers across Italy; from small villages perched on the impossibly steep slopes of Alto-Adige to the Chiese Rupestri park of Matera, a beautiful city declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site," Antonio says. "They are, more often than not, small family businesses that use traditional methods and techniques and specialise in a particular product or ingredient – and have done so for generations."

Uncovering specialist makers of fine food ingredients has ensured a product selection that is second to none – boasting a range of credentials from guaranteed authenticity to low environmental impact. "All our products are grown, made or preserved with the addition of very few ingredients, which are offered by nature," Antonio says. "For example, the Gonnelli family have been producing olive oil for almost five centuries in the oldest mill in Italy, the Frantoio di Santa Tea, which is just thirty minutes from Florence."

Other food and drink makers focus on preserving the high nutrients and quality flavours of their products using true artisan techniques. "Our suppliers of cereals and legumes, Sala Cereali, have been sourcing local cereals and raw ingredients from the Valtellina region since 1906. Their products are selected with extreme care and special attention to all stages of production and packaging," Antonio says. "Flours are their flagship product and are still processed in the traditional way, leaving the nutritional properties of the cereal intact and that particular taste that modern industrial grinding processes have eliminated."

### Seasonal indulgence

Il Fattore offers a wide range of year-round classics, from olive oils and flours to flavour-packed sauces and high-quality tinned tomatoes and fish. But at this time of year, it's no surprise that the team is focusing on the biggest retailing event of the year. Christmas provides an opportunity to highlight producers behind some of the region's most beloved seasonal treats. "Our sourdough panettone is handmade in Turin, Italy," Antonio says, and the product is embedded with history and provenance.

"Galup have been making traditional panettone for years. Their recipe has passed down through three generations and requires three stages of work and 40 hours of natural leavening. The levain dates back to 1922, incorporating a complexity of flavour that balances out its natural richness. With fresh candied fruit and an IGP Piedmont hazelnut topping, every element here is exceptional," he says.

### A trusted partner

Developing such an impressive product list has required expert know-how and a deep appreciation of fine foods. "Our appetite for good food is reflected in our specially curated range," Antonio says. "We've tasted our way through thousands of products to provide a diverse range of extraordinary foods that embody the traditions of food making whilst observing the highest forms of welfare from their respected origins."

What does this focus on welfare look like practically? "Many of our products are produced in small batches and only when the seasons and harvest permit. For example, the award-winning Raccolta Verde Extra Virgin Olive Oil from Frantoio di Santa Tea is obtained from hand-selected green olives," Antonio explains. "It has a distinct character with the intense fragrance of fresh olives and a full-bodied, balanced flavour with a spicy kick."

This intense focus on quality, sustainability and heritage – alongside the team's expertise – is what sets Il Fattore apart. "We source and import our products direct from small growers and traditional family businesses from all over Italy, with a strong focus on traditional but also organic farming. We have a wealth of experience, over 15 years, and are on hand to offer advice and assistance regarding our products and Italian food in general," Antonio says. The business is committed to spreading the joy of fine Italian foods to the UK's independent retailers. "We work hard to offer a quality service no matter our customers' location, with low minimum order quantity and next day delivery, so our products can be enjoyed across the UK."

> "We've tasted our way through thousands of products to provide a diverse range of extraordinary foods that embody the traditions of food making whilst observing the highest forms of welfare from their respected origins"





## A BRIEF HISTORY OF ITALIAN CUISINE IN THE UK

Italian cuisine first entered the UK in the 1800s, as more Italian immigrants arrived on these shores, but its popularity really took off in the next century, Sergio explains. "In the early 20th century, Italy became a firm favourite for tourists as travel became easier and cheaper, and people's interest in authentic domestic dishes further increased," he says. "Quality ingredients became more readily available and celebrity chefs championed Italian foods; the interest in creating authentic Italian dishes at home therefore escalated."

**COMMENTATORS**



**SERGIO RAGLIO**
ANTHONY ROWCLIFFE & SON



**LINDA BIANCHIN**
CATERITALY



**SALLY ASSINDER**
GAROFALO PASTA



**MATTHEW BLAKELY**
BLAKE & TATE



**PAUL GARROD**
SKOULIKAS BEDFORD



**PATRICIA DE MIDDEL PUCH**
SWICILY

# TASTE THE DIFFERENCE OF AUTHENTIC ITALIAN

We discover the illustrious history behind Italian fare, and find out how retailers can get the tills ringing

It's no secret that Brits love Italian food. From the oozing Mozzarella of a sourdough pizza to the simple yet impactful power of popping open a jar of pesto, the familiar flavours of Italian cuisine make it a tried and tested favourite across the nation. After all, in the UK, the Anglicised dish Spaghetti Bolognese was found to be a favourite mid-week meal among 42% of Brits, according to Cuisinart's *The Eating Habits of a Nation 2021*. Lockdown scratch cooking experimentation moved from the kitchen to the garden over the summer, and sales of pizza ovens at John Lewis soared by nearly 200% over the last 12 months. For the first time ever, the shop's best-selling pizza oven sold more units than its best-selling barbecue.

But Italian food is not only a favourite in the UK. Indeed, the whole world recognises the satisfying qualities of the nation's cuisine. A 2019 global survey by YouGov, which included more than 25,000 people in 24 countries, found that Italian was the world's favourite cuisine, with pizza and pasta among the most revered foods around the globe. In fact, the proportion of Britons who said they like Italian cuisine (91%) was equal to the proportion who said they liked British cuisine.

## Simplicity and quality

While Italian cuisine is always popular in the UK, there is reason to believe the nation's go-to meal of choice saw an uplift due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only were dried pasta and tinned tomatoes among the top products hoarded in stockpilers' cupboards, but the pandemic was a time for Italian food to shine thanks to a few of its best qualities: simplicity and comfort.

The home cooking boom led more Brits to find solace in the delicious ingredients and simple preparations that Italian cuisine offers. "Italian cuisine is special for many reasons," says Linda Bianchin of CaterItaly. First, she says, while recipes are simple, they're simultaneously rich, hearty and full of flavour. "The authenticity of Italian foods is experienced by the absence of processed ingredients and a general handmade process."

Sergio Raglio, chairman of Anthony Rowcliffe & Son, agrees. "Italian cuisine is popular the world over because its entire culinary lineage was built on the very simple premise of letting the produce do the talking," he explains. "The unfussy, laidback style of Italian cooking is also a primary reason for its popularity with home cooks."

During the pandemic, CaterItaly created a range of traditional Italian ragù targeting such cooks: laidback but focused on quality and authenticity. "Our products target a market of Italian food lovers burdened with a lack of cooking time," Linda explains. Yet, the versatility of Italian cuisine meant it also suited scratch cookers down to the ground, as Linda explains: "Let's just think of a lasagne, for example. The concept is simple: layers of bechamel, ragù, cheese and pasta. However, the 'making from scratch' of this dish can easily take a full day. So it's not the kind of dinner you cook every night. It's special."

Simplicity does not only describe Italy's best dishes – it also defines its most famous ingredients. "Most dry pasta is made from just durum wheat semolina and water, and from these two simple ingredients hundreds of different shapes are formed," says Sally Assinder, UK marketing manager for Garofalo Pasta. "From these many different shapes the meal solutions seem endless, from the complicated filled and baked pasta dishes to simple dishes, such as pasta with olive oil and garlic," she says. "A pasta dish can be ready in as little time as it takes to cook the pasta and heat a sauce, or it can take several hours like a slow cooked ragù served with pappardelle ribbons."

The flexibility of classic Italian dishes also plays to their favour in a world where tastes are changing. "Pasta dishes can be vegan, vegetarian or made with meat," Sally continues. And importantly, ingredients are not expensive. "It may vary in price depending on the quality of the pasta, but even a 100g portion of premium-quality pasta dressed with a simple sauce is a tasty, low-cost meal." Indeed, Italian storecupboard staples which might

> "Italian cuisine is popular the world over because its entire culinary lineage was built on the very simple premise of letting the produce do the talking"

be deemed expensive in comparison with cheaply made alternatives are still affordable within most shopping budgets, Sergio says.

In Italian cuisine, simplicity and quality go hand in hand – and for fine food retailers, taking the quality up a few notches may be a good way to go to secure sales. "The biggest change we've noticed [since the pandemic hit] is that products previously used in high-quality restaurants are now becoming popular with home users," explains Matthew Blakely of online Italian food retailer Blake & Tate. "Sales of truffle-based products such as truffle oil, truffle and mushroom sauce and even truffle and honey have tripled year on year, so although the pandemic was around this same time last year, it shows our customers have clearly adapted to using high-quality ingredients in their home cooking and don't plan to stop anytime soon."



## Tradition and passion

For Skoulikas Bedford, which sells some of Italy's premier brands in the UK, quality is inherent in the food and drink products they source and sell. Quality is at the heart of "the

> "Italians are fiercely passionate about having the best-quality produce. If retailers are passionate, they will want the customers to have the same experience as them. If they are knowledgeable, they will share their passion with confidence"

# PASTA IN CRISIS

### Sally Assinder of Garofalo Pasta explains why pasta prices are set to rise



The vast majority of dry Pasta is made from two ingredients; durum wheat semolina and water. Durum wheat is the second-most-cultivated variety of wheat after common wheat, and the latest crop to face price and supply constraints even as consumer demand grows thanks to an increase of at-home cooking during the pandemic.

However, the durum wheat market is rocketing probably as never in the past, and pasta producers are facing a 'perfect storm'. This is mostly due to the largest production area (Canada & Northern US) suffering a reduction in harvests of approximately 50%, and it is likely that there will not be enough durum wheat to meet global demands in the near future. Along with this, the pasta industry is facing many of the same issues that are affecting other producers with increased costs in power for production, packaging material and just recently UK logistics.

Semolina price increases have and continue to be so dramatic that it will be impossible for the pasta industry as a whole to avoid considerable price rises on pasta. However, on a more positive note, we are seeing a rise in sales of Garofalo Whole Wheat Pasta as the trend, post-Covid lockdown, continues seeing customers interested in the nutritional content of the food they eat.


Vegan

Pasticceria Venezia

Gluten Free




Vegan Panettone Classico




Vegan Panettone Choc Chip




Gluten Free Panettone Classico

Distributed by Skoulikas Bedford Ltd, Bedford, MK42 0SP, UK. info@skoulikasbedford.com







> The 'Made in Italy' brand is more than ever at the forefront of the positive and joyful approach to food we are experiencing. Young Italians are having fun reinventing their grandmothers' classic dishes. It is a happy, creative place to be in

ingredients used, the traditional recipes and the consistency of the products," says Paul Garrod, MD. "We seek out these unique products from Italy to give customers an authentic Italian experience. Good-quality Italian food that's made using traditional methods, as well as working with some of the best manufacturers in Italy, such as Fraccaro (who also produce our own label Pasticceria Venezia), Melegatti, Battistero, Baci and Vicenzi."

"Italians are fiercely passionate about having the best-quality produce, be it cheese, ham, vegetables, lemons, vinegar, etc," Sergio adds, and this can be plainly seen in authentic Italian food and drink products. "Although certain products are replicated across the world, there's definitely something unique about Italian products," Matthew says. "You can really feel the love and passion that's gone into making it and that's why you'll see some of their finest ingredients have certification attached to them. For example, Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) is widely used to ensure customers know they're buying genuine products made in the founding regions, so they're never left disappointed."

Italy's list of iconic PDO, Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) food and drink is noteworthy, with hundreds of genuine Italian food and wine products, including no less than 42 PDO olive oils alone. Assurances are also made around British favourites, like Prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano Reggiano. These labels protect and communicate the provenance of real Italian food – and the Italian Government has introduced strict rules about the labelling and packaging of products such as olive oil as there are growing numbers of 'Italian-sounding' products hitting the market. According to The Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry for the UK, it's a lucrative market worth €100bn worldwide, so protecting tradition has never been more important.

For Italian food makers, tradition does not equate to an old-fashioned and inflexible outlook, but rather a way of life that is in tune with nature and the seasons and which pays homage to a rich heritage. "Italian dishes present a high degree of variation as recipes follow the seasonal availability of fruits and vegetables, allowing for many adaptations and for many different flavours," explains Linda. Vegetables, fruits, wines and cheeses, she says, have important local connections. "The best example is bread: in France or in Britain, it seems like there is just one bakery for the whole country, the bread is the same everywhere. In Italy bread is different everywhere, from town to town. The same is true for cured meats: every region has its traditions and its habits, different from its neighbours."

It's important for retailers to know these products inside and out, and to understand the passion and pride behind them. "We believe that knowing your product and having a passion for what you're selling helps boost sales. If the retailers are passionate, they will want the customers to have the same experience as them," Paul says. "If they are knowledgeable, they will share their passion with confidence."

## Discover innovation

Tradition may be a cornerstone in Italian cuisine, but innovation and reinvention are still encouraged. Patricia de Middel Puch, creator of SWICILY, a liquid sweetener made with heritage organic grapes grown by small Sicilian farmers, explains: "Italy is all about ingredients talking by themselves, about simplicity, quality and a deep sense of belonging. Those are the pillars of the most acclaimed and innovative restaurants in the world. I actually believe the 'Made in Italy' brand is more than ever at the forefront of the positive and joyful approach to food we are experiencing," she explains. "Young Italians are having fun reinventing their grandmothers' classic dishes. It is a happy, creative place to be in."

How do innovative, trend-led products complement traditional and often protected food and drink? According to Patricia, the industry has always been changing, but typically this goes under the radar. "Positive change often feels organic and is totally in tune with what the consumers are looking for; this is often why it goes unnoticed." However, products must be able to stand alongside the classics, which is no mean feat. "Nowadays, any new good product or innovative food does need to embrace quality and the know-how accumulated by

## RETAIL INSIGHT: BEST-SELLING ITALIAN PRODUCTS

**MATTHEW BLAKELY,** BLAKE & TATE

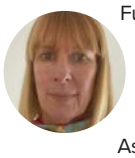


Our best-selling products tend to be high-quality imported goods from regions in Europe such as Caputo flour or San Marzano tomatoes from Italy. In terms of thriving categories, we've seen the biggest surge in pizza-related products, such pizza flour, tomatoes and toppings such as meats and drizzles. Our range of home-sized pizza equipment including dough trays and wooden pizza peels have also proved popular with many customers over recent months.

I'd strongly recommend ranging DOP certified San Marzano tomatoes for a start – they're the world's number one tomato for a reason – high-quality pizza and pasta flours from producers such as Caputo & Molino Dallagiovanna and high-end dried pasta from real Italian producers.

Why do I recommend the above? These products are the best in the world. Used by the best pizza and pasta chefs due to their amazing taste and quality. Customers who visit our website aren't here to purchase items they could buy from a British supermarket. They come to get the best of the best from across the world and that's enabled us to stand out from the crowd.

**SALLY ASSINDER,** GAROFALO PASTA



Fusilli is still the UK's favourite pasta shape and the top shape for Garofalo in terms of volume. As a result, pasta shapes with Fusilli as part of the name are rising in popularity in our best-sellers list. Fusilli Lunghi, Fusilli Tricolore, Fusillone and Fusilli Bucati Corti give customers a new shape to add to their repertoire but with a familiar ring to the name, and they are proving popular.



**SPAGHETTI BOLOGNESE** IS A **FAVOURITE** MID-WEEK MEAL AMONG **42%** OF **BRITS**

former generations. It is a matter of respect towards the products, the environment, our community and our bodies," Patricia says. "The 'Made in Italy' brand is synonymous with the highest standards of quality, transparency and respect. Once you know you have to give your best, the peace of mind and pride are worth the ride."

With innovation clearly another prong of the Italian food story for retailers to sell, what's the best way to go about adding products to well-stocked Italian shelves? One way that Matthew of Blake & Tate is refreshing his shop is by looking within the UK's own borders. While this began from a logistical, Brexit-related standpoint, he has been pleased with what he has found.

**SALES** OF **PIZZA OVENS** AT **JOHN LEWIS** ROSE **200%** OVER THE LAST **12** MONTHS

"Post-Brexit, our business model has changed. Previously we've only focused on imported foods, however in recent months due to customs and HGV driver shortages we've been left with no alternative other than to source British producers of Italian staples to fill the void, and our customers really seemed to take to it.

"Our range of British charcuterie, such as Pancetta, Salami, Pepperoni, Guanciale and many more by Capriolous in Devon has been the stand-out success," he continues. "Mixing the traditional Italian soul with a British twist – it's really opened our eyes to the amazing produce we have right here in the UK and offers our customers something they won't have tried before."

Elsewhere, Sergio says Rowcliffe is developing and introducing cheeses that "answer the consumer's need for added value, premium products, and single dairy offerings. Our Ambrosi Parmigiano Reggiano Julienne is the first of its kind to appear on the market," he explains. "It holds the unmistakable delicate flavour and quality of Parmigiano Reggiano DOP, however, it is shredded for the user's convenience. Unlike similar products in the market," he adds, "it is 100% cheese, and 0% rind."

The business's development of a 40-month matured Parmigiano Reggiano is a success story in premiumisation of an already loved product. "The 40 month has a distinct, strong aroma with spicy and smoky notes. It has an intense yellow colour verging on amber with very visible tyrosine crystals." The group also launched a spooning Gorgonzola into its independent retailers to "great success". Sergio says, "At nearly 6kgs, and served with a spoon, it really is the definition of a 'theatre' cheese. It creates a talking point in stores and is easy to sample with customers."

Creating a hot topic in your shop is a great way to open communication with customers, and CaterItaly's Linda says retailers need to do just that, especially when launching new Italian products. "Having just released a new product, which is a re-think of the classic meatball dish Polpette al Sugo packed in a jar, I can say that it can be a stressful process," she admits. In her case, the innovation was packing a traditional dish into a jar without the artificial flavours or added sugars commonly found in the supermarket ambient aisles. "They are just like Nonna made, and all you need to do is heat them up." But, she says, "The general public initially responded negatively, labelling food in a jar as unhealthy, leaving us the knowledge that we have a myth to dismantle with our products."

Sally agrees that fine food retailers can boost sales by educating their customers to the difference of authentic Italian products. "Still in the UK there is the perception that 'pasta is just pasta' and why would you pay more for one pack of pasta than another?" she explains. "Talk with customers or have information on why not all pasta is the same. Explain how the pack of pasta in the fine food retailer is different and better quality than the supermarket pasta and worth spending a little bit more to get the quality pasta experience in the dishes they make," she advises. "I love hearing when people have tried Garofalo pasta for the first time and are surprised that they can taste the difference between the quality Italian pasta and their normal pasta."

Sitting at the crossroads of innovation and tradition, of comfort and exploration and of quality and simplicity, it is no wonder that Italian food continues to be a favourite around the world.

