SPECIALITY FOOD

PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS



ADVISOR

OLLIE LLOYD:
THE POWER OF COLLABORATION
P. 14



LAURA'S LARDER

LAURA ROBERTS:
FESTIVE DRINKS TO STOCK NOW
P. 46



PAXTON & WHITFIELD

DAN BLISS:
SELLING CHEESE AT CHRISTMAS
P. 50



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In this issue

8 **John Shepherd**
Partridges

14 **Ollie Lloyd**
Advisor

54 **James Grant**
No.2 Pound Street

REGULARS

27 **Product News**

48 **Counterpoint: Curating the Ultimate Counter**

54 **Cheese Uncut**

56 **Trend Watch: Swicy**

62 **Last Words**

FEATURES

20 **Spotlight On: Garlic Farm**

22 **lunch! 2024 show preview**

26 **Meet the Producer: Ice Kitchen**

32 **Centre Spread: Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses**

34 **Spreading the Word**

36 **Taste of Yorkshire**

40 **Getting Your Christmas Hamper Offering Right**

41 **Jars To Be Relished**

44 **Comfort & Joy**

46 **Toast the Season**

50 **Selling Cheese at Christmas**

52 **Le Gruyère AOP: A Festive Favourite**

57 **Speciality & Fine Food Fair 2024 preview**







EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the September issue of *Speciality Food*, where we have one foot in late summer and the other firmly in Christmas.

I don't know about you, but even after over a decade of 'Christmas In July' I can still find it challenging to switch from one season to the other in the blink of an eye, yet this is something that our industry with aplomb year on year.

In this issue, in order to make the jump a little smoother, we're sharing a whole host of ideas and product recommendations to get you ready for the festive season – from how to curate the ultimate Christmas cheese counter and the chutneys and pickles to accompany them, to the festive cakes and puddings to stock to tempt your customers' taste buds and the drinks that are well worth space on your Christmas shelves, we've got you covered.

We're also sharing previews of two of the must-attend trade events at this time of year – lunch! and Speciality & Fine Food Fair – so you know what awaits you ahead of your visit. All that, plus the news and views from across the sector to keep you one foot forward – whatever the season.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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8 key points from The Food & Drink Federation's Q2 report

Inflation, labour shortages and tricky EU relations are just some of the issues the industry has faced in the second part of the year

Food and drink businesses are persisting during challenging times, but more action from the government is needed to help them survive and thrive says The Food and Drink Federation (FDF).

The Federation recently published its Q2 State of Industry Report, which tracks confidence and trends across the the UK's largest manufacturing sector, with a third of respondents being large employers of more than 250 staff, 31% employing 50 to 249 people, and 25% being small operations of 10 to 49 employees. Businesses represented include bakery, soft drinks, grains/starches, crops, crisps and snacks, and more.

The latest analysis from the FDF reveals nearly nine out of 10 of those asked expect to maintain or increase investment levels to the end of 2024 – a signal the sector could well have turned a corner after suffering external shocks, such as Brexit, inflation and Covid, which have led to a 30% drop in investment since 2019.

Findings show food and drink manufacturers are looking to invest long-term, and are seeking out supply chains and ways of working that secure British food supply, while creating healthier and more sustainable products for UK and global consumers.

Innovation and adopting new technology are key for economic growth, the organisation said, noting that more than a third of those surveyed planned to increase their R&D spend during the coming year.

The report also found businesses remain concerned about policy and regulatory uncertainty, and non-tariff barriers (such as health certificates) which could risk denting the industry's export competitiveness. There is an opportunity, it added, to remove these obstacles, and drive domestic and international investment to increase growth, productivity and jobs.

Balwinder Dhoot, the FDF's director for sustainability and growth, said, "Despite investment in our sector being down by a third compared to 2019, it's encouraging that manufacturers are planning to increase or sustain their investment this year. A well-crafted Industrial Strategy – working in partnership with the UK's largest manufacturing sector – will also allow us to seize investment opportunities and tackle some of the nation's critical challenges around food security, health, productivity and net zero. It is crucial for government to help establish a stable business environment that removes the burden of unnecessary and costly regulation and bureaucracy."

Balwhinder added he is pleased to see a renewed focus on improving UK-EU relations and barriers to trade with this significant partner. "Providing targeted support for smaller businesses – who make up 97% of our sector and who are disproportionately impacted by these costs and pressures – must be a priority. This approach will help make the UK the best place to invest and innovate in food and drink production."

8 KEY THINGS THE FDF HAS NOTED IN Q2

• Investment is the key to long term success. The report says more needs to be done, though, to help the industry rebuild its margins. Despite inflation holding steady at 1.5% in July, and stabilising production and input costs remaining largely unchanged in the past year, there remains a lasting impact from the war in Ukraine and Covid, meaning we're unlikely to see prices drop. For the industry to rebuild from a few difficult years, it needs to focus on investment and innovation.

• Smaller businesses are under tremendous pressure, with confidence falling to –6% in Q2 – the first negative result for this portion of respondents in a year. Two thirds of those surveyed are worried about demand as inflationary pressures see a significant consumer shift to own-label and cheaper products. Smaller producers are most vulnerable to market changes, and typically operate on short term supply contracts and tight margins.

• A large number of UK food and drink manufacturers (70%) are focused on growing UK sales, with NPD ranked as their second highest growth strategy. This demonstrates the desire of these businesses to prioritise innovation, which is incredibly important for competitiveness. Automation to address labour shortages has increased, as has adopting new and existing technologies for greater productivity.

• Priorities for industry with the new government include strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU, alongside looking at employment and skills policies, and packaging reforms. Trade relations, the FDF said, are absolutely vital, and non-tariff barriers are hindering the way manufacturers operate within the EU. Around 54% are impacted by administrative costs restricting foreign sales, 40% by export health certificates, and 24% by import health certificates. It's becoming more costly and time-consuming to operate outside of the UK.

• Labour shortages stood at 4.9% in Q2, compared to 5% in Q1, remaining above rates in wider manufacturing of 2.6%, and UK-wide (2.8%), These skills shortages continue to have an impact at all levels, from distribution to the factory floor, engineering and management.

• Of those surveyed, 58% would like funding prioritised for novel and alternative packaging, and 55% for resource footprint measurement and reduction.

• 62% of respondents said they want to use Apprenticeship Levy funds for first line manager development, while 56% for business development techniques and engineering conversion modules that allow them to upskill workers.





Sales service launched for cash-conscious brands

A new service to help speciality brands build awareness and sales with potential retail and wholesale partners has been launched by Mash Chiles of consultancy business Gourmet Partners.

Brand Builders is a low-cost, focused sales initiative which represents brands' products through sales representatives – connecting producers with retailers and wholesalers as if they had their own salesperson on the road.

Sales representatives will deliver product samples and commercial information from clients to retailers, feeding feedback to the brands, and purchase orders can be shared with clients and distributors as required.

Mash Chiles, founder of Brand Builders, said, "Our service assists all areas of the sales and purchasing cycle and will not only help to grow our clients brands, but also exists alongside our clients chosen distribution partners sales team. With our model of providing transparent collaboration at a good value price, we are passionate about helping high quality, innovative businesses succeed in the fine food industry."

Plant Based World Expo Europe returns to London

The annual gathering of plant-based retail and foodservice professionals is taking place 13th-14th November 2024 at ExCeL, London.

Leading manufacturers and solutions providers will offer a valuable overview of the plant-based sector, including end products, packaging, ingredients and logistics – offering visitors the opportunity to source new plant-based food and drink, gain inspiration and connect with other business owners.

Over 150 businesses will be showcasing their products, and visitors can also enjoy informative sessions via the event's education programme covering topics such as trends, innovation, and the future of the sector. Meanwhile, the Culinary Theatre will showcase products available on the show floor via demonstrations by professional chefs.

The Hosted Buyer Programme returns for 2024 to connect manufacturers with UK and European buyers from retail and foodservice, and the event has launched a new awards programme – The Plant-Based Excellence Awards – to help buyers source the very best products in the sector across categories including sweet, savoury, meat-mimics, ready-meals and more. The products will be judged by buyers and industry advisors on their taste, appearance, branding, sustainability and value chain. The awards will culminate in a live ceremony taking place at the show on Wednesday 13th November.

Jonathan Morley, event director of Plant Based World Expo, said, "This year, more than ever, we are focused on facilitating those all-important connections between the retail and foodservice sectors and the companies providing plant-based products. Plant Based World Expo is the place to do business – where you can source everything you need – from inspiration, to products, insights, or contacts. Now is the time to tap into this network and make the most of the plant-based opportunity, for the future of your business and for the planet."





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"August – the most dangerous month"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

I recently saw an article headline declaring that August is one of the most dangerous months in the financial calendar.

It was pointing out that the current fears of a recession in the US, the biggest one day fall on the Japanese stock exchange since 1987 and the absence of policymakers on their summer breaks are all familiar features of this quietest of months.

Apparently the late summer period is a difficult time for financial markets as the VIX index (aka the Fear Index on Wall Street) is highest in the quarter from July to September.

In other words, when it should be the most sublime part of the year there is trouble afoot. The evidence was supplied as follows: Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Russia financially collapsed in August 1998, the US sub-prime mortgage crisis was raging in August 2007 and in the UK historically three of the four devaluations of the pound that have occurred happened after a difficult August.

In the Partridges retail sphere August is no walk in the park either. It is often the quietest month in the year, including January or February, and has no standout national events to provide a shot in the arm. It's a good time to use up annual leave, to plan ahead for autumn and to reorganise things without disrupting the remaining customers. All in all, a period of downtime which can in some years seem like underwater swimming until September.

And this year it has arrived at the end of a slow-motion roller-coaster period of shop sales.

For example, in January our sales were 2.7% up compared to the same month in 2023. February 4.7% down. March 14.3% up but April 6.4% down. May was 1.7% up but June 4.8% down and July 6.3% up. As I write this halfway through August our sales for the year are so far 2.2% down on 2023.

There are numerous well known background reasons for this lethargy. I read it was the sixth wettest spring on record (and the wettest since 1986) and indeed the wettest 18 months since records began in 1836. Recorded sunshine was also down significantly in the first six months and sunshine is the nectar that drives footfall to our speciality food products.

There have also been the depressing pincer movements of a squeeze on household budgets and weak consumer confidence adding to all the political uncertainties and global conflicts.

The other unsettling aspect about August is the feeling that it should be a time for pleasure and relaxation and well-rounded human beingness which often has the opposite effect. Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD is now recognised as affecting people not just in winter but also in summer as sufferers adjust to longer days and disrupted nights. On the shop floor the general summer increase in positive expectations can be deflated in August by a decrease in customers and all-round retail activity.

However, August and the summertime blues will be quickly gone as what feels like a new year starts in September.

We will, of course, claim to miss the halcyon days of summer – at least in the mind if not in the tills.

> "August is a period of downtime which can in some years seem like underwater swimming until September"



Meet the UK's best pick your own farms

The finalists of the pick your own category of the FRA's Farm Retail Awards 2024 have been announced.

Sponsored by Fieldfare, this award is designed to shine the spotlight on Britain's best pick your own farms and has been judged earlier than the other categories in order for the visits to take place during peak pick your own season.

The shortlisted businesses are:

- **CRAIGIE'S FARM,** QUEENSFERRY
- **MANOR FARM FRUITS,** TAMWORTH
- **GARSON FARM PYO,** ESHER

Emma Mosey, chair of the Farm Retail Association, said, "The first raft of finalists have been announced and the competition is fierce. The awards are now open, make sure you get your entries in to be part of this prestigious competition celebrating PYOs, farm shops and farmers markets nationally. This is a big year for FRA, we have plans for expansion and growth in the sector – come and be part of it!"

The finalists for the remaining categories will be announced later in the year, and the awards will be announced on Tuesday 12th March at the FRA Conference at the Eastside Rooms in Birmingham.

These include:

- **LARGE FARM SHOP OF THE YEAR** sponsored by Fresh Retail
- **SMALL FARM SHOP OF THE YEAR** sponsored by The Cress Company
- **FARM CAFE/RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR** sponsored by Arrange Spaces
- **FARM SHOP BUTCHERY OF THE YEAR** sponsored by Angel Refrigeration Ltd
- **RISING STAR AWARD** sponsored by Fieldfare
- **FARMERS MARKET OF THE YEAR** sponsored by Moseley Farmers Market
- **ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE YEAR**
- **LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

All members of the Farm Retail Association are eligible to enter the awards free of charge











FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW

WHERE THE UK SPECIALIST RETAIL SECTOR MEETS

The annual meeting place for the speciality food and drink retail community is back! Farm Shop & Deli Show returns from 7th-9th April 2025 at the NEC Birmingham as part of the award-winning UK Food & Drink Shows.

Visitors will have the opportunity to explore high-quality artisan, local and speciality food and drink, along with cutting-edge equipment, labelling and packaging solutions from over 450 exceptional specialist suppliers. Taking place over three days, the show features exciting new product launches, engaging sessions led by key industry experts and exclusive food and drink innovations.

As one of the most anticipated trade events in the sector, Farm Shop & Deli Show connects leading brands with owners, directors, managers and buyers from specialist retailers with a focus on artisanal produce. Exhibitors value this vibrant event for its proven ability to drive business growth and deliver impactful results.

There are still some spaces available for the 2025 show, but don't leave it too late as they are booking up fast! Please contact Mat.Rose@wrbm.com if you're interested in being part of this award-winning show next year.

Farm Shop & Deli Show will run alongside Food & Drink Expo, National Convenience Show and Foodex Manufacturing Solutions as part of the award-winning UK Food & Drink Shows – one badge will provide free access to all four co-located shows. This means that visitors can benefit from the vast spectrum of exhibitors, products and live sessions, whilst exhibitors will have an invaluable opportunity to showcase their products and services to a wider, engaged audience.

> "You get the farm shops here, you get your delis here, and you get all your independent smaller stores, as well as the bigger buyers. So, you get to see a broad range of buyers. I think it's just amazing. It's one of the best shows out there"
>
> **NICKI STEWART, DIRECTOR, DIVERSE FINE FOOD**

FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW

7-9 APRIL 2025
NEC BIRMINGHAM

LOOKING TO EXPAND YOUR REACH TO SPECIALIST RETAILERS?

Our 2024 exhibitors expect to generate on average £66k+ in business over the next 12 months from contacts they met at the show, and visitors say that the show is important for their product sourcing and purchasing decisions.

Don't miss the chance to elevate your business! Take a look some of the many reasons why exhibiting at the Farm Shop & Deli Show can benefit you:

- Increase brand and product awareness
- Network with the industry
- Launch new products and services to the market
- Showcase existing lines
- Generate new sales leads
- Connect with existing clients
- Achieve positive press and editorial coverage

CELEBRATING AND SUPPORTING **SPECIALIST SUPPLIERS** AND **RETAILERS**

In 2025, Farm Shop & Deli Show will be inviting suppliers and retailers to shine a spotlight on their businesses and products through two Award schemes, the Retailer Awards and the Product Awards.

FARM SHOP & DELI 2025 Retailer AWARDS

FARM SHOP & DELI 2025 Product AWARDS

RECOGNISING THE UK'S BEST INDEPENDENT SPECIALIST RETAILERS

Free to enter, the Farm Shop & Deli Retailer Awards, in partnership with The Grocer and championed by Fieldfare, are highly respected in the industry for playing a fundamental role in supporting and celebrating the UK's independent, specialist retail market. Across six categories and seven regions, the awards this year will recognise and celebrate the achievements of specialist retailers within the independent sector. Entries are open until Friday 27th September 2024.

The live final will take place at the Farm Shop & Deli Show on Monday 7th April, revealing 'Best in Category', 'Best in Region', 'Newcomer of the Year' and the overall 'Retailer of the Year' winners. Find out more and enter free via the website.

CELEBRATING THE FINEST PRODUCTS IN THE SPECIALIST FOOD & DRINK SECTOR

The Farm Shop & Deli Product Awards is a must-enter for suppliers for the specialist retail sector! Judges will review all aspects of each product that enters, including the full value chain and branding, with personalised feedback and will award worthy products a bronze, silver or gold accolade. The awards are exclusively open to products sold in farm shops, delis and other specialist food retailers, aiming to champion the independent sector.

Farm Shop & Deli Product Awards winners will be revealed in the lead up to the Farm Shop & Deli Show 2025. Take a look at the show website for more details, prices and how to enter.

Find out more about both awards at: farmshopanddelishow.co.uk/awards

> "It's the biggest show of the year for us as a fine food distributor. So, I would say it's a really good place to showcase your products and get to meet as many people under one roof in three days as you can"
>
> **MATT COXON, SALES MANAGER, THE CRESS CO**





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WHERE: NEC, Birmingham
WHEN: 7th-9th April 2025
WEB: farmshopanddelishow.co.uk
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New alliance created to put the environment impact of food to the test

The alliance provides a unique opportunity to address the lack of standards between stakeholders at an EU and international level.

In a major step towards transforming the environmental credentials of the food sector, the non-profit organisation Foundation Earth has been integrated into EIT Food, the world's largest food innovation community, supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union.

The integration of Foundation Earth into EIT Food will provide the expertise needed for important advocacy work to develop internationally-recognised standards surrounding the use of data to assess the environmental impact of food.

The newly created International Alliance for Food Impact Data will have the mandate of developing internationally adopted and accepted standards for the environmental scoring for food.

Initially it will be considering the EU policy landscape, in the recognition that any future standards mandated by the EU will likely be of the highest level, ensuring that companies and supply chains can apply one standard for compliance across multiple geographies.

Foundation Earth launched in 2021 to develop a system for the environmental scoring labelling of food and drink products - and has won support for its work from a coalition of leading producers, scientists, campaigners, charities, technology partners and politicians who share the Foundation's vision for a more environmentally-friendly food system.

It says environmental impact data is key to transforming food systems, and can be used to enable informed decision-making across the value chain for environmental and sustainability reporting, and in the development of front of pack labelling for consumers.

A growing number of different methodologies and labels are in use globally, but they all adhere to different standards, meaning they aren't comparable, and it is difficult for policy-makers, companies and consumers to assess the actual environmental impact of different food products, the alliance adds.

In order for the food industry to meet its Net Zero commitments, the complex challenge of environmental data, scoring and governance must be addressed, the alliance urges.

The integration of Foundation Earth into EIT Food is significant step in the development of the Alliance which will seek to work with industry, policymakers and consultancies to ensure the delivery of large-scale impact in the sector.

EIT Food chief executive, Richard Zaltzman, said, "Environmental data is a key lever of change for food systems transformation. We are absolutely delighted to integrate the knowledge and capacity of Foundation Earth into EIT Food, which will enable us to take strides towards our shared mission of transforming the food system with credibly collected, measured and evaluated impact data. This will form the basis for decision-making across the food and drink industry, policy, future-proving innovation in our sector and enabling us to reduce the environmental impact of the entire food system."

Foundation Earth chief executive, Cliona Howie, is now director of data impact systems at EIT food, with responsibility for the alliance. She said, "Joining forces with EIT Food will foster wider collaboration across all those fragmented initiatives that are individually working on the environmental foot-printing of food and drink products. Those efforts are currently constrained by limited resources, which has slowed progress towards a single European-wide system."

Cliona hopes the initiative will "help put an end to unnecessary competition and enable us to leverage a new platform to convene a real solution with a clear roadmap, in the public service", with a focus on driving large scale impact that works across the whole food system.

She continued, "Our focus will be on driving large scale impact that works across the whole food system and transforming the environmental credentials of the continent's food and drink industry."





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Could the Deposit Return Scheme timeline change?

Communication between an MP and a member of government has sparked debate over the time frame for the scheme, which has been plagued by setbacks.

Leaders from Britain's drinks industry have allegedly written to the government for assurances there are no plans to implement the DRS (Deposit Return Scheme) earlier than 2027, as currently outlined.

The scheme, which was left out of Labour's manifesto, has been a source of outrage and bafflement over the past few years, with communication being called out as "extraordinarily poor", and with businesses in Scotland threatening to sue the Scottish government in 2023 for failing to bring the scheme to fruition that summer (delaying until 2025) at great expense to those who had been preparing for its arrival.

In May this year the Conservatives, in a joint policy statement, confirmed a further delay to the scheme across nations in order to give those affected more time to prepare, and to allow breathing space for consumers and producers to understand what DRS will involve, while taking into account devolved waste and recycling policies.

At the time, the government said plastic PET (polyethylene terephthalate) drinks bottles and metal drinks cans sized 150ml to 3litres would be in scope across the UK and therefore exempt from disposal fees and labelling obligations, while the position on glass bottles would be set out by each nation individually.

Speaking in May, Karen Betts, CEO of the Food and Drink Federation said it was critical for UK governments to work closely together to ensure the scheme is "easy to use and understand, operating under the same rules and with the same labels across the four nations. A consistent, UK-wide approach is the best way to ensure value for money, and to drive up the UK's disappointing recycling rates."

This week the timeline of the DRS was thrust into the spotlight as Daisy Cooper, Liberal Democrat MP for St Albans, posed a question to the secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs, asking whether he had plans to introduce the DRS before 2027.

In a circular reply Mary Creagh, economy minister, replied that yes, the government is committed to creating a roadmap to a zero-waste economy and to "a future where we keep our resources in use for longer; waste is reduced; we accelerate the path to Net Zero; we see investment in critical infrastructure and green jobs; our economy prospers; and nature thrives."

She went on to say Labour was reviewing its suite of packaging reforms, with work ongoing with devolved counterparts, industry and other stakeholders to "determine the next steps for the Deposit Return Scheme", and with an update from the house expected "in due course".

The note has attracted mixed reactions from industry.

Jim Bligh, director of corporate affairs and packaging at the Food and Drink Federation, said it was good to see the government committing to putting a DRS in place as part of plans for a circular economy. "This means that drinks containers will be able to be recycled and used again more efficiently and easily, which is good news for the environment, companies and consumers. It's critical that the UK's governments now work closely together to ensure the scheme is easy to use and understand, operating under the same rules and with the same labels across the four nations," he said. "A consistent, UK-wide approach is the best way to ensure value for money and to drive up the UK's disappointing recycling rates."

There is a need to be cautious though, says the BRC's director of food and sustainability, Andrew Opie, who believes any change to the timeline now will have a serious impact, and that, until any changes are confirmed, those in industry should continue to work towards a start date of October 2027.

"Given the pause for the election, the existing timelines are already very tight for the introduction of a multi-billion pound DRS scheme," he said. "We have learnt from Scotland that DRS cannot be rushed, and retailers need sufficient time to make changes in store, and for all the logistics to be in place."

Andrew urges the government to "work with us to agree a practicable implementation timeline, rather than risk the kind of arbitrary deadline that led to the costly failed DRS scheme in Scotland."

Andy Slee, SIBA's CEO, agrees more time is needed, and there is still much to be arranged and discussed. He said SIBA is committed to the principle of a scheme that works for small independent breweries and consumers, but noted producers will need at least 18 to 24 months from the point that decisions are made for a Deposit Return Scheme to be successful.

"Currently there are a mountain of issues for the government to address, including passing the regulations, appointing the Deposit Management Organisation, and agreeing the rules and arrangements before meaningful decisions are made and before any small producer can even begin to prepare," Andy said.

"We still have a situation where the four nations cannot agree to the same container types, with Wales the only nation to include glass. Given that the Scottish DRS had to be abandoned, the Government should also learn the lessons from that. Under these circumstances it is very challenging to even meet the existing timeframe of 2027 without considering an earlier timetable."



How rising ingredient costs are impacting indies

From hiking prices to reformulating products, find out how SMEs are managing their tight margins as the prices of commodities continue to rise.

The rising costs of raw ingredients, caused by climate-change-induced shortages, are heaping pressure on small businesses' margins.

"When it comes to commodities and commodity buying, generally speaking, one of the biggest challenges an SME will face is we simply do not have the same buying power as the large-scale producers and manufacturers, as we don't buy the same volume of ingredients," explained Scott Dixon, managing director of The Flava People.

"Oil, spices, bread for breadcrumbs – all core ingredients we use in a large number of our products at The Flava People – have all seen incredible cost fluctuations over recent years and months, which we have had to manage internally. In fact, sugar has increased by 15-20%, tomato by 10-15%, salt hit its peak at 10%, and some of our packaging by up to 30%!"

Many ingredients' prices are being driven up by extreme weather caused by climate change and geopolitical challenges, said Helen Murphy, co-founder and CEO of Opply, an ingredients ordering platform for SMEs. "Climate change is driving up costs for ingredients like cacao and coconut, while geopolitical conflicts are affecting items such as dates. And strict EU regulations are making superfoods like ashwagandha and matcha much more pricey. Even everyday items like teabags are experiencing price pressures due to extreme weather in key growing regions," she said.







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5578

"Growing up"



OLLIE LLOYD
ADVISOR

The other day, I saw a giant poster in the Oxford Street branch of Clark's shoe shop promoting their collaboration with the hit Netflix series Stranger Things. It got me thinking about brand collaborations and how impactful they can be. Fast food brands have always been brilliant at collaborating with non-food brands, particularly movie franchises, but it feels like there are wider opportunities for premium brands. At Unilever, I did several brand collaborations, some quite surprising. They included partnering Cif / Jif with a high street optician and offering reduced-price holidays to Surf laundry powder consumers. Each partnership allowed us to tell a specific story, capture data, drive sales and connect with local consumers.

