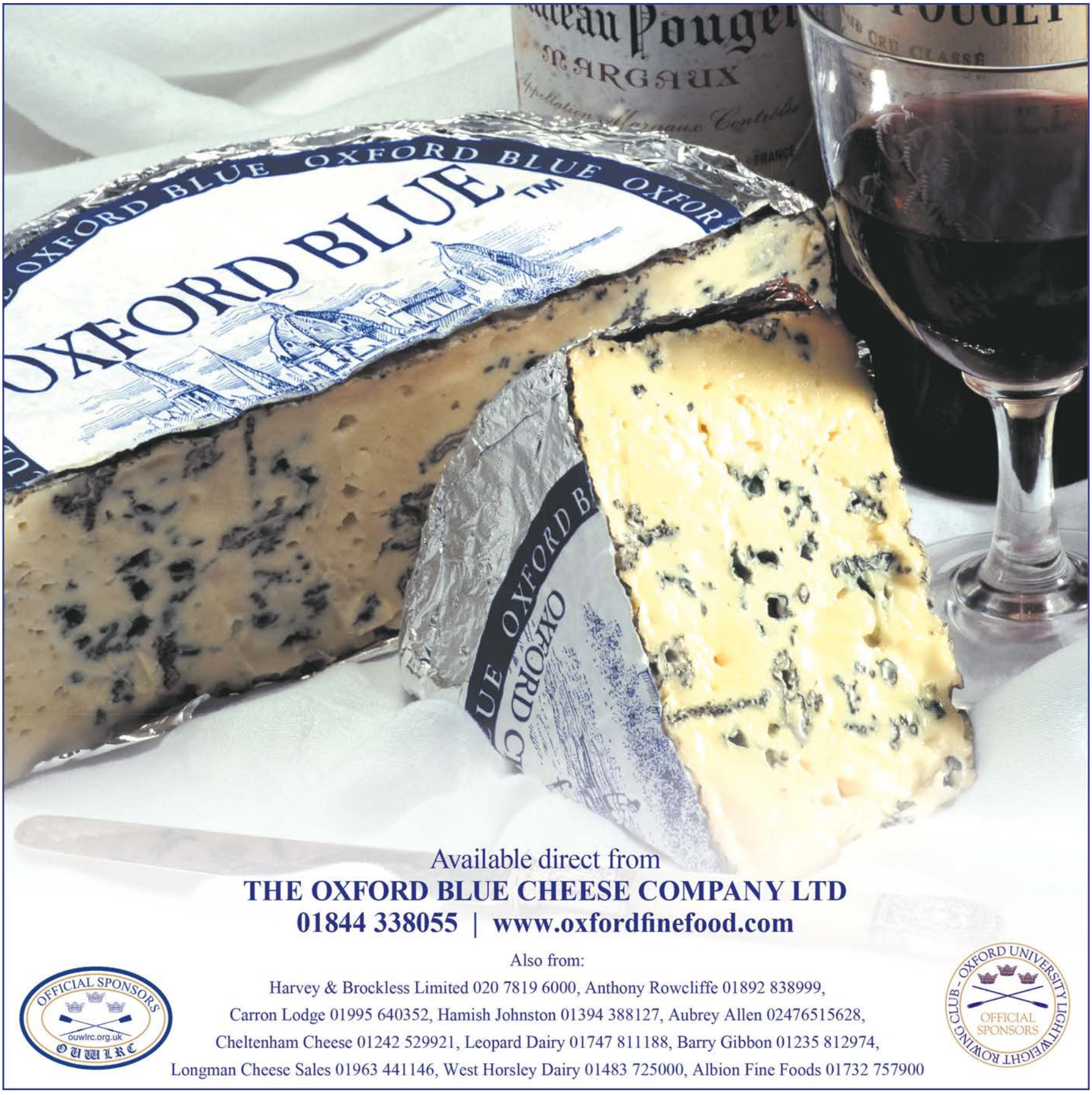
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# SPECIALITY FOOD

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## EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the October issue of *Speciality Food*. Like many across the fine food industry, the *Speciality Food* team is feeling buoyed by our recent visit to Speciality & Fine Food Fair; it was a long awaited and highly valued opportunity to catch up with familiar faces, make new connections and get a first-hand taste of what's happening in the industry right now – and let's face it, two days of relative normalcy in what has been a very abnormal 18 months.

This issue we're sharing valuable insight into the coming festive season, from the products to stock and how to display them to how indies can optimise customer experience.

You'll also find out more about Sustainable Food Month, an initiative spearheaded by *Speciality Food* and Too Good To Go, during which we'll share intel and inspiration to get your business working as sustainably as possible.

As ever, do get in touch with feedback and suggestions.

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






# Indies dodge 'perfect storm' of shortages

Brexit, Covid and historical worker shortfalls are to blame for food shortages seen in recent months. But independents have proved resilient

The UK's food and drink industry is in crisis mode as shortages of workers spanning across industries – from HGV drivers to fruit and vegetable pickers to hospitality and retail staff – result in empty shelves at supermarkets across the nation.

Industry leaders have warned that the shortages, which are being caused by a combination of Brexit and Covid, will continue to impact retailers up to the busy Christmas season, and Food & Drink Federation CEO Ian Wright has warned that the era of 'just-in-time' delivery models could be coming to an end. Amid these dire circumstances, how have independent fine food retailers fared?

## Local sourcing aids indies

"My research suggests that many independents such as farm shops are well stocked," Edward Berry of The Flying Fork consultancy told *Speciality Food*. While this doesn't speak to every single retailer's experience, it certainly shows the clear benefits of the speciality sector's shorter supply chians.

As with the panic buying shortages at the start of the pandemic, independents have proved more resilient thanks to their localised supply chains. "Local sourcing is their greatest strength," Edward added. "There is clearly a jobs crisis among hauliers and food processing factories that has had an effect on some shop shelves and the larger branded restaurant menus, but many of the country's farms are dealing with surpluses." However, he added a caveat that for some farms, labour shortages caused by the post-Brexit exodus of migrant workers means that fruit and veg is not being picked at all.

Charlie Hodson, who runs Hodson & Co Cheese Room in Norfolk, noticed a similar trend. He told *Speciality Food* that one of the only reasons for any shortages in his shop was that small suppliers are in such high demand. "I've got two or three cheesemakers who I'm finding it very difficult to get cheese from, purely because they keep running out," he said. Smaller producers have seen demand for their products sky-rocket as consumers seek out local food and drink. "It's a great thing for them because they're no longer throwing milk on the fields, which to me is the most important thing. I'd much rather not be able to have the cheese because they can't keep up with demand," Charlie said.

It comes as new research from the Local Data Company reveals that the first six months of 2021 saw the independent store market return to growth for the first time since 2017, largely driven by food retailers.

## Flexibility is key

Independent retailers have not been left entirely unscathed from the current supply and worker shortages. As well as some shops and farmers suffering from a shortage of staff, Charlie said some of his small, artisan suppliers are having trouble sourcing packaging. "I've had some suppliers say, 'We can't supply this because we can't get the lids or we can't get the jars.' So it's not the food that's an issue, it's the packaging." However, Charlie concluded that he's faced no major shortages. "Also, if I can't get one product, I can buy an equivalent product from somewhere else," he said, highlighting a level of flexibility that the multiples will find difficult to match.

Elsewhere, suppliers of imported products are also facing more barriers with post-Brexit paperwork and shipment delays. "The retailers that I've come across who are struggling are those who have more imported products," Edward said.

> "Local sourcing is independent retailers' greatest strength"

Yet, in an environment where large supermarket chains are once again experiencing significant product shortages, independent retailers have proven that smaller supply chains are much more reliable when crisis strikes.

## Calls continue for Covid visa

Although independents have emerged relatively unscathed by the supply chain chaos, the UK's wider food and farmin sector is still facing "crippling labour shortages across the supply chain," the NFU says. The group, alongside other major food and drink trade bodies, such as the Food and Drink Federation, is urging the Government to provide support through a Covid Recovery Visa.

The coalition of trade groups wrote a letter to the Prime Minister on 22nd September calling for the introduction of a 12-month Covid Recovery Visa to enable all involved in the supply chain to recruit critical roles in the short term.

"The food and farming sector remains on a knife edge due to the unprecedented shortages of workers across the entire supply chain. The industry came together in the summer to evidence these challenges, and the final report showed that there are an estimated 500,000 unfilled vacancies across the industry," the group wrote.

"The situation is not improving, in fact, images of empty supermarket shelves are becoming commonplace as labour shortages bite. As we move towards Christmas, there is a substantial threat of food inflation directly impacting the poorest families."

They continued, saying it was a "travesty" that shelves were going empty as perfectly edible food was being disposed of on some farms where it couldn't be picked, packed, processed or transported.

## What's next?

While Brexit will likely continue to cause some delays for small retailers as producers on both sides of the English Channel get up to speed with new rules and regulations, the 'perfect storm' affecting UK food supplies is another matter altogether. In addition to Brexit and Covid, rising gas prices are compounding issues for the industry by creating a carbon dioxide shortage, a product which the frozen food and meat industries rely on.

As the industry grapples with meeting consumers' needs in the run-up to the busiest time of year, it is independents once again who have proven their ability and willingness to step up and provide a fantastic service when times get tough.



## *"Leap Week!"*



**JOHN SHEPHERD**
PARTRIDGES

Everyone knows about Leap Year coming around every four years.

But few know that, at least in Central London, every year there occurs a Leap Week. A week in which sales increase to the value of at least an extra day a week.

It is the week when we say goodbye to the Dog Days of summer trading and hello to the Halcyon Days of the fourth quarter, which is hopefully looming on the horizon.

It is the week that usually includes September 1st. In this weekly period, or sometimes two-weekly period, sales rise miraculously like a footballer denied a penalty and the game continues as normal.

Last year Leap Week accounted for a 25% rise in sales. The year before, spread over two weeks, it accounted for a 20% increase.

This represents the biggest week-on-week rise in the year apart from the manic days just before Christmas.

The background reasons for all this are that August trade, never great, has over the last two years has been appallingly bad. The recipe of Brexid-19, the weather and universally lower morale does not produce the result of 'spending with abandon'. In addition, the August Bank Holiday was a brilliant invention for retailers as it demarcates the time when holiday frivolity should draw to an end and the time to start looking for serious products should begin. Schools are back, offices are coming back and the weather... I dare not say it. Homing customers return with a lingering taste for speciality foods and delicatessen products still in place and somewhere drifting by on the autumnal wind the word 'Christmas' is heard.

This year the mood of optimism is somewhat overshadowed by events in the outside world. Supply chain problems have led to a shortage of basic items. Larger deliveries have been postponed or delayed. Prices have gone up in key areas and trying to recruit new staff is not as easy as it once was.

Better to look after the old staff, I am constantly reminded... by the old staff. They are right. We have had our fair share of own goals on that scoresheet.

There is also a rise in competition. Although not immediately visible to the naked eye on a daily basis but it is bound to have an effect, the extent of which only time will tell. At an end of August count there are now 12 retailers selling takeaway food and drinks within a few hundred yards of Partridges – although none of them are grocers. Until recent times there were just four. Also, the relaxation of table and chairs licensing by the local authority has meant a lot of bars and eateries are extending their premises onto the pavements.

In addition, I have noticed around London that a diverse mix of other retailers have applied for the sale of alcohol for off sales. Cafés mainly, but in one case a fruit and veg shop and in another a butcher. In terms of competition, it was never thus but as with all competition it will help focus our minds on what really matters. Last year our good autumn turned into a good Christmas. We are hoping for an action replay.

# Sustainable Food Month launches eco-skills-boosting webinar series

Sustainable Food Month
in partnership with Too Good To Go

**Looking to take your eco credentials to the next level? Ready to learn how your business can profit while also making a positive impact on the planet? Learn from sustainability champions and food industry leaders during two exciting and informative online webinars for Sustainable Food Month, presented by *Speciality Food* and Too Good To Go.**

Food production is one of the largest contributors of greenhouse gas emissions, so *Speciality Food* and Too Good To Go are holding Sustainable Food Month to help businesses make the food industry a greener place. Throughout the month, sustainability experts will provide vital insights and tips about transforming every part of your business – from sourcing to packaging to delivery and beyond. As part of Sustainable Food Month, *Speciality Food* will be hosting a two-part webinar series which is free to attend.

The first webinar will be held on 13th October at 3pm. During the session, *The Sustainable Pound: Why & How To Boost Your Eco Credentials*, *Speciality Food* editor Holly Shackleton will speak with sustainable retailers including Dan Willis of Chorlton Cheesemongers and Megan Adams of refill retailer Re:Store to uncover the opportunities that becoming a sustainable business holds today. Attendees will learn step-by-step instructions for improving their eco credentials as well as tips for attracting and retaining forward-thinking customers.

The second webinar, *Sustainability: The Future Is In Your Hands*, will take place on 20th October at 3pm. During this session, which will feature insights from Jamie Crummie of Too Good To Go, Patrick Holden of the Sustainable Food Trust and Ruth Edge of the NFU, attendees will discover why the food industry holds the key to a brighter future, and what the future holds if we don't begin to think differently about sustainability. Learn more at sustainablefoodmonth.com.

> "Cutting food waste is a great way we can all make a difference in the fight against climate change. With the COP26 climate conference coming to Glasgow this year, there's never been a better time to take action"
>
> **MICHAEL MATHESON, CABINET SECRETARY FOR NET ZERO, ENERGY AND TRANSPORT**








# Cyprus Halloumi PDO!

The iconic Cypriot cheese Χαλλούμι/Halloumi/Hellim with its characteristic texture, unique appearance, and endless cooking versatility is now registered by the European Commission as a Protected Designation of Origin product. Alongside PDO, Χαλλούμι/Halloumi is registered as Certification Trade Mark in the UK, shielding the valuable name against imitation and misuse.

PROTECTED DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN

MINISTRY OF ENERGY COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Ministry of Energy, Commerce & Industry
www.meci.gov.cy

Cyprus High Commission Trade Centre London
www.cyprustrade.co.uk

REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

# Government unveils plans to boost food and drink exports

**The UK's agri-food sector contributes a whopping £20bn in exports each year, but only 20% of companies sell their goods overseas, according to the Government. A new export initiative will work to help more farmers and food businesses export their products.**

"Our farmers are the lifeblood of our nation – producing the home-grown food that makes up a critical component of our nation's food security, and acting as stewards of our natural environment," said environment secretary George Eustice. "We want people at home and abroad to be lining up to buy British."

The new support, which reflects recommendations from the Trade and Agriculture Commission, includes appointing more dedicated 'agri-food attaches' to act as representatives on the ground; establishing a Food and Drink Exports Council to work collaboratively to expand the UK's food and drink export strategy; and strengthening the UK's technical expertise and farmers' and producers' understanding of export markets.

NFU president Minette Batters said the move was a step in the right direction. "The NFU has long called for significant government investment which enables a partnership approach to international trade opportunities for British farmers. This is a positive step in the right direction, and I welcome this new commitment to put people on the ground with the technical expertise to open up new markets. I look forward to seeing more detail on this proposal and working with government to boost our agri-food exports abroad.

Liz Truss, who was international trade secretary at the time of the announcement, said the plans were part of a post-Brexit strategy to boost exports. "Our food and drink is among the best in the world and an independent trading nation we're seizing new opportunities that were previously denied to us," she said.

# Researchers aim to determine value of British farm shops

**The Farm Retail Association and Harper Adams University have introduced a project to discover the impact farm shops have not only on their local communities, farmers and suppliers, but also on the wider economy and the UK's rural landscape**.

There are estimated to be more than 1,000 farm shops around the country. "We know that farm shops are valued – both by the retail and agricultural sectors, and by the communities they serve," said Alastair Boot, senior lecturer in food retail and marketing at Harper Adams University. "Many of us will have a favourite farm shop in our area, for instance – and there's been some evidence over the past 18 months that, as we all strove to stay local, retail patterns have changed – with a growing appetite for British farm shops. However, there is a need to build up a picture of the sector as a whole and its impact across the country – and this is where our research, commissioned by the Farm Retail Association, will come in," he said. "Once we develop that clearer understanding, it can be used to make the case for the nation's existing farm shops, and to help develop the sector further."

> "This is the biggest research project that the Farm Retail Association has ever undertaken and the results will fly the flag for our industry. We are encouraging all farm retailers to take part"
>
> **ROB COPLEY, CHAIRMAN OF THE FARM RETAIL ASSOCIATION**

**CHAIN** RETAIL UNITS RECORDED A NET **LOSS** OF **5,251** STORES IN THE FIRST **6** MONTHS OF **2021,** WHILE **INDEPENDENT** STORES RETURNED TO **GROWTH,** WITH **804** NET **NEW** OPENINGS

**SOURCE: LOCAL DATA COMPANY**

# 4 of the biggest trends in food



**Ben Black, head of European food and beverage at the investment firm Verlinvest, reveals to *Speciality Food* where the most significant shifts are occurring in consumer habits today.**

**1 PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRANDS**
As a recent report by NeilsenIQ revealed, consumers have shifted to a purpose-driven mindset and are actively choosing products with stronger health benefits and traceable ingredients. According to Ben, the emergence of purpose-led brands is one of the most exciting trends transforming the food and drink sector today. Across numerous categories, products are being created by entrepreneurs with a vision to change the future and make the world a better place, and consumers identify with these brands.

**2 SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING**
Similarly, with sustainability having becoming a hugely significant movement across the sector, Ben suggests that plastic-free hydration will be a segment with potential to perform very well in the coming months and years. "I'm very bullish on this area because I think most consumers recognise that plastic is something that we all need to reduce and have a responsibility to reduce."

**3 E-COMMERCE**
The digitalisation of grocery and shopping habits is yet another area ripe for innovation. Indeed, while online grocery sales have dipped in recent weeks, Kantar's data reveals that digitally-inclined shoppers in the UK are staying loyal to e-commerce despite lifting restrictions.

**4 PRODUCTS WITH PROVENANCE**
Finally, one of the biggest trends sparked by Covid is the return to provenance, localisation and supply chain ethics. "People are looking to their local butcher, their local cheesemaker or local greengrocer for products. There is a high focus on provenance: where that product comes from who's making it and what's going into it," Ben said. "Provenance and supply chain ethics are to me a big, big trend that's only accelerated during Covid."



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* A handful, 30g, is the daily recommended amount, which offer 2.7g of ALA.

# Post-Brexit import checks delayed

**The Government has delayed introducing checks on food and farming imports from the EU. The measures, which were due to be implemented in October, will now be introduced in January and July next year, with the Government blaming Covid disruption and pressures on global supply chains.**

**Ian Wright CBE, chief executive of the Food and Drink Federation, said the repeated failure to implement the full UK border controls on EU imports since 1st January undermines trust and confidence among businesses, while helping the UK's competitors**. "Many food and drink manufacturers will be dismayed by the lateness of this substantial change. Businesses have invested very significant time and money in preparing for the new import regime on 1st October 2021. This move penalises those who followed Government advice and rewards those who ignored it. As recently as yesterday, officials assured us that import checks would be implemented as planned," he said.

However, the British Chambers of Commerce said the delays were "sensible given the ongoing issues with ensuring trader readiness, the need to build more border control posts and the skills shortage crisis".

Digital food and beverage marketplace ShelfNow agreed that the delay is positive news, especially for small food and drink businesses. "The extension is a good thing as it provides breathing space to all brands and buyers of food and beverage," said Philip Linardos, CEO and co-founder of ShelfNow. "In particular, it favours the smaller players, the backbones of the economy, who have not had the bandwidth in 2021 to prepare for Brexit regulations, both domestic and especially importer brands."

# Staycations boost summer food sales

**Food sales rose 2.9% in August, compared to the same period last year, data from The British Retail Consortium and KPMG shows**. However, the monthly monitor revealed that this was below the 12-month average growth of 14.4% as shopping habits returned to normal post-lockdown.

"Food and drink sales in August were broadly flat on 2020's performance, with some spending switching from retail back into the out-of-home (OOH) sector," said Susan Barratt, CEO of IGD. Research from Kantar found that the global OOH sector recorded 12% growth year-on-year in the second quarter.

But despite OOH total quarterly sales reaching a whopping $30.7bn, and sales in the UK rocketing by 176%, in-home consumption has retained its lockdown gains, Nuria Moreno, Kantar's global director of OOH and usage panels, said. Snacks and non-alcoholic drinks proved popular in the OOH category, but the biggest winners were coffee (up 150%) and soft drinks (up 63%). Susan added that UK food sales were helped in August by holidays around the UK. "Despite sales being limited by the dull weather, they were supported by staycations and the late summer Bank Holiday, which helped sales show a small amount of growth."

# New campaign puts Spanish cuisine in the spotlight

**Foods and Wines from Spain has launched the 2021 #EatSpainDrinkSpain campaign, which runs until the end of November**.

The campaign will help fine food and drink retailers around the UK discover more about the diversity and quality of Spanish wines and foods. Five tasting workshops in London, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol and Cardiff will introduce food and wine professionals to the broad range of tastes and aromas of Spanish cuisine.

The #EatSpainDrinkSpain workshops will be open to buyers, retailers, sommeliers, restaurant and shop-owners and industry professionals in each area. "From the Basque Country to Jerez, and Rioja to the plains of Extremadura, these tasting sessions will let attendees nationwide experience new wines and different foods and discover some delicious and engaging matching ideas," said Fernando Muñoz, director of Foods and Wines from Spain.

The educational events will be hosted by Spanish food and wine experts and will take industry specialists on a food and wine flavour journey across the hills and plains of Spain, showcasing a diverse range of wines and how they match with an array of hams, cheeses, charcuterie and other Spanish foods. For more information and the full schedule of events, visit foodswinesfromspain.com.

# Shopper confidence remains strong

**Despite the challenges they face today, UK businesses are more confident than they have been in more than four years, a survey by Lloyds Bank Business Barometer found**. IGD's Shopper Confidence Index also continued to hit one of the highest levels in the last five years. Confidence among younger shoppers has increased for the first time since April 2021, and overall financial confidence remains relatively high, with 24% expecting to be better off in the year ahead.

However, the August Shopper Confidence Index also revealed that the K-shaped recovery is widening. What's more, concerns around inflation could chip away at high confidence levels. IGD's ShopperVista revealed that 79% of shoppers expect food and grocery prices to get more expensive in the year ahead.