## 2021 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE STOCK CHECK




**GAROFALO FUSILLI LUNGHI**
A speciality from Campania with a classic spiral shape that lets sauces creep between the curves.
**pasta-garofalo.com**




**AMBROSI PARMIGIANO REGGIANO (DOP) JULIENNE**
Julienne shredded Parmigiano Reggiano cheese.
**rowcliffe.co.uk**




**OLIVES ET AL SIMPLY BRILLIANT GRILLED ARTICHOKES**
Crisp Italian grilled artichoke hearts. Part of the New Simply Brilliant Range of Storecupboard Essentials.
**olivesetal.co.uk**




**FIRELLI ITALIAN HOT SAUCE**
A delicious, artisan hot sauce, hand-crafted from natural ingredients in Parma, Italy.
**firelli.com**




**SEGGIANO ORGANIC SEMI FRESH BASIL**
A unique product which combines the flavours and aromas of fresh herbs with the convenience of dried.
**seggiano.com**



**LAUDEMIO FRESCOBALDI EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL**
Striking emerald green in colour, with fresh lemon zest, woody herbs and richer notes of ground coffee.
**oilmerchant.co.uk**



**COMMENTATORS**



**SEREN CHARRINGTON-HOLLINS**
FOOD AND DRINK HISTORIAN



**BECKY VALE**
TRACKLEMENTS



**MARIA WHITEHEAD MBE**
HAWKSHEAD RELISH



**MICHAEL PRICE**
PRICE'S SPICES



# THE EVOLUTION OF STORECUPBOARD ESSENTIALS

Ellen Manning finds that far from being simply a place to store the basics, pantries are becoming the source of culinary adventures

We've been storing food in some way, shape or form for centuries. From pantries to modern day storecupboards, the way people have cooked over time has always relied, in part, on some select ingredients that they can grab at a moment's notice. According to a report from insights and analytics company Future Thinking in September 2021, which looked at consumers' food attitudes and habits in 2019, despite having one of the longest working weeks in Europe nearly two thirds of people said they enjoyed cooking from scratch. However, the report also found that more people were buying pre-prepared convenience foods. Whether basic ingredients for whipping up a meal from scratch – something consumers rediscovered during lockdowns – or using pre-prepared staples to save time and effort, the storecupboard is as important in 2021 as it was in Victorian times. But are those essentials the same? Or are people reaching for different things when they grab ingredients these days?

## People are more abundant in what they store

The storecupboard isn't going anywhere, says food and drink historian Seren Charrington-Hollins, but what's in it is changing all the time along with what people are buying to stock it. "If you look in people's storecupboards now, I think you will find a lot more in terms of selection. If you go back even to the 1950s, you would find things like individual herbs, for example, but there would be less of a selection. Even if we go back to the 1930s you would find things like mild curry powder, or maybe parsley and dried herbs but what you would not find is the array of spice mixes that we now have. Now we have pre-mixed herbs, spice mixes, blends etc. If you look in the supermarkets it's mind-boggling what they sell." That variety and selection isn't limited to spices and seasonings, but extends across different storecupboard essentials, from flour to pasta and rice, she says. "Again, if you go back you might have seen dried macaroni, tapioca, pudding rice and those were staples. That's all changed. We are now a generation that is keeping a variety of things like pastas and rices, especially different types – so we are more likely to have things like sushi rice or arborio rice than tapioca or pudding rice."

Changes to our storecupboard essentials relate closely to our reasons for storing food, says Charrington-Hollins. "People are more abundant in what they store," she says. "Going back, we stored foods because they were staples – things we would reach for every day – but now we store everything. We store in a different way. We don't store because we need to make sure we have these staples to use every day or every week. I think a lot of people use the pantry or storecupboard to put ingredients where we might use them one day, but not every day. We are not reliant on it anymore because you can get food from anywhere now, whenever we want it." That change in why we store food nowadays explains why the contents of our storecupboards have changed, says Charrington-Hollins. "For example, tinned fish used to be an absolute staple. There weren't very many housewives 50 years ago who wouldn't have had tinned sardines, pilchards etc. But it's not really the type of thing we store now. I'm not saying people don't have the odd tin of tuna lying around, but it's not a storecupboard staple anymore. Maybe because we don't need to have so many tinned goods – we're more likely to have fresh products because we have refrigeration. Similarly with preserves, people used to preserve things in periods of abundance to store away for the rest of the year. But now we don't tend to preserve things because we can just pop to a shop and get it. We are more likely to buy in preserves if we want them. Tastes have changed, how we eat has changed, and that means what's in our cupboards has changed. The pantry has become something we enjoy doing, it's more about frivolity than frugality and necessity, and that's where it's changed."



## A versatile way to enliven palates

Despite changes in variety and today's consumer's love of global produce, storecupboard ingredients still relate to the categories that have occupied space on our shelves for decades – from staples like rice and pasta to those jars of condiments, chutneys and relishes, and spices, seasonings and herbs that we use to jazz up our meals. Becky Vale, marketing director at Tracklements, sees chutneys and relishes as the "stalwarts of the storecupboard". "Who among us hasn't, at some point or another, had a harried look in the fridge and been at a loss for inspiration, only to open the cupboard and see the reassuring sight of a jar of chutney, or a much loved relish with which to liven up a meal or transform a lump of cheese and a cracker into a veritable feast," she says. "I simply can't imagine a storecupboard




> "Whether basic ingredients for whipping up a meal from scratch – something consumers rediscovered during lockdowns – or using pre-prepared staples to save time and effort, the storecupboard is as important in 2021 as it was in Victorian times"



> Tastes have changed, how we eat has changed, and that means what's in our cupboards has changed. The pantry has become something we enjoy doing, it's more about frivolity than frugality and necessity and that's where it's changed

without a collection of mustards, chutneys, relishes, pickles, savoury jellies or sauces in it. Each one has a particular use, each one is the finishing touch to a meal without which it just isn't complete. Another reason they're an essential part of every kitchen storecupboard is their sheer versatility – whether you're looking for something to make a sandwich sing, or to jazz up a stew, something to bring out the best in a piece of cheese, or to perfectly complement a special meal without overpowering it."

The popularity of nostalgic food – driven perhaps by the role of food in comforting the nation through testing times – has meant that traditional condiments are enjoying buoyant sales, adds Vale, with Tracklements experiencing a 60% increase in the year to date. "We've seen from our research that the traditional essentials have really stood the test of time: mustard is still as useful and popular as ever, as is our Strong Horseradish & Cream. This past year in particular, condiments to complement traditional, comfort foods like roasts have seen really strong sales." Unsurprisingly, the most frequently bought items are the most frequently used, says Vale, but Tracklements have also noticed that more products are being added to the 'must-have' list, from chilli jam to mayonnaise which are now household staples.

## Scratch cooking is a boon to storecupboards

Our love of storecupboard staples has been further bolstered by a renewed interest in cooking from scratch. "With all the interest in food, especially home cooking from scratch over the last 18 months, people have started to look at their storecupboards and see how they can use up jars, tins and packets in a different way," says Maria Whitehead MBE, owner of Hawkshead Relish. But our newfound love of getting creative in the kitchen doesn't necessarily fit with people's busy lives in 2021, which is where some of the new storecupboard staples come into their own, according to Michael Price, owner of Price's Spices. "People are time poor and often cook from storecupboards. If you think of a chilli, you've got tinned tomatoes, kidney beans, rice, some kind of seasoning. Over the last few years I've noticed that when people find something that works for them, like a chilli mix or a fajita mix, they stick to it rather than going through the faff of adding each individual spice. They want to use a seasoning or spice mix that's been put together, properly balanced and that they know tastes great. They want to feel that they have cooked from scratch but not have the hassle. I think shortcuts are definitely the way forward and I've seen the repeat business of my spice sachets get a lot bigger. I have probably got at least a couple of dozen customers who buy either jerk seasoning, chilli or fajitas and buy 15 sachets at a time."

Having someone else do the "hard work" when it comes to taste and flavour is something that Vale says attracts people to Tracklements, allowing them to access a "powerhouse of flavour and taste" by simply opening a jar. "Everyone needs a helping hand in the kitchen sometimes," she says, "whether it's scratch cooking or whipping up a meal in minutes. Some people call them 'cheat' ingredients, but we agree with Jamie Oliver who said in his recent recipe book *7 Ways*: 'I use a lot of condiments in this book...They guarantee flavour and save hours of time in preparation...Over the years, the press have taken the piss out of me for using these so-called 'cheat' ingredients, but I think cheat ingredients are great! They help keep food exciting.'"

The use of storecupboard essentials as the basis for meals cooked from scratch, or shortcuts to add flavour quickly and easily, is something producers and retailers are honing in on, with Whitehead saying that packaging is now used to offer suggestions that extend the use of certain products beyond their traditional uses. It was also the motivation behind a recipe book released by Hawkshead in 2019, showcasing its best-selling products in more than 60 recipes. "For many years I have used our products as part of recipes for everyday dishes at home, many cooked from scratch when I get home from work, so cutting a few corners and using what is in the pantry is a great way of adding flavour when time is short." Similarly, Price includes recipes on his website to encourage customers to think outside the box when it comes to his seasonings, rubs and sauces. "Things like seasonings are so useful for transforming traditional meals," he says. "Take things like my meat rubs – you can use them on anything from a roast beef dinner to blinging something for the barbecue. It's about showing people how versatile the products are and how they can work together." Price also encourages customers to think of how his products will work together, like using a chilli jam to complement a dish made using one of his seasonings. "I try to interact with people and make sure they're buying the right products for them, so they won't just sit on the shelf, but they will use it and experiment with it. If people are buying stuff then only using it once, then maybe they're buying the wrong products, so I try to help them and inspire them."

That said, the longevity of store cupboard ingredients is one of their many bonuses, meaning even if you don't use them every day, they're there waiting for that occasion when you need them. "The beauty of them is that they last a long time, even after opening," says Whitehead. "They improve for a long time after production as the flavours develop, so we would always want to leave them a good six months before using them, but I have some in my cupboard two years on. Obviously once opened you need to store them in the fridge and the space becomes an issue, so if you can use them it's a great idea and so much better than wasting them."

## 2021 STOCK CHECK




### MATTHEWS COTSWOLD FLOUR STONEGROUND ANCIENT COTSWOLD CRUNCH

An artisanal blend of whole grain Emmer and Einkorn combined with Cotswold Spelt blended with torrefied spelt flakes.

**fwpmatthews.co.uk**




### MR LEE'S NOODLES

Award-winning "no nasties" instant noodles made using the finest freeze-dried ingredients including 100% real meats and veggies. Gluten-free with vegan options.

**mrleesnoodles.com/uk**




### MAK TOK SWEET SOY SAUCE (KICAP MANIS)

Made with high-quality soybeans that are naturally fermented with a secret blend of our family's spices for a natural sweetness with a warm aroma.

**maktok.com**




### CALI CALI FOODS CAJUN SALT SEASONING

The perfect blend of seasonings to help customers recreate the flavours of authentic California street food at home.

**calicalifoods.com**




### SHARPHAM PARK ORGANIC WHITE SPELT FLOUR

Perfect for baking, creating delicious cakes, pastry, flatbreads, pizza bases and bread.

**sharphampark.com**




### CLEARSPRING ORGANIC JAPANESE WHITE MISO

Award-winning authentic Japanese Miso, balancing sweet and savoury flavour notes.

**clearspring.co.uk**



# INTRODUCING MAIL ORDER MASTERCLASS

While the Covid-19 pandemic caused a great many challenges for the food and retail sectors, it undeniably allowed for innovation too; with the growth in online sales came a boost for mail order models. Here, experts share their insight and experiences to help you make the most of this valuable opportunity

Mail order has historically been a straightforward yet underutilised arm of the fine food sector. While specialists made the most of catalogues and postal orders, the advent of the internet changed everything. The e-commerce revolution has transformed the sector into a vibrant and increasingly vital area that every business owner can exploit.

From the direct-to-consumer boom to the popularity of meal kit boxes and letterbox hampers, everything from flattened bottles of wine to pouched and ready-to-pour pre-mixed cocktails is getting an e-commerce-friendly refresh.

While this change was already barrelling down the road towards the fine food sector, Covid-19 caused decades worth of development to happen practically overnight.

That's why *Speciality Food*, in partnership with Icertech, has created *The Mail Order Masterclass*, a go-to resource for fine food businesses looking to build up their digital resilience for the new age of retail.

After Covid-19 highlighted the critical importance of having multiple routes to reach your customer, there's never been a better time to invest.

From your first steps of setting up an e-commerce website to choosing a local or national delivery service through to how and why you should be capturing data from your online business, this report features expert advice to get you started on your mail order journey.

The industry is becoming more and more inclusive of a diverse array of products, too. Parcels are no longer reserved only for ambient goods or long-life items. Over the pandemic, food businesses took the leap into shipping out chilled and frozen products, as well as fresh items like meat and cheese. Advances in temperature controlled packaging allow businesses to rest easy that their products will reach customers looking and tasting their very best. Whether your business is shipping out meal kits or boxes of cheeses, new developments in packaging have turned e-commerce's possibilities into reality for more fine food businesses.

Plus, not only does mail order bring opportunities in reaching new customers to the table, but it also opens the door to exciting and imaginative ways to attract customer loyalty. For instance, direct-to-consumer brands boast high customer loyalty thanks to their subscription models, and retailers are learning that they can replicate these with veg boxes and cheese subscription boxes too.

Bricks and mortar retail shops will always have a place in the fine food industry, but the opportunities of operating an e-commerce and delivery arm in 2021 are too good to pass up. Read on to find out why and how you can kick-start your mail order business today.



Download the *Mail Order Masterclass* report for free from
**specialityfoodmagazine.com/mailorder**

# POSTING PROFITS:
## HOW MAIL ORDER WENT BIG

Dispatching orders used to be a simple business; now delivery models are diversifying...

**1 LETTERBOX HAMPERS**
From meal kits to flattened wine bottles and cocktail kits to cheeseboards, the letterbox format has revolutionised the way we get curated hampers direct to the customer. Reduced delivery costs and increased customer satisfaction are important factors.

**2 'INSTANT' DELIVERY APPS**
Have you hooked up with an app yet? Grocery apps such as Dija, Getir, Beelivery and Gorilla that promise ultra-fast delivery (as speedy as seven minutes in some postcodes) attracted over £5 billion of funding in 2021. Big growth is on the cards.

**3 CHILLED PACKAGING**
Not new, but certainly working harder than ever as meal kits, and chilled and frozen groceries are increasingly ordered remotely. Frozen has been a particularly high performing category since the start of the pandemic.

42.6% OF UK SHOPPERS PLAN TO CONTINUE SOURCING THEIR GROCERIES ONLINE ONCE THE PANDEMIC IS OVER
**Source: Statista**

45-54 YEAR OLDS WERE THE BIGGEST DEMOGRAPHIC FOR ONLINE FOOD AND DRINK PURCHASES IN 2020
**Source: Statista**

55% OF ONLINE SHOPPERS IDENTIFY ALCOHOL AS THEIR MOST FREQUENT ONLINE GROCERY PURCHASE IN 2021
**Source: Statista**

FISH AND NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES WERE CONSUMERS' LEAST POPULAR ONLINE GROCERY ITEMS IN 2021
**Source: Statista**

## *"Our subscription offer is the thing that gets us closest to our most engaged customers"*



**PAT BINGLEY**
CO-FOUNDER OF EATEN ALIVE, SOUTH LONDON

Myself and my business partner Glyn are chefs by background so when we started making out live kimchi, kraut and hot sauces food service was a big part of our market. Of course that hit the skids in 2020 so we were able to focus on DTC. Top of our list was subscription because it pays to engage with your most regular customers. Our website's not very sophisticated so our sub isn't fixed: people can change what products they want month to month and we keep track of that that manually. Seeing what people want gives us the chance to improve; it gives us the chance to speak to them directly. Otherwise, running a web shop you find your correspondence ends up being about issues and problems.

User experience is the big buzzy thing; lack of contact with your customers when you're digital and online explains why big brands work so hard to build engagement. As a tiny business when it comes to DTC, it's been great to be able to gather some insight and get some engagement in an organic way. With the pandemic we haven't had lots of money washing around to activate market engagement so this has been a great tool to help us understand our customers better and learn how people react to our offer.

Both Glyn and I come from Michelin-starred kitchens and if someone turns up saying 'I don't want to eat any of the food on the menu' then you send someone to the shop and you make it for them. So within reason we try to be as flexible as we can with all our customers – trade and consumer. We can do that is because our products are chilled and packed in glass, which means we have to fulfil orders ourselves. Almost everything sold online is fulfilled by a third party. We would do that to if we didn't have some products which can be tricky to handle!

Bi-monthly – we had to think what was reasonable so we looked at our best customer: what they order, how often, and also what works for us in terms of picking and packing these products. It's aimed at relatively dedicated customers; for chilled products eight weeks allows people to eat what they have before the next box arrives.

Subscription has gone back to being a small percentage of our revenue now our main channels have normalised. It's also emotive: we're doing something we care about and the subscription is the thing that gets us closest to our most engaged customers.

It helps us know we're making our products for people that care about them.

"SINCE THE **BEGINNING** OF THE **INTERNET AGE,** AND WITH A **MAJOR PUSH** FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**, GROCERY SHOPPING ON THE WEB** IS TURNING INTO AN **INCREASINGLY POPULAR** ALTERNATIVE TO **PHYSICAL** SUPERMARKET TRIPS IN THE UK"
**SOURCE: STATISTA**



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
icertech
Quality Chilled Packaging

## *"Our DTC platform went from ideation to live in six weeks"*



**ALEX SMITH**
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR OF YOUNG FOODIES

As soon as the pandemic kicked off you could see online shopping would accelerate massively. We saw that creating a DTC marketplace would be a great way of helping more brands get in front of people. That was the genesis of Mighty Small, our DTC platform, which went from ideation to live and transactional in six weeks. It took a lot of late nights!

We started with around 30 brands on the platform and now have close to 70. In the last six months we've had around 700 brands approach Mighty Small to get their product listed. We only have a capability in ambient at the moment but next year we'll be working on chilled and frozen.

'Female under-35 baking enthusiast' is a category that does well for us on Facebook ads! Late April and May '21 were slower months for the DTC side of things; sales definitely dropped as restrictions lifted and people went about their normal business but it had recovered again from the beginning of the summer. It's one of a number of Young Foodies' revenue streams, so it's never panic stations. We're never reliant on one model.

Mighty Small has definitely evolved. It started entirely DTC and its evolved to include corporate gifting, some B2B, and to be a shop window. Retail sales are a pretty even split between pre-made bundles (a picnic box, or a night in box), people making their own bundles, or large quantities of a small assortment, and then corporate gifting. That category has shifted from working-from-home sweeteners to Christmas gift boxes and corporate gift boxes. The category's moved but as one element switched off another starts. We're doing more office-based deliveries now for workplaces that want to offer healthy or vegan snacks and drinks for their employees. Health is the biggest trend that we see.

That desire from our customers to do good has grown, big time. One of the big reasons corporate gifting is successful is not only are they spending money on brands with quite big sustainability or ethical credentials, we also have a charity partnership with FoodCycle so every box bought we donate a meal. There are some interesting reports on what millennials and Gen Zs look for in a brand and they want personal connection, to use the digital world for their information and seeing through greenwashing.

> "Millenials and Gen Zs look for connection, to use the digital world for their information and see through greenwashing"

## *"We knew there couldn't be a single fix"*



**SHUMANA PALIT**
DIRECTOR OF ULTRACOMIDA IN CARDIFF

**SHOP FLOOR >**
WAREHOUSE FLOOR

We started March last year with delis, restaurants and a Spanish food import business. We had to take on as much debt as we could to ride out the pandemic, but then you look at it and think 'S**t, now we have to service that debt! We knew there couldn't be a single fix; we had to look at multiple areas. Some of the restaurant elements of our business just couldn't work during Covid but our wine sales were going through the roof. We furloughed all the staff and kept a skeleton crew in the warehouse but gradually we took on an extra. In fact, we came out of lockdown with a bigger warehouse team than we went in with.