The key to good brand collaborations is thinking strategically. You need to understand why you are doing it and select the right brand for the task. Collaborations have a whole host of benefits. Firstly, they allow you to reach audiences loyal to the partner brand but may have yet to come across your brand. Secondly, they can enhance your brand's equity, encourage people to see your brand in a new light or even allow you to enter a new category. Finally, there is a range of pure commercial benefits as it can lead to new listings, more shelf space, promotional features or even the opening of new distribution channels.

Returning to The Clark's collaboration with Stranger Things, you can imagine how this was a no-brainer opportunity. Clark's is a brand with a long history but doesn't exactly have the cult following that a Netflix series does. It makes Clark's seem more on trend and means it can showcase its products in a new context. I doubt this collaboration was led by Clark's and might have been a happy accident of wardrobe choices. Whatever this partnership's genesis, it can inspire us to think more creatively about who we might partner with.

In the world of food, one of my favourite examples of recent years is the collaboration between one of my favourite ice creams, Jude's and Battersea Dog's Home, one of the most recognised charities in the UK. The partnership allowed Jude's to enter a new category (dog ice cream) with credibility. The involvement of Battersea makes me believe that the product will be good and genuinely appropriate for dogs, not just a gimmick. It also highlights the brand's belief in doing good; it is a B-Corp, after all. This kind of partnership, should also encourage retailers to look more favourably at this NDP as it has a great story at its heart. This should deliver more promotional space and feature and listings.

Recently, a business I work with and have invested in, Botivo, has done its first collaboration. Botivo is a non-alcoholic drinks brand, or big sipping botanical aperitivo as they call it. It is genuinely delicious, and I know many foodies who are obsessed with it. It is now stocked in many independent retailers and an extensive range of high-end restaurants as they see it as a craft alternative to the mass market and, frankly, tasteless zero per cent crew! It is made with apple cider vinegar and a range of botanicals. The classic serve is with soda water and a slice of orange, but it can also be used in a range of alcoholic cocktails, with negroni being my favourite. They have collaborated with Maison Francois, a high end brasserie in central London that offers a wide range of classic French dishes, to create a special edition run of 650 bottles. The world of Pastis inspires the special edition and has a new flavour profile, including earthy artichoke, star anise and even camomile. Each bottle is hand labelled, numbered (1-650) and has a hand-dipped wax seal. As collaborations go, it is a brilliant example of celebrating a brand story in partnership with a key commercial partner. It is also the kind of approach that they can repeat with other partners going forward.

Independent retailers and craft brands have many opportunities for collaboration. Retailers can partner with their key suppliers to create unique products that celebrate their collective stories and drive home their points of differentiation. Partnerships offer craft food brands opportunities to enter new categories and drive their joint businesses. These kinds of initiatives take time and can be complex, but the upsides make them worth it.

> "Partnerships offer craft food brands opportunities to enter new categories and drive their joint businesses"

Food inflation stabilises but experts predict business rates rise in 2025

The latest Consumer Price Inflation figures are in, and while food inflation remains at 1.5%, the modest increase of headline inflation to 2.2% represents a challenge for businesses. Read on for the expert view.

Russell Gous, editor-in-chief of TopMoneyCompare
"The news that inflation increased to 2.2% in July had an immediate negative impact on GBP exchange rates, seeing Sterling underperform most major currencies after the announcement was made. This volatility could result in higher import costs, which will hit businesses importing food and drink particularly hard. The extent of the impact will depend on how long it takes to GBP to recover. However, food inflation remained unchanged at 1.5%, which is the first time in 15 months it hasn't fallen."

Balwinder Dhoot, director for sustainability and growth at The Food and Drink Federation
"We're pleased that as pressures across the food supply chain ease, food and drink price inflation continues to stabilise. While energy and global commodity prices remain elevated due to a series of shocks, including the war in Ukraine and ongoing geopolitical uncertainty, there are strong signs that the industry is turning a corner. Around 85 per cent of food manufacturers expect to maintain or increase investment levels over the coming year, after a 30 per cent decline since 2019."

Kris Hamer, director of insight of the British Retail Consortium
"With headline inflation showing signs of rising further, retailers face the prospect of another large rise in business rates next year, which are based on September inflation rates. This penalises the retail industry, as retail products currently have generally lower inflation levels than the headline figure on which business rates rises are based. The Government should buy into retail by ending the 14 years of Conservative business rates rises, which have seen the multiplier increase by a third since 2010, harming the viability of many high street stores across the country."

Helen Murphy, co-founder of Opply
"The recent increase in inflation to 2.2% presents a nuanced challenge for SMEs. This uptick, while currently modest, was not predicted by markets a month ago, and necessitates a more strategic approach to inventory management and cost forecasting. SMEs, often operating with tighter margins, must now be more vigilant in timing their stock purchases to mitigate the impact of rising costs. For example, taking advantage of lower prices during peak harvest periods, such as the bountiful sugar harvest this summer, can be a critical strategy. Accurate forecasting becomes incredibly important in this environment, yet SMEs rarely have the tools or time to do this. Even corporates don't always get this right with their droves of staff. By being proactive and leveraging favourable market conditions, SMEs can better navigate the challenges posed by inflation, ensuring stability and competitiveness in their pricing."

Melissa Snover, nutritionist and CEO of Nourished
"The news that food prices rose to 1.8% on an annual basis in August, up from 1.6% in July, and overall inflation rose from 2% to 2.2%, is not ideal. But the 2.2% rise is less than many economists expected. We welcome predictions that the Bank of England will likely reduce interest rates to under 5% in the coming months to help counter the rises in ingredient and energy prices. The food sector is in a far better position than it was in 2021 and 2022 when households paid as much as 29% more for their groceries."



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Cocoa up 150% while coffee at 15-year high

Those who enjoy a chocolate biscuit with a cup of coffee could soon be in for a shock as the prices of cocoa and coffee have spiked.

In recent months, cocoa prices have soared to historic highs, driven by a global cocoa shortage, after poor harvests were caused by droughts in West Africa, which produces around 80% of the world's cocoa output. In fact, the global cocoa supply was expected to fall by nearly 11% over the 2023/2024 season, according to the International Cocoa Organisation.

"The recent surge in ingredient prices is a real challenge for food and beverage brands, especially SMEs," Helen said. "We've seen the price of shortage-stricken cocoa skyrocket on our ordering platform, forcing brands to constantly reformulate or switch to alternatives. For example, costly locust bean gum and potato starch are now being replaced with more affordable cassia gum and tapioca dextrin."

According to Cocoa Runners the 'spot price' of commodity cocoa has almost doubled in recent months to around $7,000 per tonne. A boom for hedge funds, which could make a fortune, but to the detriment of shoppers and retailers who will bare the brunt of cost rises. "Consumers are going to face higher prices for mass market confectionery," Cocoa Runners said, which the chocolate specialist believes will lead to more producers introducing CBRs (cocoa butter replacements) such as palm and vegetable oils into their products in a bid to cut costs, leading potentially to fewer quality bars being available to specialist retail.

Cocoa Runners has made several predictions around how the chocolate market will be impacted by soaring prices. White chocolate (especially craft varieties) they believe may become a rarity, with cocoa butter now costing three times more than it did a few years ago. And cash flow could become a huge problem for small makers, who are being forced to pay new price rises up front for commodity cocoa, before they can direct those increases onto customers.

Katie Cross, founder of Cake or Death, an Exeter-based bakery, said the sharp rise of chocolate's price is having a "huge impact" on her profit margins, and she's already feeling the pinch. The bakery found the price of chocolate rose by an alarming 150% since May 2023. Chocolate makes up a third of Cake or Death's ingredient costs, with its brownies, which contain a high percentage of chocolate for quality flavour and texture, being a core product.

This autumn when supplies run low again, Katie said she will have to fork out an extra £9,000 per tonne, and this may not even be the final price hike of the year. While the increases in chocolate prices as well as cost pressures across the business are making it "increasingly difficult" for the business to make a profit, Katie, who founded Cake or Death in 2019, said she will not change the recipe to compromise the quality of the product. However, the bakery is being forced to make savings in other areas.

Meanwhile, the price of wholesale coffee has reached record highs. According to Gareth Redmond-King, head of international programme at the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU), the UK imported a billion pounds worth of coffee in 2023 – and the cost of a morning caffeine boost is set to rise because of extreme weather in countries like Vietnam and Brazil.

"97% of all coffee globally is grown in countries vulnerable to climate impacts. More than half the coffee beans we imported last year came from Brazil and Vietnam," Gareth said. "And coffee, like many UK food imports, cannot simply be grown here instead. If we don't speed the path to net-zero emissions by mid-century, and support farmers and food producers at home and abroad to adapt to a warming world, then prices will only continue to rise, as supplies are squeezed further."

Italian coffee company Lavazza warned that coffee prices are set to continue rising until mid-2025. Vice chairman Guiseppe Lavazza said prices hit a record 15-year high because of supply chain disruption, geopolitical issues and poor harvests. In early July, the price of coffee reached more than £3,300 a tonne. The price rises have caused1kg bags of beans to soar by 15% in a year, but Guiseppe said the rises could reach 20% to 25% over the year as prices continue their upward trend.

HOW CAN SMALL BUSINESSES COPE WITH RISING PRICES?

"While our costs are going up, we don't have the same leverage with retailers to be able to change our RRPs as those companies which dominate the world of grocery," Scott from The Flava People explained. "Of course, every retailer is unique, and those who prioritise working with SMEs and are more sympathetic to the challenges we face do have more collaboration and flexibility built into their models."

However, there is also the end customer to consider. "We know consumers are also facing cost pressures and rising grocery costs; as a business we want to ensure we empower people to create meals which taste good and are good, which means we must remain at a price which delivers a high-quality product at a value-for-money price. Simply put, SMEs trying to balance the bottom line are undeniably facing a complex situation," he said.

The change doesn't mean the collaborative spirit of running a small business is gone. "In order to try and increase our buying power, we have connected with fellow local business owners to create a collective volume on those ingredients which are used across the board," Scott said. "We are trying to foster personal relationships, but there is no doubt that the way we manage the buying processes had to change simply to stay in business."



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4 ways Labour's policies will impact food and drink

The King's Speech on 17th July unveiled the new Labour government's priorities following its election win. Marking the opening of parliament, the speech by King Charles III introduced several measures that will affect fine food and drink retailers and other players in the supply chain.Discover the government's priority policies and how key industry players responded to their announcement below.

1 A CRIME AND POLICING BILL TO ADDRESS RETAIL CRIME

The government will make assaulting retail workers a crime through its new Crime and Policing Bill. The independent retailers' association Bira welcomed the government's commitment to tackling shoplifting and antisocial behaviour. "We are pleased to see the government taking decisive action on issues that have become a blight on our high streets," said Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira. "For too long, our members have faced increased incidents of theft, greater volumes of stolen products, and rising abuse towards business owners and staff."

Recent figures showed the seriousness of the rise in shoplifting, as they hit a record high of 1,200 offences a day. According to the British Retail Consortium (BRC), retail crime is costing retailers and their customers £3.3 billion a year.

The government's measures include a clampdown on shoplifting (reversing the previous £200 theft threshold), the creation of a new offence for assaulting shop workers, and the introduction of 'Respect Orders' to address antisocial behaviour.

Bira said these will provide much-needed support to independent retailers across the UK, as it is hoped the law will make it easier and more straightforward for authorities to investigate and prosecute offenders.

According to the latest crime data from Co-op, there were more than 172,000 incidents of retail crime in the first half of 2024, making a 4% increase last year's levels and a 42% increase since 2022.

2 RE-COMMITMENT TO HFSS

Legislation on HFSS food, which is high in fat, sugar and salt, was introduced and began rolling out under the Conservative government, but as part of the King's Speech, Labour committed to restricting the advertising of junk food to children, as well as introducing plans to restrict the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children. Under the previous government, a ban on advertising HFSS foods online and on TV before 9pm was set to come into force in January 2025. It followed rules on in-store promotions and placement restrictions.

The NHS Confederation said in its analysis of the King's Speech that emerging evidence supports advertising restrictions as a policy tool to reduce the purchase of HFSS foods. "This legislation will improve the future resilience of the population by protecting children from unhealthy advertising and reduce obesity levels in the future," it said.

Kate Howard, children's food campaign coordinator for Sustain, welcomed the commitments and said the group hopes to see them implemented "promptly".

3 AN EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS BILL CAUSES 'WORRY' FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

The government also introduced its Employment Rights Bill in the King's Speech, which will enhance employment rights and end "exploitative" practices such as zero-hour contracts and 'fire and rehire'. It will also establish the Fair Work Agency, a single enforcement body for workplace rights.

"There are three million retail workers in the UK, and a further 2.7 million in the supply chain, and we look forward to engaging with the government as it carries out its consultation on the Bill to ensure the plans are practical and workable for businesses and employees," said Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the BRC.

As part of its plan to 'Make Work Pay,' Labour's manifesto also included plans to "remove the discriminatory age bands to ensure every adult worker benefits" from increases to the minimum wage. While it stands at £11.44 for those 21 and older, 18 to 20-year-olds are entitled to £8.60.

"More than nine out of 10 small employers say they are concerned about the prospect of increased costs and risks when they employ people, and there were no commitments within this to look after small employers who will struggle the most," said the Federation of Small Businesses' (FSB) policy chair Tina McKenzie.

4 POSITIVE POLICIES FOR FARMERS

NFU president Tom Bradshaw welcomed the government's repeated support for food security as national security, but he said that now the industry needs to see a plan for food production that backs this up.

Several bills included in the King's Speech were "significant for British farm businesses and the nation's food security," he said, "not least those relating to planning reform and infrastructure, crime and policing, mental health, skills and new technologies and renewable energy opportunities through the creation of GB Energy.

"Our farmers and growers are ambitious for the future, and with new policies that revitalise farm business confidence, government can help to kickstart economic growth, deliver affordable, climate friendly, high-welfare food production, improve the environment, and stimulate clean energy supply," he said.

On 22nd July, an open letter coordinated by the Soil Association has called on the new prime minister to back and scale up the UK's horticulture sector. "Almost half of our veg and more than 80% of our fruit is imported. This cannot go on," they wrote. "We urgently need more – not less – home-grown fruit and veg, or we face further disaster for supermarket shelves, our health, and the environment."



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SPOTLIGHT ON: THE GARLIC FARM

Is food going round in circles? Barnes Edwards, director of The Garlic Farm, highlights how the principles of a circular economy could transform the food sector



Within this readership there is often overlap between the farmers, producers and food retailers. This vertical integration can provide a meaningful connection with customers. The retailers within this space care deeply about what they sell and the methods used to produce them, and these connections are what differentiate speciality from supermarket.

By collaborating even more closely, sharing emerging science, study and knowledge more actively, could we accelerate a path to a fully regenerative food and farming system? This is the question that The Garlic Farm asked themselves as they navigated through both Organic and B Corp certification. Gripped by a desire to move quickly, this vertical business of farming, production and retailing committed to a transition through sustainability to active regeneration. Aware that 95% of all food comes from the soil, they have transformed their farming practices to constantly build soil health, rather than simply sustain it.

"We're continuing on a very steep learning curve," says Barnes Edwards, director and co-owner of The Garlic Farm. "Restoring nature whilst producing food is not easy, but it's do-able and it's urgent that we align around this and help each other deliver on both these outcomes in a sensitive and scalable way. 70% of UK land is farmed, and the speciality sector supports a small but increasing portion of this. To have large scale impact on the biodiversity crises and social challenges of food production in this country, we need a mainstream cultural system shift. Our sector can do this by leading the demand, but we must act fast, boldly and with coherence."

Agroecological outcomes come from collaboration, and the subsequent increase in competence. These outcomes are environmental and social, and happily B Corp is a



robust mechanism to validate results by brands for its customers. "The process begins with a free module for you to look at the impact of your operation, whatever that might be," explains Barnes, "and for us, a lot snowballed as a result. You're getting help to really investigate, learn, understand and measure your impact across the social and environmental sides of the business."

After taking a considered look at the past seven decades of conventional farming, it became clear to the current generation that a more agroecological approach was needed at The Garlic Farm. "There's a danger of greenwashing, so we decided that going organic was the best and most robust way to approach holistic farm management," says Barnes. "The principle of organic farming is circularity – ideally everything is reused and comes from within your boundary; there are no external inputs, you're just working with the ecosystem in its fullest sense. In a business sense, the certifications are useful not just because of the stickers on the products, but because of the whole process – the guidance, the formality, the community, the education, the group learning. It will outlive the director/owner; it becomes integrated into the fabric of the organisation."

In addition to guidance and support from the organic farming community, specifically The Soil Association, OF&G, Riverford and Living Larder, Barnes and team continue to learn from the regenerative agriculture movement. The open culture of innovation shared between nature-friendly farmers is in full evidence at events such as Groundswell and Oxford Real Farming Conference.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, located six miles away from The Garlic Farm, is also a huge inspiration in terms of their work on and approach towards the circular economy. "They are leading a way for a total global system change that addresses the same issues we are grappling with at a small scale," explains Barnes. "Within their recent study – The Big Food Redesign – they were looking at global examples of how ingredient choices can have a big impact on the planet as a whole. These insights can inspire us all to rethink our approach when it comes to all aspects of our professions. To ensure that we are recirculating energy and resources and eliminating waste. We need to get on with it, because there's not much time left."

While certifying as B Corp and converting to organic is certainly not for everyone – the latter takes a minimum of two years hard graft, and it took five years for The Garlic Farm to gain B Corp certification – there is a lot to be gained by being curious about how we as individuals and businesses can address the biodiversity crisis.

"In some cases it can be argued that biodiversity is more important than climate change. Climate change could be reversible – if we do lots of things well, we can turn it around – whereas once biodiversity stops, it stops. It's game over," says Barnes. ""Our role as farmers, business owners and retailers is to encourage an understanding that our whole ecosystem hinges on the protection of biodiversity, without it we have no food or clean water."







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lunch! 2024

Let's do lunch! Discover a hub of innovation at lunch! this September

Leading brands, launches and legendary speakers will be at lunch! this September. The definitive café, coffee-shop and food-to-go event will return to ExCeL London on 18th-19th September, co-located with sister show, Casual Dining.

From functional snacks to healthy drinks, and ethical coffee to best-selling sandwiches – lunch! is a must-attend for operators and retail buyers looking for the latest innovations for their businesses.

Thousands of decision makers have already registered for this year's show including buyers from Booths, British Airways, Caffè Nero, Compass Group, Co-op, Costa Coffee, GAIL's Bakery, Harrods, Holland & Barrett, Leon, Marks & Spencer, National Trust, Ocado, Planet Organic, Sainsburys, Sodexo, SSP, Tesco, Waitrose and many more.

Event Director Katie Tyler says, "This year's lunch! will be offering trade visitors an incredible, free, world-class speaker programme (theatres sponsored by Lipton Ice Tea), bringing together some of the biggest names in the café, coffee-shop and food-to-go industry. Alongside experts sharing invaluable insights there will be hundreds of exhibiting suppliers showcasing new and innovative products. lunch! 2024 is not to be missed!"

Fresh launches

Showcasing exciting new products, buyers can visit the Innovation Challenge Gallery to see what's new to the market, vote for the most innovative products and be part of the audience to hear the finalists' pitches. Many of the products in the Innovation Challenge and across the show floor are launching exclusively at lunch! including new products from Azuma Foods UK, H!P Chocolate, Vegware, Not Guilty Food Co, Walkers Shortbread, and Yeo Valley Farms (Production).

Buyers looking to meet the newest brands entering the market (with their exciting new products) should visit the 'Start-Up Zone'. See new products from Dot Dot Bubble Tea, Gelarto UK, HealthBae, JBN Beverages / Theodore Global, More Toddler Meals, No More Lids, OLALA!, Porij, Rithm Flow, Riviera Iced Tea, Tru Foods, Win Win Water and Yogoody.

As well as new challenger brands, the show is full of leading brands including Capri Sun UK, Fox's Burton's Companies, Lindt & Sprungli, Lipton Ice Tea, Twinings, Typhoo Tea, Yeo Valley, Flexeserve, Jimmy's Iced Coffee, KIND Snacks, Lavazza, Magrini, MOMA, Simply Lunch, TRIP and many more.

Igniting Inspiration across three theatres (sponsored by Lipton Ice Tea)

Industry leaders will take to the stage for lunch!'s highly anticipated free-to-attend seminar programme, which will include exclusive keynote interviews, exciting panel sessions and data-driven insights across three theatres (sponsored by Lipton Ice Tea). This also includes a dedicated Coffee Shop Keynote Theatre.

Big name speakers include:

- **Julian Metcalfe OBE**, founder and group CEO, itsu
- **Emma Woods**, chair, Tortilla
- **Will Stratton-Morris**, CEO UK, Caffè Nero
- **Shereen Ritchie**, CEO, buns from home
- **Cathy Goodwin**, global head of food innovation and nutrition, Costa Coffee
- **Roland Horne**, founder and CEO, WatchHouse
- **Jason Cotta**, chief growth officer, itsu
- **Bharti Radix**, founder, BloomsYard
- **Sohail Ali**, co-founder, Chaiiwala
- **David Phillpot**, convenience trading director, Europe, bp
- **David Campbell**, chair, Ole & Steen/ Lagkagehuset
- **Spencer Craig**, founder and CEO, Pure
- **Damon Conn**, growth and development director, Watchhouse
- **Hannah Munns**, hospitality in retail expert, former M&S, Morrisons, ASDA and Sainsbury's

Industry leading panels

OPERATIONS IN FOOD-TO-GO

Featuring: Emily Bagshaw, head of central operations, Tortilla; Shoaib Muhammed, director of operations; Wendy's; Emily Hawkley, director of operations, Burgerism and Elton Gray, commercial and operations director, Creams Cafe.

MARKETING FOR FOOD-TO-GO

Mariam French, marketing director, LEON; Malachy O'Keeffe, head of marketing, Wingstop and Rob Burns, marketing director of Chopstix.

OPERATIONS IN COFFEE SHOPS

Edyta Stec, director of operations, GAIL's; Russell Simpson, director of operations, The Coffee House and Luke Shaughnessy, regional operations director, Costa Coffee.

THE FOUNDERS' PANEL

Featuring: Dimeji Sadiq, founder and owner, Vegan Shack; Stephen Grocutt, founder, Cornish Bakery and Dawn O'Sullivan, founder, Boost Juice Bars.

THE FOOD-TO-GO LEADERS PANEL

Featuring: Shereen Ritchie, CEO, buns from home (panel host); Keith Bird, former CEO, Marugame Udon Europe; Bharti Radix, founder, BloomsYard and Neil Sebba, managing director, Tossed.

Industry insight

Join our industry experts for eye opening research, data and analysis for the café, coffee shop and food-to-go sector at lunch! 2024.

2030 VISION - THE FUTURE OF FOOD-TO-GO

Simon Stenning, strategic advisor and futurist, The Future of Foodservice

MAKING DELIVERY PROFITABLE – THE MOVE TO FIRST PARTY DELIVERY

Peter Backman, founder and CEO, Thedelivery.World

THE FUTURE OF FORMATS

Rhian Thomas, head of insight, IGD

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WHAT TO PUT ON A CHRISTMAS CHARCUTERIE BOARD

Two experts share their words of wisdom for creating a showstopping charcuterie board display fit for the festive season

At Christmas time, grazing platters are always a winner. As a centrepiece for a party, nibbles to satisfy guests before or after an indulgent Christmas meal, or a special treat thrown together for a date night at home, charcuterie boards can be as versatile as customers would like them to be.

Shoppers visiting speciality food stores in the run-up to Christmas are often looking for inspiration, and charcuterie boards offer an answer for retailers looking to promote the finest products across a range of categories, from cured meats to artisan cheese, and savoury or sweet accompaniments. *Speciality Food* spoke to charcuterie experts to find out what they enjoy on their cheese and meat boards over the Christmas season.

Choosing meat and accompaniments for your Christmas charcuterie board

PERFECT PAIRINGS

"A well-crafted charcuterie board is all about variety," says Jessica Summer of Mouse & Grape. "Aim to incorporate a diverse selection of cheeses, meats, fruits, and accompaniments."

As cheesemongers know, your pairing selection can make or break a sharing platter. "Pairing is an art in itself, where certain meats and cheeses can elevate another's flavours. For instance, the saltiness of prosciutto beautifully complements the creaminess of Brie."

As ever, when choosing what to put on a charcuterie board, consider textures as well as taste. "By blending soft cheeses with hard cheeses, crunchy crackers, juicy fruits, and a variety of meat charcuteries, you create a sensory experience for your guests," she adds.

LOOK THE PART

While getting the flavours right is essential, we eat with our eyes, too. Looks are important, especially if you're aiming to create a charcuterie board that will really wow customers. "Colour is another key element; a range of hues makes the board visually appealing and enticing," Jessica says.