"The continued rise in inflation concerns is likely to lead to a sudden return to risk-aversion and more value-seeking behaviour, particularly among families who are hard-pressed financially," said Simon Wainwright, director of global insight at IGD. "Retailers will need to pay close attention to the widening K-shaped recovery; lower affluent families will increasingly seek out value, so special offers, everyday low prices and visits to discount stores will become prominent," he said.

On the reverse, where fine food independents are concerned, the consumers with more cash to splash will continue to seek out higher-quality products. "More affluent shoppers will continue to trade up and focus on quality due to increased disposable income created by pent-up savings," Simon said.








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## *"Taking up the mantle"*



**BEN MCKECHNIE**
EPICURIUM

We've always been seen as a retail wholesaler, and have seen ourselves as such. While a lot of the Covid talk was about the closure of foodservice, the closure of city centres and business districts has had far wider reaching impact than has been typically reported. We hadn't appreciated quite how exposed we would be to what's effectively 'retail foodservice' – those tuckshop retailers, travel hubs and stores serving commuters and office workers with things to eat on their way to work, at lunchtime, etc. The reports of convenience retail having double digit/record growth during the pandemic belies the major disruption caused to retailers in these locations.

Conversely, forecourt retail has been doing very well with many forecourts in small towns and rural areas offering a vital lifeline to their local communities. A lot of forecourts upped their game considerably to take up this mantle.

In the speciality sector, retailers were impressively quick to adapt and have seen some great gains of course. With people locked down and finding themselves with an unexpected boost to disposable income, the comforts offered by exciting artisan foods were very welcome. I think people had the time to understand and appreciate the massive difference in quality and taste... and satisfaction... that taking the time to find and try some of the fantastic speciality food we have offers.

With a lot of speciality retailers being highly innovative by nature, they typically have been well suited to the surge in online ordering and home delivery.

Other challenges we've seen were essential people and IT. I'm under no illusion that these things were in any way unique to us, of course!

We're a small team here and the initial move to home working was very difficult for a lot of our team to cope with. It's just not a feasible option for a lot of people, and for a lot more it's not a desirable option, when you add in school closures and childcare to that, it makes for very difficult working. That's a huge disruption and challenge at the best of times, but coping with that while trying to get your head around a highly dangerous and unprecedented global catastrophe apparently waiting right outside your front door – you couldn't make this sort of thing up.

We did see a great response from the team and fortunately had some extra office space almost completed just before lockdown which meant we were able to manage with an onsite team well-spaced out and safe, albeit with no carpets or paint on the walls.

IT-wise was really a killer of working from home for us as our systems and connections just weren't set up to cope. We managed a pidgin operation at first, but calls were constantly dropped, connections would fail and the systems were so slow as to be ineffective at times. It was a massive relief to be able to get a core team back on site safely.

The brands we partner with were just as impressive as the retailers in adapting. With many of their traditionally strongest sales channels having been closed down overnight, these innovative challenger brands were also being forced off retailer shelving in favour of pasta, loo roll and bananas. To see the speed in which they reacted and got their DTC operations flying was amazing. These online channels are now major (if not central) parts of their scale up plans.

# Food waste is back on the rise

**During the pandemic, consumers spent more time at home and began shopping more intentionally. According to the food waste charity WRAP's Love Food Hate Waste campaign, these newfound food management behaviours resulted in a 43% decline in household food waste.**

Unfortunately, as the group's most recent UK Food Trends Survey has revealed, self-reported food waste has bounced back to pre-lockdown levels as UK reopens.

During lockdown, almost four in five people took up an average of 6.7 new food management behaviours, such as freezing, using up leftovers and batch cooking, causing self-reported food waste to plummet. Levels of bread, chicken, milk and potato waste fell from nearly a quarter of all items purchased in November 2019 to 13.7% in April 2020. According to the data, three in 10 people are now classified as 'high food wasters' – on par with the findings from before the pandemic.

Environment minister Rebecca Pow said more must be done to keep food out of the bins, although the UK is already making good progress with a 7% reduction in waste per capita between 2015 and 2018. She suggested encouraging consumers to make shopping lists and ensuring they store food correctly and use their freezers where possible – something that retailers can promote in store. "By making these small, positive changes to our everyday lives, we can all make a real difference."

## Natasha's Law: new rules come into force

**New food regulations requiring businesses to provide full ingredients lists and allergen information on pre-packaged products took effect from 1st October, but most business owners have admitted they were unprepared for the changes**.

Despite 90% saying they received plenty of information about the new rules, four in 10 admitted they had never heard of Natasha's Law, and eight in 10 said they felt unprepared, according to GS1 UK, a provider of global supply chain standards.

The introduction of the new regulations follows the death of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, who suffered a fatal allergic reaction. "It is worrying that the awareness of the changes is inconsistent, but not particularly surprising after everything the sector has had thrown at it over the last 18 months," said Henry Dimbleby, author of the National Food Strategy.

> "Consumers no longer just care about which ingredients are on the label, they also want to understand the provenance and impact of those that have made the list. This is a trend that has become stronger in the past year; a 2020 survey from research agency Kantar found one third of adults say they are more concerned about sustainability now than they were before the pandemic"
>
> **KAMIL SAWICKI, VP GLOBAL HEAD OF COCOA POWDER AT OFI**

## Plant-based brand unveils recyclable packaging



**Family-owned Met Foods have been revolutionising plant-based products since 2011, creating free-from foods that not only taste good but are good for you too**. When the business wanted to make the packaging of their dairy-free yoghurt brands Nush and COYO Organic more environmentally friendly, they worked closely with National Flexible to launch recyclable alternatives.

"We are really pleased with the packaging," Met Foods said. "Not only does it look bright and eye-catching, but it is also recyclable. Sustainability is important to us and our customers, and we want to ensure our products are as kind to the planet as possible." **Contact National Flexible Ltd at carol@nationalflexible.net or visit nationalflexible.co.uk.**



# Shop worker abuse grows during Covid

**Food and drink retail workers are experiencing more abuse from customers during the pandemic**. A report by legal firm Foot Anstey said the number of grocery workers suffering abuse rose 36% due to recent stock shortages after mistreatment had already been on the rise during the pandemic. The survey found that 95% of respondents noticed more verbal harassment since the start of the pandemic, and a further one in five saw more physical harassment at work, while one in 20 saw more sexual harassment. The main causes for abuse were masks (57%), social distancing (45%) and limits on customer numbers in store (38%).

"Retail workers told us they felt there were not enough laws in place to protect them," said Foot Anstey partner Nathan Peacey. "It is essential that existing laws are enforced, or new ones brought in, to support retailers' own protocols, guidance and response measures and support those on the retail frontline [to] feel safer and supported."

In August, ground-breaking new legislation came into force in Scotland to protect shop workers. The rules created a new offence for situations where a retail worker is assaulted, threatened or abused while engaging in their work.

## ONE FINE FOOD SHOP'S EXPERIENCE



**While many fine food independents have not experienced problems implementing mask or social distancing rules with their regular customers, Mark Kacary, managing director of The Norfolk Deli told *Speciality Food* his shop has had experience with 'trolling' over the last seven years**. "We have come to realise that trolls, or people who are best described as keyboard warriors, are jealous or as is the often the case are people who have an over-blown sense of entitlement and zero empathy to realise or appreciate what their comments will have to owners and their staff," he says.

Asked whether shop workers in England and Wales would benefit from a new law like Scotland's targeting offenders, he said it would be "very welcome".

"There needs to be a way to remind the public that they are dealing with human beings. Too many people view businesses as faceless corporates, whereas in fact where independent retailers are concerned, they are abusing people who often sacrifice a lot to deliver the best possible service they can," Mark said.

## GOVERNMENT IS 'DRAGGING ITS FEET'



**NFRN national president Stuart Reddish called for more urgent action, after the Home Affairs Committee published a report in which it called for urgent improvements in reporting and responding to retail crime, along with a new criminal offence**. The government issued its response to the report on 9th September, saying that it would "consider an amendment in the Lords if appropriate".

"Incidents of verbal abuse and physical attacks have become a daily occurrence for millions of shop workers and increased dramatically during the Covid pandemic," he said. "How many more will suffer the same fate while the government continues to drag its feet and merely commits to 'considering' a change in the law?

"Other frontline workers, such as the emergency services and customs officers, are quite rightly given extra protection by the law in recognition of the service they provide to the public and the responsibility placed upon them. Shop workers are just as much in the firing line and deserve the same level of protection from the law and an appropriate response from the police," he said.



# Plant-based milk market reaches £394m

**The alternative milk market continues to grow at a rapid pace as more consumers swap cow's milk for vegan replacements**. A third of Brits now use plant-based milk, according to research by Mintel, up from a quarter in 2020. This has caused total spending on plant-based milk to reach £394m in 2020, growing 32% from the previous year.

Covid, as well as a mission to improve their own carbon footprints, has inspired more Brits to use alternative, non-dairy substitutes. Almost a quarter (23%) of adults say that plant-based milk is better for them than cow's milk, while half (50%) of adults agree people's milk choices make a difference to the environment, Mintel found. Indeed, one 2018 study found that dairy is around three times more greenhouse gas emission-intensive than plant-based milks. A quarter (26%) of adults said the Covid-19 outbreak has made vegan and plant-based food and drink more appealing to them, rising to 38% of under-35s.

The most popular variety of plant-based milk today is oat milk, which overtook almond milk as usage almost doubled between 2019 and 2020. British consumers spent a whopping £146m on oat milk last year, up from £74m in 2019. Meanwhile, shoppers spent £105m on almond milk in 2020, up from £96m in 2019.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### M&S TO START PAYING SMALL SUPPLIERS WITHIN A WEEK

Marks & Spencer has revealed it will begin paying all of its small food suppliers within seven days from 1st October as part of the retailer's wider plans to boost the growth of small suppliers. The business is aiming to foster its relationships with growing suppliers as they help "bring new concepts and products to the market". More than a third of M&S's supply base is made up of small suppliers. "At a difficult time for grocery supply chains, we believe this significant step will make a major difference to the small businesses and their employees across the whole UK that are helping us protect the M&S magic and keep our food supply moving," M&S commercial director George Wright said.

### ALTERNATIVE SEAFOOD MARKET RIPE FOR GROWTH

Plant-based seafood made up just 0.1% of all retail sales in 2020, according to a report by the Good Food Institute, but the sector has big opportunities for growth. If vegan seafood products grow to make up 1.4% of the segment's sales – the amount currently taken by plant-based meat in the meat sector – it would be worth a whopping $221 million.

### DEMAND FOR CLOTTED CREAM NEARLY DOUBLES

Despite the growing market for plant-based dairy products, the desire for traditional food and drink that provide comfort and nostalgia remains. Mintel found that usage of clotted cream almost doubled from 6% in 2020 to 11% in 2021 as Brits spent more time in their homes cooking, baking, and enjoying afternoon teas.

AN **ANALYSIS** OF MORE THAN **45,000** GLOBAL FOOD **SAFETY** AND **FRAUD** ALERTS FOUND THAT **90** MORE FOOD FRAUD **INCIDENTS** WERE RECORDED IN THE FIRST **SIX** MONTHS OF **2020** COMPARED TO THE SAME PERIOD IN **2019**, WHILE **22** COUNTRIES RECORDED AN **INCREASED** NUMBER OF INCIDENTS

**SOURCE: FOOD AUTHENTICITY NETWORK**



# PRODUCT NEWS

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

## Seggiano unveils industry first

**Italian fine food specialist Seggiano has launched an innovative new range into the UK market: semi-fresh herbs in a convenient and versatile new format.**

The new range offers 10 semi-fresh single estate-grown organic herbs: Basil; Coriander; Dill; Parsley; Mint; Oregano; Rosemary; Sage; Thyme; and Italian Mix, each of which is cured using organic extra virgin olive oil and salt to preserve freshness and pungency.

Once opened, each jar will last for 14 months in the refrigerator.

David Harrions, CEO of Seggiano, said, "The Herb Garden in your kitchen. A revolution in condiments. All the delicious fragrance of fresh herbs with the convenience of long shelf-life dried herbs."

**seggiano.com**







## New artisan tortilla brand hits sector

**Irish tortilla brand Blanco Nino has forged partnerships with speciality wholesalers in order to work more closely with independent fine food retailers.**

Now supplied to *Speciality Food* readers via Cotswold Fayre, Auguste Noel and Holleys, Blanco Nino has been working in the foodservice sector for years, notably working with Thomasina Miers' restaurant chain Wahaca.

The business prides itself on a slower approach to tortilla production – each tortilla takes three days to make using traditional ancient Aztec techniques and Mexican stones – and there are three flavours in the range: Lightly Salted; Ancient Grain; and Chilli & Lime.

Philip Martin, CEO and founder of Blanco Nino, said, "We're delighted to be launching in UK stores. Quite far from the norm, our traditionally made tortilla chips take three days to make from start to finish. A slow and ancient cooking process that creates a chip with an awesome taste, texture, and aroma, unlike any other on the market."

**blanco-nino.com**




## Christmas at Cambrook

**Speciality nut producer Cambrook has expanded its range especially for the festive season to include an 80g bag of Cinnamon & Clove Caramelised Nuts.**

Available from September until December while stocks last, this new variant offers mixed nuts in a fine glaze.

Deborah Bradfield, sales and marketing manager at Cambrook said, "Each year our customers wait patiently for the first production of our famous Christmas line! It smells like Christmas and tastes like Christmas – it wouldn't be Christmas without it!"

**cambrookfoods.co.uk**




## New Pistachio & Lemon Variant from Wholey Moly

**Wholey Moly, maker of 'cookies with benefits', has added a new flavour to its range.**

The new Pistachio & Lemon flavour cookie brings a wholesome and zesty new flavour to the brand's popular range of better-for-you baked goods, and offers a satisfyingly soft-centred texture.

This new launch is set to satisfy the consumer demand for healthier biscuit options which are suitable for eating on-the-go.

Meenesh Mistry, founder of Wholey Moly, said, "Having already championed hazelnuts, almonds and cashews in our recipes, we wanted to provide a fitting stage for the sublime pistachio to shine, coupled with lemon to provide a discreet yet delightfully citrus twang."

**wholeymoly.co.uk**




## Marlish launches tonics and mixers

**Northumberland-based drinks brand Marlish has expanded its range to include sustainably produced mixers and tonics including Ginger Ale and Dandelion & Burdock Tonic Water.**

Joe Evans, co-founder and director at Marlish said, "As a brand, we believe we must give something back, every time we take something, and that is why we put sustainability at the heart of everything we do."

**marlish.co.uk**

## Ahmad Tea partners with Kew Gardens

**In time for Christmas 2021, Ahmad Tea has partnered with Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew to create a luxury tea collection.**




The range consists of four classic blends: Majestic Breakfast; Splendid Ceylon; Garden Afternoon and Elegant Earl Grey, and will satisfy tea aficionados looking for a gift-ready, high quality brew.

Dominic Marriott, master tea taster at Ahmad Tea, said, "As a leading authority in the natural world, Kew is the perfect partner for our new Beyond the Leaf collection.

"To produce the finest tea takes time, patience, and dedication. From hand plucking the best leaves and buds from the world's most prestigious tea gardens to tasting the tea at every stage in its long and intricate journey, every blend in our new collection is nurtured to ensure the highest quality and the most exquisite taste.

"At Ahmad Tea, we are lucky enough to have some of the world's best Tea Tasters on our team who sample up to 500 cups each day to ensure the blends are perfectly balanced and the taste is consistent. Beyond the Leaf is testament to this; from the rich and malty Majestic Breakfast to the refreshing and lively Splendid Ceylon, Great British classics are elevated to a new level."

**ahmadtea.com/uk**






# Hawkshead Relish releases Scotch Bonnet Sauce

**Lake District-based Hawkshead Relish has announced the launch of a new chilli sauce to complement its range of existing table sauces.**

Scotch Bonnet Sauce is a flavourful combination of fresh chillies and tomatoes and is perfect for consumers looking for a chilli sauce with a kick. It can be used as a marinade for prawns, is a perfect partner for chicken wings, and can be used as a fiery alternative to classic tomato ketchup.

As with every item in the Hawkshead Relish range, the new sauce has been made in small batches without artificial colourings, flavourings or preservatives and is gluten-free, nut-free and suitable for vegetarians and vegans.

Mark Whitehead, co-owner of Hawkshead Relish, said, "I was asked some time ago to create a hot sauce to complement our existing selection of sauces and ketchups. So, with a little spare time available to me I decided to set about creating something that would add real vibrancy and lift to every home cooks kitchen armoury. I'm pleased to say that the resulting Scotch Bonnet Sauce will certainly give home cooks the opportunity to bring an extra dimension to their food and add more than a fiery little twist to their cooking with this very distinctive sauce."

**hawksheadrelish.com**

# New buttermilk from The Edinburgh Butter Co




**The Edinburgh Butter Co, a favourite with chefs across the UK, has announced the release of its new Buttermilk.**

Available in 500ml, two litre and five litre packs, it is created as part of the butter-making process using local cream and live cultures, and is made using no preservatives, additives or thickeners.

It is a versatile flavour booster to many recipes, including bakery products.

Hilary Sinclair, co-founder and production director at The Edinburgh Butter Co, said, "We've really enjoyed the process of developing our butters with chefs and have found an increasing number of them requesting our buttermilk. It's a natural product that comes directly from the churning process so doesn't have any additives or preservatives. I think chefs have respected the integrity of this and we've seen brilliant results in everything from pastry to marinades."

**theedinburghbutterco.co.uk**




# Festive launch from Fairfields Farm

**Christmas has arrived at Fairfields Farm with the release of Roast Turkey & Stuffing Crisps.**

The new crisps bring together traditional festive flavours including British turkey and sage and onion stuffing, and are available in 40g and 150g packs so consumers can enjoy on-the-go or share with friends and family.

Made using hand-selected potatoes grown on Fairfields Farm which are cooked just metres from where they are grown in the business's purpose built on-site crisp factory powered by 100% renewable energy, the crisps showcase Fairfields' famous crunch.

Laura Strathern, co-founder of Fairfields Farm, said, " We're excited to unveil this delicious flavour for Christmas 2021. Christmas dinner is the most important meal of the year so creating a crisp that conjures all those wonderful memories of delicious turkey and stuffing has been a challenge, but I think we've cracked it."

**fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk**

## *"How to make noise on-pack"*



**LAWRENCE BARNETT**
WONDERLAND DESIGN

I love nothing more than browsing the food and drink aisles to take in the sheer variety and inventiveness that populate our shelves.

Now – more than ever – our retailers, online and in store, play host to an Aladdin's cave of exciting products and their packaging. But being that disruptor brand or just standing out on shelf isn't easy, even if you have a highly innovative product. Challenger and start up brands must use everything at their disposal to get their packs seen, understood and picked up.

It's a misconception that only start-up or young brands can have that disruptive influence. Of course, they have the advantage of being new with a different story to tell. But well-established brands can be highly effective too by using their own advantages to good effect.

Successful disruption on shelf is an art that needs discipline. Starting with defining what your brand stands for (established challengers included!). Get this nailed down and it's easier to work out what you want your pack to do and say.

Pack graphics and messaging offer so much opportunity to present your difference, be distinctive and stand out. It is what will build consumer recognition. But keep your discipline here too and embrace simplicity.

Let's take branding. Clear confident branding is crucial, yet it's astonishing how many brands hide or overlook their biggest asset at the expense of other clutter. Be confident with your branding – it's your identity, something to be proud of, and as important off pack as it is on pack.

Then there's colour. Colour has many associations, so consider it carefully. But clever use of colour can genuinely create shelf disruption and become a strong visual equity.

A design component that often gets overlooked is language. Create a way of talking about your product that has its own style and reinforces your personality. That engaging style will enable the brand story to emerge and for the product's difference to be fully appreciated.

Beyond graphics, think 3D. Bespoke pack structures are expensive but off the shelf options are more varied than ever before. Largely thanks to smaller producers being flexible and creative, yet no less eco-friendly. And don't forget to take inspiration from other categories!

I've always been a firm believer that your pack is your brand's shorthand. But social media is now another important communication tool. Stand out on shelf is great but it must be capitalised upon and reinforced on social media platforms.

Today's breadth, depth and variety of choice in our ever changing and growing food and drink world is why so many smaller producers are now part of our food and drink must haves. Consumers love that choice. And it's precisely because of this that the biggest brands have had to up their game.

Are those big brands winning? I don't know. But if the challengers keep their discipline and use design effectively to make themselves seen, heard and loved, then the biggest brands will be looking over their shoulders for quite a while yet.



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# MUSHROOM MAGIC

## Versatile, flavour- and texture-packed mushrooms can boost immunity, replace meat and even eat up plastic, reports Sally-Jayne Wright

Mushrooms doubled their online value year on year to April 2021, adding £34m and 2.2m shoppers. While veg in general had a great year – up 11.5% in value – mushrooms were one of the best performing sectors and the second-largest category by value (Kantar figures supplied by The UK and Ireland Mushroom Producers).

**WHY ARE MUSHROOMS MUSHROOMING?**
They tick three major trends: plant-based eating, eating to boost immune health, and sustainability. Let's deal with each in turn.

**BY PLANT-BASED EATING, DO YOU MEAN MEAT-FREE READY MEALS LIKE BURGERS, LASAGNES AND SAUSAGES?**
Yes, mushroom powder helps to add deep, savoury oomph to the soy, pea or wheat gluten (seitan) content of meat protein substitutes.

If you think of mushrooms as fruits sprouting above ground, there are vast and rambling tangles of hyphae or fungal threads underground. Like the roots of a tree, they grope their way through the earth in search of nutrients and mass together to form mycelium. They are high in protein and already structured, which makes it easier to press them together into meat-like products. No wonder, in July this year, Meati, a US company, raised US$50m of investment for its meat substitutes made from fungus.

**SALES OF FRESH MUSHROOMS ARE BOOMING, SO SURELY CONSUMERS MUST BE SCRATCH COOKING TOO?**
They certainly are. Vegetarian Xanthe Nathan, 22, is typical. Yes, she buys Plant Pioneers Shroomdogs from the supermarket, but she also purchases fresh oyster mushrooms to batter and deep fry at home because "they taste almost like fried chicken". In 2020, Tesco reported that sales of Brown Oyster Cluster and King Oyster mushrooms had more than doubled thanks to their meat-like texture.