**DELI/RESTAURANT >**
CUSTOMER-FACING WAREHOUSE

We turned the restaurant into a wine room, but we needed a more warehousing (Brexit was partly a factor) and we found a great space that lent itself to half warehouse, half retail. It's no-frills but has the feel of a bodega or winery: a working environment where you can taste as well as buy. We assumed people would rock up with a basket, get what they want and leave but it's almost more conducive to talking about wine than the original shop space.

**ONLINE HUB >**
DEDICATED SISTER SITE

Our existing website was pretty clunky but it's plumbed into lots of essential back-end stuff so we launched a spin-off: SpanishWinesDirect. Pivoting away from the hospitality elements of our business to more online sales was a headache, but a necessary one. Our options were to close our doors and walk ways – declaring bankruptcy – or make some big changes. It's been gruelling, and there were some elements we couldn't do as well as we wanted but it feels good now to be at the tweaking stage.



**100+% ONLINE SALES INCREASE AT ULTRACOMIDA DURING 2020**

## DIRECT TO CONSUMER: THE STATS

**97%**
OF THE UK'S CHIEF MARKETING OFFICERS SAY DTC CHANNELS ARE A HIGHER PRIORITY SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC BEGAN
**Source: ChannelAdvisor**

**45%**
OF BRANDS ARE SELLING MORE PRODUCTS THROUGH THEIR OWN CHANNELS NOW VERSUS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC
**Source: ChannelAdvisor**

**57%**
OF UK CONSUMERS REPORT REGULARLY BUYING FROM DTC BRANDS
**Source: Barclays Corporate Banking**

**96BN**
VALUE OF THE UK'S DTC SALES IN 2020
**Source: Barclays Corporate Banking**

**68%**
OF UK CONSUMERS ABANDON A WEBSITE PURCHASE DUE TO HIGH DELIVERY COSTS
**Source: Fast and Frictionless report by Brightpearl.com**

**"PIVOTING AWAY FROM HOSPITALITY TO ONLINE WAS A HEADACHE, BUT A NECESSARY ONE"**
**SHUMANA PALIT, ULTRACOMIDA**

# TREND 1: DIRECT TO CONSUMER

DTC is exploding in food and drink, making big changes in the way brands get their products to market

### 1 DTC IS HUGE, AND HERE TO STAY

Recent years have seen multinationals like Nike, L'Oreal and Pepsi bypass their usual route to market with direct-to-consumer selling from their own online platforms. Why? Well, with retail traffic down and pandemic disruption ongoing, smart operators are using the increasingly sophisticated ecommerce solutions available to engage directly and make sure every step of the consumer's experience tallies with the brand's values.

### 2 THE PANDEMIC TRIGGERED HUGE INNOVATION

DTC activity has skyrocketed in the food and drink category as hospitality-facing brands pivoted to retail. The Wasabi Company is a classic example: "In March 2020 the vast majority of our sales were to restaurants or wholesalers in the UK and Europe," says managing director Jon Old. "We decided to focus all our efforts on marketing our online sales and immediately sales started to climb. As the UK lockdown took hold, we saw an exponential increase in web traffic and sales."

### 3 NEW DTC CHANNELS CAN BRING LOGISTICAL HEADACHES...

Blackwoods Cheese Company added a shopping facility to its website to broaden its retail reach. "It has been quite difficult if I'm honest!" says director David Holton. "We are cheesemakers with a very tight team of packers who fill our jars with cheese/oil/herbs; it's a very time consuming, labour intensive and space needing process. We had to keep our budgets under control during the pandemic so we wouldn't have been able to cope with a huge influx of online orders without it having a negative effect on the amount of cheese we could physically prepare. We were grateful to see a small increase in sales but too much more and we would have struggled and actually had to hire more staff to pack more cheese with nowhere to pack it."

### 4 NEW DTC CHANNELS ARE HERE FOR GOOD...

"The most gratifying is that sales from our website in 2021 are outpacing 2020," says Jon Old, "which means the new customers we attracted have continued to shop with us. We have developed the skills to market and service this sector more effectively than ever before and this continues to be rewarded. This has been of particular importance as our sales to the EU have been significantly hampered by export restrictions and delays post Brexit. Lockdown sales, and the strategies forged during this time, have not only saved our 2020 but have much better placed to cope in the new trading environment in 2021."

### 5 APPS ARE CHANGING THE GAME...

"It was a no brainer," says David about getting his cheeses listed on food app Dija (which promised ten-minute delivery on groceries in London). "They have been incredibly easy to work with and we are happy that customers have been able to get out cheese in this way. Our post and packaging fee through our own website is not low so we enjoy working with Dija as the end consumers can buy Graceburn alongside their regular shop which makes any delivery costs less significant for them."

Download the *Mail Order Masterclass* report for free from **specialityfoodmagazine.com/mailorder**

# PUTTING THE 'E' IN ENGAGEMENT

## Generating remote sales takes persistence and speedy reactions, says digital marketeer Harry Dance

### 1 THINK STRATEGICALLY

Covid caused a huge spike in online engagement as people scrambled to alternatives to the empty shelves in supermarkets. But the issue for some businesses that relied on Covid trends alone is that without marketing you very quickly start to see those figures come down. Once restrictions eased, indies that didn't have a loyalty scheme have seen all their custom go back to Tesco. Our client Parson's Nose (see page 26) had that initial burst, but comparing this month's sales with the same time last year they're still growing and developing. They've sorted the internal logistics too but their customer-facing strategy has enabled that growth.

### 2 KISS A FEW FROGS

You have to be tireless in finding what gets you in front of the people you want to speak to. We've done this with the social media marketing through paid advertising: we keep a close eye on what's working, and cut the stuff that doesn't. Where does the data take you? Across my clients we're seeing a massive increase in people buying turkeys and festive meats. People searching for food boxes has increased significantly too. You have to follow that: test it and follow it. What attracts your audience?

### 3 KEEP AT IT

Consistency, commitment and a lack of it is what you see with a lot of companies. We all know businesses that posted once a year ago to say 'have you seen our deals?' And that's it. Consumers want to buy into the brand, so becoming a micro influencer as a brand and building a community around what you do is important. That consistency is something we've really stuck at.

### 4 THE SOCIAL MEDIA GAME IS CHANGING

Privacy online is increasing, and rightly so, but it means cookies – the things that track customers around the internet – are being taken away by big tech firms. It's already happened on Facebook to an extent. A couple of years ago I could target 'newly-married couples in Kent on a middle-class income' using the data that was captured; now that information is being taken away. Captured data used to be available for years, now it's a matter of weeks. You need to make sure you're getting people engaged and then get them into a loyalty scheme so you can own that data.

### 5 YOUR FOLLOWING IS A MEANS, NOT AN END

If you've decided you'll only do social media – organic engagement or paid-for – it'll get much harder. Firstly because the algorithm is favouring users' personal contacts over company pages they like. I call it the 'boring algorithm': because the platform owners want to make sure their users don't get bored it's only content that users engage with that reaches a wider audience. That's why posting interesting stuff is massively important, but even if you have a huge following what happens when the next Cambridge Analytica-type scandal happens and they all melt away? Use that engagement as a route to signing them up to newsletters or loyalty schemes.

**Harry Dance is digital marketing director at Kayo Digital**

**TAKEAWAY:**
A BIG FOLLOWING ON SOCIAL MEDIA IS JUST HALF THE JOB; EMAIL SIGN UPS AND OTHER DATA IS THE REAL GOAL

> "Social media is one of the most time-consuming elements of the job. Spend a morning in the warehouse and you can physically see what you've done. Putting together a Facebook post doesn't always feel productive, but it is"
>
> **SHUMANA PALIT, ULTRACOMIDA**



95.8% OF GLOBAL INTERNET USERS ACCESSED A SOCIAL NETWORK IN SEPT '21, MAKING IT THE BIGGEST MOTIVATION FOR GOING ONLINE
**Source: Hootsuite, Oct '21**



41.8% OF UK INTERNET USERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HOW COMPANIES USE THEIR PERSONAL DATA ONLINE
**Source: Hootsuite, Oct '21**



6+ SOCIAL NETWORKING PLATFORMS ARE USED BY THE AVERAGE GLOBAL INTERNET USER
**Source: Hootsuite, Oct '21**



27% OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS CITE LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION FOR THINGS TO DO AND BUY AS THEIR MAIN MOTIVATION
**Source: Hootsuite, Oct '21**



28% OF UK INTERNET USERS USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO RESEARCH BRANDS, WITH FEMALES AGED 16 TO 24 MOST LIKELY TO DO THIS
**Source: Hootsuite, Oct '21**



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

icertech
Quality Chilled Packaging

# *"I see shops as showrooms and the future being 100% digital"*



**TONY HINDHAUGH**
DIRECTOR, PARSONS NOSE

Investing in both digital and logistical agility has saved the day, says director Tony Hindhaugh. It's hard to replicate the shop experience – the theatre of butchery – online. When you order remotely most of the time a spotty teen on a scooter arrives and throws the package at you. We put a lot of effort into the delivery method; we started local and dressed our drivers as butchers. We had liveried vans and delivered a personal service. Boxes weren't vac-packed and thrown together as you'd expect for nationwide service, it was packed as you'd get it in the shop and boxes were hand delivered. We put a lot into furthering that shop experience in to delivery and it worked, actually.

What's it like bringing a national courier in? Terrifying. It's terrifying. Before we went live we did quite a few tests sending to friends and family, putting eggs in, trying different packaging...We got broken eggs, we got seeping blood from packaging – all the things you want to avoid. The terrifying thing is you lose a little bit of that customer experience because it's commercial packing rather than personal packing. The minute you try to make a personal package go nationwide it breaks. Also DPD, as good as they are, are not the same as our drivers talking the customers through the cooking process at the door, as our locals. The key thing for us is that we're relying on our brand built up through awards and media presence. We're hoping that will extend past the M25 so the lifestyle brand surrounds whatever's in the box.

I cannot express how lucky we've been to have an IT partner and be able to track market trends, reacting quickly. That extends right back to the butcher's. Burger kits became popular over night so we launched a burger kit and sold thousands. We have a commercial kitchen now making meals to feed the market. We've opened a fishmonger, got vegetables direct from British farmers. We're trying to meet all of customers' needs because people will go back to convenience. Aggressively chasing opportunities. I'm constantly looking at trends. Delivery apps – they work, and we ventured into supplying one but it's just not what we do. Keeping the quality up is quite tricky so we're trying to stick what we do best.

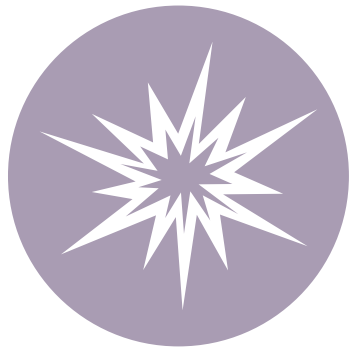
The investment in the website was essential; we changed the content on a daily basis, adding functionality. Registered regulars can get one-click purchase like Amazon, there's same day delivery, points for the loyalty card. It all worked really well. We're on Shopify and the more functionality you want the more you have to pay, so we're on a top package with them now which costs a fortune but gives that seamless payment journey. And that's so important because so many elements of the online experience can turn customers off. That's evident in our conversion rate: we have 87% returning customers and our conversion rate (visits into sales) has been up to 63%. That's evidence that it's an easy site to use.

Butchers did well in covid and some think the best way to expand is to open more shops. To be honest I think that's utter suicide. I see shops as being like showrooms and the future being 100% digital. I'm convinced of it. Opening new shops is foolhardy I think. Resources, rents, rates, less people on the high streets...You can't change the rules of the trading day: the morning will be quiet, it'll pick up towards lunchtime, it'll plateau and then drop off. It happens every day. You can't make people shop at nine in the morning so there's a peak in how many people you can sell to. So keep the shop an experience. The biggest challenge is to make the online experience a reflection of what happens in the shop.






£6,000 - ONLINE SALES PRIOR TO WEB REVAMP



£1.6M - ONLINE SALES SINCE DIGITAL STRATEGY DEPLOYED



WEB TRAFFIC UP 600% (20,000 VISITS VS 136,000 VISITS)



90% INCREASE IN SALES YOY (OCT '20 VS OCT '21)



27,000 ORDERS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF NEW SITE (VS SIX PER WEEK MAX ON OLD SYSTEM)



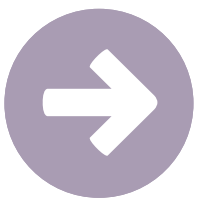
£100K INVESTMENT IN DIGITAL PLATFORM

> "We're trying to meet all of customers' needs because people will go back to convenience"

## CASE STUDY: **FLAPJACKERY, DEVON**



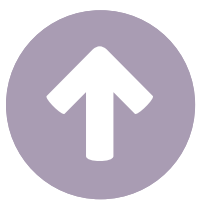
22 STAFF COMPARED TO 13 PRE-PANDEMIC



EMPLOYED AN AGENCY TO EMPLOYING AN AGENCY DEVELOPING AND MANAGING



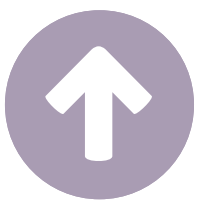
50% STAFF MADE REDUNDANT



£1.4M PROJECTED TURNOVER JULY '21 TO JUNE '22



80% FALL IN FACE-TO-FACE SALES DURING THE PANDEMIC



40% INCREASE ON PRE-PANDEMIC TURNOVER




*We knew we had to invest in our online business and were very lucky as we already had a loyal customer base who bought online. A lot of shows went virtual during the pandemic, which was a good way to keep our name out there*

**Carol Myott, Flapjackery**

Download the *Mail Order Masterclass* report for free from
**specialityfoodmagazine.com/mailorder**

icertech
Quality Chilled Packaging



# THE **ICERTECH** DIFFERENCE

Temperature controlled packaging experts Icertech are at the top of their game. Sales and marketing director Alex Pawley explains why now is the time to invest

Icertech was established over 15 years go and the team have a wealth of experience and knowledge which allows us to respond flexibly to customer enquiries, offering tailored support and advice to start-ups and established companies alike. Icertech's service really sets us apart in the temperature controlled packaging world. We offer a very high level of friendly and personal customer service; we answer the phone within two rings and you'll always be able to speak to someone who can help. We understand how important it is to find the right solution and we are more than happy to provide free samples after discussing the specific requirements with the customers.

## The value of temperature controlled packaging

So many of our customers come to us explaining how they started out supplying locally, making their deliveries themselves, but due to demand they're wanting to take their product national.

Using temperature controlled packaging will help to protect the integrity of the product being shipped, ensuring it arrives with the customer in perfect condition, and at the correct temperature, all whilst being shipped using a standard courier such as DPD. There are other options such as refrigerated vehicles, but temperature controlled packaging is typically a much more cost effective and also more flexible solution.

Covid-19 and the subsequent restrictions put in place really highlighted the importance of having multiple routes to market. With restaurants having to close overnight we helped a lot of businesses offer their product direct to consumer.

## A comprehensive range

We offer a complete range of solutions which includes ice packs and insulated boxes to suit a variety of applications. Back in 2005 the range started out as the more traditional polystyrene solutions which include our Tile-Box and Moulded Polystyrene Boxes. We continued to expand the range by introducing the Foil-Box which is a lightweight and compact solution, ideal where storage and space are at a premium.

The range of solutions has continued to evolve and now includes our sustainable Enviro-Range which consists of two paper based insulated boxes which are fully kerbside recyclable, as well as a fully recyclable ice pack. We're extremely proud of this range and will be adding to it in the coming months.




We actually manufacture our own ice packs on-site which allows us to be really competitively priced whilst ensuring product quality. Last year we produced over four million ice packs!

## The process

We ask a lot of questions to start with as we really want to get a good understanding of your requirements and what is important to your business. Once we have established what you're hoping to achieve we generally then arrange samples of the most suitable solution for the customer to review- we know how important it is to have confidence in your packaging.

After the best solution has been agreed we'll then confirm pricing based on your specific requirements. As and when you are ready to place an order we'll look at optimal delivery configurations that work for you, as well as keeping you informed about delivery dates and your order status. We work to build long term relationships with our customers by really getting to know the requirements of your business.

## The future of TCP

Consumers are more aware of the purchases they're making and how they can personally have a positive impact on the environment. Over the last few years we have noticed a big shift towards more sustainable solutions and as a result we are working with local universities on various research projects, including development of the Enviro-Range, and as a way of validating our green credentials.

As a company we're constantly looking for new ways to improve our products and practices. Over the next 12 months we will be working towards attaining ISO 14001 environmental certification as a way to formally improve our internal processes.

Knowing that our service is what sets us apart from other suppliers, we will be developing our website to offer an exceptional online service to our customers who want to be able to place orders and request free samples at their convenience.

**icertech.co.uk**




## WANT TO EXPLORE TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED PACKAGING?

Alex highlights the key questions and considerations to ask when looking to invest in TCP

**1 What are you sending out?**
A general overview of your product and your business helps us to build a better picture and helps us in making recommendations.

**2 What are you hoping to achieve in terms of performance (temperature range, time frame)?**
It's important to consider the reliability of the service provided by the courier. If you're as confident as you can be of delivery within 24 hours this means you pretty much have a choice of any of our box solutions.

**3 What solution are you currently using or considering?**
What is it about this solution that you like and don't like?

**4 What product attributes are important to your business?**
If space is a premium then a compact solution like our Foil-Box is ideal, if sustainability is key then we have our Enviro-Range.

**5** We recommend considering your budget when looking at chilled packaging solutions. We are completely transparent with our pricing, all of which can be found on our website.

## TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED PACKAGING **FAQS**

**DO YOU OFFER BRANDING?**
Yes we do! As much as we like our own branding we really do enjoy working with our customers on branded solutions. We can supply bespoke branded boxes from quantities of 300+ boxes. It's something we do a lot of and we can provide as much input as required in the design process.

**WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY?**
Take your time selecting a reliable courier and, where possible, select an overnight delivery service as this means you pretty much have a choice of any of our box solutions which are actually DPD Compliant. From our own experience using couriers, we find the tracking information and delivery updates invaluable and believe they are big part of the success rate of our deliveries.

It's often overlooked but tape is an important part of your delivery. With the fluctuations in temperature and moisture caused by cold chain shipments a solvent based tape is ideal.

**CAN I SEND A MIXTURE OF CHILLED AND AMBIENT?**
Yes, absolutely. This is a question we get asked a lot particularly when it comes to hampers and home recipe kits. We have our Foil-Box range which is a great solution for creating separate compartments, and we're also working on a fully kerbside recyclable solution.

**DO YOU OFFER BESPOKE SIZING?**
Yes we can, however, minimum quantities do apply dependant on size and style. It's generally more cost effective if you're able to utilise one of our stock sizes. If you're able to be flexible with what you're sending (e.g. sending 9 meals rather than 10) then our stock range will be the ideal way forward.