Andrew Shreeve of Cobble Lane Cured agrees that colourful ingredients will make your display pop – and here you can add some Christmas flair too. He suggests fresh rosemary, figs, dried apricots, pomegranate (for added Christmas colour) and chestnuts.

These accompaniments can help transform a board into something extraordinary. "Palate cleansers like olives, pickles or artichokes, as well as sweet additions like jams, honeys or chutneys, can provide that perfect balance of flavours," Jessica says.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

When it comes to your cured meats and artisan cheeses, advise customers to always prioritise quality. If in doubt, Andrew says you should avoid over-complicating your selection. "It's better to go for fewer, but good-quality ingredients (high-quality charcuterie and cheese and accompaniments) than overloading it with cheaper ingredients."

CHRISTMAS ADDITIONS

As well as festive-looking accompaniments, Christmas is the time to opt for indulgent meats and cheeses, as well as seasonal favourites.

"Introduce festive flavours by incorporating seasonal cheeses like Vacherin Mont D'or or truffle-infused cheeses," Jessica says. "The meats can also be more luxurious or traditional, with options like duck pâté or foie gras. Seasonal accompaniments can be the perfect touch, so think along the lines of cranberry sauce, spiced apple jam, or dates and chocolate-coated nuts. Don't forget the fruit! Winter brings with it some delicious options such as pomegranates, figs and clementines that can enhance the festive vibe of your board," she adds.

Andrew suggests going for "spicy winter warmer options" like nduja and soppressata, an Italian dry salami. "Not only are they warming, but the vibrant colours really work well," he says.

How to arrange your Christmas charcuterie board

When it comes time to arranging all your delicious ingredients, Jessica recommends starting with your cheeses, followed by meats, then fruit, nuts and other accompaniments to fill in the gaps and "create an inviting presentation".

"Bread sticks wrapped with meat are always a winner!" Andrew adds.

He says to avoid rushing through the process. "Give yourself plenty of time to prepare the board and fold the meats into shapes." Positioning is important, too. "Bear in mind to keep any wetter ingredients away from crackers."

Then, don't let all that hard work go to waste. "Once done, spray with a fine oil spray before wrapping to keep it bright," Andrew says. "Keep the meats covered with greaseproof paper and cool (ideally in the fridge) to prevent them drying out, and then get them out about 30-60 minutes before serving to allow them to come up to room temperature."

JESSICA'S 6 TIPS FOR STYLING A CHRISTMAS CHARCUTERIE BOARD

- Lean into Christmas colours. "When it comes to styling, aim for a colour palette rich in deep reds, greens, and golds, reminiscent of the holiday spirit."
- Introduce edible décor. "For instance, sprigs of rosemary or thyme can mimic the look of mini Christmas trees or wreaths, and a sprinkle of pomegranate seeds can add a touch that's reminiscent of holly berries."
- Play with shapes. "Cutting cheeses or other items into festive motifs using cookie cutters can be a fun touch."
- Make it 3D. "Adding depth and layers, like folding salami in quarters or stacking cheeses, can give your board a multi-dimensional look."
- Consider your focal point. "Perhaps a Brie wheel or baked Camembert surrounded by other accompaniments."
- Set the scene. "And for that extra festive touch, adorn your table with small candles, fairy lights, or even pinecones placed around your board. Finally, a garnish of fresh herbs or edible flowers can add that final flourish, making your board not just a treat for the palate, but a feast for the eyes too."



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MEET THE PRODUCER

Introducing Ice Kitchen mark two: a pioneer in the world of truly delicious, authentic and game-changing time-savers that will delight your customers' palates

It's a familiar challenge – recreating a wonderful meal enjoyed at a restaurant or on holiday in our own kitchens where authentic ingredients are hard to source and demands on our time are many. Frozen cooking paste producer Ice Kitchen has recognised the problem... and solved it. "Like visiting my local Thai restaurant!" a recent green curry customer announced while another proclaimed that they hadn't "tasted Jerk that good since Jamaica". This is a company that puts huge emphasis on sourcing the finest ingredients for authenticity while recognising our busy lives and striving to simplify our mealtimes.

Prior to March 2020, Ice Kitchen was creating and selling artisanal ice-lollies that were a hit with customers due to their all-natural ingredients, exciting flavours, and general deliciousness. Then, of course, COVID hit – venues closed their doors and sales plummeted. With creative mindsets and time on their hands, Ice Kitchen founder Cesar Roden and his business partner Nishit Shah began experimenting in their own kitchens and brainstorming ideas. The business needed a nimble shift, and the pair were eager to find a new outlet that would preserve Ice Kitchen's core values: innovation in frozen goods and a commitment to all-natural fresh flavours.

AN AGILE APPROACH

Both men are imbued with culinary curiosity, Cesar as the grandson of renowned food writer Claudia Roden and Nishit from an international background and years spent exploring global cuisines. Through their research, they added two more Ice Kitchen values: a determination to reduce food waste and the conviction that they could make mealtimes easier for people who care about



creating adventurous, quality, crowd-pleasing meals but lack the time to cook from scratch. "We had the luxury of time to invent and have fun while being aware that this was missing in our usual lives", Cesar remembers, while Nishit recalls relishing the technical challenges in the pursuit of recipe perfection. "We're a great team with a shared vision and complementary skills!" he says.

Cesar had been freezing freshly made curry pastes at home to use as the basis for future meals without the need for jars of ambient paste that would then linger at the back of the fridge until they had gone mouldy and had to be thrown out. Nishit's engineering experience convinced him that their existing ice-lolly machines could be repurposed to blend and freeze fresh curry pastes on lolly sticks. They did just that. With support from Ocado, who stocked their lollies, they launched Thai Red, Thai Green and Massaman Curry pastes. The reviews soon told them that customers share their



values and passion for flavourful freshness. "A perfect solution" to wasted jars, one wrote. "Completely fresh like homemade," wrote another. The Massaman Curry was described as "Life-affirming!". Nigella Lawson raved that the Thai Red Curry paste is "a brilliant innovation... If you're not pounding a paste together yourself, this is the very next best thing. Maybe even better!"

NEW RANGE, NEW BRANDING

Ever inventive, the small Ice Kitchen team has now developed five new pastes to join the Ice Kitchen family: Thai Panang, Indian Jalfrezi, Mexican Fajita, Mexican Smoky Barbecue Fajita, and Jamaican Jerk. Each paste is authentic, boldly flavourful, and made with top-quality fresh ingredients. Success thus far, along with the enthusiastic backing of investors, has allowed the company to invest in specialist equipment and rebranding. The entire range of frozen pastes now comes perfectly portioned in fully recyclable pots (themselves 100% recycled) and packaging.

LOYAL AND HAPPY CUSTOMERS

Cesar and Nishit liaise closely with their customers and have thus come to understand the importance of their products for those with particular dietary needs and preferences. Families actively shifting their eating habits away from processed, artificial ingredients value the chance to create authentically global meals guilt-free; those with coeliac disease celebrate Ice Kitchen pastes for providing mealtime adventures without risk of reaction; vegans and vegetarians enjoy the versatility that allows them to be creative with the proteins of their choice. Everyone applauds the convenience and the focus on zero waste without compromise on freshness or flavour.

FUTURE INNOVATIONS

Having explored the possibility of outsourcing production, the company have come to terms with the fact that their innovative approach means that, for now at least, they alone can produce their pastes to the standard they have set for themselves. However, this does not mean they are neglecting new product development. "We are always experimenting, playing around with new ideas," says Cesar. "It's the fun of our quest!" He and Nishit have sauces in their sights. Harnessing the power of freezing to lock in freshness, they are keen to devise internationally inspired cooking sauces that will continue to appeal to flavour-seekers and those who aspire to scratch cooking but lack the time required. "We want to shake up the freezer aisle", says Cesar, "and make people's lives easier."



> "We want to shake up the freezer aisle and make people's lives easier"

ICE° KITCHEN

"If you're not pounding a paste together yourself, this is the very next best thing. Maybe even better!"

Nigella Lawson

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FRESH FROZEN COOKING PASTES - ALL NATURAL

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

New festive gift boxes from Tracklements

Premium condiment producer Tracklements has launched four new gift boxes for the festive season.



The Gardeners' Collection contains Zingy Rosemary Chutney, Country Garden Chutney and Green Tomato Chutney; The Cheese-Lover's Collection contains Apple & Cider Brandy Vinegar Chutney, Apricot & Ginger Chutney, Fresh Chilli Jam and Caramelised Onion Marmalade; The Christmas Collection contains Cranberry, Port & Orange Sauce, Sticky Fig Relish, Spiced Plum Chutney and Christmas Spice Chutney; and The 9 Jar Mini Pack contains 25g jars of Country Garden Chutney, Robust Wholegrain Mustard, Sweet Mustard Ketchup, Sticky Fig Relish, Fresh Chilli Jam, Apple & Sage Jelly, Caramelised Onion Marmalade, Tomato & Chilli Chutney and Spiced Honey Mustard.

Becky Vale, marketing director at Tracklements, said, "We hope that our new range of enchanting and eye-catching gift packs will strike just the right note in delighting shoppers and bringing more people to the fixture this festive season. We have tailored them to fit every gifting occasion and every budget so there's something for everyone. They're such a great way of introducing new consumers to the brand and livening up Christmas displays."

tracklements.co.uk

Fen Farm Dairy expands artisan yoghurt range



Suffolk-based family farm Fen Farm Dairy, maker of Baron Bigod, has extended its range of yoghurts with two new flavours and a family-sized tub.

The new flavours are English Strawberry – made in partnership with English Preserves – and Wildflower Honey – made using honey sourced from a small beekeeping cooperative local to Fen Farm.

Plus, its best-selling natural yoghurt is now available in a 1kg tub following requests from customers. Every yoghurt in the range is inspired by traditional Icelandic skyr, and Fen Farm's skyr team visited the volcanic farmlands of Iceland to learn how to produce the product at its best. As a result, the yoghurt is thick, high in protein and low in fat.

fenfarmdairy.co.uk



Wild Knight's Chocolate Martini hits shelves

Wild Knight, the Norfolk-based distillery, has unveiled its latest creation – Chocolate Martini. The third variant in the business's range of luxury liqueurs, the vodka-based drink is made using organic Criollo cacao beans sourced from the Peruvian Amazon and offers deep chocolate richness with complex notes of fruit, nuts and flowers. It is ideal for drinking chilled or as an ingredient in a cocktail.

Matt Brown, co-founder of Wild Knight Distillery, said, "Our liqueur sales have doubled in the last year and are becoming the main part of our business. We are thrilled to be launching a brand new flavour to our range of liqueurs. The new Chocolate Martini liqueur brings something truly different and is an indulgent treat for those that enjoy rich drinks with a smooth, long finish. We are excited to see what Wild Knight fans think of this latest release; we are sure it will become one of our best-sellers."

wildknightdistillery.co.uk



Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Ramus releases Frozen Seafood range

Chilled seafood specialist Ramus has extended its selection of premium fish and seafood products with the launch of a frozen range.

The award-winning business, which is a member of the Sustainable Seafood Coalition, is passionate about supplying discerning retailers with high quality fish and seafood Produced in its BRC Accredited (AA) factory.

Supporting the retailer and consumer desire to minimise waste, while enjoying high quality and great tasting seafood, the new range is ideally positioned for independent fine food retailers looking to introduce or extend their frozen seafood offering.

The new frozen range includes breaded fish fillets, prawns, fishcakes, seafood sticks, scampi, and Salmon en Croute, Salmon Wellington and Smoked Haddock Wellington for customers looking for an indulgent frozen meal.

Alistair Ramus, director and owner of Ramus Seafood, said, "We are proud to extend our range of premium quality fish and seafood products with the launch of our frozen line. While these new additions offer convenience and value for money, they showcase the great taste and quality that Ramus Seafood is known for as well as upholding our high sustainability standards."



ramus.co.uk

Chocolate Wonders announced by Booja-Booja

Norfolk-based award-winning vegan chocolate makers Booja-Booja have recently launched Chocolate Wonders – bite-sized chocolates that are designed to enjoy on-the-go.

The range contains four flavours: Hazelnut Chocolate Wonders, Cookie Dough Chocolate Wonders, Salted Caramel Chocolate Wonders, and Raspberry Scrunch Wonders.

The new launches are organic, dairy, gluten and soya-free and sold within resealable 100% recyclable pouches. As well as containing no artificial flavourings, colours or preservatives, they are certified by the Soil Association and The Vegan Society.

Matt Gilding, MD of Booja-Booja said, "Chocolate Wonders are for those moments when you just want a little tickle of Booja-Booja joy. Lots of people buy our truffles as gifts for loved ones or save them for special occasions. Chocolate Wonders are different; they're made to bring little chocolatey smiles to simple moments. A delicious treat for yourself or to share with friends. We've created them especially to bring a little Booja-Booja delight and wonder into every day."



boojabooja.com





New dark chocolate bar from UP-UP

Ethical chocolate brand UP-UP has expanded its range of chocolate bars with the launch of its Espresso Dark Chocolate Bar.

Created using single estate coffee beans sourced from El Rosario cocoa farm on the North-Eastern coast of Columbia and 50% cocoa chocolate, the new launch upholds UP-UP's mission to support farmers and ensure transparency within its supply chain.

Calum Haggerty, director of UP-UP, said, "This chocolate is a testament that great flavour and ethics go hand in hand, and that's why we're proud of it. UP-UP brings fairness and opportunity to the chocolate industry."

upupchocolate.com

Wild & Fruitful create versatile Hot Honey



Wild & Fruitful, the Lake District-based producer of jams and sweet and savoury preserves, has added a chilli-infused Hot Honey to its range.

Made by infusing European golden summer honey with Scotch Bonnet chillies, the new launch is delicious served with pizza, barbecued meat, fried chicken and salads, or for giving a spicy kick to home bakes.

wildandfruitful.co.uk





Suma unveils Winter Berries kombucha

Suma has added a new flavour to its popular range of traditionally-made natural, low calorie and vegan-friendly kombuchas.

Made the traditional way for a drink that is lower in calories than other similar products and containing a billion kombucha cultures, Suma's kombucha is craft-brewed using natural ingredients and contain no artificial sweeteners or alcohol.

Winter Berries is the latest addition to the range, and offers a combination of raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, hibiscus and rosehip which provide well-balanced sweet and tart flavours. The new drink can be enjoyed on its own or as a mixer, and joins Cola Kombucha, Ginger Kombucha, Strawberry & Raspberry Kombucha, Lychee & Lemongrass Kombucha, Elderflower & Lemon Kombucha and Peach & Turmeric Kombucha in the range.

suma.coop

The Happy Pear's retail range enters UK market

The Happy Pear, founded by Dave and Steve Flynn, is an ambassador for plant-based eating and has produced popular cookbooks from its base in Ireland, where it also runs a café, shop, regenerative organic farm, roastery and online courses.

This month The Happy Pear launch two retail products into the UK: high fibre granola and Vita Vibe vitamin drinks. Plans are afoot for The Happy Pear's ambient range in the UK to be extended, and for its popular chilled product range – which includes fresh pesto and hummus – to join these ambient launches in the UK market.

Dave and Steve Flynn, founders of The Happy Pear, said, "We are very excited to be able to bring our healthy product range to consumers in the UK. At a time when people are paying more attention to ingredient lists, our range provides retailers with the opportunity to stock a quality selection of products that fit in with current demands for healthier choices and convenience, but with zero compromise on flavour. Our range is perfect for anyone looking to up the ante on their healthy eating. Offering ideas that breathe new life into breakfast, lunch, snacks and dinner; our products promise amazing taste, real quality with natural – never ultra processed – ingredients."

dundeis.co.uk



Mr Filbert's launches Asian Savours

Gourmet snack producer Mr Filbert's has released its latest launch: Asian Savours Mochi Rice Bites.

Suitable for vegans and vegetarians, and palm oil-free, these puffed Japanese rice snacks join the B Corp-certified brand's Chilli Rice Crackers to complete its Asian Savours range.

They are available in three flavours: Teriyaki, Tom Yum and Oriental Black Pepper.

Mark Taylor, MD at Mr Filbert's, said, "It's an exciting time for us here at Filbert's; growing our range on the success of our Chilli Rice Crackers, we're now offering three new distinctive flavours, Teriyaki, Tom Yum and Oriental Black Pepper. Talking with our customers, who are always looking for new and innovative products, we're sure our Asian Savours range is going to be a big hit – even a future bar-snack classic!"

mrfilberts.com







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DARING TO DIVERSIFY:

‘WE’RE ACCIDENTAL SHOPKEEPERS’

As part of our series shining a light on interesting farm shops, delis, garden centres and food halls, we’re in Norfolk at The Goat Shed, which has expanded from a 6ft x 4ft garden shed, to an almost 16,000sqft attraction

The Goat Shed founder Sam Steggles had no idea what lay ahead as he boarded a plane in 2020, setting off to Australia on the first leg of an enviable global tour as part of a Nuffield Farming Scholarship.

With nothing but a fresh haircut and a dent in his bank balance to show for his (very) whistlestop visit, he was soon called back to the family farm in Norfolk as Covid began to dig its roots in around the world.

For some businesses, the shock of the pandemic was too much to bear. But others thrived. And so begins this tale of growth. But let’s wind back a little first. The Goat Shed’s life really starts 15 years ago, with Fielding Cottage, and goats’ cheese. “Our cheese is 15 years old this year,” says Sam. “It’s all goats’ cheese. Norfolk Mardler is our more matured cheese, and Wensum White is our take on a goats’ milk Brie. That one’s won several World Cheese Awards!”

Customers back then often asked Sam if they could pop by the farm to buy a piece of cheese. Of course they could. And up went a 6ft x 4ft garden shed with a fridge and an honesty box – the humble beginnings of many a farm shop. “People would ask us for a bit more, so we put some honey in, or some potatoes – various bits and pieces. And we named it The Goat Shed.” Still, customers wanted more. So there was an upgrade to a 16ft x 8ft shed. Business then was slow. There were regulars, but some days no one would show up. Until Covid.

“Our cheese business was doing really well at the time,” Sam reflects. “And then I managed to secure my Nuffield Farming Scholarship which was titled, The Journey to Maturity Navigating Sustainable Food Business Growth. I wished to look at how businesses grew sustainably and substantially in tricky political and economic times, with an emphasis on recruiting and retaining great people.”

Sam says he jumped on the plane to Oz full of enthusiasm, with a sweeping itinerary including New Zealand, South Africa and China on the cards.

“I left on Sunday lunchtime, and by Wednesday the phone started ringing. I was told a lot of our cheese contracts were being pulled because people were shutting shops, pubs and restaurants. I was in Brisbane at this point. And the next day we worked out we’d lost a significant volume of business, so I went back to the airport to jump on a plane home.”

When Sam arrived, bag and passport in-hand, the airport was, he says, a ghost town. “I was told all the planes were grounded because of a thing called Covid. So I had to go to Trailfinders to buy new tickets, and I literally went around the world to get home the following Sunday.”

The irony that his scholarship thesis was formulated around trading in difficult times isn’t lost on Sam. But, like many of farming stock, he wasn’t prepared to throw in the towel when things got tough. “My wife told me people couldn’t get toilet roll, pasta or bread when I got home. We had our little goat shed and people kept turning up to see what they could get. I’d speak to them and find out what they were looking for and source it – from people we’d usually stand next to at farmers’ markets, who we knew were supplying various other farm shops or delis.”

The fledgling shop evolved. A table and gazebo were put out front as it got busier. Sam started to record videos, letting would-be and regular shoppers know what was available, and where exactly The Goat Shed was.

With building plans for an expanded cheesemaking facility on hold due to Covid restrictions, soon The Goat Shed would move.... from the shed, into the back of what was essentially a swept-out barn. “It was a kind of pop-up shop,” says Sam. “We











could offer more products, we put lots on social media about how we could get in flour, yeast, toilet rolls, bread, milk, meat – all sorts of bits and pieces."

It was a fascinating insight, he adds, into the fragility of food security in Britain. "All the supermarket shelves were empty! It was a case, really, of supporting smaller local businesses and, fortunately, that's continued. We've got such short supply chains we could get hold of most things."

As a cheesemaker, with no intention of running a shop, there was panic as the pandemic slowed down. Customers asked if The Goat Shed (in its bigger guise) would continue. "And we said 'no'," Sam explains. "We had no plans to run a shop. Cheesemaking is what we knew. But we told people if they would continue to come to us and support us, OK, we'd keep it going. We put up another building and made The Goat Shed a proper farm shop, moving everything into there in February 2021."

By now, The Goat Shed had 8,000sqft, including a kitchen offering tea and coffee, breakfasts, lunch and homemade bakes. Still, Sam says, this wasn't enough, and recently the business has doubled its footfall again, so it now encompasses two floors, with additional outdoor space. What was a response to a devastating global event, is now a full-blown family-friendly attraction. Customers are being wowed by the brand-new butchery, complete with walk-in fridge, selling meat slaughtered at an abattoir less than 10 miles away. "We're making all our own sausages, cutting our own beef, making our own burgers," Sam says.

There's an expanded deli too, again loaded with homemade fare. And a kitchen/bakery where everything from sausage rolls to cakes are crafted every single day.

Not bad for what was a little cheese shed on a rural road.

"We now have about 50 people in the team," Sam says proudly, adding that The Goat Shed really has become a destination, and it's been important to view it as a 'whole family' day out, with plenty to keep visitors on site, increasing dwell time. "People can come and see the goats and cows. We've opened up a maize maze as a direct result of customers asking us for a bit more for children to do. And we've pulled an old horse box from the nettles and converted it to sell teas, coffees and ice creams to take away and enjoy in the paddock between The Goat Shed and our cow shed."

Customers are now visiting "for a few hours at a time. For a morning out. They're meeting up here for coffee and catch-ups or business breaks and meetings. And they're stopping here on their way home to buy supper."

Farm shops, Sam says, have enduring appeal, and he doesn't see them going anywhere anytime soon, especially those that reach out to customers, listen to feedback, and deliver what shoppers want and need.

"A lot of our customers have been on this journey with us," he says. "They've experienced the story, been to the little wooden shed and pop-up shops in the barn. They've seen us transform what we're doing, and they feel invested in us – like they're part of the journey.

"Not only that, but there's a real sense of community in what we do. We have Hoof It walks once a month, where we go on a 5km or so walk from The Goat Shed with customers, coming back here for a cup of tea and a brownie. And we offer work experience placements for local children. That education side of things is important to us as well."

Absolutely critical to the survival of businesses like this is great customer service too. "All our staff are encouraged to talk to customers, not just rattle them through the tills. That's another thing. We actually have people on our tills. There's no self-check-out here!"

His advice for anyone else thinking of expanding?

"Talk to others who've done it. Get around the country and speak to people. You'll find they're open and honest and willing to help. Also, look at your location and competition. Just because someone down the road has been successful with a farm shop, doesn't mean you can replicate that success if you open one two miles up the road. You might actually dilute what they are doing, and dilute what you are doing."

Sam wouldn't turn back the clock. It's hard work running a farm shop but "if you listen to your customers, and engage with them, it's very rewarding at the same time."





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1 PARLICK ORIGINAL



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2 SUNDAY BEST



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3 TUNWORTH



Tunworth, an English Camembert, exudes a rich, earthy mushroom fragrance with a long-lasting sweet and nutty flavour. This soft, white-rinded cheese is a favourite amongst chefs and cheese lovers alike. Its distinctive presence is unmistakable, whether in your fridge or on the cheeseboard.

4 KIDDERTON ASH



Coated with ash, which gives it its unique appearance, Kidderton Ash is a log-shaped goats' cheese which matures to bright white, progressively getting creamier each day. A marvel of contrasts in colour, texture, and taste, Kidderton Ash is perfect served in thin slices on charcoal crackers with a sliver of ripe fig, for a decadent, elevated snack.

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5 BEACON BLUE



This is an international award-winning blue goats' cheese. Silvery, creamy, and fresh, it develops a peppery, moreish tang as you eat it. This elegantly sweet cheese captivates from the first bite, and is a favourite amongst cheese experts.

6 BLACKSTICKS THE ORIGINAL



Multi award-winning Blacksticks Original is a leading British blue cheese. Smooth, with a distinct blue piquancy, it is known for its exceptional flavour. Blacksticks is handmade using traditional methods and milk from family and friends within a 10-mile radius of the dairy.

7 GOOSNARGH GOLD



True to its name and nature, this cheese shines with a bright, buttery, and mellow flavour profile, embodying the essence of a fine Double Gloucester. Each cheese undergoes a meticulous five month maturation process, enhancing its character, and achieving a texture and smoothness unparalleled in its class.

8 MRS BUTLERS



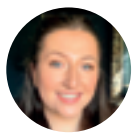
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BUTTER BIKE



IVA DANCHOVA
OAT AVENUE

SPREADING THE WORD

Far from a being a staid category, the world of jam, honey and spreads is heating up – here's why

Although it might look still to an outsider, look closer at the spreads category and you'll see that it's a hive of innovation – as well as contradiction. Consumers value the comfort of the classics and are willing to pay more for heritage, yet they're simultaneously seeking out the new. They want to make healthy choices, yet indulgence is never far from their minds. And they'll never turn their backs on a slather of something delicious on toast, yet if it can be utilised in numerous ways, so much the better.