**HOW DO MUSHROOMS FIT INTO THE HEALTH AND IMMUNITY TREND?**
An 80g serving of mushrooms counts as one of your five-a-day. As well as vitamin B, zinc, potassium and selenium, mushrooms contain a soluble fibre called beta glucan. This compound activates parts of the immune system and can boost the body's ability to fight infection.

**I'VE SEEN PACKAGED MUSHROOMS APPARENTLY 'ENRICHED WITH IMMUNE-BOOSTING VITAMIN D. WHAT'S THAT ABOUT?**
Mushrooms grown in the dark contain only small amounts of the sunshine vitamin. By exposing them to UV lamps, growers have bumped up the content, thus increasing their appeal to dairy and fish-avoiders. In 2016 Tesco launched the first UK range of Vitamin-D enriched mushrooms. 2021 saw the introduction of Marks & Spencer's Chestnut Mushrooms Enriched with Vitamin D and B6. A third of a 300g packet gives you 100% of your nutrient reference value (NRV) of Vitamin D and a third of your B6.

**I'VE READ MUSHROOMS CAN BE GROWN IN VERTICAL FARMS GIVING THEM A SMALLER CARBON FOOTPRINT. TRUE?**
Yes, and they can be grown in waste coffee grounds and use less water than is required for beef production.

One day they may be the answer to plastic pollution. Scientists have discovered strains of fungi that can use enzymes and the brute force of their mycelia to break down polyurethane – the plastic found in packing foam.

**NEVER MIND PACKING FOAM, WE SELL FOOD. HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE TREND?**
When editors at *BBC Good Food* ran a pie poll in 2020, readers voted steak, ale and mushroom pie their favourite. Three out of four quarter-finalist recipes contained fungi. So don't be shy about putting mushroom pies, pasties, stroganoffs, goulash, pâtés and soups on your menus.

**ARE TRUFFLES MUSHROOMS?**
Truffles are underground tubers – prized because they can't be cultivated. Sales of truffle products – genuine article or not – continue to do well because they feel luxurious.

Could you steal a trick from fine food specialist, Tartufaia in London's Borough Market and premium-ise your mushroom pâté with a dash of white truffle oil?

> "While veg in general had a great year – up 11.5% in value – mushrooms were one of the best performing sectors and the second-largest category by value"

**ANY MORE FUNGAL TIPS?**
Grow-your-own-mushroom kits make great gifts, as do cookery and mushroom-growing courses, live or on Zoom. Appeal to foodies with a good range of wild fungi in season and pop the occasional marinated mushroom into your gourmet sandwiches to showcase your jarred range. We still remember a sumptuous salt beef sandwich from The Georgian restaurant in London's Balham because of the yummy 'shroom in the salad filling.

**WHOSE PRODUCTS DO YOU RECOMMEND?**
Serious cooks prize condiments such as mushroom ketchup because they ramp up flavour. Burren Balsamics has a new Umami Mushroom Powder which we used to add depth to a home-made coq au vin.

For sheer novelty value, how about Fungtn's new non-alcoholic beers made in London using medicinal mushrooms or myco adaptogens. Launched in September 2020, the vegan and gluten-free brand includes an IPA brewed with Lion's Mane mushrooms, a Citra Beer brewed with Reishi mushrooms and a lager brewed with Charga mushrooms.

**WILL MUSHROOMS CONTINUE TO MUSHROOM IN POPULARITY?**
Absolutely. They tick so many boxes. Did you know that the many mycelia made by fast growing oyster mushrooms can be made into building materials that, kilo for kilo, are stronger than concrete?

One day fungi may be holding your shop up. Imagine that.




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# SPOTLIGHT ON: AHMAD TEA

Inspiring tea lovers around the world with artistry, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to supporting people and the planet is why Ahmad Tea has been a global leader in speciality tea gifts for 35 years




With the Christmas gifting season upon us, demand for speciality tea is set to soar. But in the world of tea, not all gifts are created equal.

Inspiring tea lovers around the world with artistry, innovation, and a commitment to supporting people and the planet is why Ahmad Tea has been a global leader in speciality tea gifts for 35 years.

## Putting the 'good' into tea gifts

Ahmad Tea is more than just a fine tea brand, it's a business that strives to give back with every tea they sell.

Supporting communities is one way they do this - spreading kindness to people around the world who need it most, from supporting frontline hospital staff in the UK during the Covid 19 Pandemic, to improving clean water provision and sustainability in Niger.

Responsible Sourcing is also key. As a proud member of the Ethical Tea Partnership (a global movement to promote ethical business activity in the tea trade) Ahmad Tea is working to improve the incomes and wellbeing of tea farmers, establish better living conditions and nutrition for workers and farmers, and create opportunities for women and young people in tea communities.

## Tea artistry: the gift of a great cup

The perfect cup of tea isn't created without a lot of hard work; tea artistry takes time and dedication. Ahmad Tea has some of the world's best Tea Tasters on their team who sample up to 500 cups each day to ensure the blends are of the highest quality and the taste is consistent.







Tea Tasters consider the compatibility of different teas with one another, like an artist creating colour. They travel all over the world to the best tea estates and retain a taste memory so they can review many variations of the same tea type from different estates.

Senior Tea Taster, William Manning, describes the work that goes into creating the perfect cup: "I believe that tea blending is an art. It's constant trial and error. Sometimes you can select the two best tasting teas and when you put them together, they clash. But when you create the perfect blend there's no other way to describe it other than euphoria! To be an artist takes a huge amount of passion and determination to achieve something at the highest level."

## Beyond The Leaf

Launching Christmas 2021, is an exciting new collaboration between two iconic British brands, balancing Ahmad Tea's four generations of tea knowledge with the natural beauty and heritage of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

The stunning new luxury tea collection sees the prestigious English heritage brand come together with some of the world's most beautifully blended teas to create a gift collection that is refined, elegant, and quintessentially British.

Featuring four classic blends - Majestic Breakfast, Splendid, Ceylon, Garden Afternoon and Elegant Earl Grey - the collection is the perfect balance of quality and elegance, for a smooth, delicious brew at any time of the day.

### MILESTONE MOMENTS
35 YEARS OF SPECIALITY TEA GIFTS

**1986:** Ahmad Tea is born, based in a small office above the 'Kabir Tea Shop' on Southampton's London Road.

**1987:** Ahmad Tea's first loose tea blend goes on sale, targeted at the luxury gifting market, with products stocked in local retailers in the South of England and London.

**2003:** A milestone moment as Ahmad Tea takes on the majority share of the tea gift market in the UK and is available in 68 countries worldwide.

**2010:** Ahmad Tea's new HQ opens in Chandler's Ford, Hampshire, hosting a dedicated tasting room and a carefully curated tea museum.

**2021:** Innovation in product blends, coupled with a commitment to the highest quality standards, means Ahmad Tea gifts are now sold in more than 80 countries around the world.




> "I believe that tea blending is an art. It's constant trial and error. Sometimes you can select the two best tasting teas and when you put them together, they clash. But when you create the perfect blend there's no other way to describe it other than euphoria! To be an artist takes a huge amount of passion and determination to achieve something at the highest level"



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Sustainable Food Month

in partnership with Too Good To Go




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Download the *Sustainability: The Future Is In Our Hands* report for free from **specialityfoodmagazine.com/issuedownload**

# INTRODUCING SUSTAINABLE FOOD MONTH

## From 1st-31st October 2021, S*peciality Food* and Too Good To Go are providing the industry with everything it needs to get started in sustainability



Of the many things that the Covid-19 crisis taught us, one of the most powerful is the lesson that the health of our natural world is vital to our happiness and survival. We all better-appreciated walks in nature and marvelled at the sight of previously polluted rivers running clear. Simultaneously, of course, came the appreciation for doing things slower, properly, and with meaning; this was seen across the fine food industry, where local provenance and food and drink with a story were valued more highly than ever. This means that, even without the ecological need to make change in the way the industry is run, the time is right for individual businesses to make meaningful change towards a more sustainable future for us all.

There are plenty of ways to be proactive in the sustainability arena – from fighting food waste to reconsidering the way you source and supply your goods – and there's plenty of support and resources out there, so there's never been a better time to act.

> "90% of employees feel distressed when food is wasted"
>
> **SOURCE: WASTE HAS GOT TO GO REPORT, TOO GOOD TO GO 2020**

*Speciality Food* has partnered up with Too Good To Go to host a month-long session of exclusive reports, online content and webinar sessions to help the food industry in its sustainability mission. Read on to find out what's in store, and why you should get involved.

AMID THE **PANDEMIC**, GLOBALLY **51%** BELIEVE **ENVIRONMENTAL** ISSUES REMAIN **IMPORTANT**; AND **23%** SAY THEY'RE MORE **CRITICAL** THAN **EVER**

**SOURCE: KANTAR'S COVID-19 BAROMETER**



Download the *Sustainability: The Future Is In Our Hands* report for free from **specialityfoodmagazine.com/issuedownload**

*"The move to more sustainable systems should be seen as an opportunity, not a chore"*



**HOLLY SHACKLETON**
EDITOR OF SPECIALITY FOOD

'Sustainability' has been a buzzword for years now, but never before has the industry witnessed such noise around the movement. 2021 is the milestone at which change needs to begin – for the sake of people, planet, and the health of the businesses themselves. It's time for the industry to see the move to sustainable systems as an opportunity, not a chore.

That's why *Speciality Food* has partnered with food waste pioneers Too Good To Go to launch Sustainable Food Month: a 31-day exploration of the opportunities that sustainability brings; an honest look at the challenges and how they can be overcome; and a chance to hear from sustainability icons first-hand.

There's a wide range of steps that can be taken to improve your sustainability credentials, so there really is no excuse for not pushing for change. And you can do so knowing that there's a raft of successful businesses which have done just that; we'll be speaking to many of them throughout the content we'll be sharing with you throughout October.

But the sustainability fight doesn't end once Sustainable Food Month has come to a close. I hope that you use this time to learn about the path ahead, decide how you will forge ahead, and explore new opportunities for collaboration and change, and take what you've learned into the future of the industry.







**PASCHALIS LOUCAIDES**
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF TOO GOOD TO GO UK

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important for grocery businesses. Globally one third of all food produced is wasted and this is having an astronomical impact on our planet. Food waste is responsible for a staggering eight to ten percent of greenhouse gas emissions, and climate experts have said that reducing food waste is one of the most impactful actions we can all take to address global warming.

The reality is that no one likes throwing perfectly good food away. It's a waste of money, it's bad for the planet, it's bad for staff morale, and it feels very wrong. But for a long time, food waste has been an inevitability that all grocery stores have had to grapple with.

The good news is that the data and insights we get from technology let us tackle the issue with a level of nuance – and on a scale – that was unprecedented until now. Grocery retailers are in need of friction-free solutions to reduce their food waste. They need solutions that don't require hours of training for staff or lengthy processes to be put in place.

Apps like Too Good To Go provide an easy-to-implement platform for businesses with surplus food, providing a safety net for when they find themselves with unsold food at the end of the day. To put it simply, apps can make people think twice about food waste: a precious opportunity to shift all our behaviours

*"Reducing food waste is one of the most impactful actions to address global warming"*

## WEBINAR SCHEDULE

*Speciality Food* is hosting two vital sessions focusing on how and why the food industry should invest in sustainability

### The Sustainable Pound: How & Why To Boost Your Eco Credentials

**13th October, 3pm-3:45pm**

**PANELLISTS:**

- Dan Willis, co-owner, Chorlton Cheesemongers
- Megan Adams, founder, Re:Store

In this session, successful sustainability-minded businesses share their journey to being more eco-friendly and provide a step-by-step guide to help you do the same.

### Sustainability: The Future Is In Your Hands

**20th October, 3pm-3:45pm**

**PANELLISTS:**

- Jamie Crummie, co-founder of Too Good To Go
- Patrick Holden, founder, Sustainable Food Trust
- Ruth Edge, chief food chain advisor, NFU

This session hosts some of the sustainable food world's most respected pioneers, who will talk the audience through why the time to act has arrived.

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**SOURCE: THE ETHICAL FOOD CONSUMER, UK - MINTEL, 2021**





## *"Working together for good"*

**PAUL HARGREAVES**
COTSWOLD FAYRE

One thing I love about our industry given its large environmental footprint is there's so much potential to drive significant sustainable change. Behind every big challenge we face as food businesses lies a big opportunity. But too often today food businesses are trying to tackle these issues independently and from within siloes. As a wholesaler at the heart of the journey that food takes from producers to consumers, collaboration is crucial – so from day one we've invested time and energy in building trusted relationships.

Collaboration is helping us to reduce our impact within and beyond our communities. We recently defined our Climate Action strategy around three key pillars: carbon, food waste and plastics. We do our best to eliminate food waste in our operations and donate any surplus to City Harvest, who redistribute this to vulnerable people across London. We sell surplus food from our food hall and kitchen, Flourish, via Too Good To Go. We are collaborating with our retail clients to reduce packaging waste and in partnership with UnpackagedAT have rolled out zero-waste retail stations in several stores. We took a big decision this year to offset all the plastic packaging used by our suppliers in the products we sell, partnering with rePurpose Global to remove an equivalent amount of ocean-bound plastic in Hyderabad, India which is also providing local employment.

Meanwhile, our business and team has grown significantly over the past year. Our B Corp status is attracting a team that want to benefit people and planet through their work. Ultimately, we hope to leave the world in a better place than we found it.

> "Intention to reduce the use of single-use plastics is set to increase, with 54% saying that they will be even more focused on this issue post-pandemic"



## HOW TO GET STARTED

Clare Martin, founder of eco marketing agency Blue Cactus shares her 1-2-3 of becoming more sustainable

**1** The B Corp Impact Assessment is a great place to start, even if you're not planning to become a certified B Corp, because it breaks everything down into chunks so you can analyse what you're doing now and how you can make small changes

**2** Although some people believe certifications are just a load of fluff, or an expense they're not willing to pay out for, they really can be a differentiator between you and a competitor winning business

**3** Even doing something like signing up to a service like Ecologi, where you can buy trees to offset your carbon emissions, is making an improvement and can be done for less than £5 a month!



**72%** OF THE **UK** POPULATION **BELIEVE** BUSINESSES **SHOULD** HAVE A **LEGAL** RESPONSIBILITY TO THE **PLANET** AND **PEOPLE** ALONGSIDE MAXIMISING **PROFITS**

**SOURCE: RESEARCH COMMISSIONED BY B LAB UK**

PARTNER CONTENT

## SUSTAINABILITY IN COLD CHAIN SOLUTIONS

Curbside recyclable WrapPak® cold chain solutions provide thermal protection for up to 48 hours for e-commerce food delivery

Looking for a better cold chain solution for shipping of food products? Consider paper-based cold chain packing materials to reduce or eliminate plastic packaging that is hard to recycle, made from fossil fuels and takes hundreds of years to biodegrade. This is increasingly less acceptable to consumers. You may be surprised to learn how effective paper-based thermal protection products are whilst at the same time offering many cost and sustainability advantages.

Do you have a warehouse full of existing thermal protection solutions like EPS boxes? While EPS boxes and other plastic-based thermal protection solutions, or even wool- or cotton-based solutions or denim liners, are certainly an effective thermal protection approach, they also take up a great deal of space, both in your warehouse and in the product shipping process. Plus, their end-of-life disposal comes with many sustainability issues. In this article, we explain why paper-based thermal protection is a better choice for products requiring thermal protection for up to 48 hours. We also discuss how easy it is to convert your operation to this more sustainable and cost-effective choice with an on-demand system that produces paper pads on request.

The market for cold chain packaging is expected to grow by 19.4% from 2020 to 2027. To meet this growing demand, Ranpak is providing customers with a range of paper-based thermal protection solutions that are cost-efficient and sustainable. The Ranpak WrapPak® Protector solution is ideal for food companies shipping products requiring sustained frozen, chilled, and ambient temperature ranges. Ranpak paper-based packing solutions are curbside recyclable and a more sustainable and cost-effective solution than packing using traditional EPS boxes and other plastic-based materials.

"The e-commerce market for food and beverages in Europe has seen a dramatic increase as consumers experienced the convenience of online food ordering during the pandemic," said Anne de Rouw, Business Development Manager Cold Chain Europe for Ranpak. "This includes meal kits, grocery deliveries, and specialty foods. In fact, 21% of the total food & beverages market is expected to be ordered through e-commerce by 2025. At the same time, consumers are looking for sustainable packing solutions and have a less-than-positive unboxing experience when they open a box full of plastic packing materials. That's why Ranpak has placed significant focus on the WrapPak® Protector, our paper-based cold chain packing solution, which uses waved paper pads as thermal liners."

In addition to the functionality and sustainability advantages of Ranpak cold chain solutions, food companies benefit from less space required in the warehouse. Ranpak provides both the WrapPak® Protector liner paper and the converter equipment required to generate the waved paper pads, enabling end-users to produce the packing material on demand.

### How it works

Ranpak's thermal packaging specialists work in partnership with customers to determine ideal configurations for packing specific products, whether they are ambient, chilled or frozen.. This includes determining optimal sizes of corrugated boxes to best fit WrapPak® Protector waved paper pads; additionally, Ranpak can recommend sustainable cool packs such as Recycold phase change material (PCM) if required. Ranpak's Packaging Engineering specialists conduct thermal tests in a controlled climate chamber, enabling them to develop customized solutions for customers. WrapPak® paper is uncoated Kraft paper, 100% recyclable, renewable and biodegradable, and moisture resistant. As with all Ranpak paper-based packing solutions, WrapPak® Protector liner is manufactured from FSC®-certified materials.

WrapPak® Protector solutions are ideal for products that require a temperature-controlled environment, products that require storage in chilled conditions, and frozen products.

ranpak.com/uk/keep-it-cool






**COMMENTATORS**



**SANDRA MARDIN**
TRO



**JAMES LYON-SHAW**
BRUCAN PUBS GROUP



**PETER COWIE**
JAPAN CENTRE

# HOW TO TAP INTO THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY THIS CHRISTMAS

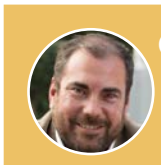
## Consumers are hungry for a fairytale Christmas, but being strategic with the experiences you curate could really pay dividends, discovers Anna Blewett

Forget a white Christmas, the fine food retail sector is dreaming of a normal Christmas free from the sort of restrictions that decimated footfall in December last year. While the carefree norms of old – cheek-by-jowl queues and unrestricted sampling – may be on hold again, there are ways to amplify the experience your store delivers, and elevate it to new heights. First step: invest in the experience economy.

Coined in 1998 to describe the era that would follow the agrarian, industrial and – most recently – service economies, the phrase relates to the way businesses can curate memorable experiences for their customers, with these memories forming part of the product. How does all this relate to your Christmas profits? Fine food retailers – with your heritage-drenched products, skills for storytelling and the sounds, smells and flavours that inhabit the shop floor – are perfectly placed to benefit from consumers' hunger for authentic experience. So says Sandra Mardin, strategy director for TRO, the 'shared experience agency' that helps clients meet their business goals by harnessing the power of memorable moments both live and online. "Historically, before the world of mass consumerism, market places were not only places of trade but also centres of social life," points out Sandra. "The exchange of goods and trade is inherently a social activity, but over time the focus has been moved to convenience and the boom in mobile technology means people now go online for their transaction. Recent history has pushed physical retail into this social shared experience space. That means the bricks and mortar stores have to work harder to get people to come in, and can't just be a place of transaction."

Sandra compares the potential of the in-store retail experience to restaurants, where the presence of other diners elevates the eating experience, or the way films feel more engaging in a full cinema. "Studies have shown that chocolate tastes nicer if you are sharing the experience," she points out. "It makes sense: looking at the reactions of others becomes part of that experience too. The pandemic caused a mass deprivation [of social encounters]; if you take something away you realise how much you love it." So what are we talking about – getting the aroma of mulled wine wafting around your Christmas SKUs? Cranking up copyright-free carols? Having an oven, espresso machine or other on-site asset filling the space with enticing aromas will certainly engage customers' senses, just as sampling can, but organising festive activities with a little more ambition and flair can really pay off. Like Keelham Farm Shop outside Skipton, which is organising a Christmas parade, afternoon tea with Santa and other exciting events, or The Bottle deli and wine bar in Newquay, where owners Toyah Marshall and Rob Palmer have scheduled ticketed wine tasting and





## GOSWELL AND BIRD'S

A new village store in Finchampstead, Berkshire, immerses customers in the golden age of retail

"The idea for the shop came from lockdown, when as a restaurateur I was able to get hold of some amazing produce and turned one of our dining rooms into a shop for locals who were struggling to get hold of groceries." As co-founder of the Brucan Pubs group operating a clutch of top-end gastropubs, owner James Lyon-Shaw knows a bit about curating a welcoming environment. This Christmas, Goswell & Bird's – the Brucan group's first venture into retail – will transform into a private dining area in the evenings, having hosted sales of turkeys, festive bakes and gift items on traditional shelves harking back to the village's Victorian stores. "As someone who's been in hospitality longer than I care to remember, I get frustrated when I get



CREDIT: SEAN CLOUDSDALE



CREDIT: SEAN CLOUDSDALE

to a shop where you're waiting for ages to get served or are cattle-herded through the space," says James. "Sometimes it feels like the magic of service in shops has been lost. So one of our aims is to make that experience of shopping really nice again, creating a space where we can have those conversations with customers and pass on the passion for the amazing produce we can get."

wreath-making events for this December.

### The ripple effect...

Of course, what economic theorists in the 90s couldn't have foreseen was the way social media would amplify experiences, allowing businesses from the largest multinational brand to the smallest indie retailer to benefit from an explosion in social sharing. "Figures from the Institute of Promotional Marketing say 90% communicate an experience to as many as eight different people," points out Sandra. "But 65% communicate to a minimum of 300 people via social media. Usually when people think about investing in an event they tend to focus on the people they're reaching live. It's easy to forget about the ripple effect that can have, but shared online an event is a great opportunity to reach people that don't live locally." For Sandra, the real art to hooking in an exponential online audience (a real asset if you sell online, or trade in something unique) is to give their watching experience some real thought. "It's not merely about having something in-store, taking a photo and sharing it online. You have to give something to people remotely as well. Think about their experience of engaging with that content. How interesting would a straightforward video be for them? Maybe they could have access to something exclusive. When you're planning your event or activity you need to think what the experience will be both for people in-store and also engaging remotely." A good example is Ludlow Farm Shop, which has used its social media channels to invite customers to contribute to the recipe for its '21 Christmas pudding. Customers unable to visit the store can contribute and interact, having their input invited and rewarded. Retailers who deliver tips, tasting notes and recommendations direct to camera are also wrapping their store experience around a new demographic.