# Cheese Talk

## "Use good cheese as a force for good this Christmas"



**SVETLANA KUKHARCHUK**
THE CHEESE LADY

The importance of Christmas for the food industry, including the cheese industry, cannot be underestimated. Christmas is the magic financial dust that makes our businesses glow in the new year. In December, cheese sales go through the roof and it seems that absolutely everybody in the country, including those who do not consume cheese during the rest of the year, all of a sudden buy cheese! It's a tremendous time for business and it's a great time for acquiring new customers.

This year however, Christmas is more vital than ever not only because it is important to us all financially but also because we, cheese retailers, have the power to send waves of positive change through certain layers of our society. Being in direct contact with cheese producers and its final consumer, we are in a unique position to have a positive effect on the lives of both groups.

As we all know, small artisan producers of cheese in Britain and abroad were hit really hard during the pandemic last year. To help them recover and thrive, we need to continue to champion these small producers, especially because they do not have marketing budgets like the big companies. Cheese retailers are their de facto marketing force and when we support them, we help to save them and the whole artisan and farmhouse cheese industry.

It is especially important to continue to support our British cheesemakers by highlighting their products in various and creative ways. We must continue telling the stories behind their cheeses, sampling them out to our customers, creating special offers and various gift sets featuring British cheeses, as well as other locally and nationally-produced artisan foods.

> "Cheese retailers are the de facto marketing force of cheesemakers, and when we support them we help to save them and the whole artisan and farmhouse cheese industry"

From years of working in cheese retail and talking to my customers, I know that good cheese is not only a delicious indulgence for them; it also has the power to boost their morale, bring them closer together with their nearest and dearest and, as a result, improve their mental health. As a nation we have been through some very tough times during the last 18 months, and we all need not only a bit of respite and stability, but we could also do with some regular spikes of positivity and happiness. So when we sell our wonderful and scrumptious cheeses this festive season, we will be playing an important role in improving our customers' lives!

If I were asked about ways of making this Christmas season even more successful and supportive, I would probably say that nothing beats "preparation, preparation, preparation". Early preparations and making the process streamlined are the key to surviving the mad retail rush of Christmas and securing financial success. Encouraging our customers to be organised and place their Christmas orders early will make lives easier for both parties. And speaking of easy, in my experience, people do not like to be bamboozled by too many choices, so presenting them with fewer well-thought-out choices is better than giving them an infinite number of options of various cheese selections and gifts. All people really want is comfort, a bit of indulgence and none of the stress.

I have to confess, however, that I believe that the ultimate key to our success this Christmas and beyond is making our businesses a force for good. When every business, however small, has a cause that they support and champion, a compound effect will bring vital changes to our local communities and our society overall. For instance, at The Cheese Lady we have decided that this year we will be supporting the Mental Health Foundation. Mental health is a cause that is very close to my heart so to support the important work of the Mental Health Foundation we will be donating a percentage of all our sales to the charity. My aim is to highlight the importance of mental health and ways of keeping it strong. I am optimistic that my small business can make a valued difference. I hope that you'll join me in my mission to enjoy good cheese and do good at the same time.

Christmas is without a shadow of a doubt the most important season of the year for the food industry, including the cheese industry.



**JUSTIN TUNSTALL,**
CHEESE CONSULTANT

In the last couple of years everything seems to have been turned on its head, so it is reassuring that the British public will still have its enthusiasm for cheese at Christmas. It's as expected as the bumper *Radio Times*, Noddy Holder's bellow and *It's A Wonderful Life*. Stilton will fly out of the chiller, and the cheese-buying public have consistently shelled out for bumper orders of cheese at this time of year – even last year!

If certainty is now a mythical construct, one thing of which we can be sure is that this year, not everything will go exactly as planned. A supply chain used to be a trade term, unknown to the general public, but now it's as likely to be discussed down the pub as the football scores. There are so many variables at play, from production levels, delivery of stock in (and onward mail-order despatch), plus the timing and nature of consumer demand. This time last year, a lockdown was not on the cards, but it still happened. Hopefully we'll not see a repetition of that, but it'd pay to have a fall-back plan. Just in case.

This year, Christmas Day falls on a Saturday, giving a full working week for just-in-time deliveries out to consumers, then a strong weekend followed by another robust week, until dusk on Friday, Christmas Eve. That's the kind of intensive trading that I love. My chillers and storage space would be turned over two to three times over a good Christmas fortnight, which meant canny ordering, particularly in the timing of top-up deliveries.

It pays to try and tie down advance sales and orders as much as possible – whether by incentivising early delivery and collection or establishing cut-off dates for pre-orders. This year, stories about potential shortages will galvanise some shoppers to organise themselves early, but there'll still be some hunting for blue cheese after lunch on Christmas Eve. During lockdown, a lot of shoppers turned to mail order for previously untried product areas (including cheese) and 'your' customers are likely to be targeted by a variety of online sellers, so make sure that you speak to them early about their Christmas orders and gift hampers. It's got a lot more competitive out there, even if you are 20 miles away from the next nearest cheesemonger.

As far as deliveries into the shop are concerned, I found it best practice to have a small number of suppliers for lines of importance to the shop. Having alternatives, but enough 'clout' with each one is important, especially if courier and delivery drivers continue to be in short supply. Equally, any goods that you are despatching need to be sure of getting there. For a while I had a sign-written shop van, used for local collection and deliveries. I'd make sure that the petrol tank was full this year, and be prepared to put some miles in, if I couldn't get courier collections.

How are your staff? There seems to be a shortage of good workers across hospitality and retail at present. If you have good people, you'll want to keep them. Make sure that they are committed by discussing rotas early on and perhaps promising a post-Christmas incentive for lasting the course, whether that's a party, hamper or bonus. Do you have reserves in case staff get sick over these crucial weeks? Perhaps retired ex-employees, college students or someone who left to tend children?

Yuletide profitability comes from minimising wastage, as much as boosting sales. Writing off stock is heart-breaking. After one particularly snowy pre-Christmas weekend, I ran out of 'friends of the shop' to receive a New Year gift of cheese. My old boss used to say "Let's fall in that river when we come to it", and don't obsess, but an idea of what you might do in such an event reduces the shock! Knowing what cheese needs selling, and when, is vital, but also applies to accompaniments. The finer the food, the fewer the preservatives; biscuits, chutneys and preserves may run out of shelf life during the quieter weeks in the early New Year. Consider matching that stock with cheese now, both in hampers and through cross-selling, rather than letting fate run its course. If you have stock to move on, try to get some benefit from it, either in cash (a contribution to cost will be better than a write-off) or goodwill, by offering it to a food bank or homeless shelter.

It's not really a seasonal thought, but there's a major difference between a murderer committing a 'crime of passion' and a professional assassin. The impassioned avenger will probably look no further than the act itself, while the latter will have a plan B, including an exit route should things go awry. If we hope to make a killing (sorry) over Christmas 2021, I suggest that we adopt the principles of the assassin and have plans B, C and maybe a few more, ready to roll out should the need arise.

More appropriately, as Tiny Tim said in *A Christmas Carol*: "God bless us every one!"

> "In the last couple of years everything seems to have been turned on its head, so it is reassuring that the British public will still have its enthusiasm for cheese at Christmas. Stilton will fly out of the chiller, and the cheese-buying public have consistently shelled out for bumper orders of cheese at this time of year – even last year!"



# CHEESE GIFTING 101

## Jump on the food gifting trend by maximising your offering with products ready to bring Christmas cheer

The gifting season is upon us, and retailers are no doubt knee-deep in red ribbons, baskets and biodegradable glitter. Farm shops and food halls have a strong tradition of providing all manner of hampers and selection boxes for the Christmas season, but even with their classic charm these items saw a rise in popularity during the pandemic as consumers who weren't able to meet up in person were keen to pass on a thoughtful gift – and what says 'thinking of you' better than a selection of carefully chosen local food and drink?

Whether or not families can meet up for their much-desired celebrations this year, cheesemongers can be sure that hampers will get the tills ringing this festive season.

### The ideal gift

Clare Jackson, co-owner of Suffolk's Slate Cheese, tells *Speciality Food* that consumers can't go wrong with an edible gift. "Food gifts such as cheese hampers are a brilliant gift for those tricky-to-buy-for names on your Christmas list. Delicious, perfect for sharing and then gone – no awkward re-gifting or trip to the charity shop needed!"

Fraser MacLellan, who runs The East London Cheese Board, adds that selection boxes take the stress out of gift giving when shoppers don't know exactly what cheeses to buy. "We have several options based on types of cheese, e.g. strong and smelly, or by budget, country and more, so it makes it easy to find a good option."

> "When people are buying cheese as a present, they often don't know what particular cheeses to buy. A box takes the stress out of that"

### Look the part

Throwing a few cheeses together into a box might sound like a great way to quickly win a couple of quid in your shop, but adding an extra dose of thought and care into your gift hampers will help boost sales even further. "It's really important for a hamper to bring joy on opening the box," Clare says. "Great presentation is vital to this initial impact.

"We also think it's important to include a considered selection of cheeses and accompaniments to create a decadent cheeseboard," Clare continues. "The cheeses should include a balance of milks, cheese styles and textures." Indeed, the secret to a great cheese box is simply great cheese. "We put a lot of thought into our selections based on many factors that we learn from tasting the cheese and also purchases made throughout the year, so we know what most customers will like," Fraser says. He also uses the feedback from customers about pairing suggestions to tweak the contents of his boxes.

But don't stop there – include a note about your business, as well as everything customers should know about the cheeses inside. "We also like to include tasting notes and drink pairing suggestions to enhance the feasting experience," Clare says.

### Choose your themes

Visitors to cheese shops are often on the lookout for local specialities – and the same will be true at Christmastime. As well as searching for a convenient gift, a hamper offers consumers the chance to show off a bit about their local area by gifting friends and family with local delicacies. "Our most popular gift is a selection of local East Anglian cheeses with crackers, which we hope brings back fond memories of summer holidays by the Suffolk seaside," Clare says.

Cheesemongers can get creative with their hampers, choosing themes by cheese or tapping into characteristics of the recipient. However, try not to get too carried away, and focus on themes you know your customers will love. "We try not to overwhelm," Fraser says. "Keeping the names simple like Christmas Classics, Best of British, Cheese Lovers Hamper, makes it clear what type of selection it is, so it's easy to buy as a gift."

And don't forget about cheese-related kit, like boards and knives, to offer alongside your range of gifting cheeses. "Covert storage of fresh cheese between delivery and Christmas morning can be a challenge so we offer an ambient range of cheese-related gifts that can be wrapped and tucked under the tree," Clare says. "With all of these we offer the option of adding a Slate gift voucher so the recipient can enjoy some New Year cheese shopping at their leisure."

Once your ideas are complete, make up a few gift-wrap hampers to display in your shop – or brave the social media influencers. "In preparation for the festive season, we've reached out to a group of local bloggers and foodie friends of Slate to share with them a box of cheese," Clare says. "We are hoping they'll love the cheese and share it in their Christmas gift guides." After all, cheese gifts are a fantastic way to spread the love of artisan cheese far and wide.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

If cheese boxes are a success in your shop, why not build on the theme by offering a monthly subscription box? "We think a foodie subscription box is a fabulous Christmas gift idea," Clare says. "We offer three- and six-month gift membership of our Slate Cheese Club, with the first box arriving in early January. What better way to top up the fridge after the Christmas feasting is over and kick off 2022 than a delicious monthly dive into the world of artisan cheese?"




PETER'S YARD
NEW POPPY SEED PACK NOW AVAILABLE
GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME

## PAIRING IDEAS



**ANDY SWINSCOE**
COURTYARD DAIRY

**WHAT'S ON YOUR DREAM CHEESEBOARD?**
It's hard to choose as it's so seasonal and dependent on my mood! But going into autumn/winter I'd have a big chunk of Young Buck Blue, a wedge of Hafod, Etivaz and Winslade.

**WHAT'S YOUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE CHEESE PAIRING?**
I'm not a big fan of overpowering the cheese in general, but Eccles cake and Lancashire is hard to beat as a nice snack.

**ANY UNUSUAL PAIRINGS YOU'D RECOMMEND?**
Poached rhubarb and Yorkshire Pecorino. I first tried it at Skosh restaurant in York and was converted!

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE TO DRINK WITH CHEESE?**
Proper cider – particularly traditionally Keeved Perry – it is very underrated. Look out for Oliver's. Trust me, you have to try it to believe it!

**WHAT MUST-HAVE CHEESE KIT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?**
*The Oxford Companion on Cheese* book. It is a great source of reference for people at all levels of cheese interest!




# MAAZ Cheese takes the crown at ICDA

**The cheese industry descended on Bingley Hall at Staffordshire County Showground on 21st October for the much-anticipated return of the International Cheese & Dairy Awards (ICDA). The event, which was held for the first time at its new venue after being postponed due to Covid, saw the title of Supreme Champion of Cheese be awarded to Netherlands-based MAAZ Cheese BV's Hommage Matured Aged Goat Cheese.**

Jair Ehrhardt, commercial director of export at MAAZ Cheese BV, said he was proud of the win. "This truly shows that Veldhuyzen Kaas & MAAZ Cheese have a strong focus on the highest quality premium Dutch cheese specialties," he told *Speciality Food*. "Our strength is our focus on quality, our knowledge of Dutch cheese and our clear selection of a unique, branded assortment, which is already available in many countries across the globe."

Tasting Hommage Matured is "an experience" Jair said. "For most people it is something they would never expect from a matured goat's cheese. It is a full fat, 100% Dutch goat milk cheese, hard pressed, which we then traditionally age for at least 20 weeks. The flavour can be described as smooth and creamy at first, and then turns into a mildly sweet sensation with a clear taste of beautifully aged cheese."

A Supreme Dairy Champion was awarded for the first time to Delamere Dairy for its Goats' Yogurt, in memory of George Lawrence MBW who was the previous show secretary. Ed Salt, MD of Delamere Dairy said the group was "thrilled". "The fact that our goats' yogurt came out on top against more mainstream dairy entries is a testament to the quality and flavour that goats' products can deliver.

"It is particularly poignant we received the award in George's name," Ed continued. He was involved with Cheshire Young Farmers for years, knew Delamere Dairy's founders and watched the company grow from its infancy. We feel really honoured to win this award, in its first year in memory of George."

The ICDA is now 124 years old, and the move to Bingley Hall provided an ideal central location in the historically significant milk field, according to chairman Ian Luxton. "The social feedback has been exceptionally positive with supportive comments about the number of exhibits, the quality of the chefs and the organisation," he told *Speciality Food*. "This is pleasing for our first year and a solid platform as we start planning for 2022."

# A roadmap for regenerative dairy

**Global food giants including Unilever, Barry Callebaut, Arla Foods, Ben & Jerry's and Woolworth South Africa, have partnered with FAI Farms and Farmwel to create a roadmap for regenerative dairy as the industry seeks to boost its sustainability credentials.**

The collaboration, called RE-DAIRY, will engage with dairy farmers and businesses to form a practical vision of what a productive, profitable and regenerative dairy sector would look like. "We face two great crises in nature: global warming and biodiversity loss," said Øistein Thorsen, chief executive of FAI Farms. He said dairy businesses around the world must cooperate to create change. "We must urgently address agriculture's impact, but we also have to produce diverse and nutritious food to nourish a growing global population. For global dairy to make the transition, we need global collaboration. That is why we invite other partners to join and take a seat at the table."

Britain's independent cheesemakers have started making sustainability a priority in their businesses, with Catherine Mead of the Speciality Cheesemakers Association telling *Speciality Food* that cheesemakers' approach to climate change mitigation is both the industry's biggest threat and its biggest opportunity.

RE-DAIRY will look at practices that are having regenerative outcomes on dairy farms around the world today and will work with farmer groups and other stakeholders to create a roadmap of critical steps and actions that must be taken to transition to regenerative dairy.

# UK supermarket cheese linked to deforestation

**Intensive dairy farms that supply products for Cathedral City Cheddar, Anchor butter and Cadbury chocolate are feeding their cattle soya from a business accused of contributing to deforestation in Brazil, according to an investigation by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Greenpeace Unearthed, *ITV News* and the *Daily Mirror*.**

The UK farms were found to source some of their animal feed from companies buying Brazilian soya exported by US-based Cargill, one of the world's biggest food conglomerates, before selling their milk to Saputo, Arla and Cadbury. The investigation has raised questions about Cargill's Triple S sustainable soya certification, which is recognised by some food companies as an environmentally friendly option.

Grupo Scheffer, which supplies Cargill, was linked to multiple incidents of environmental damage in Brazil's Amazon and Cerrado regions, which are key areas for biodiversity. Cargill said it takes this type of grievance against a supplier "very seriously". "If violations are found in any area, we will take immediate action," it said.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### AWARD-WINNING CASTELL GWYN MAKER SCALES UP

Jackie Whittaker, the maker of award-winning cheese Castell Gwyn, has received a £13,000 investment in her micro dairy from the Development Bank of Wales. The funds will go towards the purchase of a 500-litre cheese vat and cheese press, which will help the business scale up production of soft cheeses and also start producing hard cheeses. "I've been producing and selling cheese for a few years now, having first started up at the Food Technology Centre on Anglesey, then renting a dairy in Llandudno," said Jackie. "I have now built a bespoke micro dairy. The vision was always to build my own dairy and for Castell Gwyn to become a recognised brand."

### NEW ARTISAN CHEESE PRODUCTION UNIT OPENS

Friars Farm in Northampton has opened three purpose-built units for artisan food production, including cheese which is sold wholesale. The new units in Phipps Brewery are focused on production, but the business aims to open a pop-up shop, too. Friars Farm currently creates four different styles of cheeses, and is aiming to boost production to six cheeses. The site also employs two apprentices who are learning to become cheesemakers. "I don't know of anywhere else like this, so it makes us proud to do what we do," owner Steve Reid told the *Northampton Chronicle & Echo*. "We're building on the food industry in the county and we're hoping to keep it going for years to come."




# Treur Kaas launches new export brand

**Dutch cheese specialist Treur Kaas has announced the creation of a new export brand called Daniel's Selection. "We are very delighted and proud to announce this beautiful export brand," said Daan Treur, commercial director of Treur Kaas. Daan has an extensive knowledge of cheese and has specially selected high-quality, luxury products for the new range.**

The brand will include both conventional cheeses, identifiable by a brown heart on the packaging, and organic cheeses, which are marked with a green heart. It will also unify a diverse range of Dutch cheeses, which use a number of different milk types, including cow, goat, sheep and Jersey.

The brand launched in September and will be shown at trade fairs around the world this year. For more information on Daniel's Selection, visit danielsselection.com.

## **CHEESE** FACT FILE...

### BRITT & BLAIR

- **Country of origin:** The Netherlands
- **Milk:** Cow and goat
- **Description:** A unique, delicate farmstead cheese which includes a creamy layer of cow cheese and a soft layer of goat's cheese, divided by a subtle layer of the ashes of burnt grape leaves




UK **CHEESE** AND **CURD** EXPORTS WERE DOWN **20%** IN THE **YEAR** SO FAR **COMPARED** TO THE SAME PERIOD IN **2020**

**SOURCE: AHDB DATA FOR JANUARY-AUGUST**

## *"Artisan cheese needs recognition"*



**JAMES GRANT**
NO2 POUND STREET

I was fascinated to read that scientists in Austria have found molecular evidence through preserved faeces that blue cheese and beer were being consumed by miners more than 2,700 years ago. To be honest this comes as no surprise to me especially as cheese has formed a staple part of the northern hemisphere's diet for thousands of years. To now know that humans were actually making blue cheese along with beer thousands of years ago just makes me smile a little more.