What's not in question, however, is the value of quality. It's easy to get jams and honeys wrong – cut any corners and you and your customers will know instantly – but by keeping an eye on quality, innovation, and above all, taste, your ambient section could be oh so right.

The value of heritage

"Heritage and traditions are intrinsically linked with jams and marmalades, as they are part of British traditions such as afternoon tea and breakfast, and recipes are passed down through generations," begins Liz Baker, marketing manager at Tiptree, which has been farming since 1757 and making quality preserves since 1885. While the business was considered innovative at the time, making jam as an alternative to transporting fruit to London, it is now considered a traditional skill – one which Tiptree utilises with aplomb. "We still make our products in much the same way, in small batches in copper bottomed pans. Heritage and provenance are hugely important to us and make us unique, as we have many stories of jam making throughout the decades."

These stories are shared at the on-site museum at Tiptree's factory in Essex, where you'll also discover that its labelling and branding has remained constant as a "reassurring" mark of quality – as has the range's Royal Warrant, which was originally rewarded by King George V in 1911 and has remained ever since.

"Whilst we have added newer flavours to our large range of products, we still find that the traditional flavours are the bestsellers. These are tried and tested classics and have stood the test of time, with our Strawberry Conserve remaining very popular. With times being tough for consumer's budgets, we find that people are less likely to take risks with newer products and more likely to stick to those products which they know will taste consistently great."

Another business expertly combining heritage and innovation is Cottage Delight, established over 50 years ago. "Despite the heritage, we've by no means stood in the past," says Selina Talbot of Cottage Delight. "Our methods are artisan, cooking in small batches to retain flavour and our premium quality status – we've been awarded over 222 Great Taste Awards since the awards began." As well as including much-loved classics such as Strawberry Jam and Lemon Curd, the Cottage Delight range showcases innovative and award-winning products including Passionfruit & Mango Curd and Stem Ginger Jam, and new for Christmas 2024 is Christmas Pudding Curd: an indulgent orange base topped with the warming scent of festive spices.

Far from being simple toast-toppers, Cottage Delight's range of jams and spreads are remarkably adaptable – think flavour-bomb curds in cheesecakes, fan favourite Strawberry Jam in PB&J bakes – which perfectly suits the growing consumer demand for versatility. In fact, all Cottage Delight jars feature a QR code which links to a recipe, and the business has invested heavily in recipe creation, sharing ideas via recipe cards and booklets.

Ingredient versatility has an important role to play in the cost-of-living crisis. "Consumers are looking for a bargain and value for money but are still looking for quality," says Selina. "Consumers are found to be shopping own label products more than ever before which is a real opportunity for brands to invest in own label offerings which are good quality as well as at the right price point.

"We are a premium manufacturer and we wouldn't want that to ever change, however, we have had to respond to this in a way that works for the consumer and us as a premium brand. We've introduced a great selection of promotions with some available for activation all year round and some in line with those key selling points throughout the year. We've seen a fantastic uptake on these promotions and feedback from our customers have said their consumers are loving them and our product is flying off the shelf."

A healthy opportunity

For those shoppers seeking a combination of traditional comfort, great taste and health credentials, Biona has just the ticket. Its fruit spreads are free from artificial sweeteners and additives, "addressing growing consumer health consciousness and the demand for healthier, naturally sweetened options," begins Kelly Stalker, senior marketing manager at Windmill Organics (Biona). "By sweetening with organic apple juice and puree, Biona enhances the natural fruit flavors while maintaining a better nutritional profile, which supports overall wellness."

With a growing number of consumers actively seeking out healthier options, 48% of global consumers actively avoiding sugar and 67% preferring natural ingredients according to a 2020 survey by FMCG Gurus, "this approach not only caters to health-conscious consumers but also aligns with Biona's mission to deliver organic products that are both better for people and the planet," says Kelly.

While 2024's fine food shopper is likely to know the difference between 'good' honey and 'bad' honey – keeping a wide berth from suspiciously cheap, blended honeys – there is still education to be done around the full plethora of flavour and health credentials it offers.

One way to really celebrate and understand honey is to keep it raw – unprocessed and unpasteurised. "Keeping honey raw is crucial for preserving its nutritional integrity, as raw honey retains more natural enzymes, vitamins, and minerals compared to processed honey. Studies have shown that raw honey contains up to 4.3 times more antioxidants than processed honey. This ensures it maintains its antioxidant properties, prebiotic and overall health benefits, such as antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory effects, which can aid in digestion, soothe sore throats, and promote wound healing, says Kelly. "It also preserves the pollen naturally present in the honey, which is a main contributor of its taste."

"Luckily nowadays consumers are very educated and aware of the difference between real honey and the highly processed stuff they often sell for £2 in supermarkets," begins Stela Aleksieva, co-founder of BeeHype, creators of the UK's first healthier alternatives to salted caramel, preserves and jam using just raw honey and one additional natural ingredient. "According to studies, raw honey's advantages over sugar include a slightly lower glycemic index (i.e. it doesn't affect your blood-sugar levels as much). Unlike refined sugar, it also contains vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, enzymes and pollen.

"Our customers understand well that honey production is very labour-intensive for bees and beekeepers. It takes about 12 bees their entire lifetime to make just one teaspoon

of honey. Field bees visit 50 to 100 flowers during each trip in order to collect enough pollen," she explains. "There are also environmental factors such as the weather, availability of flowers, and other conditions which limit the supply and can affect the quantity and quality of raw honey. However, the end product is worth the wait and justifies the higher price point."

Where nutrition meets indulgence

Nut butters have been a mainstay on food retailers shelves for decades, but the tide is turning, with more consumers than ever eager to experiment and make the most of its innate health credentials – note: not all nut butters were born equally, and doing it right will reap delicious rewards. "Down at our small batch makery in Hampshire, we deep roast our peanuts and grind them fresh to create naturally flavour-packed peanut butters. We source the finest hi-oleic peanuts for maximum taste and minimum fuss – no added oils necessary – simply delicious nuts and natural fruit, spice and flavours," begins Jeni Reeve, founder of Butter Bike.

Home to such varied options as Chocolate, Smoked Chilli, Everything Bagel and Jalapeno (a current limited edition) peanut butters – and a whole lot more besides – the Butter Bike team is active and adventurous, and caters for the growing number of shoppers who share its spirit. "While we offer the classics – smooth and rugged blends, as well as unsalted 100% peanut butter – we think the magic lies in our wildly different flavoured butters. Keeping ingredients simple and natural, our blends bring together the finest deep roast peanuts with punchy flavours. Where our peanut butters lack added oils, emulsifiers, artificial flavours and refined sugars, their absence makes way for big flavour of toasted nuts, punchy seasonings and spices, seeds and fruity additions."

With Butter Bike's customers spooning their nut butters over a pre-cycle porridge, stirring it into yoghurt or using it as an ingredient in nutritious sweet and savoury dishes, the team has had to be unwavering in its dedication to offering a healthy product for conscientious consumers – and have had to do some education of their own. "The definition of nut butters has changed considerably," says Jeni. "What was once a highly processed blend of peanuts, sugar and sweeteners, stabilisers and emulsifiers like palm oil, is, more often than not, now an incredibly simple blend of peanuts and perhaps a little sea salt or natural ingredients. We often hear comments like, oh no, I can't eat that, I'm on a diet, which is frustrating because actually it's a really naturally wholesome and satisfying snack or ingredient to use. Yes, it is almost 50% fat, but our peanuts are hi-oleic meaning they contain a higher proportion of monounsaturated fats which can actually help normalise cholesterol, blood pressure and lower the risk of heart disease. Enjoying these simple, useful fats as part of your diet is counter to the traditional diet culture which favours calorie-counting, low-fat, high processed stuff."

Stepping away from nut butters to an altogether innovative category, granola butters were unheard of before Iva Danchova and her partner Thiviyan, founders of Oat Avenue, arrived on the scene in 2020. Gluten-free, vegan and keen to add more variety to the foods available to the growing number of free-from consumers in the UK market, Iva landed on the idea of an oat-based spread during a Covid-19 lockdown. "I looked around the supermarket shelves and thought there are almond, cashew and oat milks, and almond and cashew butters, but where's the oat butter?" After months of trial and error in the couple's home kitchen, they found a winning recipe for their range of granola butters, and with a delicious array of flavours in the range – Original, Chai Spiced, Chocolate and Raspberry – and a successful social media presence, the brand has experienced exponential growth.

No doubt this success was partly down to the attention to detail Iva and Thiviyan paid at every stage of the process. It was important to the pair to produce a product that was free of allergens, because from experience Iva had learned that to make a product gluten-free or vegan it was often replaced by an additive or ingredient that would make it unsuitable for allergy sufferers. The duo went above and beyond in the quest to make their products truly allergen-free – spending countless times the amount of money to ensure full compliance in the factory where their range is produced.

Something that has certainly stood in Oat Avenue's favour is its delicious versatility. From flavour-packed bakes to healthy snacks and smoothies, a wide range of recipes can be found on their website.

With a raft of new products making waves in the spreads category, and the consumer appetite for better becoming ever more apparent, there's never been a better time to explore the jam, honey and spreads sector.

STOCK CHECK

2024 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE



OAT AVENUE GRANOLA BUTTER RASPBERRY

A free-from spread made from simply oats, coconut sugar, raspberries and a pinch of salt.

oatavenue.com



STOKES RASPBERRY EXTRA JAM

Oodles of sweet, tart, glorious raspberries, bursting with the flavour of British summer, fill this jar with joy.

stokessauces.co.uk



ROOTS & WINGS ORGANIC TANTALISINGLY TANGY SEVILLE MARMALADE

Seville oranges, sun ripened in family-run orchards, are used to create this deep and tangy marmalade with a tangy bite.

rootsandwingsorganic.com



WILD & FRUITFUL STRAWBERRY & ROSE PETAL JAM

A harmonious blend of summer sweet strawberries and subtle hints of rose for an exotic twist on a traditional English jam recipe.

wildandfruitful.co.uk



BUTTER BIKE CINNAMON RAISIN PEANUT BUTTER

Plump, juicy raisins and toasty warm cinnamon lace this rugged peanut butter for a naturally sweet and moreish spread.

butterbike.co.uk



THE LONDON HONEY COMPANY SHROPSHIRE HONEY

An old-fashioned unpasteurised creamed British Spring honey from the clover pastures and wildflower hedgerows of Shropshire.

thelondonhoneycompany.co.uk





COMMENTATORS



JENNY PALMER
DELICIOUSLY YORKSHIRE



VANESSA PITT
FODDER



CAROLINE BELL
SHEPHERDS PURSE



ALLISTER NIXON
YORKSHIRE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY



A TASTE OF YORKSHIRE

Speciality Food spent time at this year's Great Yorkshire Show, where the team discovered more about the genuine thread of passion that weaves its way through the county's food and drink scene

Yorkshire (one of England's biggest counties), is a producer's dream. A landscape reaching from undulating countryside, encompassing vast swathes of pasture and craggy hilltops, Eastwards to a coastline swathed in mythology, heritage and history.

It is a county of brewers, bakers, dairies, farmers and distillers. One which has irrevocably evolved, particularly in the past 20 years, to become a stronghold of artisan excellence. A source of national pride on the British food and drink scene.

"The beauty of Yorkshire is, because of its size, it's got so much variety," agrees Jenny Palmer, a board member of Deliciously Yorkshire – the organisation responsible for championing the county's produce. "We've got the coast, the Wolds, the Dales, the Moors. Everything from fish to meat and cheeses, with consistently high quality across the board. We have incredible cheeses, with real variety in the types as well, and there are a lot of coffee roasters here now, which is brilliant."

Trying to pinpoint exactly what makes Yorkshire special is difficult, but comes down, Jenny thinks, to the county's versatility. "We produce everything from Yorkshire rhubarb to tomatoes," continues Jenny. "There's real diversity of the soils which can lead to a lot of different things being made here. We are on the Wolds, and what we can grow is completely different to what the Dales can grow."

The pride of the county

If there's one place that typifies the tapestry of excellence running through Yorkshire's food and drink community, it's Fodder. Found in Harrogate, just outside the entrance to Great Yorkshire Showground, the farm shop and café is operated by Yorkshire Agricultural Society, and in many ways is a 'shop window' into what the county has to offer. Almost everything visitors can eat or buy is proudly made in Yorkshire, with every nook and cranny (even wall space, where artwork nods to some of the shop's longest serving suppliers) taken up by something delicious.

The shop has been in operation for 15 years, says manager Vanessa Pitt. "It was set up to support farmers and local producers when the country was going through Mad Cow Disease and the government said they had to diversify. Today we've got over 400 suppliers in Fodder, and we support as many local and independent businesses as we can, and if we can't get it locally, we say it's the 'best of the rest'."

Many producers have been with Fodder since the beginning, including Ian Taylor Free Range Eggs, and Lottie Shaw's, which makes its sticky, treacly parkin in Halifax. "A lot of them have started with us and grown with us across the years. If they hadn't been with us, I don't think they would be as big as they are now," says Vanessa, adding that Yorkshire Agricultural Society makes a point of helping as many independents as it can, even offering grants to help would-be producers get off the ground, such as Just Jenny's ice cream and Yockenthwaite Farm Granola, who are then taken into the shop, once established, as suppliers.

Vanessa says Yorkshire Agricultural Society is "very supportive", not just of producers, but farmers and agriculture as an industry too. "All our money and profit goes back into our charity and we support farmers that way. We do health checks around their sites, lunches and dinners to get them together to talk about issues like the weather. We do a lot for farmers," she explains.

On the county's food scene, though its probably best known for the Rhubarb Triangle, where the striking candy pink vegetable squeaks and creaks as it grows in the dark, lit only by candlelight, Vanessa says there is so much more retailers need to be aware of with too many highlights to count. "You can get everything from Yorkshire now! More and more food is being produced here, and more people have diversified over the years."

Her stalwarts include Botham's of Whitby, Sawley Kitchen, Yockenthwaite Farm Granola, Mason's Gin and Longley Farm in Huddersfield. "We've got one of their biggest ranges of yoghurts," Vanessa says.

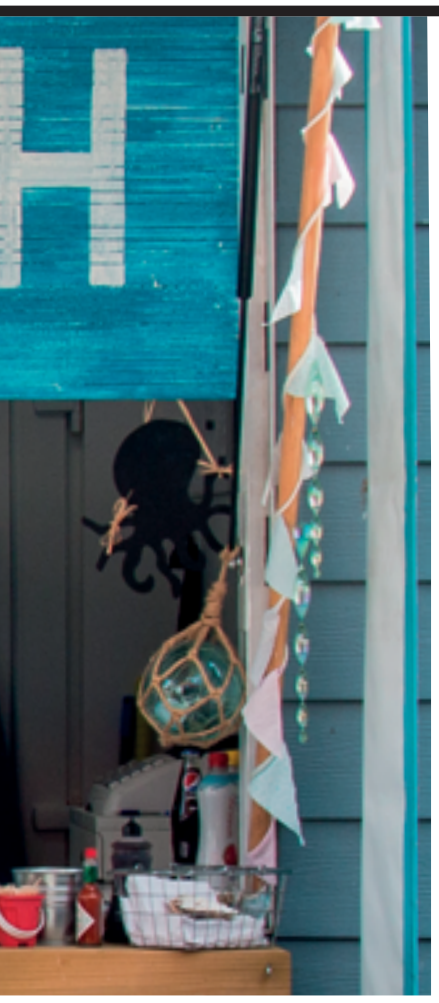
A new brand she's excited about is Yorkshire Kitchen. "We just got them in. They started out last year with some sweet butters for Christmas and now they make savoury ones too. They work really well for us because we can also sell them on the butcher's county with the steaks."

Those fly out the door, with Vanessa saying there's a clear demand right now from consumers for good quality, local meat. "They want to know where it's from. We've definitely seen an uptake in that, and vegetables. People want quality produce, and they don't mind paying to have their quality."

What makes Yorkshire such a hotbed for fine food and drink? For Vanessa and the rest of the Fodder team it's clear. "It's the area where it's from. We've got so much to be proud of. There are so many suppliers out there doing great things. And when you come to a show like Great Yorkshire Show, you can see the passion from everybody that's coming through."


FODDER


FODDER





A growing dairy heritage

Yorkshire can lay claim to being one of the most significant dairy counties in the UK, as home to Wensleydale – made famous in recent history by the *Wallace & Gromit* animations.

Caroline Bell, a director of family-run cheesemaker Shepherds Purse, and head steward of the dairy section at Great Yorkshire Show, says there is a great deal to celebrate when it comes to Yorkshire produce... especially cheese.

"I've enjoyed a front-row seat to the vibrant and rapidly-evolving Yorkshire food scene," Caroline says. "Since the start of Shepherds Purse in the late 80s to the present day, I've lived through huge changes (and in my opinion, excellent developments). In the 80s the choices for cheese in the county were pretty limited. When we started making blue cheese and launched Yorkshire Blue in 1993/4, there hadn't been a blue cheese made in Yorkshire since the 60s, and now we enjoy such a rich diversity of cheeses made across the region."

Cheesemaking, Caroline says, dates back centuries in Yorkshire "as it does across the world", with significant contributions from monastic communities. "Medieval monks, particularly those from Cistercian and Benedictine orders, were instrumental in developing and refining cheesemaking techniques in the region. Their meticulous record-keeping and dedication to high standards laid the foundation for Yorkshire's rich cheesemaking tradition."

This deep-rooted knowledge and expertise "ensures that the cheese produced is of exceptional quality and hasn't changed today".

Shepherds Purse is, Caroline says, one of many Yorkshire cheesemakers that has looked to the past, blending traditional methods with more innovative techniques to create modern and unique varieties.

"We have the famous, traditional Kit Calvert Wensleydale still being produced in Hawes by Wensleydale Creamery. We're also home to Yorkshire Pecorino, with Mario blending his Italian heritage with local agriculture. There's Yorkshire Dama, with Razan being inspired in the same way, producing cheeses that she'd loved at home in Syria from the exceptional milk supply she has access to in her new home of Yorkshire."

It's "great to see the preservation and reinvigoration of our classic Yorkshire territorial cheese and then the innovation of new and distinct cheeses by a range of cheesemakers across the region." This is vital, says Caroline. "The collaboration and support that exists among cheesemakers is the thing that makes this industry so unique and really very special."

Telling the Yorkshire story

"Yorkshire has such a fantastically diverse story to tell about the quality food produced across all four corners of our county, from grass-fed lamb in the uplands of the Yorkshire Dales to the bountiful veg from the vast swathes of productive arable land in the East, and everything in between," says Allister Nixon, CEO of Yorkshire Agricultural Society, organiser of the Great Yorkshire Show, and a registered farming charity.

For Allister, the opportunity to showcase the brilliance of Yorkshire's growers and makers is one of the very best things about the annual show, which really brings those stories to life. Those of "small family-run farms exhibiting livestock in the show rings, and of independent food and drink producers offering an incredible array of delicious locally produced food and drink in the Food Hall."

Put together, Allister adds it's "a compelling reason for supporting and sourcing Yorkshire produce, and it is why the Yorkshire Agricultural Society is proud to work closely with regional food and drink group, Deliciously Yorkshire to champion local producers.

"If the UK is serious about addressing food security, improving public procurement of British food and reducing food miles to meet net zero targets, then Yorkshire has a huge role to play in supplying quality food and drink for the nation from farmers and food producers who are embracing environmental challenges and continuing to innovate in an ever-changing world."







A GLIMPSE INTO THE YORKSHIRE ARTISAN FOOD SCENE

During our visit *Speciality Food* spent a great deal of time talking with some of Yorkshire's fabulous producers, who share their stories here

Puckett's Pickles



Sarah Puckett uses as many Yorkshire-grown and British ingredients as she can get her hands on in her pickles and preserves, which are all the more flavoursome for the inclusion of freshly roasted and ground spices.

Inspired by her great great grandmothers, who would cook with the myriad weird and wonderful ingredients their seafaring husbands returned home with, Sarah set up the business 11 years ago, with just two sturdy pots and wooden spoons. Today her creations, including her great grandmother's Carrot & Cardamom Chutney, or her own recipe Pea & Mint Ketchup, can be found on the shelves at retailers including Selfridges.

"They're popular, I think, because they are literally just fruit and vegetables with nothing artificial added. We make them in small batches and everything is really fresh. A customer favourite is the Puckalilli (based on her grandmother's recipe). "And my favourite at the moment is the Gooseberry & Orange Blossom Jam, it's just so lovely in the morning with Greek yoghurt."

The Yorkshire Pasta Company



Having tried authentic Italian pasta and discovering just how much it differed from what supermarkets had to offer, The Yorkshire Pasta Company founder Kathryn Bumby set off on a three-week journey from Tuscany to Rome, visiting restaurants, factories and makers to understand the secret to great pasta then launching the award-winning business in 2019.

"I just really fell in love with pasta," she says. "Ours, rather than being made over two hours in a big factory, is made over two full days and dried overnight on wooden racks. It's a bit like bread and beer. You get so much flavour from the wheat."

The range, which includes family favourites such as penne, contains just flour and water. "The key to its texture is, rather than making the shapes with plastic moulds, we use bronze. When you stir in your sauce it cuddles and clings to it. It's amazing," Kathryn adds.

She's proud of the brand's sustainable credentials, too. "Ours is made with Yorkshire flour, using solar energy, and sold in paper packaging with beautiful illustrations on the outside to show what's in the pack."

Feedback has been brilliant. "We even have a massive following of Italians who tell us they send it back home!"



Cryer & Stott

Made in Sheffield, Henderson's Relish is one of Yorkshire's most recognisable exports. Combined with Yorkshire Red cheese, it forms Sheffield Forge – a bestseller for cheesemonger and fine food purveyor Cryer & Stott, whose range is steeped in Yorkshire flavours and history.

Owners Clare and Richard Holmes started 26 years ago with a provisions stall in Wakefield market, before turning their hand to creating their own range of unique speciality cheeses.

"We decided to do a cheese for Wakefield first," Clare says, "and we came up with Rhuby Gold, which was a sheep's milk cheese with rhubarb through the middle – a bit like a Victoria sandwich. We did that for a few years and found that sheep's milk was seasonal. When we wanted to sell a lot of it we couldn't, so we came up with Rhuby Crumble, which is cow's milk cheese with rhubarb and vanilla through it."

The variety of cheese is extensive, and includes Lillibet (a blue made to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee), Wave (with Scarborough seaweed), Yorkshire Cask (with wholegrain mustard and Yorkshire beer) and King Charles (Scottish Cheddar with truffled mushroom in a nod to the king's favourite dish, mushroom risotto).



The Chilli Jam Man

Simon Barrett set up a tiny market stall in Yorkshire 15 years ago, having left the financial sector during a recesssion... and he hasn't looked back.

From a clutch of just a handful of products, Simon now makes more than a dozen chilli jams and preserves, inspired by his time living in Australia.

"I lived there in the 90s for about five years and got very into Southeast Asian flavours and proper heat. When I came back to the UK it was like someone had chopped my right arm off! I started off making batches for myself and giving the rest to friends, and it went from there," he says. "The way this has grown astounds me."

Simon's chilli jams range from the meek and mild to intensely fiery, using the very best fresh and slow-dried chillies, including authentic chipotle from Central America, smoked over pecan wood. "The other difference between my products and what you'll find in the supermarkets is I cook mine on rolling boil over five or six hours – that reduction of the tomatoes and the vinegars and the sugar, the garlic, ginger and chillies, means you end up with a very flavoursome product filled with umami."

He says shoppers have become more adventurous when seeking out chilli products, and are no longer afraid to dial up the heat, using his jams to enhance the spice profile of stir fries, curries and chillies, or as a seasoning at the end of cooking. They're no longer just a 'bit on the side'.



SeaGrown

Four miles out to sea, off the shores of Scarborough, a little foodie revolution is happening, as SeaGrown pioneers what the future of British seaweed looks like.

Owners Wave (who was formerly in the Navy) and Laura (a professor whose field of interest includes oceans and the climate) have "brought their knowledge together to show how brilliant seaweed is for sustainability and the environment," says SeaGrown's Jo Holborn.

"It's a powerhouse," she continues. "The only challenge in Europe is you could never really do it at scale, but they've devised a system to do it off-shore."

The brand grows three types of kelp, which find their way into savoury, umami-rich natural seaweed seasonings in original, piri piri and lemon and herb flavours and more – ideal for bringing a touch of salinity to everything from fish and chips to pasta dishes.

With the local fishing industry in decline, SeaGrown is seeking to help fishermen and women convert into the burgeoning offshore seaweed industry, and is doing its bit for the planet too. "Seaweed doesn't need land to grow," says Jo, "and it takes up 20 times more carbon than trees." The farm, she adds, teems with wildlife, with studies ongoing into the biodiversity they've been able to foster there.