Of course, it's important to be strategic, identifying your marketing goals and evaluating how activities have helped achieve them, but what does that look like? Is it about capturing data around footfall, online engagement and sales? "You could measure those things," agrees Sandra, "but also things like how many people have heard about you, how well known you're becoming. A really cheap way of doing that is to follow search trends: how many people are Googling the brand over time. Another thing you might want to measure is how much people are organically talking about you. There's value in coverage you'd normally need to pay for but you're getting it free; that's saving you money and improving your reach."

Whilst the digital realm can help you amplify activities, Sandra is quick to point out that digital will complement, not replace, live happenings. She cites a live immersive that digital behemoths TikTok recently held in Westfield. "If you only rely on digital ads and digital targeting, you end up speaking to people who already know you or already had an interest. You end up in an echo chamber: you sell to followers but after a while the pool will get exhausted as you're retargeting the same people and you'll get diminishing results. What a physical experience can do is just really help with word of mouth. It can help spread the word beyond a very narrow target audience." A Christmas experience your customers will want to shout about? That's well worth a little planning.

### MONETISING THE EXPERIENCE

Bringing chargeable new services into your shop for the festive period will add to the buzz in-store and generate revenue. Hiring in gift-wrappers, calligraphers or even personal shoppers can help time-pressed customers get a bespoke service.

Demonstrations can be a great way to sell big ticket items while giving customers a live experience. Food processors, blenders and cast-iron cookware are all flagged as the best kitchen gifts for '21 by culinary blog Kitchn.

Up the festive ante in store with aromatic mulled wine (or mulled juice, if you are unlicensed) and warm mince pies.

> "Planning your activity, you need to think what the experience will be both for people in store and also those engaging remotely"






## JAPAN CENTRE

With food halls in Westfield Stratford and Westfield London, as well as a flagship store in Leicester Square, Japan Centre works hard to build an in-store experience

"Over the festive period we'll be hosting Kagami Biraki – the breaking of the sake barrel to bring good luck and fortune to the business and our customers – and giving out sake to our customers to toast in the New Year," says Peter Cowie, Japan Centre's head of marketing. "Part of these celebrations will also include mochi pounding, with help from the food hall's chefs. Even Tak Tokumine, Japan Centre CEO, has been known to get involved! The mochi skin is then wrapped around a traditional adzuki bean filling and given to our customers to celebrate the New Year."






"Each Christmas we create a special range of bakery favourites with a festive and Japanese twist to give customers an alternative to the traditional range often seen at other food halls, from matcha and yuzu stollen to our festive matcha Bundt cake: creating new reasons to visit us in-store for a something a little different." At Westfield London site Ichiba, Europe's largest Japanese food hall, care is taken to curate a holistic experience of Japanese culture. "Japanese-style paper structures, flags and traditional fabrics break up the space, while lights inspired by chopsticks, lanterns and traditional wooden elements help customers navigate the zones of the store," says Peter. "We are proud of our Japanese roots, so during key Japanese holidays we go big on displays, from carp flags known as koinobori for Children's Day to cherry blossom to celebrate Hanami, the cherry blossom festival."

# PUTTING ON A SHOW

## Artful display can make all the difference when it comes to seasonal profits, finds Ellen Manning



**COMMENTATORS**



**IAIN KIMMINS**
BRITISH DISPLAY SOCIETY



**ROB COUTTS**
WEETONS FOOD HALL



**TORI STANLEY**
TORI & BEN'S FARM



**CLARE JACKSON**
SLATE CHEESE



**EVE REID**
METAMORPHOSIS



**RICH FORD**
SHERLOCK STUDIO

We eat with our eyes, as the old saying goes. But the effect of what we see on what we do doesn't end there. From wanting something to buying it, eating it and enjoying it, everything we consume comes back to that first time we see it. Especially when it comes to food. Which is why display remains key when it comes to selling us that food. For fine food retailers, display is always important, but even more so at Christmas. For visual merchandising professional Iain Kimmins, director and chair of the British Display Society and a former visual merchandising manager at both Harrods and Selfridges dealing with the food hall and wine department, the phrase, "You don't get a second chance to make a first impression," is key. Iain now runs his own visual merchandising (VM) consultancy, Creative Download, and for him, display is more than being creative and making things look nice. "It is a commercial driver for the business," he says. "Re-merchandising, store layout, fixtures, product categories/product adjacencies all come under the visual merchandising remit. The store is where the action is. The need to create exciting stores, driving sales through marketing, merchandising, store layout, retail theatre, graphics and VM sites."

Christmas is the "biggest shopping event of the year", Iain says, accounting for up to 30% of many retailers' annual revenue. "Given the increase of online shopping, retailers must step-up and draw customers back into their stores with great visual merchandising and retail theatre. Even food can look sexy!" He cites food halls at Fortnum's and Selfridges as great examples of retail theatre, adding, "Presenting your merchandise is more than just putting the item on a shelf. It's creating a stunning environment, ensuring that your merchandise looks premium and giving the customer that all-important memorable shopping experience."

Whether you're a nationally renowned food hall or a local deli or farm shop, the importance of display is the same, particularly at Christmas time. "It's how you set yourself apart from your competitors, draw customers in and ultimately increase sales", says Rob Coutts, managing director at Weetons Food Hall in Harrogate. Tori Stanley, owner of award-winning Derbyshire-based Tori & Ben's Farm, agrees. "Display is the window – it's everything. Louis Vuitton makes beautiful bags, we make beautiful meat. It has to look amazing because people buy with their eyes. Whether it's the counter in the farm shop or sending things from the online shop, it all has to look beautiful. Meat is meat – it's not a Louis Vuitton handbag, but it can be beautiful if it's displayed in the right way. So we spend a lot of time on it. At Christmas we do special displays, but I think we're always 110% on our display, whether it's Christmas or not."

### A window into your store

When it comes to display, windows are the most obvious option for retailers big or small. "Your windows and storefront are the face of your store," says Iain. "They are the cheapest form of advertising and one of the most important elements of your store." Yet the ability to use windows as the centrepiece of your display depends on the nature of your store. For Clare Jackson, owner of Slate Cheese, which has shops in Southwold and Aldeburgh in Suffolk, window displays can be challenging. "Our shops are quite small so for us display is a tricky area because it's not like we have got huge windows to do a big showcase, and we have to be quite careful about putting products in the window because we get direct sunlight."

Windows may bring limitations, but that doesn't mean interesting displays are a no-go. For Eve Reid, visual merchandising specialist at consultancy Metamorphosis, changes in the retail landscape mean a window into your shop is far more than the glass on the front of the building. "Your window isn't just a traditional window anymore. It's basically any window where your customer looks into you. Be it Instagram, Facebook, your windows – it's every sort of visual touchpoint." That idea means that display goes far beyond piling products up in a window – but could include the pictures you post online, or even stunts like turning your establishment itself into a display by wrapping it up in a giant bow. Display doesn't start and end with a window, adds Iain. "Creating great selling space is not solely for windows. While a great window display will entice and draw customers into the store, there is a need to ensure that the interior of the store is just as exciting."

Another key area of display for many fine food retailers is what their customers lay their eyes on when they walk into their shop. For Clare, display is key all year round, and Slate attracts customers with an unusual vertical display of cheese, affectionately known as their 'wall of cheese' and inspired by her family holidays to Chamonix, France. The shop focuses on seasonal displays led by props – from buckets and spades in summer to "sumptuous, decadent" displays at Christmas. And while the last 18 months have made food and drink a harder sell as people's ability and desire to touch, smell and taste products were restricted, she is optimistic that things are improving and this Christmas will see a return to the

> "It's not just about a couple of boxes of Panettone, it's about really exciting people, getting them thinking about Christmas and getting them in the mood"







sensory experience that shopping for food and drink can be.

For many fine food retailers, display isn't about choosing one aspect but several combined to maximise the opportunity to encourage customers to buy. "We generally rely on our two large window displays, a feature table upon entry and, of course, how the product is displayed on the shelves/stands," says Rob. It's the same for Tori, with their butcher's counter dominating the shop, backed up by displays on shelves and table tops as well as a strong social media presence. "When you walk into the shop, the first thing you see is our meat counter, and we always have beef there because beef's our thing. We then put sausages and bacon right at the other end of the counter because everybody buys bacon and sausages so that pulls people down to the other end, then they stumble across all sorts of other things on their way. We use Instagram and social media to tell the story behind the farm-to-fork journey.

"Table tops are great because people walk past them and just grab something – it might be a packet of biscuits or a bottle of gin. They just pick it up because it's easy." It's also about balancing eye-catching displays with making sure people know where they can find their favourites and staples, says Tori. "You have your promotional table top which is seasonal and 'look at me' but if people want to go and get their horseradish they know where it is and there's no fuss."

Christmas offers other opportunities to take advantage of display, says Iain, especially when it comes to 'link selling' – encouraging people to buy products that will go well with other things, such as displaying brandy butter next to Christmas pudding. It's something Claire takes advantage of when putting displays together at Slate. "We use seasonal rotation in our display so in summer time you would put fresh types of cheese whereas towards Christmas people want stronger punchier cheeses. But it's also about cheese and perfect companions, so where we can suggest pairings like chutney or pickle or wine to create those links between cheese and their companions – that's important for us and display helps do that." Showcases are also useful, adds Iain, citing Harrod's previous use of a showcase promoting Christmas Hampers as a great display that encourages customers to take a closer look.

When it comes to display, language also plays a part, says Rich Ford, strategy director at Sherlock Studio. "It's about how you can inspire people, which means using an engaging, exciting tone of voice. It's not just about a couple of boxes of Panettone, it's about really exciting people, getting them thinking about Christmas and getting them in the mood. I think for a long time it was overlooked but Covid has made tone of voice really, really important and it's becoming a differentiator as well. It's a part of your branding, it's a brand asset, your tone of voice, how you feel and come across on social media."

## Display dos and don'ts

So when it comes to display for fine food retailers, what are the dos and don'ts, according to the people in the know? Most agree on a few key elements that display should incorporate, from tempting people into a shop with visually interesting and exciting displays, to making sure you move people around the space to explore everything you're offering. Including prices is something everyone agrees is important, with customers nervous about buying something that might break the bank.

"Visual merchandising is all about creating something out of nothing," says Iain. "An experienced visual merchandiser can help drive sales by creating anything from a bay of own-branded products to creating a simple table of products with a few display props to gain height and interest." Iain's pointers include thinking about available space and fixtures, as well as keeping tables well stocked, encouraging customers to walk around them by using different products. For him, remembering that 'less is more' is an important lesson. "It is not a requirement to fill every inch of space. Leaving empty floor space gives the customer breathing space on their eye." Eve agrees, advising: "Don't try to show everything. If it looks rubbish, take it out." For her, consistency is key when it comes to communicating with customers through display. "You look at people really trying hard but they're forgetting to say, 'what actually am I trying to achieve?' People would be much better thinking about one goal and one objective, then thinking how best to communicate that as opposed to just putting a load of stuff together, because it becomes a crazy mess of 'stuff'. Just start with your message, then work out how that message would be communicated across all your mediums. If you feel you can put a window together, and it's pretty enough to be able to post a picture online, then great. It could be that you're just choosing to pull out one or two products. But it's thinking how best to link it all together." Eve's suggestion is to look for inspiration elsewhere, even if that's from different sectors, on how to tackle display a bit differently and stand out from the crowd. For Rich, when it comes to language, it's about not trying to be something that you're not, or copying another brand's tone of voice. Like Eve, he's an advocate of consistency across your brand and across the year, making sure you're talking to your customers in a voice they recognise.

For Tori, having a display that's fresh and appealing is vital, as well as ensuring that your best products are dominant as soon as someone walks in and as they move around the shop. "People like buying easily," she says, "and if it's well priced and well labelled that helps."

### DISPLAY 101

**DO**

- Make sure your display is eye-catching, colourful and visual
- Price everything - people like prices
- Change your displays regularly

**DON'T**

- Put items you want to sell too low or too high so people can't see them
- Leave off prices
- Overcrowd your displays
- Be inconsistent across your different displays

> "While the last 18 months have made food and drink a harder sell as people's ability and desire to touch, smell and taste products were restricted, people are optimistic that things are improving and this Christmas will see a return to the sensory experience that shopping for food and drink can be"






Ramp up your Christmas gifting offering with these flavourful options

**1 BALLANCOURT PÂTÉ COLLECTION**

"Ballancourt jute gift bags make a perfect gift for any lover of pâtés, which have been specially paired with Peter's Yard award winning sourdough crispbreads," says James Evans of Ballancourt. "Available in three fantastic varieties: Game, Farmhouse and Fish. Gift bags can be supplied with either Ballancourt label or customer own-label."
**ballancourt.co.uk**

**2 SNOWDONIA CHEESE BLACK BOMBER & RHUBARB & GIN CHUTNEY DUO**

Rich, creamy Black Bomber extra-mature Cheddar together with Rhubarb & Gin Chutney in a delicious gift pack. NEW for Christmas 2021, the gift pack has been cleverly designed without plastic, with a premium, modern design that will delight any cheese lover.
**snowdoniacheese.co.uk**

**3 FURNISS CHRISTMAS ALL BUTTER SHORTBREAD FINGERS**

Cornwall's oldest and most cherished biscuit brand since 1886. Staying true to their heritage, Furniss uses lashings of delightfully thick and creamy butter in their All Butter Shortbread Fingers to provide a seriously delicious biscuit. Presented in beautiful packaging, this stunning shortbread makes for the ideal Christmas gift or seasonal treat.
**furniss-foods.co.uk**




**4 HAWKSHEAD RELISH**
**CHRISTMAS SAVOURY SELECTION**
Handmade in the heart of the Lake District using traditional open pans, these three condiments encapsulate all things festive. Seasonal spices, rich apricots, ginger and orange are just a few of the ingredients that will bring your Christmas lunch to life! All gluten-free, nut-free and suitable for vegans, and also available in various gift selections.
**hawksheadrelish.com**

**5 FLOWER & WHITE**
**GLITTER BALLS**
Flower & White has an exciting array of Christmas treats, featuring its award-winning Fairtrade chocolate bars and bites, with a melting meringue middle. All products deliver an unparalleled superb taste sensation without any of the unnatural ingredients or artificial sweeteners frequently present in lower calorie products, and contain no palm oil, are vegetarian and gluten-free.
**flowerandwhite.co.uk**

**6 THE LONDON HONEY COMPANY**
**BRITISH HONEY TRIO GIFT SET**
100% Pure British Natural Honey. No additives, no preservatives, dairy-free and gluten-free. This includes Dorset Summer, Scottish Ling Heather and Kent Spring Creamed Honey, which have been minimally filtered, unblended and unpasteurized to retain the natural organic goodness of honey.
**thelondonhoneycompany.co.uk**

**7 WALKERS NONSUCH**
**ASSORTED TOFFEES & CHOCOLATE ECLAIRS**
Great for giving and perfect for sharing are Walker's Nonsuch Assorted Toffees and Chocolate Eclairs. Containing six delicious varieties and made with whole milk and years of experience, these toffees are second to none.
**walkers-nonsuch.co.uk**

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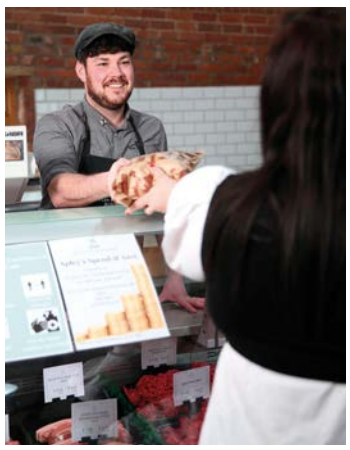
# APLEY FARM SHOP

With a myriad of services beyond food and retail, the Apley Estate team has created a true destination, explains Sophie Ritchings, marketing and events manager

Apley Estate is still in the ownership of descendants of the family who purchased it in 1868 and have three generations of the Hamilton family, a board of trustees and a dedicated team of specialist employees who are committed to its continued existence. In 2011, Lord Gavin Hamilton created and opened Apley Farm Shop.

**WHO'S IN THE APLEY FARM SHOP TEAM?**

Under the management of Apley Estate director Graeme Manton and Apley farm shop general manager Lydia Arrowsmith, Apley Farm Shop continues to grow, expand, and work with our local suppliers to produce fresh and delicious products for our customers, including award-winning Apley Estate British white beef, free-range pork, Shropshire venison, free range chicken, lamb, turkey, partridge and pheasant directly from Apley Estate, local and tenant farms. We offer carefully created and selected locally sourced fruit and vegetables, to our finest range of prime cut meats, to our own Apley



lemon drizzle cake and many sweet delights. Our delicatessen is always stocked full of handmade products, from our award-winning pork pies, pasties, pâtés, quiches, Scotch eggs, and cooked meats and charcuterie items. We truly have something for everyone to enjoy.

When visiting Apley Farm Shop, it is more of an experience than just coming to buy your groceries. Our seasonal events, wide selection of handmade Apley products and concessions on-site set us apart from other farm shops. We encourage taking a personal touch when our customers visit; we like to get to know them, if they've been before, what they like the most or what they would like more of. We think customer feedback is essential and we always take it on board.

With help from our new shop supervisor Tracy we are excited for bigger and better things as we approach 2022, with a new layout of the farm shop, more local suppliers and a more permanent outside shopping area for a fresh fruit and vegetables. We have recently taken another step towards being net zero carbon with to solar array, making us 100 percent self-sufficient in power from renewable energy.

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

It's not just groceries available at Apley Farm Shop, we offer beautifully presented, bespoke, tailored and delicious gift hampers to delight your colleagues, clients, friends, and family! Whatever the occasion or the reason behind your gift, we hope that nothing will say it better than an Apley hamper along with your personalised message.

Our Apley Hampers are designed, selected, and created to convey that all-important message to your chosen recipient. We offer a selection of predesigned hampers that can be purchased and delivered, or collected, and we offer a fully managed service for buying tailor-selected hampers.

However, Apley Farm Shop is so much more than a farm shop, encompassing a Kitchen Café, Playbarn, Skylark Nature Trail, Animal Park, Pottery Painting and Craft Studio, Plant Centre & Garden Nursery, Florist and Giftware shops. Apley has a Dog Park a Children's Party Venue and Conference Function Rooms. Apley Farm Shop offers a wide range of handmade, unique products and entertainment for the whole family to enjoy.

**WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF AT APLEY FARM SHOP?**

The way the staff worked during the pandemic was amazing. New delivery and collection services were created, and staff got involved with the jobs that needed to be done, even if it was not their normal department. That has continued even after the lockdowns; when you come to Apley Farm Shop, you can sense the feeling of teamwork amongst the staff. Not only that, but in the year that we celebrate our 10th anniversary, Apley Farm Shop has recently been listed among the Top 30 Farm Shops nationwide by national newspaper *The Times*.

> "In the year that we celebrate our 10th anniversary, Apley Farm Shop has recently been listed among the Top 30 Farm Shops nationwide by national newspaper *The Times*"



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# 8 STEPS TO MAKE 2021 YOUR BEST CHRISTMAS YET

## Industry experts offer their valuable advice for preparing for the all-important festive season

The Christmas period always involves a degree of crystal ball gazing. Will shoppers be inclined to up their spending? Which products will be on their lists? Will they opt for tradition or try something different?

Yet despite the usual question marks, experts believe Christmas 2021 could be one for the books following disappointment for many last year. "This could be a really bumper Christmas," says Edward Berry, consultant at The Flying Fork. "I think there's a good reason to be optimistic, and you only have to look at what's been going on around the country with UK holiday travel and festivals," he says. "There is a great desire to see everybody and to be sociable, and Christmas retail feeds into that moment to be together and to celebrate."

This doesn't mean retailers can rest on their laurels and go back to the Christmas 2019 playbook. "Christmas this year will not be back to normal," predicts Sarah Elliott, shop manager at Minskip Farm Shop. "However, it will definitely be bigger and better than last year. I think it will be an extra-special Christmas to make up for what everyone has missed out on – not just last Christmas, but the last year as a whole," she continued. To help retailers live up to customers' weighty expectations this year, *Speciality Food* has outlined a checklist of eight steps they can follow to make Christmas 2021 one to remember.

### 1 PREPARE THE SHOP EARLY

Fine food independents shouldn't underestimate consumers' desire to get together and celebrate this Christmas, warns Catherine Erdly, founder of The Resilient Retail Club – and that means pushing the Christmas sell early. "The key is going to be preparing in plenty of time for people who want to get ready early and making sure that you're talking about your offers for Christmas from October onwards so that people can start planning even if they are not purchasing right away," she says.

Ordering stock in plenty of time is critical to success over the holidays, Sarah adds. "The majority of our Christmas stock was ordered in late spring, beginning of summer, which felt like a bizarre activity in the glorious sunshine we were having," she says. And to those who are hesitant about quantities, Edward suggests that retailers shouldn't be afraid of going big this festive season. "The major message for retailers is to be a little bullish, and be prepared for some busy days and nights," he says. "My advice would be to be ambitious."

### COMMENTATORS



**EDWARD BERRY**
THE FLYING FORK



**CATHERINE ERDLY**
THE RESILIENT RETAIL CLUB



**SARAH ELLIOTT**
MINSKIP FARM SHOP



**MARK SMITH**
DOUBLE UP SOCIAL



**FULOP GABOR**
JACK & BEYOND



**HARRY DANCE**
KAYO DIGITAL




### 2 DON'T SKIMP ON DISPLAYS – OR SAFETY

The next task to tick off your list is preparing your in-store Christmas experience. "You want it to be eye-catching, so you want to try and attract people from the shop window onwards, making sure that it looks inviting and they want to come in," Catherine says. There are numerous exciting avenues to explore with displays – find more inspiration on page 22.

As well as creating a festive and welcoming space, safety will continue to be a priority for many shoppers. "Cleanliness is still going to be top of people's minds, and safety as well, so making sure you are keeping those elements really front and centre will make sure the customer feels comfortable coming into your physical space," Catherine says. This is an area where fine food independents have shone during the pandemic. "In my experience, independents have not dropped their guard on safety at all," Edward says. Encouraging masks as well as sanitising surfaces, ventilating spaces and social distancing, have all become a part of the 'new normal'.