Our relationship with cheese over the last four decades has changed dramatically and is finally going in the right direction. At the end of World War II our artisan cheese production had almost ground to a halt. The bulk of cheese was being made in factories with pasteurised milk. The quality of this cheese was poor especially when compared to what had been enjoyed prior. There are many reasons for this, including centralisation, national rationing and industrialisation.

Since then there has been much positive change. Cheesemongers, makers and foodies such as Patrick Rance, Bob Farrand, Mary Holbrook, Randolph Hodgson, James Aldridge, John Savage, and Peter Gott (there are more) have put artisan cheese back on the map. Today we are constantly celebrating great new artisan cheese producers who are totally at one with their work.

The reason for my column this month is to highlight this global competition and others such as The James Aldridge Award and The British Cheese Awards. In our retail lives it is so important to choose our cheese that we sell carefully. Good competitions genuinely recognise great cheese. I only ever want to sell great cheese. Other associations are also important to follow or if possible become a member of. The SCA (Specialist Cheesemakers Association) for me is the power house of knowledge. If you have a moment, just see who their members are. The SCA members include some of the world's finest cheesemakers. Many years ago whilst sitting in my (then) Jermyn Street office I fondly remember scrolling through the contact details of cheesemakers on the SCA website and contacting these truly passionate people. The foundations of my cheese selections at No2 came from careful research and conversation.

So if you are considering opening up a cheese shop, take your time. Speak to people in the know, read a lot about cheese. Have fun. This timeless food needs nurturing; we almost lost our cheese heritage, mainly because of industrialisation. Think of yourself as a pioneer. As a cheesemonger/retailer you are helping to promote good cheese and are keeping independent producers afloat. Choose your products carefully. As humans our love of cheese has been with us for thousands of years, so it should be recognised properly. For too long cheese has been commoditised by industrialists. We need more retailers of artisan cheese and artisan cheesemakers.



**COMMENTATORS**



**CAROLINE BELL**
SHEPHERDS PURSE



**CATHERINE DUFFY**
ELITE IMPORTS LTD



**BILL MATHIESON**
LONG CLAWSON



**BARON ROBERT POUGET**
OXFORD BLUE



**OWEN DAVIES**
TŶ CAWS

# THE ART OF SELLING BLUE CHEESE

How can retailers turn this festive favourite into a go-to all year-round? *Speciality Food* asks the experts how to tell the story of blue cheese

The history of blue cheese is long and illustrious. Newly unearthed research in Italy has revealed that Iron Age people living 2,700 years ago dined on blue cheese containing *Penicillium roqueforti*, and today, consumers can find that same fungal species in the Stilton on their cheeseboard.

Despite the Marmite-like reputation of blue cheese, its passionate promoters are many, and the UK is home to cheeses that sit pride of place on the global stage. But it's not only the long traditions that make Britain's blue cheese scene one to watch. "We have our classic Stilton which is a wonderful blue cheese, steeped in tradition, and then we also have this amazing array of innovation and creativity in blue cheeses which has sprung up over the last 25 years," explains Caroline Bell of cheesemaker Shepherds Purse. "When we began making Yorkshire Blue and Mrs Bell's Blue back in 1994, we were the only blue cheesemaker in Yorkshire, and now there are at least four or five of us."

## A focus on quality

Diversity and consistency are key to the superb quality of Britain's blue cheeses. "The variety of blue cheese available and the consistent quality from the UK is what makes it special," says Owen Davies, who runs Welsh cheese shop Tŷ Caws. "We can now buy British Gorgonzola-style cheeses through to Ewes' milk Roquefort-style cheeses – this ensures the UK customer needs to look no further."

Baron Robert Pouget, the creator of Oxford Blue, tells *Speciality Food* that consistency has been key to his success. "We have established a brand – the Oxford Blue Cheese brand – and the consistency of quality and supply, which means that we have a following," he says. "If your cheese has a reputation for being really consistent and dependable, then people will buy it. And that's a reputation you get over years and years and years," he says.

Stilton, which dates back to the early 18th century, has had many years to build up a strong reputation – and with it a European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status, which it has held since 1996. Bill Mathieson, who joined farmer-owned Stilton maker Long Clawson Dairy in 2021, said every batch of Stilton is held to high standards through a traceable cheesemaking process. "We deliver, consistently, the highest standard of cheese that is there in terms of Stilton."

With both traditional favourites and newcomers to enjoy, the great variety of blue cheeses available in the UK today means there is plenty of choice for retailers looking to refresh their stock. But Robert warns that the huge increase in blue cheeses on the market will inevitably lead to tough competition. "We were the first to try and break the mould and come up with a cheese that wasn't a Stilton type, but since then, a plethora of new blue cheeses have come up. The problem is that there's going to be too many blue cheeses," he says. However, he believes the outlook for blue cheese remains strong, as there is a growing taste for it in the UK and it is still a must-have on cheeseboards.

## Telling the story

It is little wonder that more cheesemakers are getting involved with the highly experimental and creative process of making blue cheese. "Blue cheese is created by adding blue mould culture which brings a whole new layer of complexity and creativity to the cheesemaking process," Caroline says. "Fungi is amazing in itself and the results of it in cheese are beautiful, not just visually but in the wonderfully rich, complex and varied umami flavours and creamy textures that we can create."

From the classics to new launches, blue cheesemakers have a strong quality of provenance that they can rely on – something which retailers can also utilise to boost sales. "People love to know where and how the cheese is made. A good story goes a long way to helping sales,"





OXFORD BLUE CHEESE

Owen says. Bill highlights Stilton's "fantastic" provenance story, but says makers and mongers can both go further to showcase the care and artisan craftsmanship that go into the cheese. "If you went down the aisle at the moment, I don't believe that you would know any of the story of the provenance of Stilton. I think we have to get the story across," he says. Long Clawson is on a mission to modernise and celebrate Stilton's rich heritage through social media platforms and influencers. "We've got to find some ways in which we can bring our product to life a way that's relevant for the next generation," Bill says.


TY CAWS

## Christmas classics

Currently, British consumers buy Stilton on average 3.6 times per year, the bulk of which is in the run-up to Christmas, Bill says. Cheese retailers can likely sell Stilton with their eyes closed during the festive season. How, then, to spice up seasonal sales? As well as celebrating Stilton's heritage, Bill says it is important to get the message out about the passion and care that go into each batch of Stilton. For instance, the milk used by Long Clawson comes from just a 40-mile radius, and on average the cows spend 180 days grazing in the fields. "Generally, the public want to support farmers and provenance," he says.

However, "There's more to Christmas than Stilton," adds Catherine Duffy, sales and marketing manager at Elite Imports, a distributor of Bavarian cheeses like Cambozola and Montagnolo Affine in the UK. "Make sure you introduce a range of blue cheese styles as they're all so different." Catherine says the consumer appetite for Continental cheeses is rising, with Montagnolo Affine's sales growing in the double digits, and shoppers have become more daring since Covid-19 hit. "The pandemic has ignited an interest in different styles and types of blue cheese and consumers have become more adventurous with their choices." For that reason, it's a good idea to stock a wide range of flavour profiles and strengths – including cheeses that can convert blue cheese sceptics. For instance, Cambozola's creamy qualities give it a strong track record, and Owen suggests Shepherds Purse's Mrs Bell's Blue as another variety that's appealing to non-blue cheese eaters. "There are great cheeses available for people who don't think they like blue cheese," Catherine says.

Chutneys, jams and drinks have a strong place alongside the Christmas cheeseboard, too. Fraser MacLellan of East London Cheese Board recommends, "Sweet wine, port, some stouts, sweet sherry, figs, jams, etc. They all help to encourage sales of blue cheese."

## A perennial favourite

The festive season makes up the bulk of blue cheese sales, but retailers can find creative ways to keep the blue cheese fever alive through the other 11 months of the year. "Blue cheese is traditional at Christmas, but it brings a warming and rich element to any occasion all year round," Caroline says. "It's great to be promoted for summer BBQs and grazing platters any time of year."

"There's a lot of versatility that I think we have to start to bring to light," Bill says. Caroline agrees, adding that, "Promoting its versatility both in terms of pairings and what it can bring to a recipe is vital. A small amount of blue cheese can really lift a recipe. Encouraging customers to try interesting pairings can inspire their own creativity too," she says.

Catherine suggests ramping up the education element. "Introduce regular 'guest blue cheeses' and hero their different styles, tastes and stories," she says. Fraser uses a seasonal strategy to switch up the cheeses in his shop. "We'll have various blues depending on the time of year. We find that ewe's milk blues such as Beenleigh or Lanark Blue are popular in spring and summer, with Stilton, Stichelton, Shropshire Blue gaining more traction post-summer. There are a few popular soft blues that we'll stock throughout the year such as Isle of Wight Blue," he adds.

Why not try taking customers on a tour of Europe's best-kept secrets? "Not many people know that Bavaria makes award-winning cheese, so surprise them with a Bavarian cheese masterclass," Catherine suggests. Introducing regular tastings could be a great way to engage customers and drive sales higher. With more creative varieties popping up and classic flavours going strong, it's an exciting time to be selling blue cheeses – for Christmas 2021 and beyond.




## THE RETAIL PERSPECTIVE:

Fraser MacLellan of East London Cheese Board shares his tips for selling blue cheese



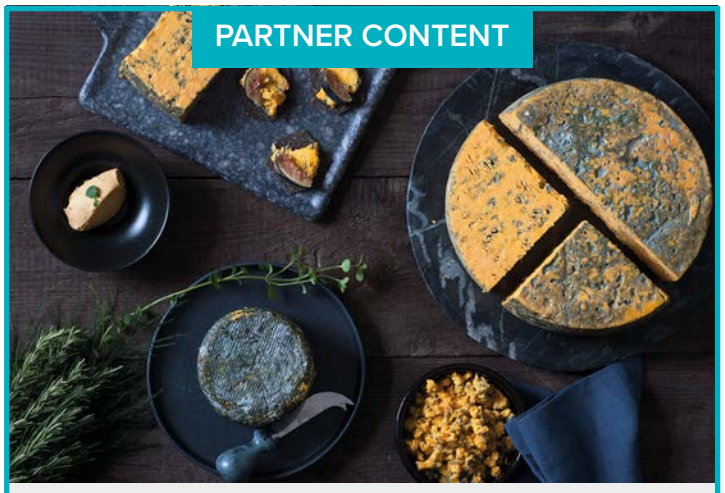
**WHAT MAKES THE UK'S BLUE CHEESES SPECIAL?**

The UK has such a great variety of blue cheeses that it's easy to find something for everyone. Whether it's pasteurised or unpasteurised, hard or soft, salty or sweet or more, there are so many great British cheeses that unless you really dislike blue cheese there is something there for you. I also love how we have the classic blue cheeses such as Stilton and Shropshire Blue, but also some really unique blue cheeses such as Beauvale, a blue cheese with the soft and creamy texture of a Gorgonzola but rich and buttery Stilton flavours, or Burt's Blue, a wonderful semi-soft blue from Cheshire. I'm also a big fan of Lanark Blue, a ewe's milk blue from Scotland.

**DO CUSTOMERS PREFER THE CLASSICS OR PUSH THE BOAT OUT WITH NEW VARIETIES?**

We sell a lot of Stilton at this time of year, so our customers definitely still love a classic blue, but our new varieties are growing in stature. If we're low on Stilton and waiting for a new batch to come in then we'll suggest alternatives, which helps those alternatives reach new palates. We also have on occasion had customers come in and specifically ask for 'something different' for the blue cheese on their cheeseboard – although it will quite often be accompanied by a bit of Stilton to keep everyone happy. We quite often get asked for advice on blue cheeses as they're not to everyone's taste, so we'll find out about the customers tastes and advise accordingly, or perhaps offer a small amount of two blues so they can see what types they prefer.

PARTNER CONTENT



# A MODERN ICON

## It's not for nothing that Blacksticks Blue has become a favourite with cheese lovers across the UK

When you think about British cheese, everyday names such as Cheddar, Red Leicester and Stilton spring to mind. But if you want to experience something extra special then speciality British cheese is what you need to try. This offers a whole world of delicious and flavourful cheeses, without the need to source them from classic European regions such as France, Italy and The Netherlands.

Speciality British cheeses are bringing excitement back to the world of cheese. Retailers of all sizes are taking note, freshening up their cheese offering and providing much more than the classics. This cheese revival is being led by pioneering brands such as Blacksticks Blue – a smooth, creamy and rich blue cheese made by Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses.

Blacksticks Blue, and the unbelievably cheese obsessed family who continue to run this independent farmhouse cheesemakers, have been campaigning for speciality British cheese for the best part of two decades. As cheesemakers, Butlers will celebrate their 90th anniversary in 2022 and Blacksticks Blue has been flying the flag for exciting, artisanal cheeses since 2003. During this time the 'crowd pleasing' blue cheese has continually built a nationwide loyal fanbase, and one that continues to grow as those looking for a bit of cheese heaven become the latest converts. Blacksticks Blue's status has grown extensively due to a few key attributes that separate it from other speciality cheeses:

### WHEN YOU TRY IT, YOU LOVE IT

Some may think that blue cheese has a bit of a 'scary' reputation but Blacksticks Blue has the ability to convert even the safest of cheese eaters. The ultra-creaminess of this moreish cheese carries and mellows the blue bite to a level that you just can't help but love! This ability to continually win people over makes it an absolute must have for any social gathering, but particularly a Christmas cheeseboard.

### A RETAIL DREAM

Blacksticks Blue is available in many formats, from large whole cheeses to small 150g pre-packaged wedges. To top it off, there are also creative formats in-between including slices, a cheese brûlée and the ultimate cheese gift – the 'Mature Your Own' Mini Truckle, which allows you to watch your own little cheese mature to your exact taste. The longer you leave it, the more blue bite you can expect – educational and delicious! Blacksticks Blue is equally at home in speciality cheesemongers, farm shops, delis and now, thanks to the unique round slices, it is the perfect solution for those running street food outlets serving burgers.

### CONTINUALLY NURTURED

As a brand, Blacksticks Blue is protected, nurtured and promoted, and the same applies to the cheese itself. As a result, it's easy for customers to see and find when shopping. You can rely on Blacksticks Blue, customers are guaranteed that the taste is always the same, and there is never a question on quality or taste. This is proven by its long history of award wins, topped by the 2021 Great Taste award, so one can see there is no complacency.

This year, with Christmas approaching fast, it's the perfect time to inspire your customers so they too can discover the very best that Britain has to offer. Whatever your business type, the Covid pandemic has meant that more than ever customers want experiences. There is no better cheese to provide you guaranteed sales, customer satisfaction and a bit of wow factor than Blacksticks Blue.

Often considered the star of any cheeseboard due to its striking orange hue (provided naturally from anatto), Blacksticks Blue is so much more. It often becomes a fridge staple thanks to its versatility – it can transform a tired recipe, provide the perfect snack or make a night in a little more special. This is why its die-hard fans never cease to amaze with their expressions of love, including poems, songs and tattoos to name just a few!

It's no surprise that Blacksticks Blue, from Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses, is leading the way in the speciality cheese market.

butlerscheeses.co.uk



**COMMENTATORS**



**JOHN GILL**
BOOTHS



**HEATHER PARRY**
FODDER



**ANDREW GOODACRE**
BRITISH INDEPENDENT RETAILERS ASSOCIATION



**RUTH HUXLEY**
GREAT CORNISH FOOD STORE



**MARCO ROSA**
DELICARIO

# CHRISTMAS 2021

## A flexible approach will serve independent retailers well this festive season, finds Jessica Brown

Christmas is the biggest, most important time of year for retailers – so much so that barely a Boxing Day goes by without thinking about the following festive period.

"We start planning Christmas as soon as we finish delivering Christmas. It literally is Christmas every day at Booths," says John Gill, the retailer's head of trading and marketing.

By summer, stock is ordered, and by the time the first autumn leaf hits the ground, the decorations are ready – if not up – staff are well briefed, and festive promotions are underway.

But there are always last-minute tweaks to be made once the festive season arrives – especially in these times of such economic and political uncertainty.

Independent retailers especially have the flexibility to adapt last minute – whether that's tweaking or changing their website or social media, writing up a last-minute festive blog post or newsletter to customers, or giving staff a new incentive to really ensure the festive enthusiasm that helps to drive sales.

But this year, retailers have a lot more to contend with – and many reasons to be flexible as close to December 25th as they can. The HGV crisis across the UK continues to affect supply chains, while constant reports on the predictions around numbers of Covid-19 rising in winter don't do anything to allay fears of further uncertainty to come.

### Spending money wisely

For many independent retailers, customers' new and changing buying habits are keeping them on their toes. For Heather Parry, managing director of Yorkshire farm shop and café Fodder, last minute-preparation this festive period has been dictated by how her customers will be shopping differently this year.

Parry expects this Christmas to be very different, and aims to respond to changes to what customers want compared to before the pandemic. She noticed through the pandemic that people reconnected with nature, and says this translates to an opportunity for retailers like Fodder.

"People are looking to be in tune with the environment more. They want local, good stuff that's had thought and care put into it. Their values have improved. They want to buy from small, local, artisan places, so the independent sector is uniquely placed."

Customers, Parry adds, are also increasingly looking for stories behind what they buy. "People are more considerate. They don't want more stuff, they want special, meaningful things. They want to spend money wisely, and know that spending money helps the local community."

In response, Fodder will be stocking up on candles made from empty gin bottles, which a local woman has been collecting from bars around Harrogate. Fodder will also be offering last-minute recipe ideas for customers looking for some inspiration.

"People will also be looking for local food that's easy to prepare, so we're doing a lot of recipe work with a local stylist," she says, adding that these recipes are made up of locally sourced ingredients.

"No one wants to be sold to anymore, so for us it's about inspiring. This year, our message is all about recipes," she says.

"People are preparing for a real celebration," she says. "Things will be more meaningful, with people being together and sharing. Local food hits this smack in the face, as does eating naturally and sustainably."

But this is driving a shift in consumers' spending behaviours, which in turn, affects what retailers will be buying in last-minute.

"Everyone wants Christmas to be special, so people are shopping earlier. It's going to be a well-planned Christmas," she says.

### Be prepared

Other retailers are also noticing that people are buying in advance this year – perhaps partly due to seeing and hearing about empty supermarket shelves, and partly because they're preparing for big celebrations.

"People aren't panic-buying, but they're buying earlier than they perhaps usually would do," says Andrew Goodacre, chief executive of the British Independent Retailers Association.

This means independent retailers have a judgement call to make: order more stock, or avoid the risk of having too much stock during an uncertain time, when customer spending is difficult to predict.

For Ruth Huxley, owner and manager of the Great Cornish Food Store, people spending more in advance this year presents the retailer some challenges.

"We're seeing people already buying things with a long shelf life




> "We depend on our customers coming in for the experience of shopping here, seeing and smelling, talking to people behind our counters about our products and getting ideas from them"



because they're worried the shelves will be empty, but we're not worried about that. We deal directly with suppliers and we have a short supply chain because our products are all local," she says.