Raydale Preserves



Raydale makes dozens of jams, curds, jellies and marmalades, but incredibly started out as a sheep farming business, says the brand's Andrew Kettlewell, with the family diversifying in 1978. "We started off doing farmers' markets, and when I took over in 2008 we began supplying shops and producing for other brands as well," Andrew continues.

As many British and Yorkshire ingredients as possible land in the jars, including local soft fruits, but the most popular product uses a more 'exotic' flavouring, with oodles of fresh lemon juice lavished upon the Lemon Curd. Curds have "taken off" this year, leading the brand to add new varieties such as Apple & Cinnamon and Cherry & Chocolate.

"I think they've become popular because of *Bake Off* and various Netflix baking series," says Andrew, who adds their bestseller with retailers is the Red Onion & Apple Chutney, which is especially in demand at Christmas."

Nidhoggr Mead

"Mead as a category is growing exponentially," says Nidhoggr Mead founder Peter Taylor, who started the business in his back bedroom nearly four years ago and is now one of the biggest honey mead producers in the UK, supplying a number of tourist attractions, being the official mead of Warhammer, and exporting around 100,000 litres to the US each year.

"There's a big trend for mead currently," Peter continues. "A lot of things are stagnating and dropping off in the market, like gin. People want something interesting, and mead is smashing it out of the park. It's becoming hip again." The brand sources all its honey from The Apiarist, which has around 3,000 hives dotted across the Yorkshire Moors, with all water sourced from the Swale Valley, and fruit for flavoured varieties selected from local farms where possible. "It's a proper Yorkshire product," adds Peter, whose success has allowed him to scale up quickly. "I now have 11 members of staff, 4,000sqft premises and run the largest honey mead company in the UK."





Botham's of Whitby

More than 150 years of tradition runs through Botham's – a trusted family-run business based in the atmospheric coastal town of Whitby. "It started when Elizabeth Botham started baking bread, and that came from a need to feed the family," says Elizabeth's great-great granddaughter, Sarah Jarman, who today runs Botham's alongside her three daughters, two brothers and sister.

"Elizabeth started to make cakes and took them to sell at a market stand, and developed from that. We still make things by hand. We're not fully mechanised by any means," adds Sarah. "Everything's hand-mixed and hand-boxed."

The brand's most recognised products are its Lemon Buns, Chocolate Japonaise, and Gingerbread, which hails from a very traditional Victorian recipe. "But, from a retail point of view, what goes best are the biscuits and bracks. The tea loaves. They have a long shelf life and we sell a lot of those."



Wensleydale Creamery

The creamery takes its role as custodians of a 1,000-year history of cheesemaking in Yorkshire very seriously, says marketing manager Sandra Bell. "We believe it's important for brands like Wensleydale Creamery, underpinned by heritage and provenance, to champion and lead the way for cheesemaking in the region, encouraging more consumers to buy locally made produce," she adds.

Wensleydale Creamery, nestled in the rolling hills of Wensleydale in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, is a key part of the county's dairy industry, and a symbol of the region's dedication to excellence. "Testament to this," says Sandra, "are the many awards won, this most recent being at this year's Great Yorkshire Show, where our Yorkshire Wensleydale was judged to be Best Territorial Cheese and took the title of Reserve Supreme Champion Cheese."

The cheesemaker sources its milk from a dedicated group of Red Tractor-assured family farmers, whose skill, hard work and passion is reflected in the quality of the finished product – including Yorkshire Wensleydale. traditionally known for its creamy, crumbly texture. "PGI status qualifies the authencity of our Wensleydale and helps give our customers assurance that they are buying the original Wensleydale cheese that is handcrafted right here in Wensleydale," says Sandra.

Yockenthwaite Farm Granola

This family-run granola company demonstrates how the simplest homegrown ideas can snowball to success.

"My husband and mother-in-law were running a B&B at Yockenthwaite Farm in the Dales, and wanted to offer an alternative to a full English. Something healthier," says Lianne Hird. "They started making granola, and it was so successful they took it to a market and sold out. It's then they realised they had a business, so they got a premises in Skipton, and in 2020 expanded again into bigger premises."

Lianne puts the success of the brand down to its pure, high quality British oats, and the fact just one product in the range contains sugar, with the rest sweetened subtly with honey.

"The customer favourite is our Nutty Spelt, which contains the ancient grain. It's followed closely by Just Ginger. That started as a winter edition a few years ago, and slowly it's become a firm favourite. We think it's a bit different to other granolas. Most of them have fruit and nuts, but as far as we can tell no one uses ginger."





GETTING YOUR CHRISTMAS HAMPER OFFERING RIGHT

Are you making the most of your gifting selection during the festive season? We speak to retailers about what works best for them

For food lovers, there is no better gift than a basket bursting with amazing artisanal produce... possibly finished with a glossy ribbon.

Whether plucked ready-made from a shelf, or carefully curated with a recipient's loves and likes taken into consideration, hampers in all their shapes, sizes and forms remain an important part of speciality retail for shoppers, who rely on independent stores to take the hard work out of gifting for them.

Why hampers still matter

Hampers elevate the act of giving, says Hay Hampers' Judith Harris, who adds they are a way for consumers to delight their loved ones with "an exquisite assortment of treasures".

"From indulgent chocolates to artisanal cheeses, and fine wines to gourmet teas, hampers are a manifestation of culinary opulence," Judith adds. "Gifting the write hamper speaks volumes about the sender's appreciation. They're making a gesture that will linger in the memory long after the last morsel is savoured."

Maryam Ghani of Haute Hampers agrees that hampers continue to have a cherished place in the tradition of gift giving at Christmas, embodying a sense of thoughtfulness few other presents can match. The allure of a festive hamper, she says, "lies in its ability to transform an assortment of premium goods into a cohesive, luxurious experience". They are also, says Fortnum & Mason's senior hamper buyer, Holly Hughes, a way of sharing joy, facilitating togetherness and demonstrating generosity, which is what makes them so enduringly popular.

While Millie Durbak of Prestige Hampers believes they're considered the ultimate 'statement gift'. Giving a hamper at Christmas shows you're really trying to push the boat out.

What makes a great Christmas hamper?

The best hampers, says Holly, "contain a thoughtful curation that really encapsulates a moment or experience. Take our Christmas Traditions Hamper. We never want to include anything that will get lost at the back of the cupboard. We aim for recipients to be excited to open all components, and to hopefully surprise them with something new along the way."

In Maryam's opinion, the key to getting hampers right, after you've chosen the very best inclusions, is presentation, which she says is paramount. "A great hamper is beautifully arranged, reflecting elegance and care. The visual appeal, from chic packaging to intricate detailing, transforms the act of unwrapping into an event in itself. It should be more than just a collection of items. A hamper is a celebration of taste, craftsmanship and the joy of giving, encapsulating the spirit of luxury in every detail."

One of Judith's top tips is to go for quality over quantity. "It's better to have fewer premium items rather than a basket full of mediocre ones," she says. Offer variety as well – a mix of different products to keep the unboxing of the hamper interesting. Encourage shoppers to "think about what the recipient likes. If they love tea, include a selection of their favourite blends. If they love cheese, add some artisanal cheeses."

Judith says retailers helping customers to build personalised hampers should begin by "identifying a theme or narrative that aligns with the recipient".

"Select items that resonate with exclusivity, quality and sophistication. The key to a remarkable luxury hamper lies in the blend of diverse yet complementary items," Judith continues. "Strive for diversity in tastes, textures and flavours, while maintaining a consistent thread that weaves the narrative of luxury and refinement." Judith also suggests finishing with a handwritten note, or a booklet detailing the origin stories of the products and producers inside. "Remember, attention to detail in packaging and presentation enhances the overall gifting experience."

What do customers want from their Christmas hampers?

If the recipient is an epicurean, known for collecting kitchenalia, they will likely adore a hamper with all the bells and whistles – maybe a sturdy, lidded wicker box they can trug along on picnics.

Increasingly, though, what shoppers are looking for in a hamper is sustainability. WBC director Andrew Wilson says, "Offering a pre-made hamper, entirely recyclable from the card hamper to the shredded paper, right through to gift tags, is a brilliant way to make eco-friendly shopping easy."

Andrew suggests personalisation and experiential gifting, as highlighted by a study at the University of Pennsylvania, are also taking off in a big way, "creating stronger emotional ties between gifter and giftee", and adds that what takes a hamper offering from good to great is offering a wide breadth of options, taking everyone's budgets into consideration, whether they can afford a small parcel of chutneys and crackers, or an enormous, ostentatious affair packed to the rafters.

A key trend Holly has noticed this year is that customers "want a strong story such as a Bloody Mary gift box, or very thoughtful curations. They want the sentiment of the hamper or gift box to be special and, therefore, more personal." Echoing Andrew, Holly says shoppers are considering how packaging will be reused too, with Fortnum & Mason putting extra special finishing touches to its hampers, setting the scene for what's inside, while creating something that can be held onto and used in future as a keepsake.

Maryam's customers want hampers packed with products they can't find in the supermarkets, and her team takes a great deal of time working with producers and artisans to choose the best quality food and drink.

"We've also seen a trend in non-alcoholic hampers," Maryam adds. "Even though lots of people love a glass or two at Christmas, the idea of a hamper filled with food goodies and seasonal squash rather than wine to share with the whole family, is a lovely idea and something we're looking at more."

Millie has also seen an uptake in alcohol-free gifting options this year, alongside those that meet dietary requirements.

What to include in Christmas hampers this year

The 'best kept secrets' of a Fortnum's hamper, says Holly, include the retailer's Red Ale & Mustard Mayonnaise, chewy Toffolossus biscuits and, increasingly, English sparkling or rosé wine, which are becoming firm customer favourites.

Champagne from Moet & Chandon or Veuve Clicquot are hitting the mark for Maryam's hamper buyers, and she also likes Mouse House's waxed cheeses. "Not only are they delicious, but we love the fact it's a family-run business, with the cheeses produced on their farm in Lincolnshire. They create innovative flavours like Italian Pizza and Lemon Cheesecake."

"We've taste tested a lot of products," says Millie, revealing the retailer has recently launched its own exclusive Valley brand to expand on what makes its gifts truly unique. Specialist shops should be leveraging their own white label products in their hampers this Christmas, she believes. They are items shoppers really can't get anywhere else, and an attractive point of difference.

"I like to include something different. A rare find. Something from a smaller producer. Something new to market, maybe unusual – and most importantly, it has to taste fantastic," says Judith, who adds you cannot go wrong including locally made cakes, fine wines, and excellent quality cheese.

JARS TO BE RELISHED

What's hot to stock in the chutney aisle this season? *Speciality Food* investigates...



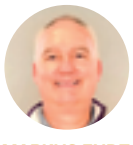
COMMENTATORS



BECKY VALE
TRACKLEMENTS



MARIA WHITEHEAD
THE HAWKSHEAD RELISH COMPANY



MARKUS ENDT
RH AMAR

Chutneys. They're the condiment that just keeps on giving. When our cooking efforts fall flat, or inspiration fails us, unleashing the contents of our favourite jar can provide that punch of flavour we've been reaching for in an inexpensive and impactful way.

Changing tastes and global influences have ensured the category remains fresh, with tantalisingly new and exotic combinations landing on shelves on a monthly basis, appealing to a broad spectrum of shoppers. But, as in the entire food and drink sphere, it's tradition and the classics that are currently reining. Home cooks are combining experimental ingredients and tastes with a generous spoonful of relishes that spark comfort and nostalgia.

They're also looking for better quality preserves from brands that are taking stock of their desire for cleaner labels, reduced sugar and additives, and more fruit and veg.

The importance of chutneys in retail

They might not have the instant 'wow' factor of, say, the cheese counter, but chutneys remain a key product for independents, and deserve lots of love and attention, says Tracklements' Becky Vale, who explains that shoppers rely on speciality stores to give them a greater breadth of choice than supermarkets.

"We did a bit of research recently, and we know people buy based on flavour, quality and taste in this category. It makes sense for speciality retailers to stock brands that deliver on those three things," Becky says.

We have expectations when we visit an independent shop, Becky adds. "We go to them because we trust them to have curated a quality offering for us. That is such an important thing to remember."

And there's more choice than ever before for the retail sector, says The Hawkshead Relish Company founder Maria Whitehead, adding that this category has come a very long way since she started her business more than 25 years ago. "It's not just the standard ploughman's pickle now. There are so many different variations on flavour, texture, colours and ingredients. In years gone by people would cook a chutney down for hours on end and it would be dark brown and all very standard. When you look at what's being made now it's incredible. There is so much to choose from."

Maria believes both shoppers and retailers have "woken up" to the fact a chutney can add something to a dish, rather than just being something you put on the side of the plate.

"They form a component of a lot of meals," agrees Markus Endt, senior technical manager at RH Amar. "There's a big movement for charcuterie boards at the moment and chutneys and spreads are interchangeable here, allowing people to add extra characteristics to what they're eating. They are quite important."





Echoing Maria's thoughts about the direction of travel for chutneys, Markus says, "People haven't been scared to incorporate more exotic flavours. There's a lot more experimenting going on with flavours across different brands," which is shaking up what retailers have access to. "There are some flavours I never thought would marry well, but they do. It's a wonderful segment at the moment, and a very exciting one."

Choosing quality

Following on from Becky's earlier comments, shoppers visiting farm shops, delis and food halls have high expectations. Choosing your chutneys and relishes carefully, with their key purchasing needs in mind, will put you in good stead.

Markus says the best place to start is by "looking at the ingredient declaration and the order of ingredients. If there is a higher fruit and vegetable count, and the list starts off with that, then you know that's the primary focus of the product. If water or glucose syrup are the first ingredients, you're probably looking at a more watered down version of what good looks like."

Increasingly brands are adding honey, rather than sugar, to their chutneys, which Markus also sees as a sign of commitment to quality and premiumisation.

"When you look at the ingredients you should understand everything on that label," agrees Maria. "There shouldn't be anything on there you wouldn't expect to use if you were making a chutney at home. Vinegar, sugar and salt are all natural preservatives. There's no need to use anything artificial."

Like Markus, she also suggests looking for brands that put fruit and vegetables high up on the list in each jar. "Making sure it's all proper ingredients." And also that what's in the jar looks vibrant, not 'gloopy'. "There's a place for a chutney that is darker, but you should be able to distinguish the ingredients that are in there, both visually and on the palate," Maria adds.

A really good chutney will help your customers to "jazz up their food", she says. And placed alongside cheese and charcuterie on the ever popular grazing platter, there's nowhere to hide if your chutney fails to hit the mark.

"They have to look as good as they taste. We eat with our eyes. Customers should look at the product and think 'I want to dip in and try that'."

For this reason, Maria says The Hawkshead Relish Company doesn't cook its chutneys down for hours on end. "It's important to retain that texture and colour so not everything looks the same. When you open the lid you should get a burst of freshness. So, with our mango chutney, we roast and grind our spices, and when you open the lid you get a really fragrant smell." The chutney, a customer favourite, is finished with lemon juice so there's "a finish of citrus when you eat it, which really cleanses the palate, ready for the next mouthful of curry."

Chutney should "always be something that adds to the dish you're serving it with".

The difference between good and bad chutney, adds Becky, isn't just where ingredients sit on the label, but where those ingredients have come from. "We are big believers that you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," she laughs.

"You have to select the best ingredients, and treat them with love, respect and care. When you put in great ingredients, you know what you're making will taste delicious. We have an expression here that if your grandmother wouldn't recognise it, it doesn't go in!"

Time is essential to getting quality right as well. "A good chutney is not something you can rush," Becky explains. "Getting the flavours to meld into each other and taste of something greater than the sum of their parts takes time. That's a very precious ingredient. Get it right and the taste will shine though."

Tasting, of course, is important to assess quality too. As is, says Becky, seeking out award-winners, which have been chosen by experts for meeting and exceeding expectations.

What's trending in chutneys?

Markus says the 'swicy' trend (with hot honey leading the charge) is infiltrating the world of chutney. "Honey is being included in a lot more chutneys and relishes," he explains. "We're seeing more of that, and more chilli – marrying that heat and sweetness together. It's very exciting. Brands are also using more exotic fruits and vegetables and creating a real point of difference."



> "They have to look as good as they taste. We eat with our eyes. Customers should look at the product and think 'I want to dip in and try that"
>
> **MARIA WHITEHEAD, THE HAWKSHEAD RELISH COMPANY**

RH Amar has just tapped into this area of 'newness' by launching the Cooks & Co Fig Spread, available in original, orange and chilli-infused varieties. It's smooth, contains less sugar than a jam, and is incredibly versatile, Markus says, working in place of a traditional chutney on a cheeseboard or charcuterie platter.

Customers are looking for slightly stronger flavours, Maria says, adding that she too has seen an uptake in chilli-infused chutneys and relishes. "We've done a limited edition aubergine pickle, and as it matures in the jar it's absolutely amazing. It really packs a punch of flavour, and that's doing so well."

There's no getting away from the allure of nostalgia, though, with Hawkshead seeing strong sales of its Piccalilli and Westmorland Chutney. "It's the first chutney we did," says Maria. "It's got dates and prunes and apricots. It's softer than a lot of ploughman-type pickles and has been a bestseller since day one. It's just all those lovely flavours you'd expect to have with a cheese sandwich."

Pickles have experienced 28% growth at Tracklements, says Becky, driven significantly by classic flavours such as Apple & Cider Brandy Chutney and Apricot & Ginger Chutney. "They are just brilliant combinations," she adds. "They really work well. They are the ones people come back to time and time again. I think that in interesting times people do like to stick to what they know... the familiar and the cosy."

Maria has noticed that consumers are becoming more sophisticated in their choice of chutney, too. They're really thinking about what pairs well with various ingredients. "For instance, they might be looking for a fig chutney to go with a softer goats' cheese, or for something more robust with hard cheese like Cheddar. A bit like wine pairings, they want to know the best way to complement things."

That extends beyond the cheeseboard. "Beetroot and horseradish goes well with something like a shepherd's pie," adds Maria. "We've gone beyond the days of people having a red sauce, a brown sauce and ploughman's pickle in the fridge."



How to get the most out of your chutney aisle

The advice from all three experts is to offer samples. Putting these products in front of customers, and letting them experience what's in the jar, beyond the label, is an essential tool for selling.

"Pair them with something," says Markus. "With cheese at the cheese counter, for example. Give customers ideas of how to use the chutneys. There's only so much information you can put on a label, and sometimes people will fumble around thinking 'how do I use this?'. If retailers put the products in the right place and show consumers how to use them and where to use them, while giving out treats and snacks using the chutneys, that's a good way





to encourage engagement."

Becky wants retailers to "make chutney sexy again. They are powerhouses of flavour!"

Like Marcus, she suggests lifting some products out of the ambient aisle and matching them up with other offerings around your store. "You might put farmhouse pickles by the cold meats, or mango chutney by the poppadoms. Show people their purpose. Plus, people are going mad for British cheese at the moment. Think about perfect pairings there. We now have an online hub where we make suggestions of what to match our chutneys with. You can come up with all sorts of surprising things, like rosemary jelly with goats' cheese. Spark excitement. Make a point of difference. Make people stop and think 'ah, I never thought about putting that with that'."

Maria also believes conjuring up and having ready a list of pairing suggestions, alongside offering tastings, will help retailers make the most of their chutney range. "So many people have said to us, 'I've got this black garlic pickle or this red onion marmalade, but apart from having it with cold meat I don't know what to do with it'. So we brought out a book a few years ago which shows people how to use our products in cooking and everyday dishes, because they really are treasure troves of flavour. You can use them for all sorts of things!"

Think outside of the box, Maria says. Advise customers to spread a little black garlic pickle over a piece of salmon before grilling it, for example. "We talk about waste a lot. I hate any kind of waste so I don't want anybody to have one of our jars in the fridge to use on one occasion and then be left to go beyond the sell by date. Retailers need to encourage customers to embrace chutneys and use them in different ways."

Beyond getting shoppers to trial products, Maria wants retailers to get staff involved in product tasting. "We often send over extra jars and I want them to have staff taste the products so they can talk about them, and talk about them with real authority."

One thing's clear, chutneys are here to stay. "They will never go out of fashion!" says Becky.



STOCK CHECK



GODMINSTER STICKY FIG CHUTNEY

Deep, rich, and filled with fresh figs. This crunchy, sticky chutney is a game-changer when paired with truffle cheese or alongside game dishes.

godminster.com



WELSH LADY PRESERVES HOT BANANA CHUTNEY

A unique, spicy chutney packed with ripe bananas and filled with flavour. Use in sandwiches, alongside a curry, or even as a dip.

welshladypreserves.com



THE GARLIC FARM FIG, APPLE AND GARLIC CHUTNEY

This gluten-free chutney partners beautifully with cheese and game dishes, and also compliments curries, casseroles and rice dishes.

thegarlicfarm.co.uk



THE WOODEN SPOON DRAGON'S BREATH

A fiery, tasty chutney filled with loads of slow-cooked onions, chilli, garlic and red peppers. Free from anything artificial.

thewoodenspoon.co.uk



WILD & FRUITFUL SMOKY TOMATO CHUTNEY

Made with ripe summer tomatoes, caramelised garlic and smoky spices. Ideal with cheeses and barbecued meats, or even stirred into sauces and pastas.

wildandfruitful.co.uk



CANDI'S CHUTNEY THE NON MANGO MANGO CHUTNEY

A traditional Kashmiri mango chutney – made with East Anglian Bramley apples for lower food miles. Excellent with cheese or alongside curries.

candiscupboard.com



CROOKED PICKLE CO SWEET & SOUR PINEAPPLE

Juicy pieces of pineapple pickled with chillies, Szechuan pepper and turmeric. Deliciously different.

crookedpickle.co



STOKES SAUCES STICKY PICKLE

A big hitter from this brand, combining their blend of vegetables with a sticky, spicy, sweet concoction made from molasses and treacle.

stokessauces.co.uk



TRACKLEMENTS MANGO & CHILLI CHUTNEY

Tangy, sweet, and with the warmth of chillies and the finest spices. Use this with curries, as a base for stir fries, a marinade, or even to pep up a cheese sandwich.

tracklements.co.uk



COOKS & CO FIG SPREAD

An all-natural, thick, sweet, rich spread made purely with figs. Wonderful alongside strong Cheddars and blue cheese, or stirred into gravies and stews.

cooksandco.co.uk

COMFORT & JOY

Shoppers are preparing for their annual feast of festive cakes and puddings – here's how to satisfy their appetite



COMMENTATORS



LAURA ROBERTS
LAURA'S LARDER



ALISON WRIGHT
FITZBILLIES



GIANFRANCO PERRI
JUST GOURMET FOODS

Us Brits love a bake, and never more so than at Christmas. Whether it's the shared need for extra comfort during the colder months, the pull of nostalgia or the enjoyment of the familiar novelty that gets pulled out year-on-year, come the festive season customers across the UK are raring to indulge in traditional cakes and puddings.

Tradition may still reign supreme, at least for now, but that's not to say that innovation doesn't play a part during Christmas too. During the festive season, modern takes on classic flavours might well be worth experimenting with. Think mince pies with added richness from chocolate, Heston's infamous candied orange-stuffed Christmas pudding, and Limoncello-infused panettone for the adventurous lovers of this Italian delicacy.

It certainly pays for independents to stock a well-crafted range of the classics – gingerbread, mince pies, festive fruit cakes and puddings – but it's well worth testing out some new products that offer up a twist for the customers keen to branch out, too; consider keeping order numbers modest for the first year to avoid potential wastage come the New Year.

Classic flavours sell

For Laura Roberts, owner of Laura's Larder, tradition wins out every year and customers – and Laura herself – have their tried and true must-buys. "We stick to some favourites – those items that our customers consistently praise and that sell well. Mini mince pies are a prime example. People seem to absolutely love them, so they're a staple in our festive line-up. For puddings, we always stock Figgy's Christmas Puddings. They're unbelievably good – everyone raves about how they taste just like homemade, even though they didn't make them themselves, of course!" she begins.

At Laura's Larder, classic Christmas flavours are king. "We keep it traditional. Honestly, I hope the days of every-flavour mince pies are behind us (though I do have a soft spot for the ones with a frangipane topping). As for new flavours, they can be showcased in the shop without tampering with something that's already delicious – introduce something new instead."

"My focus this year is on high-quality items that bring joy and nostalgia, with a few fun stocking fillers for good measure. People are craving familiarity and warmth, especially during the festive season."

Laura has found that it pays to offer a couple of free-from options so nobody misses out. "To cater to a wider audience, we also ensure we have an alcohol-free and gluten-free option, typically from Coles, who offer a great variety of Christmas puds."

The size of the products you sell is worth careful consideration, too. "It's important to offer variety in pack sizes for both small gatherings and large, and we also sell large and mini versions at the counter for those who can't resist having one almost every day in December," says Laura.

While familiar comfort is the name of the game at Laura's Larder come Christmas time, that's not to say that the team doesn't change with the times. "We do evolve based on customer habits," she says. "For instance, people are spending less time at home but are looking for treats to bring to someone's house so we have to tailor for that."