### 3 TAKE CARE OF YOUR STAFF

Taking on new staff members and training them up is a crucial part of Christmas preparations – and another area where early planning will pay off. "Work out in plenty of time what your requirements will be and keep an eye out for great candidates," Catherine says. "Don't leave it to the last minute when all of the best people will have been snapped up." If your shop is recruiting, Catherine recommends creating a clear job description with a list of roles and responsibilities. It can also help to give some details of the working environment, for example mentioning that your business is independent or family run, as these may be important qualities to applicants.

Training new staff members is also important in the run-up to Christmas. "We will need every spare hand to help prepare for the festive season and handle the busy period," Sarah says. "We get the best out of staff with an open communication. If we are open and honest with them then it will make them feel more comfortable and return the open communication back. We ensure everyone is happy by working side-by-side with them all year. We are

> "Make sure that you're talking about your offers for Christmas from October onwards"

very blessed with the team we have here, with how well we all get along inside and outside of work." Preparing standardised training will help ensure the onboarding process smooth and that new staff members are up to speed as quickly as possible, Catherine says.

### 4 PREPARE YOUR E-COMMERCE SITE

Many bricks and mortar retailers – including Minskip Farm Shop – experienced their first foray into online Christmas sales last year. This year, Minskip is diving back in, offering home deliveries as well as 'Cluck and Collect'. Online food shopping has remained popular post-lockdown, and if Covid-19 cases rise over the winter, retailers can expect e-commerce sales to pick up again.

Run an audit of your website to check that everything is working correctly. Catherine explains, "It's a question of checking that your online website reflects your store, making it as seamless as possible." As with physical retail, the earlier you can prepare your e-commerce shop the better. For Fulop Gabor, managing director of Jack & Beyond, an online and bricks and mortar cake shop, preparations are well underway. "Our products are already uploaded and so are the Christmas product categories on our website, but they are hidden for now. It is important to upload a couple of months before so Google can start to recognise and index your pages before the actual sale starts," he explains. "Don't leave it for the last minute because it will be extremely hard to appear on search engine sites."

### 5 PLAN FOR DELIVERIES

While e-commerce offers exciting possibilities, there is no point promising the world if you can't deliver. Harry Dance of Kayo Digital recommends building in a lead time that is advertised on your website, then using a third-party fulfilment tool to handle picking and shipping. "It will have the added benefit of linking with couriers to generate labels and arrange shipments," he says.

Jack & Beyond's Fulop has chosen a final shipping day of 21st December to give his business – and delivery companies – plenty of time to get products to their destinations. "It is too risky to push it to the 22nd as usually there are some delays with all the shipping companies, especially Royal Mail. Our busiest period is always the last week of Christmas," he says. Encouraging early orders can also help manage business during the busier periods. "We will encourage the customers to pre-order between Black Friday and the 6th of December with a 10% discount," Fulop says. "We are baking everything from scratch so this allows us to plan ahead and maximise the sales."

### 6 BOOST SOCIAL MEDIA

While social media is likely a part of your year-round strategy, Mark Smith, social media strategist and content producer at Double Up Social, recommends tailoring your content to the season to get the most out of your social channels around the festive season. "Christmas means different things to different people, but the general sense of giving, generosity and cold weather all prevail. Therefore, during the Christmas season, your content strategy should represent this. Think giveaways, advent ideas, and a general overhaul of your image bank to feel more Christmassy! Not only will this show that your brand is active and responsive, but is also a perfect opportunity to share your brand values," he explains.

To get the most out of your social media accounts, avoid posting and disappearing. "Being active and creating conversations does wonders in increasing your social presence. It's called social media for a reason! Using polls, questions, memes etc helps drum up conversation around your brand, and often is a good way to encourage your audience to tag and bring in new people to your community," Mark says.

Fine food independents should also consider getting their cameras out during the preparation stage to give customers a sneak peek. "Bring the customers along on the journey, share behind the scenes of you getting ready for Christmas,



## QUICK WINS FOR E-COMMERCE

Harry Dance, digital marketing director of Kayo Digital, shares an insider take on improving your online presence

Keyword research and finding profitable search terms has long been considered a vital aspect of search engine optimisation (SEO), and it will help you grow over Christmas. Understanding what people are searching for will help you supply and optimise your site focusing on user demand. How do you do this? There are several ways to find what people are searching for and the easiest to do are:

- Ask your customers and prospects what they're looking for and what you don't provide.
- Google the product, scroll to the bottom and review the 'related searches' area to see if you find any inspiration for other terms you should be optimising for.
- Do your own competitor analysis and website audit or get a businesses like Kayo Digital to provide complimentary SEO audits.
- Use tools you have access to in gathering your data (e.g. Google Trends, Google Analytics).

Another quick win is to create a Merchant Center account on Google Shopping and start showing product listings to users across Google. The Merchant Center helps you get discovered, and the good news is you can list your products for free or advertise them on Google. Google Shopping is forgotten about a lot, and wrongly so – especially as you can now offer to promote your products free through the Google tool.




# PRODUCER INSIGHT

*Speciality Food* asks Neil Donachie, out of home marketing manager at Fentimans, how the drinks maker is preparing for the Christmas rush

**HOW IS FENTIMANS PREPARING FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON THIS YEAR?**

Fentimans has always traditionally performed well at Christmas. Our premium positioning makes us the brand of choice for special family occasions which take place throughout the season. We have seen strong sales since the lifting of restrictions across all channels, and we fully anticipate this will carry through into the last few months of the year, particularly for our iconic Ginger Beer, a flavour perfect suited to the time of year.

In preparation, at Fentimans we tend to invest in consumer advertising from September to November, between the summer and December peaks, to introduce as many new consumers to the brand as possible and remind those who haven't purchased the brand in a while before they make their Christmas purchases.

**ARE THERE ANY TRENDS IN THE DRINKS SPACE THAT RETAILERS SHOULD BE AWARE OF THIS FESTIVE SEASON?**

One big trend we have seen following the pandemic is the growth of at-home cocktails. As the on-trade closed, many consumers began making their favourite drinks at home, and this has seen a big surge in demand for the relevant ingredients. It will be interesting to see if this results in a surge in demand for cocktail-based ingredients as consumers get together over the festive season.

**WHAT TIPS CAN YOU OFFER FOR RETAILERS WHO ARE PLANNING FOR CHRISTMAS NOW?**

Christmas is a time when many shoppers are on 'auto-pilot,' with large amounts of shopping to do and many trip purchases pre-planned. Ensuring point of purchase features are visually impactful and contain relevant messages will give you the best chance of capitalising on higher footfall and increasing impulse purchases.

help them build the excitement and make sure you are telling them about all of the ways that you can help them have the best Christmas ever," Catherine says.

### 7 CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS WITH ADS

"People don't like hearing this, but social media is increasingly becoming a paid advertising tool," says Harry. "Because of this, you're likely to have to put your hand in your pocket if you're to generate revenue. The reason being? Social platforms want companies to pay for their exposure and make the social platforms more about people."

Mark agrees that many platforms today are becoming 'pay-to-play'. "When running ads, retailers should utilise Facebook's Ads Manager – rather than 'boosting' or 'promoting' posts from directly within the Facebook and Instagram Apps," he adds. "The free Facebook Ads Manager allows you to set up and fine-tune ads with much more detail and often provides a much better return-on-ad-spend compared to creating 'simpler' ads directly through the platform itself."

If you're in a pinch and aren't able to pay for advertising, Harry recommends encouraging friends, family and customers to share your content to grow your reach organically. "Create competitions, giveaways and use images and videos to generate engagement," he says.

### 8 TRY NEWSLETTERS AND OTHER ONLINE TOOLS

In a world increasingly ruled by GDPR, tech giants like Google and Facebook are offering advertisers less information to protect their users. Because of this, 'owned data' is increasingly important for those looking to grow their online presence. Enter the email newsletter. "When someone buys from you, ask if they would like to be part of your newsletter. If they say yes, you will then have a piece of owned data you can use to help you grow a relationship and your business," Harry explains. "Don't let the email lists you've collated over the years go to waste. Their value will only increase." On top of this, retailers can create online loyalty programmes. "Increasingly, there is software being released to help with loyalty programmes. They can even be free if you are of a certain size. Companies like LoyaltyLion help by keeping current customers happy, encouraging referrals and improving e-commerce retention," Harry says.

By preparing early and perfecting both in-store and digital operations this Christmas, retailers can make this year their – and their customers' – best.

> "Being active and creating conversations does wonders in increasing your social presence. It's called social media for a reason!"


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**FAIRFIELDS FARM ROAST TURKEY & STUFFING CRISPS**
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**seggiano.com**




**SACRED CHRISTMAS PUDDING GIN**
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**sacredgin.com**




**GINGERBREAD CHRISTMAS GIN LIQUEUR**
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**H!P (HAPPINESS IN PLANTS) GINGERBREAD OAT MILK BAR**
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**CARTWRIGHT & BUTLER CRANBERRY & ORANGE MINI MINCE PIES**
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**PASTICCERIA VENEZIA VEGAN PANETTONE**
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**thegreatbritishporridgeco.uk**



# BRING THE PARTY TO CHRISTMAS 2021

## With customers preparing for a sparkling festive season, boost your sales by stocking the right products for holiday celebrations

**COMMENTATORS**



**LEWIS BOWEN**
BABCO UK



**MATT WHELAN**
FIELDFARE



**NANCY MERCALA**
CAKEHEAD



**PAUL GARROD**
SKOULIKAS BEDFORD



**CLARE GIBSON**
ICB



**SANDRA BELL**
WENSLEYDALE CREAMERY

Retailers can traditionally count on the tills ringing in the festive season, with consumers indulging in foodie delights for parties, reunions and gatherings with friends and family. And after Covid-19 threw a spanner in shoppers' party plans in 2020, retailers shouldn't be afraid to go big this year. "We are heading into one of the most anticipated festive periods in recent history after missing Christmas in 2020," explains Lewis Bowen, strategic group director of Babco UK. "The whole country wants to celebrate more than ever before with loved ones, and they want to do it in style. This festive season is going to see a huge focus on premium food and drink products, with people wanting to spoil themselves and others," Lewis adds. "It's a great opportunity for upselling and promoting premium products."

### Stocking for indulgence and convenience

Predictions of a rejuvenated festive party season will be music to the ears of the fine food industry, who are year-round purveyors of all things edible and indulgent. With consumers prepared to upgrade from the typical fare this year, retailers should look to luxury to satisfy the growing demands for memorable and impressive food and drink. However, with Covid-19 still in our lives, catering for flexible arrangements will once again be key.

> "This festive season is going to see a huge focus on premium food and drink products, with people wanting to spoil themselves and others"



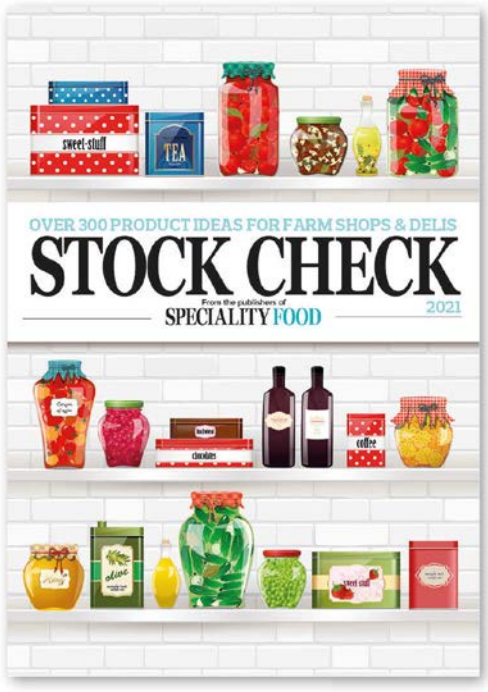
FIELDFARE

"People will want to impress with little luxuries, special treats and impressive centre pieces," says Matt Whelan, managing director at Fieldfare, a specialist in frozen food. "At the same time, they want convenience, so we believe that retailers would do well to stock up on products that will impress, but are simple to prepare and offer flexibility," he says. "Flexibility is king." Frozen food products, which have a long shelf life, or grab-and-go hampers stocked with convenient selections at multiple sizes and price points, offer customers easy ways to satisfy their indulgent side, whether they are entertaining close-knit gatherings or large groups.

"Most people like to be prepared at Christmas to prevent a last-minute panic, but they also like to have flexibility so they can plan for the unexpected. This is where the freezer is definitely your friend," Matt adds. For instance, Fieldfare's 'pick your own' product offering allows customers to personalise the size of their purchase. "Whether you are entertaining two or 20 people, with our unique offer, you can pick as much as you want but no more than you need," Matt explains. "Dishes such as our award-winning Coquilles St Jacques make for a very impressive starter, yet it's so simple to prepare and individually


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CAKEHEAD



CAKEHEAD

portioned, so you only prepare as many as you need," he explains. "Our Mini Swirls or Maple and Bacon Sausage Rolls – which can be cut in half for a substantial nibble – are perfect with champagne before the Christmas dinner. Impressive, delicious and convenient." Indeed, stocking these triple-threat products that make consumers' lives simpler around the hectic party season is a sure-fire way to win loyalty for the new year.

## Impress with quality ingredients

While indulgent recipes are as popular as ever, luxury on its own isn't enough. This year, consumers are prioritising products that offer a nod to sustainability and provenance. With a growing focus on healthy and clean-label brands, conscious indulgence is typically the name of the game; however, at Christmastime, consumers will allow permissible treats, too. "Sweet treats are perfect at a festive party," says Nancy Mercala, brand marketing manager at cake maker Cakehead. "For one, diets go out the window during Christmas, and it is most definitely the time to indulge. Since last Christmas didn't go to plan for us all, everyone will be excited this year for gatherings with friends and family," she says.

High-quality ingredients and artisan mastery offer the premium edge that consumers crave when they visit farm shops and delis. "Sweet treats like ours are perfect to spread some happiness this festive season, with every bite bringing you joy," Nancy continues. "We lavishly hand paddle the chocolate on top of our products in an artisanal way, and each bake is handpicked and handcrafted by our fantastic team in our cakery based in Oakham. We even make our own indulgent caramel using our secret recipe," Nancy says.

Another way that independent retailers can stand out is through a carefully curated international range, the likes of which specialist distributors can provide, as Paul Garrod, managing director of Skoulikas Bedford, explains. "With our passion and love of Italian food, we bring together a selection of authentic and traditional speciality products, carefully sourced and created using only the finest ingredients, offering exceptional indulgent flavours and elegant presentation for gifting," he says. The group's portfolio includes its own-brand Pasticceria Venezia, which has launched several vegan-friendly and gluten-free panettones, as well as Italian brands. "By working closely with some of Italy's premier confectioners and bakers, such as Fraccaro, Lazzaroni, Melegatti and Baci Perugina, we are sure that our distinctive range will offer customers much festive cheer!"

## Blend innovation with tradition

Clare Gibson, marketing director at beverage maker ICB adds her voice to those predicting a renewal of the festive spirit for Christmas 2021: "People are more likely to go all out on their food and drinks this year, having more, and bigger, gatherings with friends and family," she says. But with exciting new brands and products launching all the time,

# DRINKS FOCUS

Lewis Bowen, strategic group director at Babco UK, and Clare Gibson, marketing director at ICB, offer their insights for creating a sparkling drinks selection fit for any party



### OFFER A STORY

Collectively, we share a pent-up need to party, and cocktails will be high on the list of at-home entertainment this Christmas, with fizz and flavoured spirits and liqueurs taking a front seat again after missing out last year. Your drinks selection is crucial, as we all plan to impress.

Premium drinks, whether gin, vodka, rum or wine, all offer a chance for us to enjoy the finer things in life and to share with others. This year, choose a few drinks that are different and have a try at making some cocktails to add huge sparkle to your party. Better than that, seek out drinks that actually contain sparkle! People do not want to see the usual products; they will be turning to drinks that offer a story, something new, and are seen as a treat.

There is a huge trend in consumers trading up and buying better. After the year that was 2020, people deserve to drink and eat well, and have fun. So, this year, festive products with added novelty and quirks look set to do well, whether that's a Christmas pudding gin liqueur that lights up or a shimmering bottle of toffee vodka!

### MINDFULNESS AND INDULGENCE



Having great low- and no- alternatives to cater for designated drivers and those wanting to take a more mindful approach to festive celebrations this year is crucial. Ensuring that retailers are stocking such options, like non-alcoholic spirit Amplify which comes in bottle and pre-made can format, will ensure their customers have a full range of options to choose from when planning their Christmas gathering.

Christmas is a time for indulgence, so sweet and delicious liqueurs are a must stock as well – including those which can also be used within traditional boozy festive bakes and desserts, such as the Carthy & Black range of cream liqueurs, Palm Beach rum liqueurs and TW Kempton gin liqueurs. Liqueurs are bound to be a popular choice, with a lower ABV than traditional spirits, they offer consumers a less-alcoholic option for seasonal gatherings.

> "People are more likely to go all out on their food and drinks this year, having more, and bigger, gatherings with friends and family"



## BOOST SALES WITH EYE-CATCHING DISPLAYS

### How to enchant customers with attractive and impressive set-ups

Displays are a big part of the party season, and Cakehead's Nancy Mercala says an abundant and beautiful display can be a big win for customers. "Visiting your favourite coffee shop, garden centre or farm shop with friends and family is seen as a day out," she says. "If you have a large offering with plenty of variety for your customers, they will most certainly keep coming back for more. This is why we work hard and take pride in offering a variety of round cakes, tray cakes and traybakes to allow you to create displays your customers will find irresistible."

Lewis Bowen of Babco UK adds that displays should make customers feel festive and drive a desire to buy. "Give your displays the love they deserve and don't be scared to ask a brand for support to help with getting your displays as appealing as they can be. Many brands have already created stunning displays which are both brand and category lead. As we are all craving experience, tastings are also a great way to drive sales and make people feel good, especially with a festive tipple."

how do retailers choose where to draw the line between tradition and innovation? Claire believes it is important that retailers stock "exciting, innovative and seasonal flavours – those that offer a sense of nostalgia and comfort which continues to be a trend within the industry". For example, the flavour chocolate orange, which pops up everywhere from chocolatey spreads to gin liqueurs. "The chocolate orange flavour combination is one that is commonly associated with the Christmas period as a timeless classic, serving to bring back warm memories of previous years and catering to consumer trends," she explains.

Fieldfare's Matt agrees that traditional recipes which bring an element of innovation will perform well this party season. "Nostalgia will play a big part this year, but there will also be a strong emphasis on individual choice and flexibility," he says. "We expect to see many trifles, pavlovas and Christmas puddings made with a special, secret twist making an appearance – we're excited to share our simple and delicious Layered Cherry and Amaretti Dessert – our modern twist on a trifle!"

> "Retailers would do well to stock up on products that will impress, but are simple to prepare and offer flexibility"

This classic-meets-modern approach will also suit the growing ranks of consumers with specialised diets. "There is a continued increase in the number of people choosing meat-free diets, and so many families will also be looking for inspiration for individuals with a special dish," Matt says. Showcasing free-from versions of classic Christmas dishes could be a great way to cater to customers with dietary requirements.

### Don't forget the classics

While there are plenty of new-and-improved products ready for retailers' shelves, the mainstays of the Christmas feast will always be in demand. From Brussels sprouts to Christmas puddings – each element is essential to the party spread. Products that bring these classic Christmas flavours with the quality, provenance and impressive look that fine food retailers are known for will tick all of the boxes. "Catering for loved ones will be top of Christmas lists, and the centrepiece of the festive feast will be the cheeseboard," says Sandra Bell, marketing manager at Wensleydale Creamery. "Grazing over an indulgent cheeseboard is an age-old Christmas tradition and it will continue to sit pride of place at Christmas gatherings. As well as honouring the classic flavours, bringing exciting and innovative festive flavour profiles to consumers will be key," she continues.

> "Today's party food offering needs to impress – in flavour and aesthetics"

Sandra agrees that blending classic flavours with innovative accompaniments is a recipe for success. "Today's party food offering needs to impress – in flavour and aesthetics – which means combining more nostalgic, traditional favourite cheeses like Yorkshire Wensleydale & Cranberries, with more intriguing, limited edition festive flavours, such as Yorkshire Wensleydale Winter Warmer, Mince Pie or Orange & Champagne," she says. From brand new products to classic must-haves – and everything in between – customers' Christmas shopping lists will be packed with inspiring food and drink to set off the 2021 party season with a bang.





2021 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE STOCK CHECK




**STOKES SAUCES CRANBERRY & ORANGE SAUCE**
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**stokessauces.co.uk**




**BLANCO NIÑO ANCIENT GRAIN**
Embracing a slower approach to achieving a superior corn tortilla chip.
**blanco-nino.com**




**OLINA'S BAKEHOUSE VARIETY PACK**
Offers the perfect selection of wafers and toast for a party.
**gourmetfood.com.au**




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**FENTIMANS GINGER BEER**
A traditionally brewed ginger beer with a complex taste.
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# MEET THE CHEESEMAKER

After years of iconic status within the artisan cheese sector, Godminster's daring new attitude has borne a flavour-filled innovation




Today Godminster is one of the fine food industry's most recognisable businesses; its burgundy-waxed truckles have gained iconic status with cheese lovers across the UK and its conscientious approach to cheese production and sustainability has won it legions of devoted fans. From a small business which started out in 2000, when owner and founder Richard Hollingbery created 20 waxed truckles of Cheddar to pass on to those who had helped him convert his farm to organic as thank you gifts, this sizeable growth is testament to the team's passion for doing things right.

It's not for nothing that Godminster was awarded the Nation's Favourite Organic Product award in 2019 for its smooth, rich and indulgent organic Cheddar. "We only use the highest quality organic Cheddar in our truckles," says Jessica Kimber-Holloway, commercial and operations director, "including in our blended flavour-added truckles, so the customer always knows they're getting the same gold medal Godminster Cheddar every time."