"We're making sure we've got top quality fresh produce for people that they can't by in advance. Most of our food here is fresh, and people can't bring these purchases forward so they have to leave them until the last minute.

"The challenge for us is whether people will be buying frozen turkeys and not birds nearer the time. We're trying to get customers to pre-order as much as possible so we've got an idea and can commit to those orders, but there's a lot we'll have to leave until the last minute."

Huxley has already visited all the shop's suppliers to make sure they're all okay, and has asked for timings of deliveries earlier, which is something she doesn't usually do.

To combat these uncertainties, Goodacre advises retailers to buy as much stock as they can now.

"Independent retailers have a nimbler supply chain, whereas large supermarkets are quite rigid in terms of which stock comes from where," he says.

"We're seeing independent retailers working very closely with suppliers; they're worried about some products' availability but they're trying to buy in advance. The ultimate threat will be whether they have all the products as normal to cover the festive period," he says.

"The challenge is that buying in



advance means cash, which people don't always have, particularly after coming through a difficult pandemic. How far ahead they can purchase will be one of the biggest challenges.

"There are some short-term solutions. People are being asked to buy more in advance and storing it on site, but this isn't an option to every retailer. I wouldn't recommend leaving anything until the last minute – it's risky – but I understand why people need to because of cash flow."

Huxley, however, may not be pre-ordering in the quantities she might have done in previous years in the final few days leading up to Christmas. "It's too risky to end up with a lot of stock," she says – but she's optimistic. "On the other hand, the independent sector might see an uplift in people wanting something extra special."

In response to this, her store will be encouraging people to pre-order party food from its deli counter in the weeks before Christmas.

"We're anticipating that chefs will probably be busy with party food, we're thinking people will want to have informal get-togethers with friends. We're planning for that, but it'll be last minute, we can't do it in advance," she says.

"People who aren't ready to go back to restaurants want easy dining at home, but something nice that someone else has made."

## A surprising opportunity

The other reason supply may be affected is the HGV crisis that's been ongoing across the UK for months, due to a shortage of HGV drivers. Some supermarkets have been limiting their stock to essential items, to help stave off panic buying.

But many independent retailers see this as an opportunity – and don't anticipate needing to make any last-minute decisions to mitigate negative impacts.

"We're a small place with a short supply chain," Parry says. "Our shelves have been full this whole time. It's given a push to the independent sector; we can do things the bigger boys can't – we don't have HGVs, and 85% of what we sell comes from Yorkshire."

The other uncertainty leaving retailers unsure of what and how to prepare in the final weeks before Christmas is the looming threat of rising Covid-19 infection rates. Experts have warned that there could be restrictions put in place, and that transmission of the virus won't improve until after winter.

But, Goodacre says, "everyone seems quite relaxed about the impact of Covid. The real figure to watch is the number of people being treated in hospital. Unless flu drives a lot of people into hospital, people are confident we can get through the festive period.

"If we can avoid closures and lockdown, retailers will have an opportunity. Businesses need a really good festive period to see them through early next year."

Marco Rosa, co-founder or Delicario, says he isn't a last-minute planner. But while he's confident that the current economic and political situation puts Delicario, and other



> "Covid showed us we can do stuff quicker than we thought, and taught us that you don't have to overthink it. We'll just have to wait and see which plan we end up using"



independent retailers in a good position, he worries it could also present problems.

"This year could be challenging because of Covid-19. We're focusing on Christmas hampers this year, but one challenge is there could be issues bringing them in from the far east to the UK," he says.

But if any Covid restrictions are introduced before Christmas, Rosa is confident that he doesn't need to do much preparation in advance.

"We learnt a lot from last year," he says. "Independent shops were excellent in organising themselves for home delivery services. We don't need to learn from scratch, like we did last year."

## Be flexible

One area that retailers can tweak at the last minute to prepare for Christmas is their websites.

"We're changing our website and making online ordering easier to do, but we will also have to react," Parry says.

She has three plans for Christmas, depending on how the festive period could unfold, and any last-minute restrictions that may come into force to help control the spread of Covid-19.

"That's what the pandemic has taught us – when Covid hit, we had online orders up on the Monday morning. It showed us we can do stuff quicker than we thought, and taught us that you don't have to overthink it. We'll just have to wait and see which plan we end up using."

Booths also has a plan B to help mitigate this year's uncertainties.

"We plan Christmas carefully, but there is always something unexpected that crops up, particularly as we've faced so many challenges with in the supply chain," says Gill.

> "We don't need to learn from scratch like we did last year"

"The main thing is to have a plan B and to be flexible in display. There's always another product to highlight or promote if you're light on deliveries of a specific product. Flexibility is key, and keeping up a close dialogue with suppliers, clear and open communication is key with the Booths supply chain."

## The question of events

There are also last-minute arrangements to be made in-store – usually, at least. But Huxley is concerned with in-store events this year, and how these could potentially play out this Christmas. As an in-store-only retailer, these have been a big part of the store's festive season in previous years.

"The next few weeks will be telling to see if people's confidence returns, or if some people aren't ready for get-togethers in enclosed spaces yet, she says.

"We depend on our customers coming in for the experience of shopping here, seeing and smelling, talking to people behind our counters about our products and getting ideas from them."

She says she is still undecided about whether to host in-store events.

"At the moment we have a policy where we're recommending customers wear face coverings in store, so it's not viable to request that then offer them testing to try.

"If things have reached a point where people are generally feeling much more relaxed and comfortable about people being in here without masks, we'd go ahead and do it, but we don't know how infection rates will go as winter progresses so we're not making firm plans at the moment, which is difficult.

"Covid has taught us that no one knows what's around the corner," she says.







## STOCK CHECK

2021 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE




### THE WENSLEYDALE CREAMERY YORKSHIRE WENSLEYDALE SNOWMAN

Creamy, crumbly and full of flavour Yorkshire Wensleydale cheese encased in a sweet Snowman character.

**wensleydale.co.uk**




### SNOWDONIA CHEESE COMPANY BLACK BOMBER & CHUTNEY GIFT PACK

Deliciously creamy Black Bomber extra mature Cheddar is paired with Balsamic Caramelised Onion Chutney, and presented in a limited-edition gift pack.

**snowdoniacheese.co.uk**




### VIOLIFE FESTIVE VEGAN SELECTION BOX

Containing Mozzarella Flavour with Cranberry, Crumbly Greek White, EPIC Mature Cheddar Flavour and Smoky Cheddar Flavour.

**violifefoods.com**




### HAWKSHEAD CHEESEBOARD CHUTNEY

Fabulously fruity with fresh figs, cranberries and apples, finished with Pinot Noir red wine adding to depth of flavour, designed to complement any cheeseboard.

**hawksheadrelish.com**




### COLSTON BASSETT STILTON

A classic, award-winning Stilton. A must-have for any Christmas cheeseboard.

**colstonbassettdairy.co.uk**




### TRACKLEMENTS THE FESTIVE FOUR

Perfect for making an attention-grabbing display and sure to delight every foodie shopper. Featuring seasonal favourites.

**tracklements.co.uk**



### SPARKENHOE RED LEICESTER

Nutty and sweet with a citrus finish. Cloth bound and matured for six months on beech shelves.

**leicestershirecheese.co.uk**




### CROPWELL BISHOP WHITE STILTON WITH DATE & ORANGE

A perfect festive pairing of White Stilton and seasonal fruit. Suitable for vegetarians.

**cropwellbishopstilton.co.uk**




### STAG SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR CHEESE

A rich and tasty cake, which pairs beautifully with a delicious cheese board.

**stagbakeries.co.uk**




### CAMBROOK NUTS COCKTAIL HOUR NUTS

Get in the party mood with this combination of chilli cashews and peanuts, hickory smoke seasoned almonds, and caramelised sesame hazelnuts.

**cambrookfoods.co.uk**

SPONSORED BY

maple FROM CANADA





# RYE DELICATESSEN

## The passion Dezi Dalton, proprietor at Rye Delicatessen, has for what she does has transformed her business into a destination deli

I left my career in London to move to Rye to raise my family but quickly decided that I wanted to do something that would keep me busy but allow me to meet the needs of growing children. 17 years later we have grown the business to become an integral part of the Rye community as well as a destination to the thousands of visitors who are drawn to this historic and ancient Cinque Port Town.

### WHO'S IN THE TEAM?

We have grown to a team of 16 people including our amazing kitchen team headed by chef Tamzin Sundaram who runs a happy, creative kitchen team scratch-cooking from ingredients from our local larder as well as using the more unusual and exotic. This keeps our offering fresh, current and abundant as there are always at least 12 fresh salads, numerous cakes, bakes, savouries, snacks and a freezer range of small batches of delicious meals that draws on heritage recipes from numerous members of our diverse team.

### WHAT SETS THE BUSINESS APART FROM OTHER INDEPENDENT RETAILERS?

Our spot in East Sussex places us at the border of Kent and together we are rich in artisan producers of cheese, excellent fresh produce including legendary strawberries and asparagus as well as livestock which includes premium beef but also world-renowned Romney Marsh Lamb, and from our shores, the best scallops you can possibly imagine.

Our local vineyards are producing wines that have stolen a march on the world stage and Rye Deli is a great place to pick up one of the excellent offerings from Charles Palmer, Mountfield, Gusbourne or the Isle of Oxney!

### WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF AT RYE DELICATESSEN?

We are very much part of the local community and have had the privilege of catering off-site not only for parties on a smaller scale but weddings and other celebrations of all scales. Our 'word-of-mouth' reputation has extended far and wide and we have serviced hundreds of location shoots for film production and national and international companies. The team at the Deli are very much that, a team, and as Rye locals they invariably know most of the people that cross our threshold. This enhances the personal service that we pride ourselves on and as a consequence we have a strong, loyal customer base. It was this element that kept us open everyday throughout the pandemic, serving in the shop but also setting out a network with our team to make home deliveries. The increase of our bespoke hamper service grew beyond all expectations as people made food gifts a go-to solution in the pandemic; a trend that has remained in place following the easing of restrictions. We continue to take orders from far flung places to deliver food gifts to our wider community.

One of the areas of interest our customers have expressed is cookery demonstrations and we hope to launch a series of classes in the Spring of 2022. In addition, we will bring back local producers to come in-store and showcase their products. This was always a great draw pre-pandemic where customers connect with producers, learn of their journeys and get to enjoy their offering with understanding of provenance and product! Great for promoting sales but also for getting real, first-hand feedback and taking your customers with you on your food explorations.



We have seen a great shift in the profile of our food offering with a growing percentage of shelf space and homemade foods being given to the production of vegetarian and more specifically vegan produce. It has been exciting to create new homemade lines and has resulted in new ingredient items to our larder. We were the proud winners of a *Speciality Food* competition which gave us thousands of pounds of goods, some of which we had been to reluctant to try. As a result, we now stock so many new lines including Beeswax food wrappers and Kimchi!

### WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED RECENTLY?

Every year sees a growth to our business. There are always new challenges despite the pandemic, but that really brings us together as a team. We have a real open philosophy and try to create an environment where there is room for everyone's ideas and input. We embrace participation in local events some of which require us to dress up! We are lucky to be a group of people who love food, love people and love what we do, with no two days ever being the same!

### WHAT'S NEXT FOR RYE DELICATESSEN?

We are constantly asked if the Rye Deli Cookbook will ever be available, and of course, as ever, it is time that gets in the way. But, as the team and the business grows it is most definitely working its way up the agenda! Watch this space!

> "We are lucky to be a group of people who love food, love people and love what we do, with no two days ever being the same!"



maple FROM CANADA

INCREDIBLE MAPLE

*A maple syrup for every taste.*

For more information on the grades of pure, Canadian maple syrup available to retailers and free recipes, visit

**maplefromcanada.co.uk**



# THE BIGGEST TRENDS FOR 2022

Want to know what's set to take the food industry by storm? Here's your cheat sheet to the biggest buzzwords for next year

The food and drink industry is evolving all the time. While some trends seem to burst from out of nowhere only to disappear just as quickly as they came, others are the culmination of longer-term shifts in consumer eating and shopping habits or have their roots in political or economic changes. Whether a trend starts out on TikTok, through the buzz of a trade show floor or because of the changes wrought by a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic, the takeaway is the same: being at the cutting edge of new trends means your shelves will be stocked with just the products that consumers are looking for.

## 1 THE PLANT-BASED FOOD MOVEMENT

The explosion of interest in vegan food and drink has rocketed the sector to new heights over recent years, and that's set to continue in 2022. "There has been a staggering rise in the number of plant-based meat and fish products in recent months," explains Philip Linardos, co-founder and CEO of ShelfNow, a marketplace for specialist brands. At ShelfNow, he says, sales of vegetarian and vegan food and drink have risen by over 150% in the past 12 months.

What is next for the plant-based sector? Bloomberg Intelligence's report, *Plant-Based Foods Poised for Explosive Growth*, says that if plant-based meat follows in the footsteps of alternative milks, its value will jump from $4.2bn to as much as $118bn by 2030. Despite this, Heather Morris, co-founder of consultancy SHFoodie, is confident that veggies are poised to become the true hero of our plates rather than the supporting act. "Plant-based products will continue to push the boundaries with technology to produce ever more realistic meat alternatives, but plants are also set to be centre stage; not mimicking meat but coming into their own as meal centres, particularly for the increasing number of flexitarian consumers who are simply reducing the amount of meat they consume and increasing the amount and variety of vegetables on their plate," she says.

## 2 INDULGENCE AND COMFORTS IN HIGH DEMAND

2020 saw retro comfort foods rise to forefront of consumer demand. "Driven by a desire for nostalgic comfort through an unsettling time, the leading example of this was banana bread, which trended across social media so frequently it became known as the symbolic comfort food of the pandemic," drinks brand Fentimans says in its 2022 market report. "As we emerge from the pandemic, these traditional home comfort flavours have taken on a new emotional relevance in our lives and will establish themselves as key parts of the British identity."

Indeed, traditional flavours will be key for connecting with consumers, but comfort has also been found in permissible indulgences. The Craft Bakers Association's latest report found that over a third of bakers saw sales of sweet bakery products grow over the past year. "Indulgence is never out of fashion, although it is now taking a range of forms, from special edition sweets and snacks through to lighter or healthier versions of traditional indulgent or comfort foods," Heather says. "As we come out of the pandemic, we often feel we need a 'treat' to lift our spirits but we still want to consider our health, so we make choices like smaller portions of chocolates or by having a cauliflower or beetroot pizza base to reduce carbs. It's definitely an area set to continue expanding through 2022," she says.

### FOCUS ON: VEGAN MILK

A third of Brits use plant-based milk today, according to research by Mintel, up from a quarter in 2020, and total spending on vegan milk has grown 32% to reach £394m in 2020. In the UK, oat milk is the most popular variety, but more innovation is driving new products. "Grain milk is another development to watch, and it's currently the fastest-growing dairy-free milk with barley milk, in particular, proving highly popular amongst many consumers," Philip says. Heather also identifies potato-based milk DUG as one to watch. "DUG potato milk is one example of a new product pushing the sustainability message further as well as showcasing their great tasting product," she says.

## 3 SCRATCH COOKING VS CONVENIENCE

The lifting of lockdown did not spell the end for the home cooking trend – almost a third of Brits are cooking from scratch at least four times a week, according to Cuisinart's report, *The Eating Habits of a Nation 2021*, and young people are getting creative in the kitchen, with twice the number of 18–24-year-olds learning new kitchen skills than those over 50.

But food and drink catering for on-the-go lifestyles have certainly experienced a post-Covid boost. The food to go sector has returned, and after sales were hit by a 45.5% decline in 2020, Lumina Intelligence now predicts food to go sales will grow by nearly a third to reach £15.3bn in 2021. Sales of products like ready meals have rebounded, but convenient cooking sauces or flavour-packed spice bundles also suit consumers who are spending more time out and about but want to continue their lockdown cooking habits.

## 4 SUSTAINABILITY LINKED WITH HEALTH

Sustainability and health concerns have long been niche areas of the food and drink sector, but as they move to the fore, links are forming between healthy eating and a healthy planet. "[Consultancy] CGA's research shows that nearly three-quarters of consumers now try to lead a healthy lifestyle (73%) and an environmentally friendly lifestyle (72%)," states Fentimans' report. "While the easing of Covid-19 restrictions might lessen some of people's immediate concerns on these issues, they will be near the top of the agenda for the foreseeable future," it adds. Consumers will be

### TAKING THE PLANT-BASED TREND FURTHER

As the plant-based food sector becomes ingrained into the wider industry, expectations are set to rise, according to Heather at SHFoodie. "We always find with categories that become mainstream that further focus on quality and, in particular, what goes into the products becomes more of interest once they are no longer novel; consumers always want more from their food than to simply stop them being hungry."

She points to soya "taking a bit of flak over environmental concerns" and ingredients in plant-based foods, like stabilisers and processing aids, which have come under the spotlight. "Plant-based products will continue to proliferate, that's inevitable, but they will need to become more environmentally aware with product labelling on pack about carbon footprint and sustainability adding more overtly to the choice criteria, reflecting the increasing mood in the country for action on climate and environment," she says.

## FOCUS ON: GUT HEALTH

ShelfNow's Philip says the continued popularity of gut health products, like kombucha drinks, will grow in the new year. "Between 2020-2021, the number of kombucha products available via ShelfNow were up by 67%," he said. Heather adds that kefir and apple cider vinegar will also ride the gut health wave, with apple cider vinegar in particular offering big growth potential across a number of categories.

seeking out sustainable packaging and climate-positive messages, as well as clear nutritional information.

The sector has seen a huge amount of new health and wellbeing products over the last two years. "Products with functional ingredients really took off," Heather says. "One area tipped for growth are products that help those suffering with long Covid, e.g. taste and smell loss, as well as boosting immunity for disease prevention. Probiotics have been shown to be beneficial for post-Covid sufferers. More research is needed, but it's one to watch."

Furthermore, 40% of the nation is committing to healthier eating this year, according to Cuisinart's report, with almost two-thirds of Brits now actively cooking from scratch using freshly bought ingredients.

From a sustainable angle, Heather also predicts waste reduction, or food 'upcycling' will be at the heart of the eco food movement in 2022. "As a by-product of food production, companies are looking at their waste streams, both for improving their environmental impact and for cost savings, particularly with price hikes on ingredients and packaging becoming more pertinent," she says. "Over the coming months I predict there will be more companies looking at how so-called 'waste' materials can be put to good use, which can only be a good thing for all of us."

### 5 E-COMMERCE REMAINS RELEVANT, BUT SHOPPERS WANT EXPERIENCES

The pandemic persuaded more consumers than ever before to shop for food and drink online, and although this has somewhat shifted back post-lockdown, e-commerce remains a popular way to shop. "The value of apps, QR codes and other digital tools has soared, and consumers have embraced them as a way to order and pay for their drinks and food in a safe, secure and convenient way," Fentimans notes.

However, consumers who were deprived of social interactions for over a year are craving experiential retail and hospitality, with CGA's data showing 27% are likely to visit experience-led venues as soon as they can. Retailers offering Covid-safe tastings, engaging displays and interactive experiences will satisfy these consumers' desires, while an integrated e-commerce arm will assure shoppers who aren't as keen to mix and mingle yet.