Laura has found that avoiding overtly Christmassy stock is key to reducing post-Christmas waste. "I have a strict rule about minimising things like trees and Santas on packaging – less is definitely more!" she says. "Mince pies can sell right through to New Year, but after that, as January remorse and gym subscriptions kick in (guilty!), sales drop off. Anything with a tree or a Santa on it is a no-go after the holidays." Careful ordering and learning from experience have proven fruitful. "I'm very careful with ordering, keeping detailed notes on last year's sales, reviewing orders, and considering how spending patterns have changed throughout the year to adjust our stock accordingly."

Some gifting items are ripe for selling throughout the year, even if you did originally order them for the festive season. "If it's just a beautiful box of chocolates or biscuits, we can store them behind the scenes and possibly bring them back out for Valentine's Day, Mother's Day or even Easter," says Laura.

Tradition with a twist

At Fitzbillies, the historic bakery in the heart of Cambridge – best known for its iconic ultra-sticky Chelsea Buns – tradition is served with a comforting twist at Christmas time. "We will always have the much loved mince pies, Christmas cake and Christmas pudding – classics, which when made well, by hand, with great ingredients, are incredibly delicious," begins Alison Wright, owner of Fitzbillies. "However there are plenty of places in our range where we can bring in new flavours. We update our macaron flavours each year. This year we've added white chocolate and sten ginger and cranberry to the range. Our festive brownies are very popular adults and kids alike. The flavours include Chocolate Orange, Gingerbread Spice and Double Chocolate."

By offering a carefully curated range of products and providing the perfect balance of tradition and newness, Fitzbillies has become an annual must-visit during the festive season. "Baked goods are such an important part of many local families' Christmas traditions: coming into Fitzbillies to buy the first mince pies of the season and making sure they get their Christmas cake and pudding before stocks run out." Offering a festive taste of home to customers further afield via online ordering has reaped rewards, too.

At Fitzbillies, requests for mince pies arrive increasingly early each year. "It's the buttery pastry that makes them so addictive. Last year we made 26,000 all by hand." While the business's Chelsea buns are not technically a Christmas bake, they also feed into many families' festive traditions. "Lots of customers view them as a Christmas tradition and come in on Christmas Eve to buy theirs. Now we also sell 'Bake-at-Home' Chelsea buns to order online, so our fans can have them fresh and warm from their own ovens on Christmas day – even if they are not in Cambridge.

"Number three is our Christmas macarons – we can't make enough, with their festive colours and flavours: this year we have White Chocolate & Stem Ginger, Cranberry, Mint Chocolate, Clementine, Salted Caramel and Dark Chocolate.

Consider your Christmas bake and cake range. Is there an item that becomes particularly popular as the big day approaches (or you'd like it to)? Consider making an occasion of its arrival – post a countdown on social media, show behind the scenes of it being baked and decorated, and tell customers exactly where they can find it in the shop so they know when and where they can satisfy their cravings when the time comes.

Wondering which product to





choose? Highlight the showstopper. "Everyone is looking for the wow-factor. Something that creates a centrepiece for the celebration, whether on Christmas day itself or for the other meals and social events around it," says Alison. "Our Chelsea Bun Christmas Tree is very popular for larger get-togethers as its perfect to tear and share."

Buon Natale

For many foodies, Italian fare is a popular choice year-round, and during the festive season delicacies such as panettone offer high quality alternatives to Britain's tradition of heavy and strongly spiced options. "There is nothing quite like the sweet lightness of a panettone or pandoro at Christmas," begins Gianfranco Perri, founder of Just Gourmet Foods. "In a period of feasting when foods are rich and often heavy, a good panettone brings relief and versatility, which is welcome. British traditional festive sweet bakes are based on richness and heavily spiced flavours, which are simply not to everyone's tastes, especially after a big meal. They also bring an Italian elegance to proceedings which an iced fruit cake just doesn't quite deliver!"

As well as being a lighter foil to the richness of British Christmas, panettone can be enjoyed at any time of day and can even be cooked with. "Suitable for occasions throughout the day, a panettone can be transformed into a decadent breakfast of French toast, a light accompaniment to mid-morning coffee, an afternoon sweet to have with tea or even a dessert when used as a bread and butter pudding."

There's a myriad of variations to choose from in Just Gourmet Foods' range, including a savoury option. "Loison produce a Dark Chocolate & Rum range which is at the decadent end of the scale, but we also love their Frutta & Fiori collection with flavours such as Fig or Amarena Cherry. From Salted Caramel to Pistachio & Matcha, Tirimisu to Limoncello, we even have a savoury version from Lazzaroni – a Pizzatone which has the lightness of crumb but is flavoured with tomato, mozzarella and oregano – perfect for a festive sharing board or perhaps with an aperitivo moment."

A sizeable step away from tradition these flavours may be, but the team are catering to a growing demand. "We see an increasing sense of exploration amongst our customers as panettone becomes an embedded feature of their Christmas ranging, and we love bringing new flavours to the offer to spark inspiration and ensure that sales remain buoyant," says Gianfranco.

Panettone isn't the only delicious festive Italian bake in Just Gourmet Foods' portfolio. "While panettone may get the majority of the airtime over the festive period, we also provide lesser known options in the form of Filone, essentially a slightly denser panettone in a loaf shape, which is perfect for an afternoon tea. Sbrisola, which is a type of crumble cake, baked in a round tin and topped with a crunchy layer is another great option for a seasonal sweet treat and provides a point of difference in the parade of iced fruit cakes and mince pies," says Gianfranco.

They're great for gifting, too. "Italian festive cakes are a great choice for gifting as they are so beautifully presented: from hand wrapped papers and satin bows to ornate tins which will find a future life as storage for all manner of things," says Gianfranco.

"Just Gourmet's Festive Italian selection has been constructed with the intention of ensuring that we satisfy our retailers' festive needs," concludes Gianfranco. "We recognise that a large part of Christmas for our retailers is how products fit into the overall look and feel of their stores. By offering a wide selection of packaging types, sizes and price points, as well as all the flavours you could wish for, our customers will be able to build a range which will deliver both visual impact and sales."

> "By offering a wide selection of packaging types, sizes and price points, as well as all the flavours you could wish for, our customers will be able to build a range which will deliver both visual impact and sales"

2024 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE

STOCK CHECK



POSITIVE BAKES CHRISTMAS PUDDING BROWNIES

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positivebakes.com



SEGGIANO CLASSIC VIN SANTO PANETTONE

Handmade by a family-run bakery in Tuscany and enriched with 12% DOC Vin Santo del Chianti.

seggiano.com



COLE'S SIGNATURE CHRISTMAS PUDDING

A rich and traditional pudding made extra special with the addition of bourbon and ginger.

colespuddings.com



ORIGINAL CAKE CO BELGIAN CHOCOLATE YULE CAKE

An individual portion of yule log made with rich and creamy Belgian chocolate.

holleysfinefoods.com



LILLYPUDS PREMIUM VEGAN CHRISTMAS PUDDING

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lillypuds.co.uk



STAG BAKERIES SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR CHEESE FRUIT CAKE

This rich, crumbly, fruity cake is an exciting alternative to biscuits with cheese.

stagbakeries.co.uk



COMMENTATORS



PETER ALLEN
WINE THAT'S FRUIT



NATALIE HALL
YORK DRINKS



LAURA ROBERTS
LAURA'S LARDER



OLLIE LLOYD
ADVISOR

TOAST THE SEASON

The time to add party pizzazz to your drinks selection has come. Careful stocking, smart promotion and drinks that 'wow' will be key to your success

As the season of merriment approaches, now's the time to add a little sparkle to your drinks offering. From quenching your customers' thirst for seasonal novelty and providing warming comfort to helping their celebrations go with a bang, there are plenty of ways to make your drinks section the talk of the town this Christmas.

"In the festive season people seek comfort, connection and celebration," begins Peter Allen, founder of Wine That's Fruit. "What better way than to enjoy a well-chosen wine? Wine compliments the traditional food choices and has been part of cherished rituals over the ages, and supports celebration, connection and joy!"

As well as being a must-have at the dinner table, wine is a popular choice for gifting – especially around the festive period. "We love to gift, and wine makes an excellent choice of gifting for neighbours, friends or family," continues Peter. Remember to create an experience beyond the transaction to suit the occasion. "The festive season sparks curiosity and a wish to explore new drinks and flavours. Wine warms not only the body but also the spirit! You are not just selling a drink; you're offering joy, memories, and a hint of festive magic."

Set yourself apart

With retailers across the board vying for shoppers' attention in the run-up to Christmas, it pays to take efforts to stand out from the crowd by offering something new that will delight your customers. "People want to explore new experiences, new flavours, seek out hidden gems and indulge in discoveries," says Peter. "One option is to explore beyond grapes to a wonderful world of flavours of all the other fruits out there. Don't risk a gift that is not special or something new. Some brands, such as Wine That's Fruit, offer more exceptional qualities too, such as removing all the nasties from the production process - like preservatives and use of animal products – to provide a locally produced natural wine, free from added sulphites, vegan friendly and naturally gluten-free."

Don't let the novelty of a new product put time-poor customers off a purchase – with time and resources at a premium for you and your staff, too, smart displays



can reap rewards. "When offering something new it's important to help educate your customers. You can share tasting notes, food pairings and quirky facts about each wine. Also, recipes for enhancing the wines into spritzers, or cocktails








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NICKY MAIA Brand Manager - nicky.maia@artichokehq.com



that would make the special occasion go with a bang. If in-store wine tastings are feasible, they will help customers engage with a new product and to assess whether this is right for their occasion or for the gift recipient."

All wines are not made equally, and it's important to tick the boxes that conscientious shoppers are demanding from fine food and drink and the retailers who stock it. "Shoppers today are also more discerning about the wine's credentials," says Peter. "Has the product been made and packaged in an environmentally conscious way that supports protection of the environment? Has it been produced locally supporting local communities? Is it made of natural ingredients, avoiding the use of traditional additives (such as sulphites) or has it been cleared using animal products? Has the product been packaged to encourage responsible drinking? If all these elements can be combined, such as with Wine That's Fruit, then the offer will meet many of the desires of today's customer to be doing the right thing."

A thirst for gin

A mainstay of any drinks cabinet, gin comes into its own during the festive season, and with a few seasonal nudges from retailers shoppers are sure to add it to their gift list and party menus. "Providing ideas for lovely Christmas cocktails certainly works for us," begins Natalie Hall, director at York Drinks. "We add gin to grenadine and lime juice in a Nick & Nora glass with a sugared rim. The deep red and sparkly white never fail to make guests to our tastings feel Christmassy. We call it the Fairytale of Old York." When it comes to promotion around cocktails and pairings, the only limit is your imagination. "Making gin the go-to party spirit is never too tricky as it's such a versatile drink!" says Natalie. "And with lots of eating around this time of year, the G&T is the pre-prandial par excellence."

This versatility, and the huge variety of gins on the market offering a kaleidoscope of flavours, makes gin a worthwhile addition to your gifting display. "Gift sets of miniature gins make lovely presents, providing people the chance to taste several gins during the cold dark new year," says Natalie. "This plays on the variety of gins available today." To quench this thirst, York Drinks sells triple packs of its classic gins (London, Old Tom and Navy) and its more inventive range (Chocolate & Orange, Roman Fruit and Rhubarb). "Last year, we sold lots of sets of gin and marmalade and jam to make 'Easy Martinis'."

Innovation is the name of the game in the gin world, and consumers are happy to experiment with the latest launches, says Natalie, particularly at Christmas. "We see a spike in interest and sales when we launch a new flavour. And there is a seasonal aspect to the different flavours of gin. Our Chocolate & Orange gin inspired by the Terry's Chocolate Orange, invented in York and made in the city for decades is always popular during the festive season."

Go low/no

While Christmas may traditionally be the time of much merriment (read: an additional hangover or two), the move towards abstinence is just as present during the festive season as at other times of year. "With one in three consumers now alcohol-free [Lumina Intelligence], it's important now more than ever to be offering customers high-quality soft drinks which are a complex alternative to alcohol," begins Rhian Morris, marketing manager at Luscombe.

Thankfully, the low/no sector has plenty to offer these shoppers as 2024 draws to a close – including an exciting new launch from Luscombe itself. "As the festive season approaches, customers will be looking for something a little different and to elevate their usual choices, this is where soft drinks with a seasonal twist can really do well. Interesting flavours which give a nod to the festive season will be extremely popular and we've seen this previously with our Sicilian Citrus Crush, Passion Fruit Ginger Beer and past release, Cranberry Crush. We are extremely excited to launch a new Mulled Winter Warmer from Luscombe this year, our first seasonal winter specific product launch. Available from October, it's a delicious non-alcoholic alternative to traditional mulled wine and is perfect for cosy winter evenings and festive celebrations. A harmonious blend of organic fruit and traditional mulling spices it can be enjoyed warm or cold and will be available in both 27cl and 74cl bottles."

Classic flavours with a twist also promise strong sales. "Our multi-award-winning organic ginger beers are also very popular at Christmas and include our Hot, Cool and Passion Fruit Ginger Beer," says Rhian. "With warmth and spice, they are just perfect for Christmas and are best served over ice with a slice or a curl of lemon or lime to complement the warmth of the ginger but also make superb additions to cocktails made at home such as Moscow Mule and Dark and Stormy."

HOW TO SELL: **CHRISTMAS COCKTAILS**



Ollie Lloyd, advisor, investor and presenter of The FoodTalk Show shares ideas to get your spirits sales flying

Over the last twenty years, foodies have thrown themselves into creating any number of chef-inspired creations. However, this creativity doesn't translate into cocktail-making. To inspire customers to create cocktails this season, you must encourage them to experiment without overwhelming them.

One of the easiest ways of doing this is to offer simple serving suggestions so that with the help of one or two items, foodies can craft cocktails that get talked about. This could be a bottle of rum, which, when combined with lime, ginger beer, and bitters, will create a mean dark and stormy. Or it could be triple sec, which, when combined with vodka, cranberry juice, and lime, can make a delicious Cosmo.

If you want to get foodies really engaged, you can always encourage them to infuse an old bottle of gin or vodka that has been languishing in the back of the drinks cupboard with some of your fresh produce. A few recipe cards and some Kilner jars could get your customers to create any number of unique spirits that could even be presents for friends.

There are also lots of clever cheats that can make a simple drink that little bit special. You can mix in a teaspoon of marmalade into a G&T or throw in a fun garnish from rosemary to thyme. Or you can offer up a range of seasonings or bitters that make drinks people are already used to, a bit more interesting and festive.

STOCK CHECK



BELVOIR FARM SPARKLING CLEMENTINE & CRANBERRY
A refreshingly festive sparkling soft drink with the perfect balance of sweet clementine and sharp cranberry.
belvoirfarm.co.uk



SUMA WINTER BERRIES KOMBUCHA
A blend of raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries, complemented by a hint of hibiscus and rosehip.
suma.coop



BLACK LINES DRINKS OATNOG
A dairy-free take on eggnog, filled with wintery spices. For every bottle sold five meals are donated to The Felix Project charity.
blacklinesdrinks.com



ARTISAN DRINKS VIOLET BLOSSOM TONIC
A soft bubbler ideal to offer as a unique soft drink option or as a mixer. Combines violet and apple blossom and elderflower.
artisandrinks.com



TRACK SPICED RUM
A light, botanical-style spiced rum, bright with Seville orange peel, vanilla, cloves, ginger and cinnamon. Ideal on the rocks or with a mixer.
8trackrum.com



SACRED CARDAMOM GIN
Classic London Dry gin infused with exotic botanicals and with an addition punch from an abundance of organic green cardamom pods.
sacredgin.com



WILD KNIGHT CHOCOLATE MARTINI
Crafted with organic Criollo cacao beans from the Peruvian Amazon, this boasts complex notes of fruit and nuts.
wildknightdistillery.co.uk



TIPTREE CHRISTMAS PUDDING RUM LIQUEUR
Small-batch craft English Rum distilled with handmade Tiptree Christmas Puddings.
tiptree.com



LUSCOMBE MULLED WINTER WARMER
A delicious non-alcoholic alternative to traditional mulled wine, this can be enjoyed warm or cold.
luscombe.co.uk



YORK GIN YORK ZERO
Classic juniper and coriander notes are complemented by fresh zesty orange in this alcohol-free spirit.
yorkgin.com

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CURATING THE PERFECT COUNTER

From selling what you love to smart set-ups, here's how to create a cheese counter that's sure to impress this season

As the busiest time of year for fine food retailers approaches, three expert cheesemongers share their tips for ensuring a smooth-running and strong-selling cheese selection.

Stay true to your ethos

For Dan Bliss, cheese buyer at Paxton & Whitfield, it's important to stay loyal to your sourcing philosophy while allowing room for flexibility. "Above all else, we look to select cheeses that are delicious, sustainable, and made by artisan producers using traditional methods. We have a core selection of cheeses and styles that we review every six months, and we like to make sure the range is always balanced in styles whilst reflecting the season. We have guest cheese slots in the range where we can feature new cheeses or award-winners that means we still have an element of flexibility and use our Cheese Club to trial cheeses and get great feedback from our cheese-loving members."

For Dan, a cloth-bound Cheddar is a must-stock. "Every British cheese counter needs a Cheddar and we love supporting the fantastic artisan makers that use traditional methods, plus they're delicious!" Keens Extra Mature is a top seller at Friday Street Farm Shop's cheese room. "Everyone loves a Cheddar and the Keens Extra Mature provides that much-craved tangy bite," says Dean Holmes, deli and cheese room manager.

Next up at Paxton & Whitfield, Baron Bigod. "Brie styles are a mainstay of cheese counters, the incredible makers at Fen Farm have created a modern British classic that is not only really tasty but also has fantastic name recognition!" This cheese is also a popular choice at Friday Street – "it is made locally to us, just down the road in Bungay. Deliciously gooey with a nice citrussy centre, it goes beautifully with charcoal crackers."

Stichelton, a traditional British blue made with real milk and "a real stalwart of the British cheese scene" is next, followed by Sinodun Hill – "a multi award-winning goat's cheese made in Oxfordshire, this pretty pyramid is not only eye catching but delicious." A Comté around the 18 month age profile is a "crowdpleasing cheese people will ask for". Finally, Mont D'Or. "As cheesemongers, there is such a pull towards seasonal cheese and this is the king of seasonal cheeses," says Dan. "Spoonable even at room texture, it's really good theatre on the cheese counter at Christmas."

Sell what you love

Of course, when it comes to matters of taste, subjectivity plays a key role, which is why the team at Paxton & Whitfield work together to build the cheesemonger's range using a rigid set of criteria. "Clear selection criteria is key," she says. "Samples of new cheeses are reviewed by a panel at Paxton's – a group of very experienced cheesemongers with a variety of preferences. That way we can be really objective and focus on what role we need a cheese to play in our range."

That's not to say that personal enjoyment doesn't play a part too – especially if you're working on a smaller scale. "At the end of the day, a monger has to fall in love with a cheese to sell it. If you are curating your own small counter then I think personal preference shows your personality, otherwise fantastic training goes a long way for your team." One mustn't forget the palates of customers. "Customer preference definitely plays a part," says Dan – "if customers don't love something then it can sit on the counter too long and then we don't feel we are doing that cheese due service in terms of quality."

Maintain a healthy balance

Balance is important at Friday Street's cheese room, says Dean. "We try and keep a nice balance in our cheese room, offering plenty of options for all different palates. We always push local cheeses but its also good to have the favourites like Red Leicester or a Cambozola too as well the unusual, like the Alp Blossom, which really catches customers' eyes." A touch of experimentation with the range keeps things fresh for staff and customers alike. "Recently we have got in an organic semi soft matured sheep's cheese called Seven Sisters which is wrapped in seaweed. The saltiness of the seaweed and the nuttiness of the cheese gives is a lovely yet different flavour. We very rarely swap out cheeses, during the quieter periods we may not order as much cheese but every now and again it is nice to get a different, more exciting cheese in to get people talking and hope perhaps we may stumble across the next cornerstone of our cheese room."

With a number of excellent cheesemakers in the surrounding area, it's only natural that Dean sources locally for the cheese room. "Stocking local cheeses really helps push the business forward," he says. "Being a farm shop, we like to keep everything as local as possible and during the summer months, tourists love to come and see what Suffolk has to offer."

At I.J. Mellis the team works to an 80:20 rule – 80% of the cheese counter is made up of cheeses that are sure to sell, leaving 20% to experiment with. "Even if you choose some cheeses that don't sell, you still have your 80% as a safety net," says Rory Mellis, director. Keeping the majority of the range familiar benefits both staff and customers. "Your regulars, staff and other customers need your staples so staff know what they're working with and customers know that they'll be able to get hold of what they want without issue." Meanwhile, regulars will appreciate the odd change-up to whet their appetite for adventure. "Your locals are likely to come in wanting something different sometimes, so the 20% is largely for them. We change it up every quarter or so, maybe less often than that."

Keep it functional

For Rory, the functionality of a cheese counter is of paramount importance – especially during busy periods such as Christmas. He advises that staff have everything within easy reach, avoiding staff crossing paths wherever possible – this could mean splitting a large counter into two or three sections. "Stock these sections with all of your most popular cheeses and make sure you have all your amenities around you – like scales, chopping boards and wax paper, and a tasting knife in your pocket, so you don't have to walk away from your customer to prepare their order," he recommends.

> "A monger has to fall in love with cheese to sell it. If you are curating your own smal counter, personal preference shows your personality"

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WHITE LAKE CHEESE



DAN BLISS
PAXTON & WHITFIELD

THE ART OF SELLING CHEESE AT CHRISTMAS

Cheese experts from across the industry share their tips on how to add sparkle to your cheese offering this festive season

For many food lovers, the Christmas cheeseboard comes second only to the turkey when it comes to excitement levels, which means that getting your cheese selection right ahead of the big day is of paramount importance to fine food retailers.

Christmas is a time of overindulgence, of course, but by sourcing smartly and knowing what your customer wants – as well as what will surprise and delight them into an impulse purchase or two – you'll ensure that they'll leave your premises satisfied by not only their hoard but also by the service you've provided.

Stock a carefully curated selection generously, and you'll ensure the return of your regular customers as well as attracting new ones to the fold.

Feed the feast

"Christmas is a time for feasting and, personally speaking, I'm one of those shoppers that can't help but buy enough fine cheese to feed a small army. It's a tradition; there's almost something built into our DNA telling us that you don't want to run out of fancy cheese at Christmas!" says Sarah Norris, head of marketing at Godminster. "Joking aside, I think that there is a Venn diagram of wants and needs when it comes to Christmas cheese shopping: shoppers want something traditional, they want something to feel like an indulgent treat, they want something special, and they want something comforting. Cheeses that tick all of those boxes will fly out the fridge doors."

Dean Holmes, deli and cheese room manager at Friday Street, agrees. "At Christmas time, discipline goes out the window – everyone gives in to their weaknesses and buy larger lumps and wider variety of cheese than they would normally, accompanied with requests for wines, crackers and biscuits that complement them."

In terms of what to stock, Dean has found that year-round best-sellers sell even better at Christmas. "The corner stone for our cheese room is Baron Bigod – it's our best-seller week in, week out, and at Christmas time customers buy such large quantities. If I was to choose something other than the Baron Bigod it would have to be Alp Blossom. Alp Blossom catches everyone's attention when they enter the cheese room, with its beautiful confetti-like appearance. It's a smooth, sweet and gentle Austrian cheese covered in alpine flowers of the mountain meadows."

At I.J. Mellis, director Rory Mellis has found that customers are divided into two camps – the regulars and the festive shoppers, both of which require tailored approaches. "So many people just come to us once a year, and they can be quite ritualistic with what they buy. It tends to be the customers who are with us all year round that are excited to see something new come in for Christmas."

This experimentation often comes in the form of small goats' cheeses. "This tends to be their little bit of fun in addition to getting wedges and wheels of the classics, so we always increase our range of little goat's cheeses for Christmas," says Rory. These purchases are often impulse ones – shoppers have more people in the house than usual so are looking for a small, delicious and perhaps adventurous addition to their cheeseboard, and are happy to experiment with cheeses they haven't tried before.

The value of truckles

While truckles are a safe stocking bet all year round, they're even more valuable as the festive season approaches, as Sarah explains. "Firstly, they're perfect for gifting. A waxed truckle still needs refrigeration but will last longer out of a fridge thanks to their waxed coating. This makes them really great for customers taking car journeys up and down the country visiting relatives, as well as the perfect cheese for hampers and gift packs. Secondly, they've got fantastic Christmas shelf appeal. Waxed truckles can come in great shapes like Stars which look brilliant in a fridge or on a cheeseboard.

Thirdly, they often include great seasonal flavours. Truffle Cheddars are a great sellers throughout the year but at Christmas they really shine. Capitalise on the increased interest in decadent flavours by adding more lines of seasonally relevant flavours like truffle."

Bring out the blues

Many would argue that Christmas isn't Christmas without a wedge of Stilton, and the traditional British blue has held onto its crown of the king of Christmas cheeses with good reason. "Stilton is always the centre of attention when it comes to a Christmas cheeseboard," says Priya Taylor, brand marketing manager at Long Clawson. "Being an iconic festive cheese, Stilton becomes the king of the cheeseboard, and it pairs very well with festive favourites such as fruits, chutneys and wine."