## A flavourful offering

The Godminster range is chock full of sumptuous cheddar truckles that are the (literal) heart of every cheeseboard. "We're best known for our classic Vintage Organic Cheddar in its iconic burgundy wax that proudly bears the Union Jack." The team has experimented with flavours in recent years, with each variation staying true to the classic Godminster Cheddar. "Our Oak-Smoked Vintage Organic Cheddar is the truckle that has won the most gold awards over the years, owing to the rich depth of oak-smoked flavour that comes with being cold-smoked for six hours over sustainably sourced oak chippings," explains Jessica. Meanwhile, the cheesemaker's Black Truffle Cheddar proved to be an instant success when it was first released in 2019. "It sold out when we first launched it and is a delicious moreish truffled Cheddar that's full of luxurious truffle pieces," says Jessica, "and completing the quattro is our Daredevil Chilli Vintage Organic Cheddar – our brand new chilli Cheddar that we launched at Speciality & Fine Food Fair 2021."

A truly delicious Cheddar is even better with a perfectly partnered cracker, so the Godminster team has worked hard to create an accompaniments line that will bring out the best in its range of cheeses. "We've just launched a brand new trio of artisan handmade biscuits: Golden Honey and Oat; Charcoal and Cumin; and Beetroot and Nigella Seed. These have all been carefully developed to complement our cheddars perfectly," says Jessica.

## Kindness at its heart

Godminster was recently awarded the title of the UK's Best Large Organic Farm, and its efforts to champion a more organic, bio-diverse and sustainable world are valuably varied. "Since going organic we've planted over 2.5km of new native hedgerows, with a further 25,000 broadleaf trees, to restore some of the wild habitats for birds and small mammals and increase the farm's biodiversity. We've also maintained 150 acres of permanent pasture to provide further habitats for wild populations." The Godminster cows themselves are also beneficiaries of this eco-conscious approach. Fed on a 90% homegrown diet of organic grass and silage from Godminster's organic farm, cared for using the best new scientific advancements and massaged using herbal creams, the animals live much more contented lives than many of their conventional counterparts.

Naturally, these sustainable efforts come at a cost which is reflected in the higher price point of Godminster Cheddars compared to conventionally-produced cheeses, but the team is only too happy to explain the added value that comes with each truckle. "When a customer buys an organic product, those extra few pennies are going directly into British wildlife conservation and sustainability efforts back at our farm. Organic farmers rely on healthy ecosystems, therefore farm in a way that encourages a diverse range of wildlife on the farm," says Jessica.

"It's also about looking after our patch of British countryside and making sure that we are contributing the environment, not detracting from it. 'Agroecology' is a great term for this way of thinking. It refers to the wider holistic picture of farming: the healthier soils that store more carbon, the hedgerows teeming with birds, the tussocky wild fields full of British hares."

## New from the farm

Created during lockdown, Godminster's Daredevil Chilli Vintage Organic Cheddar was the result of the team's desire to do things a little differently. "Lockdown has been incredibly tough for the British food industry – and the world at large – and the Daredevil Chilli is all about embracing a challenge and rising up to meet it," explains Jessica. "We celebrated the launch of this cheddar with a literal 'launch' – we raised over £6,000 for mental health charity Mind in Somerset and brought the cheese with us on our sponsored skydive!"

The cheese itself is a fiery combination of Britishgrown Daredevil chillies with Godminster's deliciously smooth and creamy Cheddar. The ultimate serving suggestion for our Daredevil Chilli is to enjoy it with walnuts and British honey on the maker's Charcoal & Cumin crackers. "We also love it on nachos," she adds, "it adds the perfect fiery twist!"

> "We're proud to be a little different to what's out there. What we do on our farm reflects everything we love and what the Godminster cheese range stands for: sustainability, organic excellence, kindness, and quality"



# Cheese Talk

## The Power of Collaboration

"Having an open, honest relationship with your peers helps improve your business and the industry as a whole"



**JULES KANE,**
CHISWICK CHEESE MARKET

The Chiswick Cheese Market was the Cookbook Kitchen's response to the dire state of the food industry in the face of the pandemic. We were initially inspired by Jamie Oliver's Save British Cheese campaign, a message which was compounded by the daily pleas from cheesemakers to share their posts when they were desperate to sell their cheese to a new public. Many of these producers only supplied restaurants and caterers; they suddenly realised they essentially had just one client, hospitality, which was closed.

Committee member Fran Warde spoke to Sarah Stewart from Neal's Yard Dairy on one her nightly Kitchen Conversations on Instagram Live about the huge challenges the cheese making industry was facing. It seemed like a real call for help and we had to answer.

Closer to home, my dear friends Catherine and Philip Colton's dairy supply business West Horsley Dairy was nearly out of business without hospitality orders. My husband and I set up a weekly dairy order in our area to help support them, but it was a drop in the ocean compared to the orders they were used to filling.

A cheese market seemed like a natural fit for Chiswick (formerly known as Cheesewick due to its cheese farm and cheese market). Our goal was to create a monthly destination event that would attract cheese lovers to Chiswick, offering everything from extraordinary cheese varieties from small producers near and far, cheese products, cheese paraphernalia and accoutrements to enjoy with your cheese. We also wanted to help support our bricks and mortar businesses and help breathe new life into our high street.

Lucy Cufflin and I took on the roles of curators of the market to ensure that we offered the widest variety of quality cheeses from across Britain and beyond. We launched with 23 stalls operating under strict Covid safety measures. In our research for the market, we discovered some local gems on our doorstep with relish makers from Ealing and Mozzarella makers in Acton.

From day one, the cheese market was extremely well-received by both the local businesses and the over 5,500 visitors to the market. For some of the cheese makers it was the first time they had met the public and could tell the story of their cheeses. One trader commented, "You have created one of the most important food events in London for us."

The most exciting aspect of the buzz created by the first market was the collaborations that it initiated. We introduced High Weald Dairy and Ealing Relish Company to Honest Burger and together they have created the Cheesewick Burger which is the local special on the menu at their Chiswick Branch. It is one of the best-selling burgers and it continues to keep the market relevant to our local community even when it isn't market day.

Allie Thomas and her daughter, of Cradocs Savoury Biscuits, came from Powys in Wales for the first market and sold so well that they are now stocked in three of our local fine food retailers. They wouldn't have taken a train to London hoping to secure these connections, but our market was the ideal springboard. They are also working on a bespoke cracker with another of our regular traders, Marlow Cheese.

A further collaboration among market traders has given rise to an entirely new cheese named for us. 'Cheesewick' is Marlow Cheese's truffled Brie made from Guernsey cows' milk and truffles from one of our Italian traders, Thee Olive Tree.

From its inception, we knew Cheesewick would need to grow and with the relaxation in Covid rules we have been successful in securing a new license from Hounslow council with space for 36 stalls. The additional stalls create an opportunity to introduce a broader range of cheeses and accoutrements including vintage kitchenware and linen as well as encouraging local food hubs to work with us. We are hoping to showcase Welsh cheeses in November in collaboration with The Welsh Fine Food Cluster. We are already known in the cheese world to be a very nurturing bunch.

> "The most exciting aspect of the buzz created by the first market was the collaborations that it initiated. We introduced High Weald Dairy and Ealing Relish Company to Honest Burger and together they have created the Cheesewick Burger. It continues to keep the market relevant to our local community even when it isn't market day"



**ANDY SWINSCOE,**
COURTYARD DAIRY

We've always worked hard to collaborate with all partners across the industry: from very close relationships with suppliers where we've helped them establish, develop and improve their cheeses, to working closely with our restaurant customers as we seek to promote both each other and cheese in general. However, we've also spent some time working with other cheese shops, just speaking to them, swapping ideas, and training each other's staff. And sometimes even importing and buying cheese in bulk with them – it gives us more efficiencies. I think having this honest, open relationship with your peers helps improve your business and also the industry as a whole. We don't want to conquer the world, just sell good cheese and encourage others to do the same so we can convert more of the British public!

Covid has strengthened a lot of our collaborations. Particularly with some restaurants who promoted our plight, but also with a lot of other cheese shops. Neal's Yard Dairy were fabulous in their support, sending us some mail order business through their Jamie Oliver campaign, and others such as The Cheese Society and The Cheese Geek really helped us think through our mail order process as we had to pivot our business to doing more deliveries.

Life is too short to not work together, and we need to work as an industry of specialist retailers to promote the brilliance of farmhouse and raw milk cheese and work in an appropriate manner that does this. Working to build relationships with suppliers, particularly as they are so small and family-based, along with encouraging other retailers to improve what they do, and supporting these farmers, is key to raising the knowledge and skills in serving this style of cheese and getting people to try it.

There are plenty of collaborations elsewhere in the sector that I find inspiring. The Specialist Cheesemaker Association initially started to help farmers collaborate so they could stand up to the legislative might and get advice and help from each other in making small-scale cheese and raw milk cheese. Its success and importance to the industry should not be undervalued and showcases just how working together positively can benefit everyone. If you're not a member and into cheese, you should be!

Many skilled cheesemakers have set up very successful collaborations/partnerships with farms (making on their farm with their milk), which has enabled them to make raw milk cheese as they are where the milk is produced and have a very close connection to the farm, feeding and milking methods to make quality cheese. Great examples of this include Stichelton and Rollright.

In terms of what's to come for collaboration within the artisan cheese sector, I think the impact of Covid and the connectability of like-minded businesses through social media which may be separated by distance, hopefully will encourage those open-minded to speak to their 'competitors' and peers to improve the industry as a whole. We can only hope!

> "Life is too short not to work together, and we need to work as an industry of specialist retailers to promote the brilliance of farmhouse and raw milk cheese, and work in an appropriate manner that does this. Working to build relationships with suppliers, particularly as they are so small and family-based, along with encouraging other retailers to improve what they do, and supportive these farmers, is key to raising the knowledge and skills in serving this style of cheese and getting people to try it"



# A **PERSONAL** TOUCH

## Take your service up a notch by offering customers a customised cheese and wine pairing

Cheese and wine are the ultimate traditional pairing, and heading into the busy festive season, you can be certain that customers will be on the hunt for ideas that will 'wow' their guests. Before footfall in the shop picks up, it's worth going back to basics to re-examine your favourite pairings, unearth some new gems and look at brand new ways to provide a personalised offering for your customers this season.

### Customise your selection

Wine and cheese are a classic pairing for a reason. "Wine acts like an additional layer of complexity to a dish, and as such it has the ability to both enhance and diminish the flavours in the food, and similarly the food can affect the wine," says Jamie Patterson, co-founder of Ramekins & Wine, which offers immersive food and wine pairing experiences. "It's incredibly important with cheese," he stresses. "Have a tannic Bordeaux with an oozing Gorgonzola and it won't be a pleasant experience. Pair the same wine with an aged Comté, however, and it will likely be highly delicious." There are a number of aspects that can go into creating fantastic pairings. At Ramekins & Wine, Jamie dives into the technical make-up of wine to create a perfectly suited dish, but customers likely don't need this level of precision, he says. "For a customer, the goal is to have wines that generally complement the food. With that in mind, it comes down to the food they're eating, the type of sauce or side dish, the occasion and budget."

> "Have a tannic Bordeaux with an oozing Gorgonzola and it won't be a pleasant experience. Pair the same wine with an aged Comté, however, and it will likely be highly delicious"

For Svetlana Kukharchuk of The Cheese Lady, careful questioning can help reveal the ideal cheese and wine pairing for a customer. "Personalising each customer's order is one of the most fun parts of what we do. By asking insightful questions, we gauge customers' taste preferences, favourite drinks and what occasion they are getting cheese and wine for," she explains. "Everybody's palate is unique and different so we like to base our recommendations on the customer's palate rather than our own. Our recommendations will be different for a person who likes red wine and only firm cheeses to someone who is going to a girl's night with bubbles," she says.

"The best cheesemongers know how to break down the barriers to make customers feel utterly relaxed to ask questions," adds Greg Parsons, co-owner Sharpham Dairy. "It's important customers know there's no right or wrong cheeseboard – it's all about preference. Asking questions about customer's favourite cheeses, the dinner menu, occasion, as well as encouraging customers to taste samples, can go a long way to helping to build customer loyalty and ultimately lead to sales."

### Rules of thumb

That being said, there are some general tips and tricks that retailers can keep in mind. "Pairing cheese and wine is more of an art than a science so there are very few definitive rules, however time-tested wisdoms like 'What grows together, goes together,' generally work," Svetlana says. "I also believe that cheese and wine should match in their intensity of flavour and body. One should consider their primary flavours (sweetness, acidity, salt, bitterness, umami) and their secondary flavours (fruity, nutty, etc) and see whether they complement and/or balance each other out."

With Christmas on the horizon, retailers will want to have all the answers for uncertain customers. "One good rule," Jamie says, "is that hard cheeses are very versatile with wine, and soft, or blue cheeses very temperamental – they tend to need a sweeter wine alongside." But, he adds, "Don't overthink it. The traditional Christmas dinner is an impossible challenge, but you can certainly have something very pleasant. Whites with high acidity and presence – Chablis is a great choice – and reds with structure and power – Bordeaux or Rhone wines such as Châteauneuf-du-Pape are classical and a treat. A good Aussie Muscat from Rutherglen is a must with the Christmas pudding in our house," he says.

If customers are looking for a more in-depth lesson, why not pair up with a local sommelier to offer a tasting, either in person or over Zoom? "Tasting experiences are a fantastic way of discovering not only new cheeses and wines but also new combinations you would have never tried otherwise," Svetlana says. "We all eventually get into a comfort zone when it comes to food and wine, even the most adventurous foodies amongst us. But tasting events allow us to quite literally broaden our taste horizons, sample and discover new things." With plenty to explore in the months ahead, it's time to get tasting.

### JAMIE'S FESTIVE PAIRING TIPS

"One problem with the Christmas cheese board is you have lots of different cheeses but just one wine. We'd suggest serving one type of cheese, as the French often do, and serve with a spectacular wine that's guaranteed to go well," he says. Try these matches...

- Madeira and aged Parmesan
- Bordeaux and aged Comté
- Loire Sauvignon Blanc and French goat's cheese
- Sauternes and blue cheese
- Oak-aged Chardonnay and vintage Cheddar
- Oloroso Sherry and Camembert



## PAIRING IDEAS



**RORY MELLIS**
IJ MELLIS CHEESEMONGERS

**WHAT'S ON YOUR DREAM CHEESEBOARD?**
My dream cheeseboard would include a piece of Manchego, some Stilton, a pyramid of Blackmount, a lovely Scottish ash-coated goat's milk cheese, Westray Wife, a washed rind Alpine-style cheese from the Orkney Isles (usually aged for four months) and Pitchfork Cheddar, an organic cheddar made by the Trethowan Brothers in Somerset.

**WHAT'S YOUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE CHEESE PAIRING?**
Wee Comrie, a buttery and mellow soft cheese made by Strathearn Cheese in Perth, and Aipple Cider, a medium-dry apple cider made in Fife.

**ANY UNUSUAL PAIRINGS YOU'D RECOMMEND?**
I'd recommend a wedge of Baron Bigod with digestives and a bottle of kombucha.

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE TO DRINK WITH CHEESE?**
Wine — lots and lots of red wine. French Pinot Noir or Gamay.




# Bumper year for Welsh cheesemaker

**South Caernarfon Creameries (SCC), Wales's premier dairy company and the maker of Dragon Cheese, has achieved record profits despite Covid-19.**

The group recorded operating profits of £3.4 million on sales of £61.5 million in a record year for Wales's largest farmer-owned dairy cooperative. It comes as the cheesemaker begins work on a major expansion at its headquarters, which will increase capacity from the current 15,000 tons of cheese a year to 23,000 tons, creating 23 jobs and taking the total workforce to 160.

"In a year like no other we have delivered a resilient business performance while continuing to pay one of the best milk prices in Wales to our farmer-members," said managing director Alan Wyn Jones.

SCC, which makes the award-winning Dragon Cheese, has 135 Welsh farmer-members who received an end-of-year dividend of £806,000 – nearly a quarter of the cooperative's profits.

"The site processed record volumes of milk in the last 12 months and this trend will continue as we carry on growing while maintaining our high-quality standards," Alan said. "We are well-used to operating in a volatile global marketplace, but no one could have foreseen the challenges of the last year in which the Covid crisis struck." He added that the new Brexit trading arrangements have added costs to exporting, which is having a negative impact.

"While the year ahead will remain challenging as we continue to manage the business alongside the pandemic conditions and seeing cost inflation now coming through from raw materials and key overheads, the positives are that global economies will continue to recover, the fundamentals of dairy look positive," he continued. "Our focus remains on the delivery of our objectives and the opportunities ahead, which we are now well-placed to take advantage of to deliver long-term business performance and prosperity for our stakeholders."

# Blackwoods launches Graceburn into retail

**Artisan cheese company Blackwoods is launching its handmade cow's milk cheese to the retail sector due to strong customer demand. Graceburn, which is made from fresh organic milk sourced from a local dairy herd, is described as a creamier version of Feta, which is marinated in cold pressed rapeseed oil from a local Kent supplier.**

The cheeses are available in three flavours: Original, which is flavoured with garlic, thyme and pepper; Truffle, which is made with luxurious black truffle; and Chipotle and Lemon, which is marinated in chipotle chilli and lemon zest.

"We are really proud of Graceburn, which is based on an old Persian Feta recipe," says managing director and head cheesemaker David Holton. "We make it by hand in Kent using the freshest local milk from a sustainable farm, and then marinate in a local oil. The result is a really unique cheese."




> "The future is really bright at the moment for cheesemakers. We have some challenges, and we have to be really mindful of those – sustainability is possibly the biggest, and we've got to get ahead on that. But we've demonstrated through the last 18 months how agile and flexible we are as a sector with the way in which we've adapted to these really massively disruptive market forces. We've evidenced how we can do it, and we mustn't lose all this momentum"
>
> CATHERINE MEAD, SPECIALIST CHEESEMAKERS ASSOCIATION



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### LAB-GROWN CHEESE START-UP TO EXPAND ITS RANGE

Berlin-based Formo, which makes cultured Mozzarella and Ricotta cheeses without cows, has received record funding from investors to create sustainable dairy alternatives. The group received $50m of Series A funding, which is a record for a European food tech business. It will use the funds to expand its range into mature and ripened cheeses like Cheddar and Gruyere. "We want to open up the focus and really make sure we are able to cover pretty much any cheese type you can imagine," co-founder and chief executive told Bloomberg.

### OXFORD CHEESE SHOP OPENS SECOND SITE

Jericho Cheese Company has expanded, opening a second premises in Oxford city centre. Cheesemonger Adam Verlander told the *Oxford Mail* he had been looking for a second site before Covid-19 hit. He jumped at the opportunity when a local landlord decided to split a large retail unit into smaller units to open up the market to smaller-scale stores. "A small company like ours couldn't have afforded – and didn't need – a large unit. By making the space smaller it has automatically made it more affordable and manageable," he said.

# Shepherds Purse forced to rename Fettle

**North-Yorkshire-based artisan cheesemaker Shepherds Purse has come under fire for the name of its Yorkshire Fettle cheese. It comes 12 years after the cheese was first renamed due to Feta being awarded a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) by the European Commission.**

Greece was awarded exclusive rights to the name Feta when the PDO was granted in 2002, and in 2008 Shepherds Purse was made to rename its Mediterranean salad-style cheese Yorkshire Fettle. The cheese gained acclaim in 2020 after a campaign to save sheep milk producers saw Shepherds Purse awarded the title of Cheese Heroes of the Year at the Virtual Cheese Awards. The cheese was also featured on Channel 4's *Food Unwrapped* and Channel 5's *This Week on the Farm*.

The Association of Greek Producers, SEVGAP, says the use of the word Fettle breaches the protection afforded to Feta. "It's devastating to see our well-loved product go through this process once more after we believed it was resolved back in 2008," said Caroline Bell, who runs Shepherds Purse with sister Katie Matten. "Whilst we agree whole heartedly with the spirit of PDO legislation, we don't believe that our name breaches it. But we sit as a fringe case and sadly, as a small independent family business, our resources to fight it are limited, particularly after this exceptionally difficult period due to the pandemic."

While it comes as a blow, Katie said it will not set the cheesemaker back. "It's an exceptional product made from quality British sheep milk and we have over 30 years' experience in making it. We will move forward positively despite this recent challenge."

## CHEESE FACT FILE...

### VASTEDDA DELLA VALLE DEL BELICE



- **Country of origin:** Italy
- **Region:** Sicily
- **Milk:** Ewe's
- **Description:** Traditional spun paste sheep's milk cheese. Slightly acidic with a sweet, fresh and pleasant flavour

THE GLOBAL **VEGAN** CHEESE MARKET IS **EXPECTED** TO **GROW** AT AN **ANNUAL** RATE OF **15.08%** BETWEEN **2021** AND **2028**

**SOURCE: MARKET INSIGHTS**




## *"Millennial cheese"*



**JAMES GRANT**
NO2 POUND STREET

Our wine, cheese shop and deli was established in 2010. The shop is based in a rural area with little footfall. Our main income is at the weekends when families and those weekly commuters finally come into the town. Location is key to the success of most small businesses, so in order to put our business on the map we have had to work very hard.

We have been able to promote our business in many ways. The most effective has been by doing charter and farmer's markets. Engaging with our audience and explaining about the produce is key to sales. We found some key towns that were missing cheese sellers at their markets. Since starting these, we have been able to increase sales, let people know who we are, what we are and where the shop is located.

Some markets that we attend are as far as 30 miles from the shop and others are on the doorstep. To this day we still find people who have been living in Wendover all of their lives that have still not been into our shop. Markets give you an opportunity to engage and sell your business; this has been a great way to win new customers and encourage people to visit the shop.

Over the last few weekends, I have attended some major food festivals. Recently I attended Christchurch Food Festival – a well-established event set up over 20 years ago. The event runs over the last August Bank Holiday. The festival aims to help people reconnect with real food instead of the commodity-driven industrial food on offer in the supermarkets.

So, I called up an audience to my Christchurch festival pitch and a group of Millennials came over to listen to me talking about British artisan cheese. Their ears pricked up and eyes were fixed on each cheese that I described. I explained that each cheese was a product of hard work, passion, good animal husbandry and that each cheese reflected the terroir and species of animal used for the recipes.

I gave samples of each cheese to my new Millennial friends, Emmy, Josh and Matt. They were in awe of the flavour and quality of the cheese and their faces immediately lit up with glee. At the finish line of the tasting I thought to give a sample of freshly made Somerset Buffalo Mozzarella. Until this point the vegan, Emmy, had decided not to partake. However, after telling Emmy about the animal husbandry and how well I knew and trusted this particular cheesemaker, Emmy decided to have a taste. What happened next was not expected – Emmy tasted the cheese and after a few seconds burst into tears! Emmy exclaimed that this was the finest Mozzarella and then recalled enjoying Mozzarella before becoming vegan, but never having tasted something so moist, creamy and citrussy ever before.