### 6 CONSUMERS CRAVE LOCAL FOOD

It's no secret that the pandemic has caused a sea-change in the way consumers view food systems. More than a quarter (26%) of consumers are buying more local produce than they were a year ago, according to CGA's data, and independent food shops are benefitting, with a survey by the Local Data Company finding an 11.6% rise in openings of local food shops and delis between March 2020 and May 2021.

Food provenance is in the spotlight, and consumers are showing a preference for local products. A survey from payments firm Cashflows revealed that 62% of Brits enjoy buying from independents like farm shops, and nearly three in four are willing to spend up to 10% more for an item from a local shop.

**PLANT-BASED** FOODS WILL MAKE UP **7.7%** OF THE GLOBAL **PROTEIN** MARKET BY **2030**, WITH A **VALUE** OF MORE THAN **$162BN**

SOURCE: BLOOMBERG INTELLIGENCE REPORT, PLANT-BASED FOODS POISED FOR EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

THE UK'S **E-COMMERCE** SECTOR IS **EXPECTED** TO **GENERATE** NEARLY **$104BN** IN **REVENUE** IN **2021**, UP **7%** FROM **2020**

SOURCE: DATA FROM FINARIA.IT

## 3 TOP TREND PREDICTIONS FROM WHOLE FOODS MARKET

Every year, Whole Foods Market's Trends Council of more than 50 team members, including local foragers, global buyers, and culinary experts, compiles a list of the most exciting predictions for the year ahead. Here's what they chose for 2022...

**YUZU**

This lesser-known citrus is mainly cultivated in Japan, Korea and China, but it is taking the culinary world by storm. Tart and sour, the tangerine-sized fruit is popping up in vinaigrettes, hard seltzers, mayos and more.

**REDUCETARIANISM**

The trend for reducing meat, dairy and egg consumption without cutting them out completely is growing. When animal products are on the menu, reducetarians make them count, opting for premium grass-fed meat and free-range eggs.

**GRAINS THAT GIVE BACK**

Grocery grains are refocusing on the environment in 2022 with grains grown by agriculture practices and farming processes that help address soil health. Teff, known as a tiny grass seed with a mild nutty flavour is known for its efficiency as the grain is highly adaptable and can survive extreme weather conditions.





Take part in our Product Sampling Promotion!

**Are you a Producer?**

We are looking for ten companies to offer a product sample to our readership. Get in touch for more details and costs.

**Are you a Retailer?**

Look out in our January Issue for the opportunity to sample new product ranges.

For more information contact:
jessica.brett@aceville.co.uk or 01206 505901

# CHRISTMAS AT DAYLESFORD

*Speciality Food* goes behind the scenes to find out how this retail icon prepares for the festive season

**As for many retailers, Christmas is without a doubt our busiest time of year**. Plenty of conversations for our NPD and buying teams start over a year in advance and the planning is well and truly underway in the first quarter of the calendar year. We start the process well in advance to make sure we bring our customers their favourite seasonal products such as organic slow-grown Bronze Turkeys and traditional mince pies, along with a variety of new limited-edition products that they won't have seen before.



**There is not an area of the business that Christmas does not touch. From our producers on the farm, to the buying and creative teams, chefs in the kitchens, the wholesale team and of course those on the shopfloors, everyone is involved in the preparations from one degree to another**. The creative and theme team are involved from start to finish. They come up with the overall campaign for Christmas and are involved every step of the way all the way along to decorating and merchandising the five farm shops. In addition to our busy teams, Carole Bamford is very hands-on in the business and sees everything from new limited-edition products, to the Christmas menus in the cafés.

**Christmas is a busy time for us. Our producers will be rearing organic slow-grown Bronze Turkeys, the bakers preparing mince pies, Christmas puddings and savoury snacks, the creamery team creating and maturing new and seasonal cheeses, while the gardeners are making sure we have plenty of sprouts, leafy greens and seasonal vegetables**. Daylesford Organic turns 20 next year, so we have many years of experience to draw on and we start preparing early. In addition to our classic items and popular hampers that we sell each year, we always make sure to introduce new limited-edition items. This year we have new Sour Cherry, Armagnac & Prune Mince Pies, Sweet & Smoky Nut Selection and an Organic Whole, Boned, Rolled & Stuffed Turkey as part of the Christmas range. In addition to food, the Home team introduce an entirely new Christmas range each year with tree decorations, crackers, wrapping paper, linens, crockery and candles.

**We work closely with our wholesale partners such as Ocado and put a huge amount of energy into our own bricks and mortar shops**. Our flagship – the farm in the Cotswolds – is a destination for both locals and visitors to the area. At Christmas, footfall rises significantly from the start of December and the week leading up to Christmas is usually our busiest of the year.

**Whilst Christmas is busy, it is important not to place all focus solely on one trading period**. As a seasonal farm we also have lambing in the spring, the glut of vegetables from our market garden in the summer months and harvest to keep us busy. In addition, we have Easter, Valentine's Day, and Mother's and Father's Day as key gifting dates, and the farm itself is always very busy in the summer months with high customer footfall.

**Our approach to Christmas this year is 'Let's Celebrate'**. From the feedback we have gathered, people want Christmas to feel extra special, with a focus on spending quality time with family and friends. Once again, we are hoping to host the special festive events we are known for. To remain within safety and Covid guidelines we were limited in our activities last year and cannot wait to bring back carol singing, Father Christmas and his reindeer at the farm and special shopping events. We also have a busy calendar of events lined up, including Festive Floristry & Wreath Making, Food & Drink Masterclasses, Seasonal Craft and Wellness Workshops as well as Christmas courses at The Cookery School.

**At Daylesford, we like to work with nature and incorporate natural materials sourced from our Cotswolds farmland**. Our hard-working visual merchandising team is planning to transform the shops in London and the Cotswolds with seasonal decorations and floral arrangements. The look of our stores changes every year but the principles remain the same in that we are inspired by nature and honour traditions, celebrating with Christmas trees and wreaths. Whilst the planning has been underway for some time, the Christmas install will take place during the last week of October. Customers visiting this year can expect Christmas trees, wreaths and chandeliers made from foliage and foraged seasonal materials along with artisan felt decorations and festive lighting.



**For us, it is important we make the most of the bounty of natural materials we have available to us and incorporate sustainable items elsewhere**. Christmas is absolutely a time to celebrate and indulge, but we always have our brand values in mind with everything we do. We hold ourselves accountable for our ethical and environmental standards and Christmas is no different, so we would not choose to decorate the stores with anything that would be heading for landfill come January.

## ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES

Online retail is a side of the business that has grown exponentially for us in the last 18 months. In the trading year ending March 2021, we saw a 263% increase in online sales. We are in the process of launching a new website to support our online sales and e-commerce teams. We see online as just as important as our bricks and mortar shops as it forms another storefront that anyone can see. The e-commerce teams work hard to offer a beautifully merchandised site and seamless customer journey.

Social media is an important tool to connect with our customers and drive engagement and sales. We use these channels to keep our customers aware of new products, seasonal heroes and updates from the farm. This storytelling will focus on what makes our festive products different and unique and will start when we hit the lead-up to Christmas and our range has launched in stores and online.

> "Christmas is absolutely a time to celebrate and indulge, but we always have our brand values in mind with everything we do"








# HARNESSING **COMMUNITY SPIRIT** POST-COVID

## Local businesses and consumers came together during the pandemic, and maintaining these relationships in the future will pay dividends

Over the course of the pandemic, a curious thing happened in the food and drink sector. Communities came together, virtual events emerged and expanded linking like-minded consumers, and businesses teamed up to help one another through a challenging time. "Despite it being very tough for so many people during the pandemic, communities really did come together and rally round; from neighbours supporting each other to the central role small businesses played," said Michelle Ovens, the founder of Small Business Britain.

Small businesses played an outsized role in their local areas, from providing food and drink essentials to offering a place where customers could safely shop and socialise. "Independent retailers are the beating hearts of their communities and do so much more than just sell goods to customers," says Narinder Randhawa, national president of the Federation of Independent Retailers (NFRN). "They get to know their regular customers personally and build up relationships that can continue for years, something that larger businesses such as supermarkets can't offer."

Not only do independents "genuinely care" about their customers, Michelle says, but they also help keep local people connected. "Whether it was a local greengrocer stepping up with veg box deliveries or the independent restaurant that started doing takeaways, it was often the local independents who went out of their way to help vulnerable people and the NHS, and to make sure people had access to everything from essentials to little luxuries," Michelle says.

### Making a difference

The nation's appreciation for small firms has reflected these kindnesses, recently reaching an all-time high. A survey by Small Business Saturday and American Express found that over half (51%) of people support small businesses more now than before the pandemic, and almost half (49%) feel more positively towards small businesses.

During the pandemic, so many indie retailers stepped up to the plate that the NFRN launched the Shop Local, Shop Little Heroes Awards to recognise members that went above and beyond to support their local communities. One winning pair was Dennis and Linda Williams, who own a convenience store in Edinburgh. "Dennis and Linda set up a hardship fund at the beginning of the first Covid-19 lockdown to help people in their local community who found themselves up against hard times due to the impact of the pandemic," Narinder says. "To the couple's amazement, they raised a total of £9,000 in donations from the local community, including a £1,000 donation from Dennis and Linda themselves." The fund went towards local community members' bills, shopping vouchers and travel arrangements for locals requiring social care.

### Moving forward

When crisis hit, independent retailers and other food industry players acted. But while there are many great examples of how members of the fine food industry responded to the Covid crisis, how can indies keep this community spirit alive post-lockdown, as consumers lives return to a 'new normal'?

"Firms survived during Covid through adapting to support their customers in new ways," Michelle says. "The entrepreneurial instincts kicked in, and with the right support, many were able to pivot into new opportunities and avenues, particularly through embracing digital." Going forwards, she says, it will be important to keep this agile mindset at the fore. "There is huge affection for small businesses, and that is a massive platform to build from," Michelle says. "Small retailers need to look at their customer base, their local community, and really focus on how they can support people, what they can offer that will resonate and how they will engage them through various channels, particularly online. People want connection and community and small businesses build this, so this is a huge asset they can fire up."

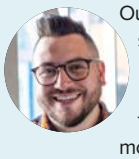
> "Independent retailers are the beating hearts of their communities"

Narinder agrees that shoppers have started to recognise and appreciate independent retailers' commitment to their communities, with footfall remaining high. "Even after restrictions were eased, many NFRN members have maintained free deliveries to elderly and vulnerable customers and continue to provide such services as free hot meals and make donations to food banks and other good causes," he said.

With these examples, one thing is clear: while Covid has caused incalculable, irreparable damage, it also acted as a wake-up call for communities to the services and products their local shops provide. Post-Covid, Michelle says small businesses will take on a larger role in their communities. "The small businesses that make up our local communities, high streets and supply chains will be the driving force behind jobs and economic growth," she says. "People are now a lot more aware of just how vital small businesses are not just to the economy but to our lives, and that they need to back them for the long-term."

## CASE STUDY: **THE MIDWEEK MEAL CLUB**

### Jamie Spafford, co-founder of SORTEDfood, explains how online communities can flourish



Our 'community' started as our group of friends from school. Over time, more and more people joined in the conversation with us on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, turning SORTEDfood into this incredible community of food lovers around the world. Thanks to the power of social media, we were able to reach people in countries around the world and allow them to join in the conversation with us.

Food and drink is one of the most exciting and innovative sectors to be involved in, and it wouldn't be possible without the amazing communities of people who support each other and share their passion. We've managed to meet so many of our community members from around the world 'in real life' on our travels, but online communities really allow conversations to flow regardless of geography – it's amazing to think about people from all over the world with different backgrounds, different outlooks on life, different traditions, all coming together to share a love for food.

When creating community, there are no shortcuts – it takes time to build trust and relationships with people. It's something we've been working on for over a decade and we're still learning every day. So be patient and open yourself up to new conversations and new perspectives... you never know where it might lead!

## CASE STUDY: **THE FOOD HALL**

### Shane Godwin, MD at Macknade, has put community at the centre of the business



Community is at the very heart of Macknade and has been for generations. We believe in focusing on what our customers want and ensure we deliver it at every level. Our trilogy of communities, team, customers and suppliers, work harmoniously across every facet of our business, enabling each and every person to truly feel part of what Macknade is to them.

There's no question about it: communities revolve and grow around food and drink. Our ethos is to create favourite spaces for our customers. So whether they are shopping for fresh produce and specialist ingredients or staying to enjoy a coffee or meal with family and friends in our stores, everyone feels included and comfortable.

The last 18 months have proved to us how important our community is. Covid highlighted the great things we were already doing but also gave us the confidence to engage with different communities in the county and fine-tune our offer to ensure all customers continue to feel safe and valued across all touch points of our organisation.

## CASE STUDY: **THE SUPPLIER**

### Paul and Debora Rees, co-founders of Copper Bay Seafood, strengthened their community through e-commerce



We've been working with the local fish industry for over 30 years, and the Welsh community has always been at the heart of our business, directly impacting how we operate day-to-day. The importance of building communities was even more prevalent when we trialled our services online for the first time during the pandemic – a pivot that was vital for our customers. After receiving unprecedented support from both our loyal and new customers alike and following a successful trial run we were able to move the brand online permanently.

Local fishermen and suppliers are pivotal to sustaining our success as a business. This was particularly true when we took the leap to move our services online, because we needed their support to meet the high demand during the successful trial run mid-pandemic. Launching our e-commerce site gave us the chance to connect with many new customers, meaning our community has significantly grown and has continued to do so post-Covid.

**COMMENTATORS**



**WILL COWLING**
FMCG GURUS



**DANIEL ADAMS**
BONE BROTH BROS



**JAMES WRIGHT**
CHEERFUL BUDDHA



**CLAIRE AYRES**
TWIST TEAS



**HELEN BOULTER**
TAYLORS OF HARROGATE



**VICTORIA COZENS**
PERKY BLENDERS



# WHERE COMFORT MEETS FUNCTION

## The challenges of Covid have brought to light the importance of health and happiness, and these two factors are key to the hot drinks opportunity

While the Covid pandemic seems to have calmed into a sense of normality for many of us, there are elements of its influence that are still being experienced as strongly as they have been since the start of 2020. Comfort and functionality may not appear to be natural bedfellows, but in British shopping habits they were two of the strongest trends the food industry witnessed. Hot drinks offer an opportunity for independent retailers to engage with both of these consumer wants, and the great news is that you can tick both traditional and trend boxes while you're at it.

According to research conducted by FMCG Gurus, the new 'holistic' approach to life and health has been accelerated by the onset of the pandemic; according to spokesperson Will Cowling, consumers are "recognising that all aspects of health are interlinked." Their research found that functional hot drinks are a solid proposition for retailers looking to the future, with 45% of consumers interested in hot drinks offering benefits around sleep, and 55% attracted to hot drinks boasting skincare improvement claims. The study also uncovered some opportunities which as yet are not being tapped for their full potential; 36% of shoppers would like to see more hot drinks demonstrate digestive health benefits, while 35% said they would appreciate hot beverages which offered cognitive health improvement. According to Will, "This highlights an opportunity for brands and manufacturers to position hot drink products aiding a number of different health issues, as consumers actively seek our products that can boost their health even if not currently suffering from any illness."

### The health opportunity

Bone broth has been a popular trend across social media and the wellness sphere for a few years now, but Covid is bringing its unique combination of health credentials and delicious flavour into the mainstream – making winter 2021 the perfect time to explore this tasty trend. "With the global pandemic shining a strong spotlight on the importance of good health and wellbeing, and bone broth enjoying a string of claimed health benefits (including aiding digestion and improving gut health, boosting immunity and as a beauty elixir to promote strong hair, nails and young-looking skin), the buoyant broth market is estimated to grow over 3.5% CAGR between 2020 and 2026," explains Daniel Adams, managing director of Bone Broth Bros.

Thanks to its 'superfood' credentials – bone broth is said to be nutritionally-rich, containing high levels of protein and collagen and gluten-free – and its impressively simple production – imagine the contents of a bubbling broth pot condensed down – the product also bridges the attractive gap between the growing health functionality opportunity and artisan food; something which currently only a limited number of products on the market can claim to do. "Stocking products that are moving from being niche health products to more widely enjoyed functional health products is a great way to drive sales with individuals that are looking for hot drink options that aren't just about comfort or caffeine," he continues.

'Functionality' is a term bandied about a lot in the food and drink industry right now, particularly in the start-up arena, but what does it actually mean? "We describe functional drinks as those blended or infused with an additional ingredient that elevates their original property to serve an additional benefit or purpose," explains James Wright, owner of Cheerful Buddha. "For example, CBD-infused coffee elevates standard coffee by reducing the negative effects caffeine can cause – such as anxiety – creating a calmer clarity and focus."

### Making wellness convenient (and tasty)

While some of us are happy to carve out additional time to invest in stronger health and wellbeing, for a great number of British consumers the easier it is to adopt healthy habits the better. "We all know that creating a new routine or behaviour into our daily lives is incredibly difficult, requiring some serious effort, dedication and willpower. Therefore, infusing additional functionality into hot drinks we consume on a daily basis like coffee, in a delicious and great tasting way, makes it much easier to enjoy and feel the benefits," he continues.

CBD was the perfect health and wellness product to give the functional drink treatment. "Having been fans of using CBD for a while we were frustrated with a number of things relating to our CBD wellness routine," says James. "Firstly, the taste of CBD isn't very nice, so using tinctures wasn't a routine we looked forward to. Secondly, taking a tincture of CBD every day was another thing to remember to do in our vitamin and supplement routine which was getting too long! We thought of adding it to our morning coffee to save the hassle, but obviously oil and water don't mix, so not only did it leave a horrible film on the top of our Americano, but the CBD taste also ruined our coffee! Thus our challenge was born... To make a great tasting CBD coffee infusion."

For Twist Teas founder Claire Ayres, tea was the optimum vehicle for functionality. "Gone are the days of simply adding boiling water and a dash of milk to a dusty, mass-produced tea bag," she begins. "Health-conscious consumers are far savvier and more aware now than ever of the effect of what they eat and drink does to themselves and the environment."

Of course, if you're looking to sell a new type of product it's important to know who might buy it. Twist Teas have found that it is younger generations driving the charge. "Millenials and Gen Zs are keen to try teas that have proven health benefits, and consumers of all ages are following fast in their footsteps." That's why the business developed its Functional Teas range: "aimed at helping people to perform at their peak throughout the day. Whether you drink tea to energise in the morning, to detox throuhout the day, to revive after a workout, or to have a restful night's sleep, Twist has a tea to suit every requirement."