Stilton is a particularly strong seller during the festive season, and it pays to put some thought into how you can stock it smartly. "You could offer cheese tastings or bite size tasting samples of cheese on a cocktail stick," suggests Priya. "This could be enhanced with offering tastings with pairings such as fruits, nuts, crackers and wine too. Why not elevate this even further by demonstrating the versatility of Stilton via some Christmas canapes and recipe cards?"

While Stilton will be at the centre of Christmas cheeseboards up and down the country come Christmas Day, there are a myriad of ways to enjoy it which come into their own during the festive season. "Cooking with Stilton elevates any dish because a little goes a long way. Try crumbling Stilton into your favourite soup, adding some to a cheese toastie, or into a winter warming pie." Check out the 1912 Artisan Stilton website for a host of recipes sure to delight your customers.

Don't forget the goats' cheese

Grand Stiltons and savoury Cheddars are stalwarts of the Christmas cheese counter, and with good reason – their full flavours satisfy our festive appetites for rich tastes and familiarity – but ignore the opportunities that goats' cheeses provide at your peril.

"Goats' cheeses are a great option for the Christmas cheeseboard as they are often a lighter cheese to enjoy compared to the traditional hard and blue cheeses, and have a different flavour profile," begins Roger Longman, owner of White Lake Cheese. "Also, the pure white of a goats' cheese is reminiscent of snow,



so it adds a festive touch!"

Goats cheese is delicious on cheese board and in numerous festive recipes. "In terms of enjoying a goats' cheese as part of a festive cheeseboard, goats' cheese goes very well with fresh fruit, nuts and honey. To make it very special at Christmas you can enjoy goats' cheese with a drizzle of truffled honey – delicious," says Roger. "Goats' cheese goes very well with a crisp Sauvignon Blanc or a young red wine like a Cabernet Franc or a Beaujolais. As far as recipes go, think about using semi-hard or hard goats' cheeses in raclettes, tartiflettes or in a cheese fondue. Perfect dishes for warming you up in the winter!"

The art of display

When it comes to display, shoppers are expecting fireworks from fine food retailers – by putting extra effort into the details you can create a space that makes shoppers want to linger, which often leads to extra spend. When it comes to the cheese counter, create a functional yet inspiring space. "Thinking about those cheeses that add a bit of theatre and celebration is really important," says Sarah. "Encourage your customers to visualise what their Christmas dinner table will look like and picture them opening up a larger-than-life truckle of cheese to the 'oohs' and 'aahs' of their friends and family."

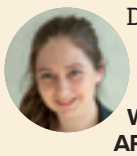
Rory recommends keeping it simple and stocking it high to catch people's attention. Last year the exterior of I.J. Mellis was adorned with clementines from Paris for a striking display which not only caught customers' eyes but added a fragrance to proceedings, too. "People were buying two or three to serve with their cheese – they were only 20 or 30 pence each, but they definitely added some fun to the season."

If you have the space for a cheese room, Christmas is likely the time that it will come into its own. "There aren't many farm shops that can boast having a cheese room, so the experience is like nothing most people have seen before," says Dean "Being able to come in to such an environment and to smell and taste all the cheese we have to offer and have it cut to size and neatly wrapped makes it even more enjoyable."

Even having a dedicated space doesn't avoid the annual challenge of how much to stock and how to display it well. "At Christmas time our displays tend to be a bit more difficult as due to the volume of customers we need to really fill the cheese room up but we do like to always make sure everything is well presented and attractive for our customers," he concludes.

> "We find customers like to have their anchor cheeses – say a Wensleydale or a Cheddar like Montgomery and a traditional blue Stilton – but then customers love a wildcard or trying something new!"

RETAILER **INSIGHT**



Dan Bliss, cheese buyer at Paxton & Whitfield, shares the iconic cheesemonger's festive best-sellers

WHAT ARE YOUR STRONGEST SELLING CHEESES AT CHRISTMAS?
It's fair to say that Stilton is still incredibly popular at Christmas but perhaps not as popular as it once was. Our Paxton's Cave Aged Cheddar always appears in our top five, the balance of sweet and nutty but also rich and savoury is a real crowd pleaser! Comté sales grow year on year and there's definitely a trend for alpine cheeses at the moment!

ARE THERE ANY NEW LAUNCHES YOU'RE EXCITED TO SHOWCASE THIS CHRISTMAS?
Mountain-style cheeses continue to be a trend in the cheese world; we are really excited to launch a Swiss cheese encrusted with wildflower petals called Wildblutenkase this year. We are also creating a boozy British blue especially for Christmas – Drunken Dovedale is a blue cheese from Derbyshire that we have infused with our Monbazillac, a dessert wine from the Dordogne.

ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS MORE ADVENTUROUS DURING THE FESTIVE SEASON OR DO THEY STICK TO FESTIVE STALWARTS LIKE STILTON – OR A COMBINATION OF BOTH?
It's definitely a bit of both. We find customers like to have their anchor cheeses – say a Wensleydale (we love the artisan Wensleysdale – Yoredale) or a Cheddar like Montgomery and a traditional blue such as Stilton. But then customers love a wildcard or trying something new! Over the festive period our hand-truffled Brie becomes a real centrepiece for many!

2024 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE **STOCK CHECK**



LE GRUYÈRE AOP
An artisanal cheese that's smooth and aromatic at six months, becoming full-bodied and savoury at 24 months.
gruyere.com



1912 ARTISAN STILTON
An award-winning creamy yet crumbly Stilton with moreish tanginess and PDO status.
1912.co.uk



THE CHESHIRE CHEESE COMPANY RESERVA
Creamy Cheddar enhanced with Spanish Rioja wine and a tang of caramelised onions.
cheshirecheesecompany.co.uk



GODMINSTER OAK-SMOKED CHEYNEY'S FORTUNE
Organic gold medal-winning Cheddar, cold smoked over oak chippings from sustainable woodlands.
godminster.com



SNOWDONIA CHEESE COMPANY ROCK STAR FONDUE CHEESE BAKE
The vintage cave-aged Cheddar is combined with cracked black pepper and white wine and served in a terracotta pot, ready to warm in the oven.
snowdoniacheese.co.uk



FEN FARM DAIRY TRUFFLED BARON BIGOD
Bloomy, mushroomy raw milk Brie-style cheese, with a layer of homemade mascarpone infused with fine black truffles.
fenfarmdairy.co.uk



A FESTIVE FAVOURITE

With its unique, loved-by-all flavour and finely crafted quality, it's no wonder Le Gruyère AOP is a cornerstone of the Christmas cheese counter

In family-run village dairies located in the picturesque western cantons of Switzerland, the internationally-renowned cheese Le Gruyère AOP is made by expert hands using skills passed down the generations for centuries.

A heritage cheese

The history of Le Gruyère AOP begins in 1115, when the inhabitants of five neighbouring regions of Switzerland – the town of Gruyères in the Canton of Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Jura and Bern – transformed the milk of their cattle herds into cheese. In the 900 years since then, the knowledge and techniques established by its original makers have been upheld to the delight of cheese lovers across the world. By 1762 the cheese was officially named and its provenance noted in the dictionary of the Académie Française, but despite this, the style of the Le Gruyère AOP was often imitated to create lesser quality wheels until – following discussions held across Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – it was awarded AOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) accreditation across Switzerland then certified AOP (Protected Designation of Origin) across Europe.

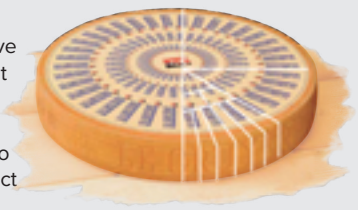
The 170 dairies which produce Le Gruyère AOP are expected to uphold the rigid specifications set by the accreditation at every stage of the production process, from the cows producing the milk to the ageing of the cheese – keeping the high quality and unique, delicious flavour of Le Gruyère AOP consistent.

Unique and versatile for all ages

This consistent flavour has played a huge part in earning and maintaining the worldwide popularity of Le Gruyère AOP, as well as numerous awards. Its distinctive yet subtle flavours are both unique and versatile, making it popular with consumers of all ages as well as delicious served in a number of ways, from a flavourful addition to a cheeseboard to melted in a fondue.

HOW TO CUT LE GRUYÈRE AOP

Cut the wheel in half using a cheesewire then cut into quarters using a double-handled knife – halve these quarters into eighths, then cut the top half into three wedges and the bottom into six slices. Wrap the cut portions with clingfilm in order to avoid the cheese getting into contact with the air.



> "The 170 dairies which produce Le Gruyère AOP are expected to uphold the rigid specifications set by the accreditation at every stage of the production process, keeping the high quality and unique, delicious flavour of Le Gruyère AOP consistent"





LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

TASTING NOTES

Le Gruyère AOP is available in two ages, each of which displays subtle differences in flavour:

- **Le Gruyère AOP Classic** (aged six-nine months). Nutty, sweet and refined – delicious melted and popular with fans of mild cheeses
- **Le Gruyère AOP Réserve** (aged 10 months and up). Aromatic and full of flavour – its complex, mature flavours make it a popular choice for a cheeseboard

DID U KNOW THE NAME AND PROVENANCE OF **LE GRUYÈRE AOP** WAS OFFICIALLY LISTED IN THE DICTIONARY OF ACADEMIE FRANCAISE IN 1762





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"We are Earth – Humas (Human)"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

In the Parable of the Sower (Lk 8:5-15), Jesus teaches that both seed and soil are necessary for growth. Both seed and soil need proper interaction to produce a satisfying crop. The seed is likened to the word of God. The soil is the life and the heart of each human being.

When we think today about the food that we eat can we honestly say that there is a proper interaction with the soil and seed?

September is Organic Month and a good time to reflect and discuss on how organic farming is being perceived as a nation. To prepare myself for this editorial I have been researching and chatting to organic farmers up and down the UK and have found some incredibly inspirational content that I do hope you will appreciate.

In the UK we are so lucky to have so much choice when it comes to cheese, but are we? Do we need to consider where the cheese is coming from? Does the label give you the full story?

Organic is generally the more expensive choice, why is that? Working organically to produce mixed and diverse pastures that are at one with the ecology of the landscape takes a lot of research, time, hope and hard work. The nutrients that our diverse rich pastures can give our livestock is certainly rewarding. Not only does it filter through to the taste of the cheese but also adds to the health and wellbeing of the animals. The livestock are content and produce great rich milk with a diet of herbal leys grown through carbon rich soils.

Have you ever spotted a bunch of cows grazing in a distinct pattern? That may be when the farmer may had missed spraying a section with fertiliser. The cows are simply going to where the nutrient rich grasses are that they enjoy far more. At a recent Specialist Cheesemakers Visit to Torpenhow Dairy Farm in Cumbria that is exactly where I found out why Jenny and Mark Lee decided to change their farming from fertiliser to organic literally overnight. Some five years later they can clearly see the rewards. At first production levels fell sharply. Over time and thankfully with the additional income from on-site event catering the family were able to successfully transition to organic. The land is giving back, and it shows in the milk and importantly the exceptional cheese.

Organic is a farming system that works with nature, it is therefore sustainable and should be the most trusted. Organic has been lost in translation over recent years and the need for proper explanation is welcome. It is encouraging to see Feltham's Farm owners Penny Nagle and Marcus Fergusson recently start the Organic Cheesemakers Network. They are both driven to bring together producers up and down the UK to protect and preserve organic cheesemaking.

Why don't organic cheesemakers get rewarded for reducing pollution and the brilliant goods that they deliver? Organic farmers are at one with positive agricultural transition, this helps to rebuild carbon in the soil. Our health as a nation would improve if organic food production was more accessible. The water health in our communities is tainted by industrial farm waste and the government do nothing to stop it. As big industry continues to feed the nation the government continues to allow them to pollute as they fear that any sanctions imposed will result in food increases.

It is essential that the people are allowed to see and hear the full story about the food that they eat. We have no idea where all the milk comes from that produces the industrial cheese that adorns the supermarket shelves. We do not know what conditions the animals live in and the food that they are given.

Patrick Holden is the cheesemaker at Holden Farm in Wales and the founder of the British Organic Farmer's established in 1982. His extensive advocacy work centres on the importance of transforming our food and farming systems to address climate change, reverse biodiversity loss, and improve public health. His cheese, Hafod, is a delight with rich earthy and umami notes, full of character and terroir. His farm has been certified organic since 1973 making it the oldest organic dairy farm in Wales.

In order to break the cycle we need more people to understand organic and allow them to get the full story behind their food. More open farm visits would be beneficial to allow people to fully appreciate the work care, love and sheer determination these organic farmers have. Which is simply to be at one with nature by working with and not against it and taking only what is needed to ensure regeneration is achieved.

Could you be the next Young Cheesemonger of the Year?

Entries are now open for the competition, with the winner to be decided at the World Cheese Awards this November.



In 1377, the Ordinances of the Cheesemongers were set down, limiting trade to only two official cheese markets in London. Selling cheese anywhere else was illegal. Thankfully, times have changed, and we now have more than 1,500 delis employing a workforce of nearly 11,000 in the UK alone. Somewhere amongst these and the international cheesemongering community is the next Young Cheesemonger of the Year, with the Academy of Cheese now calling out for cheesemongers to enter in their search.

One of the few competitions that invites cheesemongers from around the world to take part, Young Cheesemonger of the Year will be held for the third year running at the World Cheese Awards in Viseu, Portugal on Friday, 15th November 2024.

In 2023, the competition extended its global reach, with six entrants from five countries facing each other in Trondheim, Norway, resulting in 21-year-old Lily Morris from Wales winning the coveted title. Lily is thankful for the exposure that entering the competition has given her family business, saying, "I entered Young Cheesemonger to challenge my cheese knowledge and to have some fun! Winning really boosted not only my confidence in my mongering abilities, but it also helped build up the shop's reputation. It has inspired me to keep on exploring the ever-changing cheese world, which never fails to amaze me!".

Free to enter, the competition is open to any cheesemonger under the age of 30, with applicants being asked, initially, to provide a short biography and submit recommendations for their perfect cheeseboard. New for 2024 is the 'Perfect Pairing' round, which asks applicants to present to the panel of judges their ultimate combination of one cheese, one Peter's Yard cracker and one complementary accompaniment. Six shortlisted entrants will be invited to attend the World Cheese Awards - the largest cheese-only competition on the planet - and compete against their peers across five rounds.

The Academy says it is delighted to have Peter's Yard on board as sponsors of the competition for the first time this year. As well as sponsorship, Peter's Yard is offering finalists £300 each in funding to support their travel and accommodation costs. Yona Ellis, marketing director at Peter's Yard, said, "We're delighted to be supporting the Academy of Cheese in their search to find the freshest talent in the Young Cheesemonger of the Year award. We can't wait to see what innovative pairings the contestants create with our award-winning crackers."

Peter's Yard is joined by the Guild of Fine Food as co-sponsors of the competition, with the winner of the award being announced on the same day at the World Cheese Awards.

Key dates for Young Cheesemonger of the Year 2024:

Deadline for entry:
Monday, 30th September

Finalists announced:
Thursday, 10th October

Finals & Results:
Friday, 15th November

Established to promote cheese knowledge and provide career development within the industry, the Academy of Cheese aims to build greater respect for the industry, with Young Cheesemonger of the Year showcasing the skill, knowledge and talent of its members.

As well as a bright future and the coveted title of Young Cheesemonger 2024, the winner will receive a trophy, feature in Fine Food Digest, and secure a place on the Academy of Cheese Level Two Member Certification course. They will also be invited to judge at the World Cheese Awards 2025.

Full details, along with the application form, can be found on the Academy of Cheese website.

Treur Kaas expands range

Award-winning cheesemaker Treur Kaas has added two new cheeses to its range.



The Goat Maasdam is an Emmental-type cheese made using goat's milk, and boasts a slightly sweet taste as a result of the recipe which creates holes in the cheese. The creamy paste and sweet goat's cheese flavour of this cheese make it a stand-out new product in the fine cheese sphere.

Treur Kaas have also launched Triple Dutch, a soft and creamy cheese made using 40% cow's milk, 40% goat's milk and 20% sheep's milk and matured for four weeks.

Both cheeses are made using pasteurised milk and vegetarian rennet.



Family celebrates ‘touching’ award at Great Yorkshire Show

Shepherds Purse, the artisan family cheesemaker, is enjoying a double celebration as it won Supreme Champion Cheese at the Great Yorkshire Show, on top of celebrating its 35th anniversary at the show.

The cheesemaker first launched at the Great Yorkshire Show in 1989 when its founder, the late Judy Bell MBE, took her innovative sheep’s milk ‘Feta’ (now Mrs Bell’s Salad Cheese), with mixed responses from farmers who weren’t used to eating cheese made from sheep’s milk.

Fast forward to today, and for the first time ever at the Great Yorkshire Show, Shepherds Purse has won Supreme Champion for its newly launched Organic Yorkshire Blue cheese which uses milk produced at Acorn Organic Dairies . The judges described the winner as having “a creamy texture with elegant, sweet notes, buttery, creamy, indulgent and well balanced. A well-deserved winner.” The sisters have dedicated their prestigious win to their mum.

The family’s first organic cheese also won major trophies in the Best Organic Product in Show and Best Yorkshire Product in Show classes as well as Mrs Bell’s Blue securing the Best Blue Cheese in Show trophy – a hotly contested category. On top of these wins there were also six golds, three silvers and five bronze awards for the cheese making family.

Katie Matten, joint managing director of Shepherds Purse, said, “We are absolutely thrilled to win the Supreme Champion Cheese award at the Great Yorkshire Show and to win it for the first time on our 35th anniversary is beyond special.

“It’s such a fitting tribute to our mum, Judy especially as she’d always wanted to launch an organic cheese. Caroline and I feel proud that we have delivered her ambitions and so this win really does seem like the perfect way to celebrate the journey we’ve been on as a family and a business. Our 35th anniversary feels like a significant milestone after the sadness of losing mum but we now look to the future as we continue to produce our world-class cheeses and to fly the flag for Yorkshire cheesemaking.”



Take part in the Real Cheese Project’s 2024 live final

The Real Cheese Project is inviting independent retailers and cheese-loving consumers to choose their winners for the final of The People’s Cheese, Heritage Edition.

The project, launched by James Grant of No2 Pound Street, is on a mission to educate shoppers about artisan cheese and guide them to independent cheese shops.

The four semi-finalists, chosen by hundreds of members of the public at Chiswick Cheese Market in July, are Keens Cheddar, Thelmas Original Caerffili, Cropwell Bishop Stilton and Mr’s Bourne’s Cheshire.

To take part, retailers need to buy cheese from the four cheeses competing and sell tasting boxes to customers who can tune in to the live final.

The People's Cheese final – hosted by comedian Marcus Brigstocke – will take place at Mrs Kirkham’s, Lancashire, on 11th October and will be live streamed.

To find out more, visit therealcheeseproject.co.uk





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SWICY SELLS

It might be trending on TikTok and inspired by far-off cuisines, but you might already have the tools to cash in sitting on your shelves

WHAT IS 'SWICY', EXACTLY?

Swicy is simply a moreish combination of sweet and spicy and it's everywhere; consider it 2024's version of salted caramel.

WHY'S IT TRENDING NOW?

"Spicy food has become a lot more mainstream in Western culture," adds Nina Matsunaga, chef patron of the Black Bull in Sedbergh, Cumbria. In the UK, the spicy food trend has become more and more popular as British consumers develop the confidence to explore warmer, hotter tastes. But for many, Nina adds, "getting used to spice is still quite hard."

Now, sweet and spicy flavour combinations are diversifying how Brits understand spice. Swicy, Tom says, is "clearly an interesting proposition for heat-seekers," but Nina says that balancing the spice with sweet makes it more broadly palatable: "It spices food up and makes it interesting, adding a new flavour profile."

Dean Harper, chef and director at Harper Fine Dining, says the trend represents "an exciting deviation from traditional flavour combinations, granting consumers the best of both worlds".

Social media, Dominique Woolf, cookbook author and founder of The Woolf's Kitchen, says, has played a "huge part in bringing this trend to life, showcasing it to a new, adventurous audience. Thanks to the viral popularity of dishes like Korean fried chicken, which uses gochujang, Korean food and its sweet and spicy deliciousness have never been more popular."

AH, SO IT'S GOT OVERSEAS ROOTS?

"Sweet and spicy food combinations aren't new," says Dominique. "They exist across numerous cuisines, from Thai sweet chilli sauce and its quintessential condiment nam prik pao, to Korean gochujang paste, Mexican hot chocolate and the Sichuan dish kung pao."

Mexican food, too, is seeing its moment in the spotlight in the UK, and it has many swicy combinations, from traditional Mexican mole, described by Michelle Rosser, co-founder and managing director of Pembrokeshire Chilli Farm, as "a complex sauce made with chilli and chocolate" to a sweet margarita spiced up by a kick of chilli salt on the rim.

The rise of 'swicy', or sweet and spicy, flavours "plays nicely to the ongoing consumer movement towards more diverse, exciting taste experiences – experiences that often have roots in globally inspired cuisines," says Tom Gatehouse, senior trends strategist at food consultants Egg Soldiers.

WHO'S HUNGRY FOR SWICY FOOD AND DRINK?

According to Scott Joynston, product development manager at The Flava People, younger generations, like Gen Z and younger Millennials, are a significant driving force behind the swicy trend. "This generation has been instrumental in the innovation of new and exciting food trends as they are constantly seeking exciting and new flavour profiles to tantalise the taste buds." As younger generations tease out the trending flavours they're interested in, these are seeping into the mainstream audience. "Today's consumers are seeking more complex flavours from their foods, and this is where the sweet and spicy flavours come in," Scott says. "It is driven by the consumer's need to create a flavour combination that turns a forgettable meal into an excellent one."

HOW CAN I SELL THE SWICY TREND?

From Thai chilli pastes to chilli jam chutneys, you may even have sweet and spicy combinations on your shelves already. To get these products flying into consumers baskets, try marketing the 'swicy' flavours as the latest trend to try and offering customers a few recipe ideas.



US SALES FOR FOODS DESCRIBED AS 'SPICY' HAS INCREASED BY 9% YOY

SOURCE: CIRCANA

In a cost-of-living crisis when consumers are choosing to eat in rather than out, condiments offer a brilliant way to elevate home-cooked meals. "While what brings the flavour – sauces, spices, seasonings – is often not the most expensive part of the meal, it really can make the difference," Scott says.

But where to start? Tom says Korean cuisine in particular has benefitted from the "focused spotlight on swicy-centric possibilities," with the stage firmly set for gochujang. "The sweet/spicy Korean condiment staple is now turning up in all manner of dish types and product settings, be it as a crisp seasoning, creamy pasta sauce addition, fried chicken glaze, ice cream enhancer, Korean BBQ seasoning, or even as an upgrade to hot honey," Tom says.

WHAT'S TO COME FOR THE SWICY TREND?

"The phrase 'swicy' will probably fade out of popularity quite quickly," Ben from Sorted Food believes. "The novelty of the portmanteau will wear off. However, the flavour combination has been around a while and is here to stay."

One sign the flavour pairing is here for the long haul is its broad appeal, Tom says. "It's very versatile, not just in product scope but also as a taste profile among consumers."

> "Today's consumers are seeking more complex flavours from their foods, and this is where the sweet and spicy flavours come in"



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SPECIALITY & FINE FOOD FAIR 2024

Celebrating 25 years of the must-visit annual event



Speciality & Fine Food Fair returns to Olympia London on 10th-11th September to celebrate the latest new products, innovations and trends in the world of food and drink and to mark its 25th anniversary with a range of new features and exclusive events.

For 25 years the Fair has been a trusted product-sourcing resource for food and drink buyers across the UK, from independent retailers and delis to supermarket multiples, from café owners to restaurant chains, and from global wholesalers to speciality distributors of artisan food and drink.

Buyers and industry professionals are eagerly awaiting this year's event, with Steve Reice, CTO of Artisan Food Club, commenting, "For me to leave my desk to attend a trade show, it needs to be something special. When it comes to Speciality & Fine Food Fair, there is no decision to make. Hands down the best trade show in the UK. I achieve more in one day at the Fair than I do across all the other shows combined."

Visitors to the Fair will be able to pop into the Great Taste Deli to explore a range of products recognised by the Guild of Fine Food's Great Taste Awards, including products awarded with the highest accolade of three stars and the products nominated for 2024's Golden Forks.

Nicola Woods, event manager for Speciality & Fine Food Fair, comments, "We can't wait to welcome the speciality food and drink sector back to the Fair for two inspiring days discovering delicious new products, hearing from insightful industry leaders and networking with peers.

"This year is a truly special edition of the Fair as we celebrate our 25th anniversary, including with a fantastic documentary looking back at the history of the event with some of our key partners and producers, and we are so excited to bring this unique community together once more."





> "For me to leave my desk to attend a trade show, it needs to be something special. When it comes to Speciality & Fine Food Fair, there is no decision to make. Hands down the best trade show in the UK. I achieve more in one day at the Fair than I do across all the other shows combined"





THE START-UP VILLAGE

The Start-Up Village is a bustling hub at the heart of the Fair packed with exciting, up-and-coming food & drink businesses. Visitors will have the opportunity to meet with passionate brand owners as they launch innovative new products, pushing the boundaries of great taste and pioneering in the field of sustainability.