This eureka moment showed Emmy how commoditised cheese has become. All that was needed was for my Millennial friends to taste the cheese and for them to realise that this food that predates recorded history needs now to be properly respected and enjoyed.

Later the same evening, as I was grabbing a quick pint in a local bar after a long day selling great cheese, Matt, Emmy and Josh bumped into me. They invited me for a drink downtown. I nervously accepted (as a man in his early 50s with a group of Millennial lads could mean shots and trouble). We ended up in a Death Metal bar with other Millennials and a few Generation Xs like me.

We talked about music and about life, and do you know what? It was wonderful. Yes, there was the obligatory shot of goodness knows what. But importantly they all agreed that they were all tired of society's lies when it comes to politics, religion and food. When I asked how it was having a drink with an old man like me, they all said, we all live in one time, we need to seize the moment every day and be kind to each other and honest about what we eat. My Millennial friends all agreed that cheese is a luxury and should be respected. Millennial Cheese indeed.

> "When I asked how it was having a drink with an old man like me, they all said that we all live in one time, we need to seize the moment every day and be kind to each other and honest about what we eat. My Millennial friends all agreed that cheese is a luxury and should be respected"

**COMMENTATORS**



**KIRSTIE JONES**
SOUTH CAERNARFON CREAMERY



**CAROLINE BELL**
SHEPHERDS PURSE



**JEN GRIMSTONE-JONES**
CHEESE ETC, THE PANGBOURNE CHEESE SHOP



**ABBY ALLEN**
PIPERS FARM



**PAUL HEASMAN**
ROWCLIFFE

# 2021: THE YEAR OF BRITISH CHEESE

## Collaboration is key to maximising on the growing demand for artisan British cheeses

If 2020 was a year full of challenges for cheesemakers and mongers as they adapted to the double-whammy of Covid-19 and Brexit, 2021 has, for many, been a year of opportunities. *Speciality Food's Cheese Report*, published earlier this year, featured testimonials from cheesemakers who saw demand for their products jump, as well as retailers and distributors from the UK and around the world who noted that changing consumer behaviours were benefitting artisan producers.

"The after-effects of Brexit and the Coronavirus pandemic combined have seen demand for provenance, quality, and sustainability soar," explains Kirstie Jones, marketing manager at Wales' largest farmer-owned dairy cooperative South Caernarfon Creamery (SCC). With the 'Buy British' movement gaining steam, we explore how cheese businesses can harness this momentum to spread the message about handcrafted British cheeses.

### The story behind the product

Caroline Bell of Shepherds Purse says there is no doubt that more people have discovered British cheeses due to the pandemic. But, she adds, the "quality and diversity are what is bringing people back for more. New fans have discovered cheeses they love, and hopefully they can see the passion and sheer talent that exists amongst Britain's cheesemakers and mongers, too. The pandemic has meant that many have been able to take more time to shop, and that lends itself to a more considered experience and a willingness to explore more," she says.

"Consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from, how it's made, the quality and its story," agrees Kirstie. This growing demand has given producers like SCC, which makes Dragon cheese, the "perfect platform to expand our operations and shout about our own Welsh provenance and quality produce, giving a chance for our Welsh producers to tell their story themselves," Kirstie adds.

With sustainability high on consumers' list of priorities, it's well worth shouting about Britain's vast array of sustainable and organic cheesemakers. "People want to shop local," says Avril Molloy of the Irish School of Cheese, "but they may not realise that there's a beautiful cheese similar to one that might have come from France, where the milk comes from down the road and the cheesemaker uses milk from their own herd that's grazed on local land," she says. "Sustainability and supporting local are really, really important to consumers at the moment. And there's nothing better to demonstrate sustainability than a locally made cheese that hasn't travelled thousands of miles, where terroir really sings through."



ROWCLIFFE

### What to stock

British cheeses are always in high demand around the holidays, and there are plenty of varieties out there to tantalise consumers' taste buds – from the well-known and loved larger establishments that shoppers will always add to their baskets, to the ultra-small-scale producers that consumers can taste-test and explore. But Jen Grimstone-Jones, cheesemonger at Cheese Etc, The Pangbourne Cheese Shop, believes that British cheeses will be flying off the shelves at even higher rates this year. "Our local cheeses are always in high demand. We will sell out of all of them even though I will buy more in than last year. People like to know where their food comes from, and a lot of our customers are conscious of food miles," Jen says. Avril agrees that cheesemongers should put lesser-known, local varieties in the spotlight to give them a chance to thrive. "I think people will latch on to them even more this year."

The job of selecting exactly which British cheeses to stock is no easy decision, however. Jen says she is guided first of all by locality. "First and foremost, we try and stock local cheeses where we can, i.e. cheeses from Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire," she says. "Then we try and visit as many of our cheesemakers as possible." Inspiration can hit anywhere, even on holiday. "We stopped off in Gloucestershire whilst on holiday a few years ago and tasted the various Single Gloucester PDO cheeses that are made," Jen explains. "On the back of that trip, we decided that we liked Jonathan Crump's the best, and we now buy both our Double and Single Gloucesters directly from him. "It's really important to us to stock cheeses where we know their provenance," Jen continues. "Our customers like to hear more about the cheeses and we like to learn from the cheesemakers. At the end of the day, if we are going to stock a new cheese in our counter it has to take the place of another, so it has to offer something a bit different."

For Abby Allen, sales and marketing director at Pipers Farm, traditional craft, quality ingredients and ethical, regenerative or organic farming practices are key. "In looking for new producers, it's always been about supporting Britain's small-scale family farms who are producing food in a way that not only tastes great, but isn't damaging the environment and isn't loaded with chemicals or highly processed. Our customers want to support British small producers, and the pandemic has only reinforced this. The British artisan cheese industry is really thriving. While customers may have their preferences when it comes to hard or soft cheeses, they are open to trying new varieties, especially British takes on Continental classics."

At Pipers Farm, a customer favourite is an organic halloumi from High Weald Dairy in Sussex. "It's been very popular. Perhaps it's our way of recreating a Greek holiday at home," Abby says. Another firm favourite is Fen Farm Dairy's Baron Bigod. "It's the only traditional raw milk Brie-de-Meaux style cheese produced in the UK and one of only a handful of its type in the world to be made by the farmer on the farm, which can genuinely be called a true farmhouse Brie. These are the kind of producers we like to celebrate."

While these cheeses can be more expensive than their European counterparts, Jen says her customers understand that they are buying a high-quality product from small-scale producers. "At the end of the day, the flavour of British cheese is phenomenal, and most people are driven by flavour."

### What's next?

As life returns to a 'new normal', will the desire for British cheeses continue? SCC's Kirstie believes so. "We anticipate this trend will continue even after the effects of the pandemic have faded." But to keep



sparking consumers' inspiration, Caroline says engagement and connection are key. "This is the challenge as life returns to the pace where convenience again becomes more of a priority (consciously or sub-consciously)," she explains.

Cheesemakers can also look to the positive trends developing for the dairy sector. "Cheese has excelled over the last 18 months, providing a healthy yet indulgent ingredient and convenient snack for the consumer," says Kirstie. "With the trend for health and convenience set to continue, this provides the perfect opportunity for growth and new product development."

For cheesemongers, pre-packaging British cheese hampers or boxes can help keep new British cheeses at the forefront of consumers' minds even as life becomes more hectic again, Abby says. Aside from this, just keep telling cheesemakers' stories. Really get behind these producers and share their story in a way that will resonate with your customers," she adds.

"We can be so proud of our existing cheesemakers," Caroline says, "The talent, passion and dedication is incredible, and we are making world class cheeses. We also have some wonderfully talented and passionate cheesemakers entering the industry who appear to be approaching it with a real authentic love of the science, the art and the ethics of cheesemaking. We must continue to all work together to inspire and educate customers and consumers, so that they can connect more with what we do, why we do it, and the passion with which we do it. And we must continue to support each other, challenge each other and champion each other – the collaborative support in this industry is unrivalled."

# 5 MINUTES WITH

## PAUL HEASMAN, PURCHASING COORDINATOR AT ROWCLIFFE



**WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST TRENDS SHAPING THE BRITISH CHEESE SECTOR TODAY?**

Covid has without doubt been the biggest reason for shifts in trends across all food sectors. Cheese has fared well due to its household penetration, but ideas also flourished for new and better ways to market and sell it; suddenly cheesemakers who did not have a decent website or rarely used social media were all over platforms such as Instagram and selling cheese online, being creative with ways to use them as eating habits changed throughout lockdown. By flagging the industry's challenges, a new wave of digital shoppers has joined the British cheese fan base, keen to understand it better.

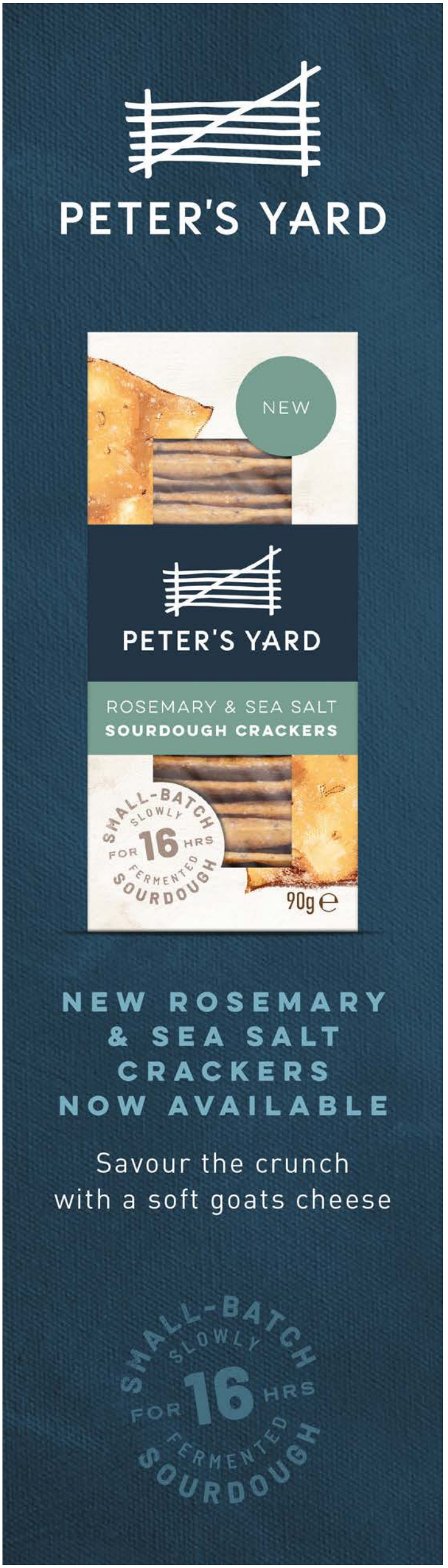
**WHAT SETS FINE BRITISH CHEESES APART FROM THEIR EUROPEAN COUNTERPARTS?**

In a word, people. The past 30 years or so has seen a resurgence of British Artisan Cheeses, forced in part by the demise of decent milk returns and higher exposure of Continental offerings. British farmers learned that the diverse terroir of the UK aligned to creative mixing of different breeds provides great conditions for making amazing cheeses; today's shopper is spoilt for choice with artisan cheeses that far exceed the quality of the EU's. Tim Rowcliffe once told me that nice people make nice cheese; he is right, and fortunately the UK cheese industry is abundant with these people whose passion and skill are evident in the superior quality artisanal cheeses produced. When championing our cheeses, we must do more to celebrate those that make it all possible.

**HOW SIGNIFICANT WILL CHRISTMAS 2021 BE FOR THE BRITISH CHEESE INDUSTRY?**

People are now planning 2021 festivities around relaxed restrictions, which will of course involve a lot more food! This is good for the industry, especially the restaurant sector, and cheese will once again feature heavily. Cheesemakers will further maximise their new selling and marketing skills, and wholesalers and retailers will do their bit to ensure availability. Christmas is destined to bring renewed joy to many, which I hope includes our resilient British cheesemakers.

> "At the end of the day, the flavour of British cheese is phenomenal, and most people are driven by flavour"






# International Cheese & Dairy Awards 2021

## Once again the cheese industry comes together to discover and celebrate the very best of the world's cheese and dairy products

After a challenging two years for the cheese and dairy industry, the largest cheese and dairy event of the year – the International Cheese & Dairy Awards – are back with a bang on 21st October 2021, announcing a new consumer brand amongst an exciting new roster of celebrity chef attendees, cookery demonstrations and exciting food and drink discoveries.

At its new home of Staffordshire Show Ground, Stafford, the revamped event is sure to be a must-attend show for cheese and dairy lovers – industry professionals and consumers alike.

The renowned International Cheese & Dairy Awards welcome a new award which is sure to be hotly contested: the Supreme Champion Trophy for Best Dairy Product. In total, over 5,000 award entries from across the world will be judged by over 100 expert judges from the cheese industry, making the awards one of the most respected institutions in the international food community.

A brand new awards scheme has been launched in addition to the International Cheese & Dairy Awards: The Cheese Board Awards, which aim to highlight and celebrate the best products on the market that pair perfectly with cheese. There are 50 classes in these awards, so cheese fans can be confident that they will find a myriad of delicious food and drink products to enjoy alongside their cheese amongst the winners.

Cheese-loving consumers will be well catered for at the newly-launched Love Cheese Live event, a brand which has been developed to educate consumers on taste, quality and a range of cheese and food products. Taking place on 22nd-23rd October, this event – held in the Love Cheese Pavillion – will host over 400 food producers, multiple cooking demonstration areas, expert talks, pairing experiences and a children's cookery school amongst other exciting attractions. Regional specialities will be showcased by industry bodies including Taste Cheshire, Eat & Drink Staffordshire and Deliciously Yorkshire, and there will be live music and outdoor activities beyond the pavilions. **To find out more and buy tickets visit lovecheeselive.co.uk.**






## CELEBRITY CHEF LINE-UP

**An impressive roster of leading chefs will be in attendance at the event, including...**



**JAMES MARTIN**



**MARCO PIERRE WHITE**



**MICHEL ROUX JR**



**MATT TEBBUTT**

> With the cancellation of last year's event this has given us time to look at the current format and the opportunities to work with retailer and key sponsors to develop a platform to secure the show's future success and make it relevant to both trade and consumer audiences
>
> **STEVE MONCRIEFF, STRATEGY DIRECTOR**

## IAN LUXTON ICDA CHAIRMAN

"I am thrilled that 2021 brings with it a thoroughly refreshed International Cheese & Dairy Awards at our new weather proof venue at Bingley Hall in Stafford. The location is in a perfect central location with over 5 million consumers within an hour of the show ground.

After 124 years, I am also delighted that the awards remain in their historically significant milk field and our move will serve to set the foundations for security of the awards over the next 100 years.

After such a long and difficult period, the committee have devoted themselves to making real improvements to the event.

October will see the launch of The Cheese Board Awards, celebrating those products associated with Cheese and sponsored by Marks & Spencer. We have also moved to a two day consumer event on Thursday 22 and Friday 23 October, branded 'Love Cheese Live' which will support the Industry by allowing award winning products to reach out directly to consumers.

It will be a fantastic occasion to learn about judging, to bring newly developed products for assessment, to network, to develop a farm to fork experience and to educate consumers about all the great work and positive news from the industry. It will be an occasion to celebrate our Industry at the UK's largest Cheese, Dairy, Food and Drink Weekender!

> This will be a fantastic occasion to learn about judging, to bring newly developed products for assessment, to network, to develop a farm to fork experience and to educate consumers about all the great work and positive news from the industry

# A CHEESE MADE IN A PICTURE-POSTCARD SETTING?

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**COMMENTATORS**



**DOMINIE FEARN**
THE WILD HARE GROUP



**RICHARD HARROW**
BRITISH FROZEN FOOD FEDERATION



**MILLY BAGOT**
BYRUBY

# THE RETURN OF CONVENIENCE

## Ready meals and soups fell out of favour in the Covid era. Post-lockdown, a focus on provenance and quality ingredients will mark the next generation of convenience

2020 was a challenging year for many fine food brands, but convenience-leaning segments, such as ready meals and soups, saw particularly tough circumstances. Typically a cornerstone of busy Brits' diets – 86% of adults in the UK eat ready meals or ready-to-cook foods, and three in 10 eat ready meals at least once a week, according to Mintel – it's little surprise that the market has an eye-watering value of £3.9bn.

The pandemic was a harsh awakening for the sector, as consumers who were spending more time in their homes got crafty in the kitchen and relied less on ready-to-eat food. "Convenience food will always be popular by nature; however, during the height of the pandemic, there was a real shift towards home cooking and baking," says Dominie Fearn, founder of The Wild Hare Group.

"Ready meals didn't have a particularly good pandemic," adds Richard Harrow, CEO of the British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF). "We saw that in the early stages of the pandemic, and it continued all the way through. Ready meal consumers tend to be cash rich and time poor. With the lockdown, everyone had more time," he says.

However, post-lockdown, consumers lives are filling up with activities, and the selling points of convenient food and drink are ringing true once again. According to the BFFF's data for the 52-week period ending June, ready meals were up by 2.1% as they begin to bounce back. "As we move to a post-Covid era, people are becoming more inclined to increase their uptake of convenience food due to naturally busier schedules," Dominie explains. Amid this growing market, speciality retailers can draw customers in with an offering that highlights high-quality ingredients and sustainable credentials.

### The Covid effect

Covid not only caused shoppers to skip over the ready meal chillers – it also accelerated changes in consumer behaviour that have long been contributing to a decline in mass-produced ready meals and soups. "I genuinely think people's eating habits have changed," says Milly Bagot, co-founder of ByRuby. "They care more about quality ingredients and being conscious of provenance. People are eating less meat and fish, so when they do eat it, they want it to be carefully sourced."

The 'processed' image of ready meals and soups has long been a deterrent for healthy-minded customers. With Covid supercharging the health trend, shoppers are taking a closer look at ingredient labels. "The pandemic has meant that people have had to cook more out of necessity and understand what goes into a really delicious meal," Milly explains. "This makes them more discerning when they reach for a ready meal."

The brands that were positioned in the fine food sector, which prioritise provenance as well as taste, were some of the few beneficiaries during the pandemic.

> "The pandemic has meant that people have had to cook more out of necessity and understand what goes into a really delicious meal. This makes them more discerning when they reach for a ready meal"



### HEATH IN FOCUS

Milly Bagot, the co-founder of ByRuby, on why health is the future for ready meals



Health for me is all about natural and great ingredients cooked with care; not necessarily low fat. The freezer is the future for ready meals; it will reduce waste and get people eating in a more healthy way. I think the real problem is additives and preservatives, which you don't need in a frozen meal. The future of ready meals needs to be more ingredients-focused. Other ready meal brands need to be more transparent when talking about their ingredients, and I think the consumer will become more questioning.



> The freezer is the future for ready meals; it will reduce waste and get people eating in a more healthy way

ByRuby saw a significant spike in sales early in the pandemic when supermarkets were struggling to stock shelves and delivery slots were like gold dust. Businesses that are able to maintain this have the potential to continue growing post-Covid. Milly believes this new Covid-inspired demographic – the consumers who would have previously dined at a restaurant but not trusted the quality of ready meals – is here to stay. "We have lots of customers who wouldn't ordinarily buy so-called ready meals but feel they trust what we do because of the ingredients we use and our careful sourcing. Those people will not go away after the pandemic dissipates."

## Staying power

Post-Covid, the return to normal – or even a 'new normal' – will certainly benefit the ready meals and soups sector. "As shoppers start to return to more normal shopping habits – which we're seeing at the moment quite strongly – I would expect that ready meals will start to bounce back," Richard says. However, to retain customers who are zeroing in on health and sustainability, fine food independents should look to the brands championing provenance and sustainability.

Retailers can expect to see more and more brands improving their eco credentials, Richard says. "As a manufacturer, you ignore sustainability at your peril." There are a number of qualities retailers can look for in sustainable ready meals, from packaging that is recyclable or compostable to ambitious net zero carbon plans – for example, Wild Hare has partnered with a carbon tracking app that lets customers offset their carbon footprint by supporting nature-based soltuions, such as tree planting or restoring peatlands. But finding an eco-friendly niche can also be as simple as sourcing ingredients produced closer to home. "By sourcing our food from local British farmers, the reduced travel distance lowers the amount of CO2 emitted into the atmosphere via transportation vehicles," Domine says.

> People are looking for health, absolutely, but they're looking for comfort food as well

Producers of great-tasting ready meals that put the environment first will see positive growth, Dominie believes. "I think the future is bright for quality ready meals post-Covid. The attention of the entire world has shifted towards the climate crisis and there has never been a more appropriate time to adopt a carbon-conscious attitude to both production and consumption," she says. "I am determined to educate people on the importance of sustainability and hope that we can encourage collective action in an industry that could really make a big difference to the overall carbon footprint of the UK."

After a tough year and half, it is clear that the speciality ready meals sector is optimistic again. "People have enjoyed eating at home more and the process of cooking, but they still want something seriously special that they haven't cooked themselves now and then," Milly says. "That's where our meals come in."

**READY** MEALS ARE **BOUNCING** BACK WITH **SALES** UP **2.1%**

**SOURCE: BRITISH FROZEN FOOD FEDERATION DATA FOR THE 52 WEEKS TO JUNE 2021**

## A TASTE FOR THE CLASSICS

The rise of plant-based ready meals has been a significant development – and something which was accelerated by Covid. A poll by Yonder revealed that more than a fifth of Brits were eating less meat than the previous year, and 65% were willing to reduce their meat consumption, with health being a driving factor. According to Richard, retailers can expect to see more free-from and vegan products hit the market. "You wouldn't have naturally associated plant-based with ready meals a few years ago. You were seeing it as a meat replacement, as a protein. Now you're actually seeing it as a ready meal."

This change is well underway in the multiples. A report by Eating Better reveals that more and more plant-based ready meals are making their way onto supermarket shelves. The 2021 report said vegan meals are the fastest-growing category, up by 92% since the group's first survey in 2018. Aldi and Tesco had increased their plant-based ready meal options by 175% and 103% respectively.