### The evolution of comforting classics

While functionality is a key element of shoppers' checklists right now,

> "Over the last 18 months many consumers, unable to get a proper coffee out of home, and having more time on their hands, have upgraded to roast and ground coffee at home. Whilst many people's lives are now getting busier, many are continuing to enjoy the habits they formed during the slower pace of life throughout the pandemic. With winter fast approaching too, customers will appreciate a good selection of warming, classic coffees"

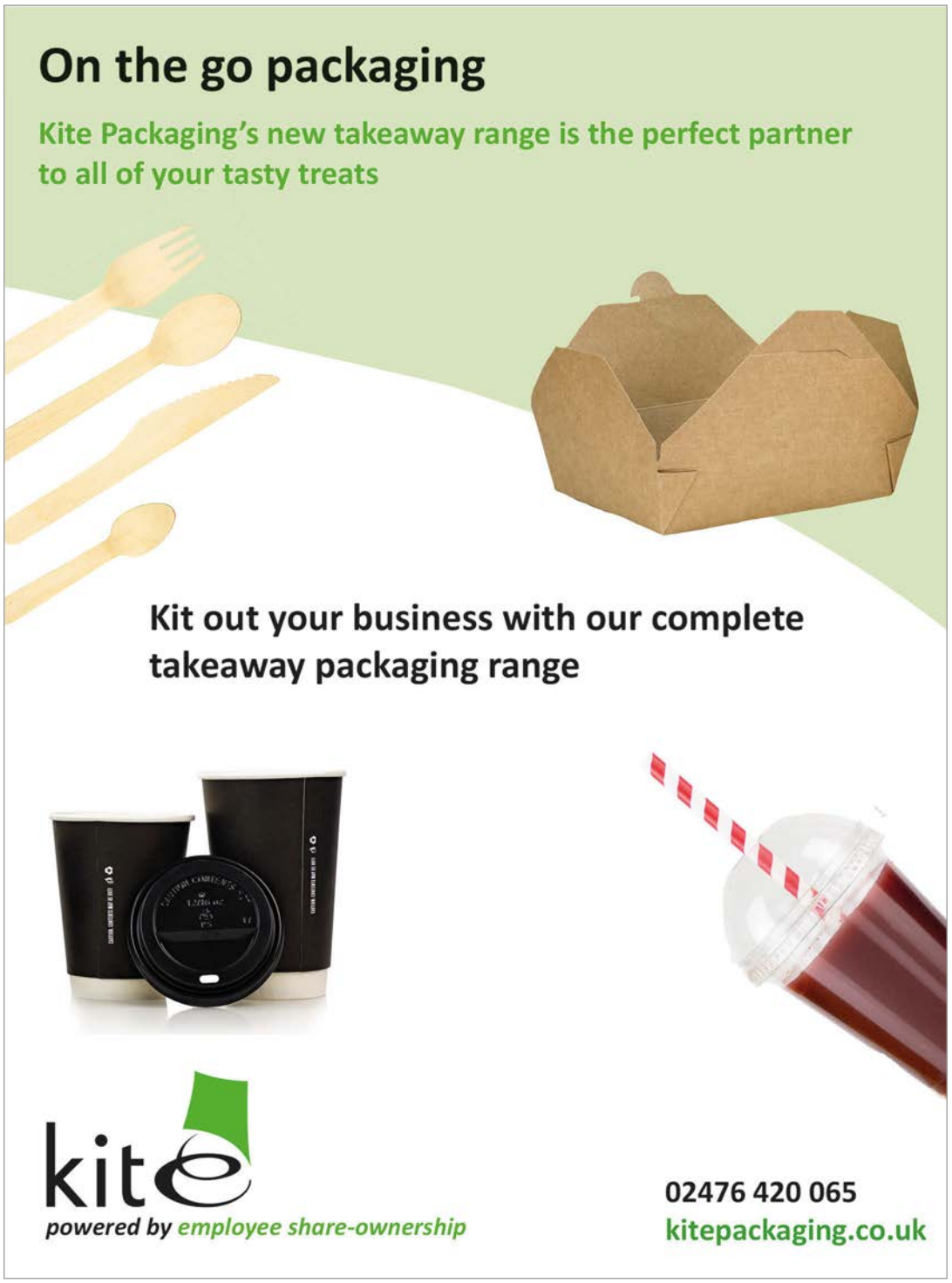
arguably comfort is top of the pile – as it has been for a long time. And, in the absence of coffee shops during the first couple of lockdowns in the UK, customers developed an appreciation for at-home hot drink indulgence that looks as though it's here to stay. "Over the last 18 months many consumers, unable to get a proper coffee out of home, and having more time on their hands, have upgraded to roast and ground coffee at home. Whilst many people's lives are now getting busier, many are continuing to enjoy the habits they formed during the slower pace of life throughout the pandemic. With winter fast approaching too, customers will appreciate a good selection of warming, classic coffees," explains Helen Boulter, multi sector sales controller at Taylors of Harrogate.

According to Helen, roast and ground coffee is growing faster than any other sector within hot beverages – and ground coffee makes up 64% of these sales. "At Taylors of Harrogate, we're dedicated to producing the best coffee there is and a much loved and popular classic in our range is our Rich Italian blend. With notes of dark chocolate and almonds, it's the perfect comforting, cosy coffee," says Helen. Of course, it's important for *Speciality Food* readers to continue to satisfy the needs of their customers, whether they're back to the pre-pandemic pace or still slowed down due to Covid but wanting to enjoy great coffee without hassle. "Coffee Bags, worth £13m – up 46% YOY2 and growing, are perfect for these consumers and ideal for cold winter days on the move," suggests Helen. "Taylors of Harrogate Coffee Bags contain fresh roast and ground coffee and work just like a tea bag, brewing in just two minutes, making it easy to enjoy a delicious cup of coffee – all that's needed is a kettle."

When it comes to selling coffee to fine food consumers, it's important to know the difference between 'blends' and 'single origin'. According to Victoria Cozens, co-founder of London-based roasters Perky Blenders, blending different coffee beans together can result in tailored flavour profiles which remain consistent over time, even if the elements change slightly. "Not all coffees are equal and coffee producers around the world produce different styles, flavours and levels of quality," she explains. "By blending different styles of coffees we can achieve taste profiles that would not be possible from a single origin coffee. This opens up a world of possibilities and keeps it fun for us at the Roastery!"

In terms of single origin coffees worth selling, Perky Blenders look for "complex coffees that can stand on their own and display layered flavours," Victoria explains. "Single origins tend to lend themselves to more experienced coffee drinkers who like to taste the expression of a specific terroir, varietal, fermentation or post-harvest processing." Ideal for self-described foodies, "they tend to be more adventurous as there are so many different producers around the world, all with their specific style and markers. It takes time, dedication, and a keen sense of taste to discover them all."

Whether you're catering for comfort-seeking shoppers with a quality take on storecupboard staples or exploring the functional opportunity, now is the time to take stock of the hot drinks on your shelves; by getting the balance right you'll be able to quench the thirst of your evolving customer base.



## 2021 Speciality Food Magazine Stock Check




### SUMMERDOWN PEPPERMINT TEA PYRAMIDS

A strikingly crisp, refreshing and intensely aromatic herbal tea.

**summerdown.com**




### THE EAST INDIA COMPANY ROYAL BREAKFAST LOOSE LEAF BLACK TEA CADDY

With a rich and robust flavour, this blend is a full-bodied alternative to English breakfast tea.

**theeastindiacompany.com**




### TOM'S TEAS TROPICAL TWIST

A tea for children that is full of fruity flavour and no bad stuff.

**tomsteas.com**




### KOPI HOUSE NANYANG KOPI POWDER

Authentic Singaporean Nanyang coffee, full bodied with notes of cacao and burnt toast.

**kopihouse.co.uk**




### JP'S ORIGINALS NANA'S CHAI

A family recipe for warming spiced ginger and cardamom chai in 100% plastic-free packaging.

**jpsoriginals.com**




### AHMAD TEA WITH ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW BEYOND THE LEAF

The perfect balance of quality and elegance for a smooth, delicious brew at any time of the day.

**uk.ahmadtea.com**






# FINAL CALL

After the uncertainty that Covid-19 caused around Christmas 2020, retailers were likely looking forward to a straightforward festive season this year. But question marks have emerged over our golden quarter once again. Issues caused by the pandemic's ever-changing nature have been compounded by complex labour shortages which have left some shelves empty and ramped up costs of everything from packaging to energy. Will Christmas be cancelled again?

Although you never quite know when Covid is involved, I for one will place myself firmly in the 'no' camp. Firstly, many independents have not faced the same problems with empty shelves that the multiples have, thanks to their shorter supply chains, their close relationships with suppliers and their flexibility in the face of challenges. This means that they can once again step in to provide their local communities with essential products as well as much-needed treats and gifts fit for the season if needed.

This year, the data is also showing that customers are keen to do their Christmas shopping early, which has given rise to fears of panic buying. But the desire to stock up on Christmas treats well before the big day also shows just how badly consumers want to have a festive celebration with their loved ones this year. Whatever may happen in the run-up to Christmas Day, consumers are preparing themselves for anything. It's best that retailers do the same. During this challenging time, remember to take care of your staff. Christmas can be a busy but rewarding time for retailers, but by playing your cards right you can boost loyalty among both staff and customers.

We may not be able to count on Covid – or even deliveries from HGVs – but we can count on the fact that the average Brit will be keen to celebrate this Christmas in any way they can, and retailers who cater for this celebratory spirit will no doubt find success.

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

# 5 MINUTES WITH

## DR MEGAN ROSSI, CO-FOUNDER OF BIO&ME



**WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?**
Working full time as a research fellow at Kings College London rather than part time.

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?**
Working at the cinema taught me about the value of money and hard work. I also found out what goes into their popcorn and ice creams, and have never eaten them again.

**WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?**
Processing people's poop samples for my PhD!

**WHAT INSPIRES YOU?**
Seeing how making small changes to people's lifestyles and diets can have a huge impact on their gut health, and subsequently on their mental and overall health too.

**WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?**
Definitely taste testing for each of the different products that we make at Bio&Me.

**AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?**
Hearing myths around gut health. Sadly, people with big influence send out inaccurate messages.

**HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?**
There's so much excitement around gut health. But there is a long way to go in terms of bringing evidence-based products to the shelves.

**TEA OR COFFEE?**
My husband makes a brilliant coffee. As a new mum it's definitely the thing that gets me out of bed.

**WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?**
A buffet including seafood and a range of Mediterranean salads and roasted vegetables – I really love freekeh at the moment. For dessert I'd include my new prebiotic live yoghurt range topped with my granola (clearly biased, but I'm obsessed), dark chocolate and fresh fruit salad.

**WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?**
Perseverance is the hard work you do after you get tired of doing the hard work you already did.

**WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?**
Insects were surprisingly flavoursome! I also ate Nopal, a cactus from Mexico. We have been testing its health benefits in a clinical trial.

**WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?**
It would have to be the one I poured my heart and soul into writing, *Eat Yourself Healthy*.

**SWEET OR SAVOURY?**
I do very much love chocolate. I made my prebiotic chocolate bark to show that even white chocolate can be transformed into food that still tastes amazing with added prebiotics.




## BE CONNECTED




@SpecialityFood

linkedin.com/company/speciality-food

specialityfoodmagazine

FOLLOW SPECIALITY FOOD ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO HEAR MORE FROM FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY VOICES

**Editor**
Holly Shackleton, 01206 505981
holly.shackleton@aceville.co.uk

**News & Content Editor**
Courtney Goldsmith 01206 505971
courtney.goldsmith@aceville.co.uk

**Group Editor**
Charlotte Smith
charlotte.smith@aceville.co.uk

**Group Advertising Manager**
Sam Reubin 01206 505936
sam.reubin@aceville.co.uk

**Advertising Manager**
Jessica Brett 01206 505901
jessica.brett@aceville.co.uk

**Accounts**
Sue Carr 01206 505903

**Art Director**
Lee Whiteford
lee.whiteford@aceville.co.uk

**Publisher**
Helen Tudor 01206 505970

**Published by**
Aceville Publications Ltd,
21-23 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Road,
Colchester, Essex, CO2 8JY

**Next issue available:**
January 2022

**Subscriptions**
01293 312188
specialityfood@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk

BAR rate UK £29.25. Overseas £40.00
Tel. 01778 392464

Take part in our
**Product Sampling Promotion!**

TASTE DIRECT

**Are you a Producer?**
We are looking for ten companies to offer a product sample to our readership. Get in touch for more details and costs.

**Are you a Retailer?**
Look out in our January Issue for the opportunity to sample new product ranges.

For more information contact:
jessica.brett@aceville.co.uk or 01206 505901

The final word on fine food

# TRIED & TESTED



### DOUGHLICIOUS SNACKABLE DOUGH

More often than not in my house, what starts out in the mixing bowl doesn't always make it to the cooling rack, so I was delighted to discover Snackable Dough from Doughlicious as it allows me to satisfy my cookie dough cravings unhindered. The latest addition to the range, Chocolate Peppermint, is deliciously festive, while the other flavours in the range – Chocolate Chip, Lemon Raspberry, Apple Crumble, Coco Delight and Orange Chocolate – are equally as crave-busting. What's more, they're all-natural, organic, vegan-friendly and low in sugar. Top marks from me.
**doughlicious.co.uk**

### TEXAS GIRL SALSA

Boasting a US, Tex-Mex-inspired blend thanks to co-founder Margaret's Texas roots, Texas Girl Salsa brings fun and flavour to the party. Created to counter the uninspiring own-brand salsas that grace most ordinary supermarket shelves, it certainly delivers on flavour. The Hot version offers a slow-burning and satisfying kick of heat. The blend of fresh tomatoes, peppers and spices is perfect for spooning over homemade nachos or tacos, or scooping up with tortilla chips.
**texasgirlsalsa.com**



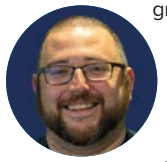
### AGORA ROSSO VERMOUTH

Vermouth is high on my list of products overdue their time in the spotlight, so I was glad to uncover Agora's Rosso Vermouth at a recent event. A perfectly balanced combination of star anise, rose, vanilla, lavender and cassia bark, it's a modern – and highly versatile – interpretation of an under-appreciated classic, and now takes pride of place in my cocktail cabinet. It adds delicious depth to cocktails (try using it in a Manhattan, Negroni or Martini) but is just as enjoyable served simply on the rocks or with added tonic for a longer, refreshing tipple.
**agoravermouth.com**



# THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Andy Foster, executive chef at Dylan's Restaurant



Dylan's is a family of three award-winning waterside restaurants, serving locally sourced produce and seafood in the beautiful coastal towns of Menai Bridge, Criccieth and Llandudno, North Wales. In 2020, we also established our Baked Goods & General Store, a lockdown project turned success, opening on Menai Bridge high street in 2021. We opened our first restaurant, Dylan's Menai Bridge, on the banks of the Menai Strait back in 2012. Our focus was on serving fresh, local produce, seafood and pizzas, and a desire to welcome our guests with the very best North Wales that has to offer. For me, our mission statement has always held true: 'Celebrating the local produce, character and natural beauty of North Wales'. From the outset, we developed fantastic relationships with some of the finest fisherfolk and farmers in the area, also arguably some of the best in the world, sourcing an abundance of fish, shellfish, meat, fruit, vegetables, spirits and beer; even Welsh wine!

For those fishing the Menai Straits, the world is their oyster. The naturally grown Menai mussels and oysters have been a staple on our menu, enjoyed by our customers in their hundreds of thousands annually, since 2012 – this unique stretch of water provides the perfect environment for delicious shellfish to thrive under the eye of fisherman Shaun Krijnen. At peak season we take 500 oysters out of the water every week, as well as over 600kg of mussels, to keep our restaurant customers fed and happy.

When we opened our first restaurant, we were confident that the area would develop and grow in popularity as a food haven, and we knew that our suppliers would grow and benefit too. It's this fantastic symbiotic relationship which is a win-win for the entire local food chain.

Back on land, our prep kitchen is found in the heart of Anglesey, Ynys Mon, and 1.5 miles away you'll find Dolmeinir Farm, where we source Welsh lamb and pork from the Owen family, with Nia delivering to us almost daily. Our duo of Welsh lamb/Deuawd o Cig Oen with braised shoulder and crisp breast, baby carrots, minted Israeli couscous and carrot pureé is a firm favourite on our summer menu, as well as our Sticky Pork Bao Buns/ Bao Buns Porc Gludiog, with belly pork, soy, ginger and honey glaze, satay dressing, Asian style coleslaw and crushed peanuts. It's not just our starters and mains, but also our desserts – our Anglesey Apple Pie for example – with apples from James Hooton & Family at Hooton Farm is an absolute local crowd pleaser – for our team as well as our customers!

Our relationship with Ieuan Edwards, of the award-winning butchers Edwards of Conwy, has been a personal highlight, with our own steak burgers made to a specific recipe by his butchers, as well as fantastic Welsh Tomahawk steaks gracing our specials boards.

Further down the coast, down the 'Silk Road' of the A55, you'll find Andy Owen line fishing seabass from his boat Morgan James out of Y Felinheli. It's a local delicacy massively enjoyed in the restaurants. Up North, around the coast of Holyhead on Anglesey, Darron Trowel will be dropping lobster pots from his boat, Trust, which will absolutely fly off the menu!

A meal is nothing without a drink, of course, and we're very fortunate to have some fantastic award-winning distilleries and breweries through North Wales, including Llanfairpwll Distillery with their gins and rum, and Wild Horse Brewery in Llandudno, just two of many who have grown with us.

Being able to source local hero ingredients, so integral to each dish, is a real buzz for all my chefs who get to work with real, local, fresh produce every day.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Garofalo



# PUSHING THE BOAT OUT

Do consumers want innovation in their pizzas and pastas, or do they prefer classic flavours?

Italian cuisine is synonymous with tradition. The very best recipes are widely known, but their intricacies are carefully guarded secrets, passed down through countless generations, from one nonna to the next.

You certainly can't beat the classics – I for one will never tire of a Margherita pizza or a simple yet stunning cacio e pepe – and nothing can beat a Caprese salad made with the finest Mozzarella, the freshest tomatoes and basil and a drizzle of top-quality, authentic olive oil. Often, the simplest recipes are the best – they are classic dishes for a reason, after all.

In today's innovation-obsessed world, where new brands are always emerging to fill a gap in the market and fresh-eyed entrepreneurs are always seeking out new foodie problems to solve, is it best just to leave well enough alone when it comes to Italian fare?

At *Speciality Food*, we believe that traditional Italian products will always have pride of place on retailers' shelves. From carefully crafted pasta to unbeatable PDO products, such as Parmigiano Reggiano or Parma Ham. That's because we know the time, care and craft that go into such products, and their acclaimed tradition brings a level of provenance that will lift any dish.

However, we also have a soft spot for innovation. For the foodies who never stop testing and tweaking recipes to create something brand new, yet thoroughly delicious. We've been elated, as many retailers have been, too, to witness the rise in home cooking throughout the Covid crisis. The spike in at-home pizza oven sales has no doubt led to much experimentation from consumers keen to explore the breadth and depth of their cooking abilities.

This balance between tradition and innovation is what keeps our industry fresh and exciting, while also being firmly rooted in the rich culinary history of Italy. But just don't ask me to add pineapple to my pizza.

To find out more about what makes Italian cuisine a British best-seller, head to our Italian food special on page 18.

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



A CHEESE FROM

# THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGE IN SWITZERLAND.

TRULY IMPECCABLE TASTE.

GRUYERE.COM

LE GRUYÈRE®
SWITZERLAND
AOP

THE TASTE OF SWITZERLAND SINCE 1115.

SCHWEIZ SUISSE SVIZZERA SWITZERLAND

Switzerland. Naturally.

AOP

Cheeses from Switzerland.
www.cheesesfromswitzerland.com