Despite clear demand for vegan meals, plant-based isn't everything. While consumers are keen to eat more meat-free meals when they cook for themselves, Milly believes that when they reach for a ready meal they're looking for classic flavours. "A ready meal for most is a treat, and that's how people eat ByRuby," she says. The brand's most popular products support this theory, as classic dishes – such as British Free-Range Chicken, Leek and Bacon Pie or Classic Fish Pie – are firm favourites. Wild Hare's bestsellers reflect this too, with Dominie noting that the business's traditional Shepherd's Pie is a fan favourite.

Richard agrees that nostalgia is a winner for ready meals. "We're seeing two things: people are looking for health, absolutely, but they're looking for comfort food as well. We've still got uncertain times around us, so I think people are going to their favourites."

## STOCK CHECK




**BYRUBY GRASS-FED BEEF BOURGUIGNON**
Slowly braised organic, grass-fed Rhug Estate tender beef in red wine with chestnut mushrooms, baby onions and organic, dry-cured bacon.
**byruby.co.uk**




**WILD HARE BRITISH CHICKEN DHAL**
Made with lemon, ginger and spinach, these healthy, sustainable ready meals will be sure to tantalise tastebuds.
**thewildharegroup.co.uk**




**MUNCHFIT EAT STRONG**
Become stronger and make lean gains with higher calorie meals, like Lebanese Lamb Burgers, Quinoa Carrot Salad.
**munchfit.co.uk**




**PEP KITCHEN CHORIZO TEMPEH & RED PEPPER STEW**
Spanish-style stew with red pepper, chickpeas and butterbeans.
**pepkitchen.co.uk**




**LAZY VEGAN THAI GREEN CURRY**
A Thai-style frozen ready meal loaded with fresh vegetables.
**lazyvegan.com**




**DYLAN'S AT HOME LEEK & POTATO SOUP**
Perfect for a starter or cosy meal at home, and best served with toasted sourdough bread.
**dylansrestaurant.co.uk**




**ROD AND BEN'S MOROCCAN VEGETABLE SOUP**
A warming, exotically spiced fragrant soup, bringing together the flavours of the Medina and the Atlas mountains.
**rodandbens.com**




**NOBLE HOUSE PREPARED LAMB TAGINE**
Lamb, dates, apricots, chickpeas and tomatoes, gently roasted and slow cooked in a rich sweet broth, with authentic Moroccan spices.
**noblehouseprepared.com**




**MR LEE'S CHICKEN CONGEE RICE PORRIDGE**
Ready to eat in just four minutes and made with authentic Asian-style flavours, natural ingredients and a unique grain blend.
**mrleesnoodles.com**




**WILD & GAME VENISON COTTAGE PIE**
This comforting treat combines minced venison with a rich gravy, carrots, peas and onions and buttery mashed Scottish potatoes.
**wildandgame.co.uk**

**COMMENTATORS**



**RUTH EDGE**
NFU



**CHARLOTTE SMITH**
EGGS TO APPLES FARM SHOP



**ELISE FRIEDMAN**
THE LONDON DELICATESSEN



**ANNA ELLIOT**
EVERSFIELD ORGANIC



**JAMES WOODWARD**
SUSTAIN



**SASKIA NUIJTEN**
EIT FOOD




# BUILDING TRUST IN BRITISH FOOD

Shoppers are showing a growing desire to support local producers. Here's how farmers and retailers alike can make the most of the opportunity

The special appeal of food produced or grown locally has always been an important string in the bow of fine food retailers, but never has the demand for British-made food and drink been as high as it is today. In fact, data from the Farmer Favourability Survey, conducted by OnePoll, found that 73% of the public often or always looks specifically for British food when shopping – the highest figure recorded since the survey began in 2012. "We believe that customers see the quality of British products that farmers are producing and wish to support this," explains NFU head of food chain Ruth Edge. "It is great to see our environmental and welfare credentials being recognised."

The Farmer Favourability Survey also revealed unwavering support for British food and farming, as the record-breaking level reached at the start of the pandemic continued in 2021. This followed innovation group EIT Food's largest ever TrustTracker study in June 2020, which was conducted with nearly 20,000 consumers across 18 European countries to measure trust in the food system. The survey revealed another positive outlook for farmers. "Of all players within the food sector, farmers were identified as the most trusted by the public, with two-thirds (67%) of European consumers reporting that they trust farmers compared to just 13% that do not," says Saskia Nuijten, director of communication at EIT Food. The survey measures the key 'trust determinants' of competency, care and openness. "In 2020, 64% of respondents said they felt farmers have necessary skills, 69% said farmers are doing a good job and 55% said farmers are honest about their role in the food system. Overall, 56% also stated that they felt farmers act in the public interest; this rises to 72% in the UK," Saskia says.

## Conscious consumption

Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming, ran its own survey early on in the pandemic. "We found that more and more people were choosing to buy from better food traders, like farmers' markets and independent shops," said James Woodward, sustainable farming officer. "We believe that people want to buy more of their household produce from places that they can trust, have a relationship with and which are more ethical and sustainable. The climate and nature emergency, coupled with the Covid pandemic, have made people think more about their health and impact on the planet and each other," he explains.

Anna Elliot, sales and marketing director at Eversfield Organic, which runs an e-commerce shop as well as several farm shops, agrees. "We believe consumers are becoming aware of where their food is coming from and actively trying to support locally sourced, British food and producers." Anna says. "Importing food from different countries takes time and money, let alone costs to the environment. More consumers are choosing to support seasonal, British foods so that in turn they are supporting the environment, plus their neighbours who produce it."

Sustainability has become a clear driver of the 'Buy British' mentality. Elise Friedman founded her shop The London Delicatessen in response to growing demand for local food. "The benefits of buying from independent makers, ranging from environmental friendliness to sheer quality, were just too good to pass up," Elise says. She has found that customers have a keen desire to cut down on food waste. "It's terribly wasteful and inefficient to ship food all over the world when you can literally grow it in your back garden. Add on to this the environmental cost of masses of plastic packaging and you have a green cause worth fighting for. It matters to our customers that food is sourced sustainably and that the packaging will not be a burden on the environment."




> "Locally produced food ties people to a place and gives people a sense of belonging and something to relate to"

Far more than a trend, the sustainability movement has the power to boost demand for locally produced goods dramatically. "We expect the local shopping trend to continue as sustainability issues gain more traction and lower commuting costs result in increased disposable income, which many will choose to spend on food and drink," says Kate Rosser, insight analyst at the Local Data Company.

## Technology's role

In today's environment, how do farmers, producers and retailers alike continue to build trust with consumers? "While there is no indication that trust will decrease, there are important factors farmers need to consider if they want to maintain, or grow, trust from the UK public," Saskia says. "When asked for suggestions about what each part of the food system could do specifically to help build trust, consumers said that farmers need to be more approachable and get closer to the public.

"People suggested public-facing web pages and more opportunities for them to visit or meet with farmers at markets could help,"



she continues. Sustain's James agrees that technology is providing new avenues for farmers. "Lots of farmers are using social media to bring their farm to the public and show what they are doing, and this is proving successful," he says. "For example, Nikki Yoxall, who farms in Aberdeenshire, is doing amazing work in using social media and other tools to bring her farm to life and the public."

Saskia says that consumers also want farms to provide more transparency and honesty about their processes and practices, and to show what they are doing to minimise negative impacts on animals and the environment. Anna agrees that traceability is a key way to build trust. "All our organic and wild meat and sustainable fish come with full traceability, right back to the farm where it was reared or the boat it was caught on. Farmer, breed and date of slaughter are all things we can find with the individual traceability numbers,"





**56%** OF **EUROPEANS** FEEL **FARMERS** ACT IN THE **PUBLIC** INTEREST, RISING TO **72%** IN THE **UK**

**SOURCE: EIT FOOD**

Anna explains. "In our farm shops, we like to display this information for customers to easily see, plus our shop teams are more than happy to talk customers through any transparency queries, too."

## Building community

While technology can provide new avenues for sharing information, it's the message and story at the heart of this which will engage new consumers. "It's important that the public understand that farmers are people with stories, while learning about where food comes from and how they can support a more sustainable farming future," James says. "Farmers should look to build strong and open relationships with their surrounding communities and customers by proactively engaging with people and having conversation about farming and food," he says. Open farm days and events are another great way to do this, with groups like LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) offering a way to get local communities onto farms to learn about regenerative and agroecological farming. John Pawsey of Shimpling Park Farm is an example of a farmer who has worked hard to bring his organic mixed farm to people to in a way that is "engaging and exciting," James says.

Independent retailers can also provide a space to engage consumers with producers. "Locally produced food ties people to a place and gives people a sense of belonging and something to relate to. Knowing there are people out there enjoying the same things as you is one of life's little joys," says Elise. Community is increasingly important to people, she says. "We hope we foster some of that spirit through providing a convenient marketplace for people to find what they need. A desire to look after the environment and be less dependent on faceless corporations will drive people to search out the best of what their locality has to offer." The Local Data Company's Kate agrees that consumers are choosing to shop locally to support their communities and enjoy a more personalised service. "Many have grown to value the personable experience, where shopkeepers know your name and are keen to chat – something that can't be found shopping online or in the larger supermarkets."

Anna, too, has found that physical retail shops are important for building trust with consumers. "As we're primarily an online business, our farm shops have been key to growing and developing customer relationships, explaining the ethos of the business and the importance of organic in a face-to-face environment," she explains. Events also help build community spirit. "We're always putting on events in our farm shops, such as BBQs to try out our organic meat at our Tavistock Farm Shop and the Dartmoor Inn, Merrivale. Our Totnes Farm Shop and Café offers discounts and special offers for customers of the café to use in the shop as another 'try before you buy' experience. The purpose of such events is to get people back to their local high streets, trying locally sourced and ethically produced food to give back to the local economy and hopefully discover their new favourite organic produce while on their farm-to-fork journey."

As more consumers take an interest in where their food comes from, the opportunity for British producers and indie retailers is growing. "Smaller producers and farmers are seemingly becoming more trustworthy as they offer more transparency," Anna says. "Lots of large-scale food suppliers are often 'outed' in the news for untrustworthy food production and communication. This may be why more people are turning to local farmers, farm shops and independent suppliers. Even with the growth of digital, word-of-mouth and personal relationships are still so important when it comes to purchasing decisions. We need that trust between farmers and consumers so we know the money we are investing into such producers is going to a good cause," she says. By growing the trust between suppliers and consumers, the entire fine food and drink industry – and the customers they serve – stand to benefit. As Anna concludes, "Trust is needed both ways to keep the very intricate circle of producing, selling and consumption going."

> "Covid has allowed many shoppers to access local food more easily, and small businesses have taken a step forward in showcasing what is available"

## WHAT'S REVIVING DEMAND FOR LOCAL?

Consumers are increasingly appreciating the high-quality, fresh food and drink available from UK producers – but what's driving this trend? Covid and Brexit – the two biggest industry buzzwords of recent years – have both played significant roles. A poll of 2,000 adults revealed that more than half intended to buy more British produce in 2021 due to Brexit. The survey, commissioned by food production company Crosse & Blackwell, also found that following Brexit, Brits would pay an average of 10% more for a product if it was made in Britain.

While Brexit rekindled a desire to support British producers, Covid-19's shock to global food supply chains hammered home just how important local products can be. "The pandemic encouraged customers, both existing and new, to focus on what's available on their doorstep rather than automatically turning to, or relying on supermarkets 100% of the time," says Charlotte Smith of Eggs to Apples Farm Shop.

"Availability was at the forefront of everyone's minds when lockdown first hit. Supermarkets were unable to keep up with demand for many essentials. It was local producers, farmers, and businesses that truly shone through," she continues. "Having historically strong relationships with them meant our shorter supply chains were able to keep up with demand, much to the relief of our customers. This highlighted the important role our local and British producers play in the larger shopping community."



## RETAIL INSIGHT

Looking to promote more British producers in your shop? Charlotte Smith of Eggs to Apples Farm Shop explains how she uses displays to boost sales

We have increased the visibility of where our produce comes from using individual signage for many producers, such as the ethical Sussex butcher we use from West Sussex, our local dairy that provides all our milk and cream, and the Sussex bakeries who deliver to us daily. All our fruit and vegetables are clearly labelled with their origin; whether it's lemons from Spain or strawberries from two miles down the road, we can ensure customers have an informed choice. Our signage around the shop is updated regularly using chalk boards and we love to shout about seasonal heroes arriving in-store each year, such as local asparagus and cherries.



# FINAL CALL

As we approach the winter months, it's unclear what could be around the corner. Covid-19 cases remain stubbornly high as I write this, and despite the Prime Minister being "dead set" against shutting us into another lockdown, our industry knows all too well how quickly things can change. As ever, the outlook is uncertain, and we must remain flexible in order to be ready for anything that's thrown our way.

But whatever the coming months might bring, it's been a summer to remember for many retailers and producers alike. The reopening of foodservice and hospitality was a welcome relief to those with restaurants and cafés, and it brought a tangible difference to consumer confidence. Shoppers are becoming bolder visiting stores, and with many keen to be socialising again, it's an exciting time to be a bricks and mortar shop.

Plus, we've had a warm welcome back to the world of events. In September, the fine food industry came together for the Speciality & Fine Food Fair. The atmosphere was buzzing for the two-day event, and everyone I spoke with was so pleased to be back networking, tasting and finding inspiration in person with one another again. On a personal note, it was my first trade show since I joined *Speciality Food* mid-pandemic, and it was fantastic to meet the passionate individuals behind so many of the businesses I have discovered over the last year.

I was far from the only newcomer in attendance. There were plenty of fresh names and brand new launches on the stands this year. To hear one story after the next about how businesses that had started up in January 2020 with big dreams and bold visions survived the pandemic through innovation, grit and a good dose of hard work, was inspiring. It's great to see so many of them going strong after these difficult two years. From the nimble innovation of start-ups to the dedicated passion of long-established brands, this industry is full of inspiring tales, and I feel privileged to be able to help tell those stories today.

**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

## EMMA HEAL, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF LUCKY SAINTS



**WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?**
Travelling around the world with Lady Gaga as one of her backing dancers.

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?**
I cut my teeth in the world of food and drink when I joined Tesco as a graduate buyer. Before I was allowed anywhere near a negotiation or product development table, I spent six months in the Cheshunt Extra store, working my way around each department.

**WHAT INSPIRES YOU?**
Without sounding overly cheesy, it's the people I work with.

**WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?**
The toughest times have been when I've worked for an organisation where my personal values weren't aligned.

**WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?**
Hands down, it's been building our incredible team.

**AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?**
Right now, it's waiting impatiently for footfall to fully bounce back.

**HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?**
We'd love the government and the food/drink industry to collaborate and really champion the physical and mental health benefits of people moderating their alcohol consumption, even slightly!

**TEA OR COFFEE?**
Tea please. Milk, no sugar and a biscuit if it's going.

**WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?**
Pizza Pilgrims Margherita with a negroni to start, followed by an Honest Burger and their legendary rosemary chips all washed down with a few pints of Lucky Saint. I'd finish it all off with my mum's apple crumble and throw in an affogato for good measure.

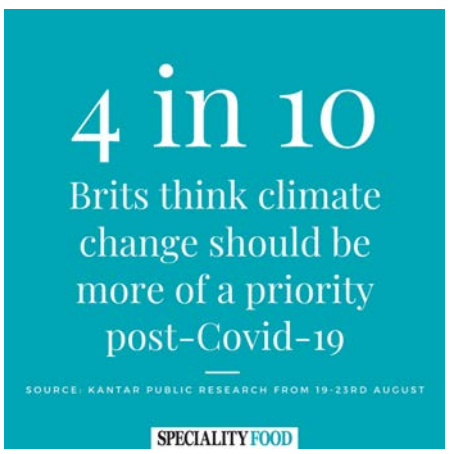
**WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?**
The team and I created three values we all live by everyday: Be Generous, Stay Humble and Get Lucky.

**WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?**
When I was backpacking in Indonesia we drank coffee made from beans that had been 'extracted' from the bottom of a marsupial.

**WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?**
*Winnie the Pooh* by A.A. Milne. So many lessons for life in those beautiful pages.

**SWEET OR SAVOURY?**
Sweet popcorn at the bottom of the carton, salty on top.

## BE CONNECTED




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

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The final word on fine food

# TRIED & TESTED

### JP'S ORIGINAL TEA ROSE CHAI




I have always been a lover of chai – from steaming cups of the subtly warming varieties to the ones with a fierce kick of heat that I'll gladly drink by the mug-full. That's why I was instantly drawn to JP's Original Tea's Rose Chai, which promises to be a modern twist on the traditional Kashmiri chai. While it doesn't obviously resemble those fiery brews, the delicate blend of Yunnan green tea and sweet rose is fragrant and refreshing, while the crushed cardamom brings a sense of familiarity. Plus, each box contributes to Friendsline, a small grassroots charity supporting women in developing countries.
**jpsoriginals.com**

### CHIMILOVE CHIMICHURRI ORIGINAL




There is seemingly no end to the number of jars and sauces I have in my fridge today, but the one I find myself reaching for time and time again is Chimilove's Chimichurri. The Original blend's jalapeños offer a real kick of heat, while parsley and oregano bring a delicious freshness. I've enjoyed it drizzled onto a veggie wrap and mixed in with scrambled eggs, but meat lovers can get adventurous using it as a marinade on fish or chicken or rubbing it into a cut of steak.
**chimi.love**

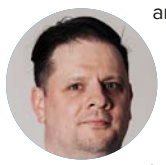
### OZERLAT PISTACHIO TURKISH DELIGHT




If Turkish Delight takes you back to reading about the wondrous world of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, you're not alone. But you can forget about childish fantasies of sweet treats with Ozerlat – these pistachio delicacies are thoroughly grown up. The sweet, smooth pieces are balanced with roasted pistachio chunks, creating an indulgent treat that's perfectly suited to quality snacking. The swish box also means it's a great gifting option for customers ahead of the festive season.
**ozerlat.co.uk**

# THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Chris Niven, executive chef of The Lawn



The Lawn is located right on the coast in North Berwick, East Lothian, overlooking the hotel's green lawns, the golf course and across to the Fife coast. The views are pretty spectacular from the restaurant. North Berwick has an amazing harbour and it's right on our doorstep. This makes it easy for us to source wonderful seafood and lobster. There is a lobster hatchery at the harbour, too, that houses 20,000 baby lobsters which are reared by a terrific team until they are old enough to take on the sea.

North Berwick has a real sense of community. The locals are friendly and supportive, which makes it a great place to be part of. We are spoilt for choice when it comes to local produce as there are so many producers to choose from.

East Lothian has a phenomenal selection of suppliers and producers. There are quite a few organic producers here that sell to local farm shops and at the likes of Haddington farmer's market. East Lothian is on the coast, so there is an abundance of fish and shellfish here; our menu at The Lawn is inspired by the coast and features a lot of locally and sustainability sourced seafood.

I am quite new to the area – my previous role was in St Andrews in Fife – but I have had plenty of time in the run up to opening to meet the suppliers and producers local to the hotel, and I have been really impressed. One of my favourites is our cold pressed rapeseed oil that comes from Black & Gold at Stevenson Mains Farm in Haddington, which is 15 minutes from the hotel. I use this quite a bit and it really helps bring out the flavour in produce.

Belhaven Smokehouse offers the best smoked salmon and trout in the country in my opinion. They never fail to deliver outstanding tasting fish. A producer I was excited to start working with is Phantassie, which provides us with all our fruit and vegetables. We receive a spreadsheet on a weekly basis as to what is coming into season, and this helps us plan our daily specials and seasonal menus. Again, I cannot fault the produce that they provide.

Our menu lets the ingredients do the talking, so having wonderful fresh fruit and vegetables really makes a dish. When it comes to beef and lamb, I use John Gilmour Butchers in the neighbouring town of Tranent. I have worked with them for years and know the team very well. We get 35-day dry-aged quality beef and lamb from them. They are not mass producers and are masters in their field when it comes to marbling and ageing the produce.

I source my lobsters from a fishing boat at Seacliff harbour; John the fisherman has been amazing, and I plan to get out on the boat with him in the next few months to really understand the produce they catch. I use some Edinburgh suppliers, too, like Edinburgh Butter Company for butter and buttermilk and Andante bakery for bread. Over the next few months, I plan to take my kitchen team to meet and spend some time with our suppliers as part of their development, so they can really understand the produce.

> "North Berwick has a real sense of community. The locals are friendly and supportive, which makes it a great place to be part of. We are spoilt for choice when it comes to local produce"

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Garofalo

# CHAMPIONING AUTHENTIC ITALIAN PRODUCTS

With the risk of food fraud on the rise, independent retailers can help educate consumers on the joy of genuine Italian food and drink



Brits' love for all things Italian is well-known among speciality retailers. If anything, during these strange pandemic months, that love for familiar and warming dishes like pizza and pasta has grown, with sales of products such as pizza ovens and tinned tomatoes soaring.

But recent data provides a stark warning about the rise of counterfeit products. Pre-Brexit, Britain was the fourth-largest importer of Italian food, according to *The Takeout*, but by September 2021, Italy's pasta exports to the UK have fallen by 28%, extra virgin olive oil by 13% and tomato products by 16%. A statement from Italy's agriculture lobby group, Coldiretti, warned that manufacturers are using deceptive packaging to trick customers into believing they're buying genuine Italian products. "The British need to watch out for Italian oil and Parmesan with an Italian flag on the label, which actually comes from America," warned chief economist Lorenzo Bazza.

'Italian-sounding' products have long been an issue in the UK market, but if this is on the rise, there's all the more reason for fine food retailers to step in with quality, authentic products. Retailers have the opportunity to educate customers about genuine protected product labels and certifications, such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). Italy has a whopping 42 PDO and six Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) olive oils, proving there is plenty of quality to be found for those ready to look for it.

Meanwhile, the UK has introduced its own Geographical Indication (GI) schemes post-Brexit to ensure popular and traditional products made in the UK can obtain special status to prove their authenticity. The first of these, Gower Salt Marsh Lamb, was introduced in August.

The passion for provenance growing, with more consumers wanting to know exactly where the food and drink they purchase comes from. Throughout Covid, shoppers have also become aware of the tough conditions for food makers, and the drive to support local producers is increasing. With the intent clearly there, all retailers need to do is help consumers connect the dots by showcasing the very best authentic and small-batch products on the market today.

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



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