From artisanal chocolates to craft spirits and niche superfoods, the Start-Up Village also cultivates an atmosphere of collaboration, allowing like-minded entrepreneurs to connect, learn, and grow.

Joining the Fair this year are All Dressed Up Dressings, dressings conceived by an ex-private chef and coming in flavours including miso & sesame, tahini & lime, and spicy harissa. Visitors can also meet the team behind JD's Hot Honey, a new generation of sweet heat sauces designed to drizzle and drench pizza, chicken, BBQ, grilled fish, roast vegetables, ice cream, cocktails and more.

Elsewhere in the Start-Up Village are Pasemelo, bringing a bold vegan blend of Mediterranean tapenade-style ingredients, without wheat, gluten or dairy. The umami, sour and salt flavours of the Artichoke & Olive Tapenade, and the sweet, umami, salt and spice of the Tomato & Piquante Pepper Tapenade, gives a wide range of flavour elements to work with.

For fans of matcha, The Matcha Yaad is a vibrant culinary venture that celebrates the fusion of Japanese Matcha and Jamaican flavours, offering innovative and refreshing beverage experiences. The company's Refresher line of beverages delivers exceptional canned matcha drinks, manufactured in the UK.



NEW PRODUCTS AT THE FAIR

Visitors to the Fair will be able to enjoy a wide range of exciting new speciality food and drink products. Made on the company's farm in Herefordshire, drinks from Foreva Farmers use renewable energy in its carbon neutral facility and come in flavours including smoky ginger ale, classic tonic water and elderflower & honey tonic water.

Award-winning cheese brand Golden Hooves will be launching a new regenerative Double Gloucester, while authentic Indian cooking sauce brand Aagrah will be showcasing its new Garlic & Coriander Naan.

The Fresh Pasta Company will be introducing a new collection of products – Cured & Raw – and the company has recently partnered with Valsana in Italy allowing it to feature an array of Italian artisan-made products, including meat and cheeses.

Hames Chocolates will be debuting new flow wrapped Hot Chocolate Stir-Ins, a true indulgence for chocolate lovers, made with recyclable packaging and compostable spoon and available in 15 flavours.

Gourmet popcorn brand Popcorn Shed will be launching new Popcorn Nuggets at the Fair, with crunchy caramel smothered in luxurious chocolate, perfect for the festive season.

SAMPLE QUALITY FINE FOOD

In addition to showcasing countless new producers, the Fair is also proud to have a number of long-standing exhibitors representing the very best of UK and international speciality food and drink.

For more than 20 years, Cibosano has been importing high quality Italian charcuterie and supplying a range of quality products including cheeses matured with black truffles, saffron, chilli, crushed vines, fresh Sicilian ricotta and Buffalo Mozzarella to delis, food halls and restaurants around London and the UK.

Long-standing partner to the Fair and the UK's biggest regional food group Taste of the West will also be on hand to showcase a number of quality products from Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire

John Sheaves, CEO of Taste of the West, comments, "Taste of the West has proudly played a major part in the history of Speciality & Fine Food Fair, which this year celebrates its 25th anniversary. The Fair is an invaluable platform for quality West Country producers to showcase their products to the wider world and we're very much looking forward to this year's special edition of the event."

Visitors to the Fair can also meet The Fine Cheese Co. Selectors and affineurs of the best British and European cheeses. With a motto of 'Seek out the best, and, when you've found it, keep looking', The Fine Cheese Co is trusted by buyers to put quality at the heart of everything it does.

Also at the Fair this year is La Credenza, an importer and distributor of Italian artisan food products since 2001, based in London with an Italian sourcing office. The company's product range includes cheese, charcuterie, fruit and vegetables, pasta, biscuits, flours and specialty breads. All are made by artisan producers throughout all Italian regions and expertly selected by the in-house team.

Renowned luxury gifting brand Farhi will also be marking a milestone at the Fair, celebrating its 20th anniversary and showcasing its best-selling signature bonbonniere in addition to its bespoke private label offering.

Italian brand Be Truffle will be at Speciality & Fine Food Fair showing a wide range of truffle-based products including White Truffle Coarse Salt, Black Truffle Honey, White Truffle Olive Oil and Black Truffle Balsamic Vinegar.





INTERNATIONAL INNOVATION

In a year packed with meaningful anniversaries, French confectionery brand Pierro Gourmand will be marking 100 years of its iconic ice cream at this year's edition of Speciality & Fine Food Fair.

The company is one of many quality international brands from around the world taking part in the Fair, with everything from Belgian chocolates to Georgian honey to tropical fruit from Thailand on offer for visitors to source and sample.

Buyers will also have the chance to meet with Cherky Foods, a Spanish brand offering a range of products including beer jerky, keto bars and vegan, plant-based jerky made from mushrooms.

Monatea, a South African brand, will be showcasing its range of exquisite organic Rooibos-based botanical and functional beverages available in three distinct flavours. Monatea is deliciously unsweet, zero-sugar and zero-sweetener cold-brew Rooibos and botanicals. Füqboi is the world's first sex positivity beverage, while Victory Jüs is a better-for-you energy drink with guayusa for all the flow and zero jitter.



TALKING TRENDS AT THE FAIR

Industry leaders from Waitrose, Macknade, Ocado and more will be taking to the stage for the Fair's 2024 seminar programme, which each year is a must-attend for retailers and hospitality professionals to keep on top of the latest trends and innovations in the world of speciality food and drink.

The Drinks Uncovered stage will be playing host to a wide range of talks and demos centred around the drinks sector. Sarah Stewart, sake wine and cheese Educator at West London Wine School, will be discussing pairings of sake and cheese and the delicious synergy rooted in the power of umami, while *Cibare Food & Drinks Magazine* editor-in-chief Eve Tudor will be hosting a discussion of the world of low and no.

A panel moderated by Ruth Dolby, director at Food Science Fusion will see Richard Enion, director at ENRICHD, Darwin Fletcher, founder and creator of Quirky Monkey and Zain Peer, co-founder of London Nootropics delving into the world of mushroom-based drinks and the rise of nootropics, adaptogens and functional beverages.

The Talking Trends stage, in partnership with the European Union, will host a comprehensive programme of content covering everything from the latest speciality retail trends to hot new ingredients to topics such as DEI, empowering retail teams and consumer perceptions of ultra-processed foods.

Priya Narain, purpose and culture manager at KERB and panellist for 'Diversity: More than just ticking boxes', says: "Joining this important debate is crucial to me because DEI is the backbone of a thriving, innovative industry. It's more than a tick-box exercise – it's about fostering an environment where diverse voices lead to richer, more creative outcomes for everyone."

Lizzie Haywood, innovation manager at Waitrose & Partners will be kicking off the Fair's content programme with a presentation on the key ingredients and cuisine trends that are shaping the speciality food and drink sector.

She comments, "I am really excited to be speaking at Speciality & Fine Food Fair again this year, it is one of my favourite trade shows of the year with so many innovative brands showcasing their products."

Leading industry voices including Andrew Goodacre of the British Independent Retailers Association (BIRA), Emma Mosey of the Farm Retail Association and *Fine Food Digest*'s Michael Lane will be taking to the stage to discuss what independent retail should be asking of the new Labour government, and key areas of campaigning for the industry.

Award-winning author and presenter Jenny Jeffries will be joined onstage by Hawksmoor general manager Tom Foxwell, The Happy Pear founder Stephen Flynn and Claire Mackenzie, producer of the documentary *Six Inches of Soil*, to discuss the pros and cons of independent retailers and hospitality businesses working with regenerative farms..



PITCH LIVE WITH IND!E AND OCADO

Speciality & Fine Food Fair has announced an exciting new partnership with IND!E and Ocado, providing two innovative food and drink brands with the opportunity to secure a listing with the online supermarket.

Open to producers exhibiting at Speciality & Fine Food Fair 2024, Pitch Live will see brands take part in a *Dragon's Den*-style live pitch on the Fair's Talking Trends stage, before one food brand and one drinks brand are declared the winners.

The two winning brands will secure a listing on Ocado through the IND!E partnership. The IND!E shop-in shop at Ocado will be a dedicated space to showcase a curated selection of innovative products from emerging brands, offering customers a unique shopping experience and giving SMEs the chance to reach a wider audience.

Hannah McKillop, marketing manager at IND!E, comments: "We've decided to partner with Speciality & Fine Food Fair again for 2024 because it aligns perfectly with our mission to connect with and support high-quality, innovative brands and help them get into retail.

"The Fair provides a unique platform for emerging brands to showcase their products to a diverse and engaged audience, fostering brand awareness and loyalty. Additionally, our past collaborations have proven successful, and it has been fantastic to work with the winner of Pitch Live last year in bringing their products to UK consumers."

Freya O'Mara, trading manager, pantry and speciality foods at Ocado Retail, says, "We are incredibly excited to be part of Pitch Live at Speciality & Fine Food Fair 2024. This event is a fantastic opportunity to connect with the most promising and innovative food and drink brands.

"At Ocado and through our partnership with IND!E, we are passionate about bringing our customers the best and most unique products available, and Pitch Live allows us to discover and support the next generation of standout brands. We look forward to seeing the creativity and quality that this year's participants will bring to the table."

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Personalised chocolate and biscuits are a real eyecatcher for weddings, corporate hospitality and other events. With Eddie, a direct-to-food printer with edible ink, you can print full-colour photos, logos, designs and text onto sweets, marshmallows, white chocolate and all kinds of baked goods. Eddie prints directly onto the surface of food, eliminating the need for icing sheets and avoiding any aftertaste or added texture that could compromise the quality of the food. Certified edible ink, stainless steel housing and easy-to-clean components make Eddie the safest direct-to-food printer designed for food processing environments. By offering branded and bespoke products this printer opens up new profits for chefs, keen hobbyists, caterers and hotels alike. DTM Print will showcase Eddie at Speciality & Fine Food Fair.



dtm-print.eu

JUST GOURMET FOODS

STAND 1460



Just Gourmet Foods has been delighting fine food retailers with its carefully curated range of authentic Italian foods since 2018. The team specialises in partnering with artisanal producers to bring the best of Italian food to discerning fine food retailers' shelves across the UK. Just Gourmet Foods is inspired by the skill and dedication of artisans across Italy to import and distribute a rich variety of foods to the speciality food sector weekly, from oils and vinegars to snacks, baked goods and other authentic Italian ambient products.

justgourmetfoods.co.uk

DRIVERS PICKLES

STAND 2608

Drivers Pickles delight in the art of personalised gifting with their latest offering - the Customisable 4 Jar Gift Box. Drivers invite you to handpick from their exquisite selection of 350g jars, each brimming with flavour and age old family recipes. Whether it's the zesty tang of classic pickles, the rich depth of savoury relishes, or the sweet allure of artisanal chutneys, you can create a bespoke gift containing any 4 of your Drivers best sellers. Presented in an elegantly designed, shelf friendly stackable box, it's the perfect foodie gift for any time of year but especially during the festive season. Come and sample their award winning premium pickles, relishes and chutneys at SFFF Stand 2608 or contact press@pickle-lovers.co.uk to order your bespoke gift box.



pickle-lovers.co.uk

STAG BAKERIES

STAND 1501

Based in the Scottish Outer Hebrides, Stag Bakeries is a family-run bakery with a heritage dating back to 1885. Traditional recipes and time-honoured methods remain at the heart of every product their skilled craft bakers make. The result is a product range trusted on quality and provenance. Stag's signature product is its Seaweed Water Biscuits. Named Best Scottish Speciality Product in 2013, the product pairs a classic water biscuit recipe with a blend of three seaweeds to provide a truly unique flavour full of character. A great option for canapés, this biscuit provides a delicious platform for fantastic snacking combinations.



sales@stagbakeries.co.uk
stagbakeries.co.uk

SPECIALITY & FINE FOOD FAIR AWARDS 2024

The shortlist has been unveiled for the Speciality & Fine Food Fair Awards 2024, sponsored by the Federation of French Charcuterie Catering Companies (FICT), which recognise quality artisan products and inspiring independent retailers.



Nicola Woods, Event Manager for Speciality & Fine Food Fair, comments, "We were overwhelmed by the volume and quality of the award entries this year, with our judges deliberating hard to select the shortlisted products and businesses.

"It's so exciting to see the innovation in the UK and international speciality food sector, and to read about the amazing work independent retailers are doing to serve their communities and champion artisanal food and drink. Congratulations to everyone shortlisted, we can't wait to celebrate with you at the Fair!"

The shortlist for the 2024 Speciality & Fine Food Fair Awards is:

NOT YET ON THE SHELF

- **Fowlescombe Rare & Pasture Ltd**
Rare @ Pasture Smoked Beef Pastrami
- **Persian Kitchen Foods Ltd**
Baba Ganoush
- **Hensol Castle Distillery**
Hensol Castle Welsh Vodka
- **SUPERKEEN**
Organic Cereal powered by Tiger Nuts

Caragh Keane, founder of SUPERKEEN, comments, "I am so incredibly grateful to hear that SUPERKEEN is shortlisted for a Speciality & Fine Food Fair Award 2024! Specialty & Fine Food Fair is an amazing event that I have wanted to be a part of since starting the brand. We are 'Super Keen' to hear the results and to hear all about the wonderful brands involved."

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR - INTERNATIONAL

- **Asilia Limited**
Asilia Salt
- **The Happy Pear**
Dip & Snack Red Pepper Hummus
- **Be Truffle**
Sweet Truffle Chilli
- **Be Truffle**
Truffle Soy Sauce

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR - UK

- **Golden Hooves**
Red Leicester
- **House of Theobroma**
Cacaolasses
- **The Matcha Yaad**
Matcha Ginger Refresher
- **Golden Hooves**
Smoked Cheddar

BEST DEI INITIATIVE

- **NEMI Teas Ltd.**
- **The Biskery**

LARGE INDEPENDENT RETAILER OF THE YEAR, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BIRA

- **Low Sizergh Barn**
- **The De Beauvoir Deli**
- **Cobbs Farm Co Ltd**
- **Priory Farm Estate**

Alison Park, owner, Low Sizergh Barn, comments, "We're so pleased this shortlisting celebrates our approach to speciality food. Our farm shop has always been about bringing our customers together with the people who grow and produce their food.

"Customers love saying hello to the cows at milking time and buying a litre of the herd's organic raw milk from the vending machine opposite our milking parlour. It's such an immediate connection and really brings the farm-to-fork ideal to the fore. We are all so thrilled to have reached this level in these national awards."

SMALL INDEPENDENT RETAILER OF THE YEAR, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BIRA

- **Cheese Etc. The Pangbourne Cheese Shop**
- **The Norfolk Deli**
- **Forest Deli**
- **The Cheese Lady**

Andrew Goodacre, CEO of BIRA, and awards judge, comments, "In my role as CEO for BIRA I am lucky to be invited to judge many awards. I see this as a privilege as I read about some of the fantastic retail businesses on our high streets throughout the UK. These awards were no different, with all the entrants showing their real passion for their business and their customers. In my mind they are all winners."

Stefano Cuomo, CEO of Macknade and awards judge, adds, "Showcasing the very best of our peers, as chosen by the communities that use them, these awards highlight the innovation and hard work that goes on in our independent businesses, up and down our nation, to not only provide incredible service and experience, but illustrating how we, as a sector, are leading the shift to progressive and sustainable supply chains and consumption – reading my peers' entries for these awards makes me so proud to be part of this vibrant sector!"





25 RISING STARS

Speciality & Fine Food Fair has joined forces with *Speciality Food* to celebrate 25 inspiring founders in the world of artisan food and drink.

The initiative was launched with the intention of looking ahead to the future of speciality food and drink, and to recognise some of the products, brands and individuals that might play an important role in that future.

"It's amazing to think that Speciality & Fine Food Fair is celebrating its 25th birthday this year," says Speciality & Fine Food Fair event manager Nicola Woods. "The world of fine food and drink has changed so drastically in that time, with the explosion of innovative and delicious products mirroring the growing consumer appetite for new and diverse food & drink.

"Over the past quarter century, Speciality & Fine Food Fair has been a platform for passionate entrepreneurs to get their start, network with the industry and grow their brand, and we're so excited to be celebrating 25 Rising Stars in this year in partnership with *Speciality Food*.

"We'll be recognising these inspiring foodie founders at the Fair this year, and to further celebrate our 25th anniversary we'll be introducing new features, tasting stations, networking opportunities and chances to hear about the latest industry trends. We can't wait to welcome you to the Fair and take a look ahead to the next 25 years of speciality food and drink. See you in September!"

Commenting on becoming one of the 25 Rising Stars, Tom Palmer, founder of Yep Kitchen, said, "I am unbelievably excited and honoured to have been chosen as one of 25 Rising Stars in the UK food & drink industry! Sitting in



my Beijing apartment some two years ago, drafting up the initial concepts for Yep Kitchen, I never imagined it would lead me to this point. Creating this business and sharing it with the world is literally my dream come true."

Karen Robinson, founder of Three Robins, adds, "What an honour to be named one of 25 Rising Stars in food and drink by Speciality & Fine Food Fair and *Speciality Food*! I'm not sure I would have believed it if someone told me that I would be on this list a few years ago when I was making oat milk in my kitchen and trying to figure out all the ins and outs of setting up a food and drink business. Huge thanks to *Speciality Food* and all the judges for this recognition, and congratulations to the other incredible founders!"

THE 25 RISING STARS ARE:

- **BELLA ACLAND**
Founder, Soul Kitchen
- **SHADIA AL HILI**
Founder, Cuzena
- **LAURA BARTON**
Founder, Granola Butter Co.
- **RHIAN CAFFULL**
Owner, Veg Life
- **ANGUS COWEN AND CHARLOTTE DAWE**
Co-founders, Sea Sisters
- **JENNIFER DREIER AND KIER KEMP**
Co-founders, Condimaniac
- **NICK EGAN**
CEO, Cornwall Pasta Co.
- **CHRIS FARNWORTH AND RYAN MOORE**
Co-founders, Blendsmiths
- **MONIQUE FARQUHARSON**
Founder, The Matcha Yaad
- **ALEXA FERNANDEZ**
Founder & CEO, Chili Maven
- **WILL FUGARD**
CEO, Gusto Organic
- **MARIETTA HICKMAN**
Founder & CEO, Cheeky Nibble
- **ALEXA HIGMAN**
Co-founder & CEO, Exhale Healthy Coffee
- **SEJI HONG**
Director, Bombom
- **ANDREW JONES AND HANNAH SPRINGHAM**
Chef patron and owner, Farmyard Frozen
- **EDWARD VAN DER LANDE**
Founder, More Toddler Meals
- **ELLA MCKAY**
Founder, FATSO
- **KIT NEWELL AND MATT NEWELL**
Co-founders, Hive Mind Mead & Brew Co.
- **TOM PALMER**
Founder, Yep Kitchen
- **KAREN ROBINSON**
Founder, Three Robins
- **JAMES SANTILLO AND TARA SMYTH**
Co-founders, Sunday Charcuterie
- **DAN SHEARMAN**
Founder & CEO, WilderBee Hot Honey
- **EVA THORNE**
Founder, Garden of Eva
- **NATALIE WOOD**
Founder, Soul Fruit UK
- **FAN YANG**
Founder & CEO, Other Foods

Join the who's who of the retail and hospitality sector at Speciality & Fine Food Fair 2024, taking place on Tuesday 10th – Wednesday 11th September at Olympia London. To learn more about this year's event, and to register for your complimentary trade ticket, visit specialityandfinefoodfairs.co.uk.

> This year is a truly special edition of the Fair as we celebrate our 25th anniversary, including with a fantastic documentary looking back at the history of the event with some of our key partners and producers, and we are so excited to bring this unique community together once more



OR-GANIC

STAND 3128

great taste WINNER & Excellence Awards 2023

"Come to our stand to taste the only certified organic rapeseed oil produced in the UK, grown, cold-pressed and bottled with passion and care in the heart of Aberdeenshire. Careful, chemical-free growing techniques and gentle pressing deliver an incredible colour and flavour - ÒR-ganic is in a league of its own. This is due to its very special production methods - nothing is added and nothing is taken away, which gives a unique, richly flavoured oil. With incredible feedback on the flavour from chefs and foodies, OR-ganic is also perfect for the environmental and health-conscious consumer - come and try it for yourself."



or-ganic.co.uk

GODMINSTER

STAND 1420D

Deep in the heart of Wessex, where landscape and legend intertwine, and character and curiosity are around every corner, lies Godminster. Born in Bruton, the brand brings the spirit of the West Country to the cheeseboard. Every truckle tells a tale – of myth and mystery, taste and tradition – made hand in hand with the land. Godminster's mission is to be at the heart of the cheeseboard of life. Why? Because a cheeseboard is a centrepiece that brings people together around the table, and it's got something for everyone to enjoy, just the way they like it.



info@godminster.com
godminster.com

JUTHAN CHOCOLATE

STAND 2736

Indulge in exquisite, handcrafted bean-to-bar chocolate made in Surrey. Juthan's luxury bean-to-bar creations are designed for mindful enjoyment, inviting you to savour every nuanced flavour. Their base chocolate is crafted with just three organic ingredients – cocoa, milk, and sugar – delivering purity in every bite. No emulsifiers, palm oil, or gluten. No imported chocolate. Juthan's beans are meticulously ground for three days to create a velvety, melt-in-your-mouth experience. Embark on an unparalleled taste journey with every piece. Indulge yourself; you deserve it!



juthanchocolate.com

BE TRUFFLE

STAND 1940A

Be Truffle is an innovative new range of truffle-inspired products from Italy. The portfolio combines traditional truffle goods such as whole/sliced truffle, truffle butter, truffle honey and truffle salts/powder with an exciting collection of easy-to-use condiments that inject new life into everyday British favourites including ketchup, sweet chili, mayonnaise, olive oil and mustard, alongside a selection of inviting truffle-based sauces. Be Truffle represents a new genre of store cupboard essentials, capable of transforming a variety of dishes and snacks. Eye-catching graphics and contemporary flavours ensure that Be Truffle attracts a new audience of food connoisseurs.



betruffle.com



FINAL CALL

The British weather certainly kept all of us on our toes this summer, even as the food and drink industry welcomed sector-wide positive developments in inflation and economic confidence. But as the summer's school holidays and global sporting events come to an end and the season fades in the rearview mirror, we hope our readers have a chance to reflect on what went right in their summer 2024 trading before swiftly moving on to the busy autumn and winter months – whether that was a novel range of trending products that took off, an event that brought new faces into the shop or a trial marketing campaign that boosted sales.

Soon, the season of picnics on the beach and barbecues in the garden will make way for the most wonderful time of year – a time for cosy family gatherings and glitzy New Year's parties. We're well into our Christmas preparations here at Speciality Food, and over the coming months we'll continue bringing you all the intel and expertise you need to make a success of the golden quarter.

It's well worth remembering that as customers stock up for the colder months, they'll be looking for traditional favourites and exciting new products in equal measure. The run-up to the Christmas season is a great time for spotlighting your heritage producers and up-and-coming makers, so now's the time to hone your selection. Fine food retailers have everything to play for as champions of fantastic British food and drink brands.

Before I sign off for this month, I want to say a big thank you to all the retailers, producers and food industry experts who have taken the time to share their expertise with me over the past year. I'm sadly moving on from the *Speciality Food* team now, but I've loved learning from you and sharing your inspiring stories.

As I bid farewell, the rest of the team are as keen as ever to hear from our readers, so if you have news, views or insights to share, please note that my inbox will no longer be monitored, so get in touch with holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com.

5 MINUTES WITH

JESS HIGGINS, FOUNDER OF FREYA BONE BROTH



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I would probably still be miserable as a lawyer!

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
I sold penny sweets in the local village shop – not quite as nutritious as bone broth!

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Anyone who starts their own business, supports their family and manages to maintain work-life balance at the same time. It's a real juggling act, and anyone that can pull it off is a real inspiration.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
I was previously a *Metro* newspaper distributor. Many long hours were spent standing in the rain and traffic in Manchester at 5am – I can't say those are my fondest memories!

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
We hear from so many of our customers who leave incredible reviews and messages about how bone broth has supported their health or that of their family. It's always a nice reminder of why we started Freja, and we hope to help many more people in the future.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
Not being able to switch off – it's the founder's curse! But it's more than worth it.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
Sadly, it is now dominated by ultra processed foods pretending to be healthy, natural and good for you. Consumers are understandably confused by the mixed messages they receive from food brands, so we feel it's time to go back to a more traditional and balanced way of eating.

TEA OR COFFEE?
Tea is always the correct answer to this question.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
I would eat myself to death on dim sum before the executioner could catch me.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
Pardon my French, but #getsh**done. I'm a doer, not a thinker.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
I had rotten fish in Sweden – AKA the delicacy, fermented herring surströmming.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Anne of Green Gables – pure escapism to a time of innocence and simplicity.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Savoury, no question. Bone broth all the way.

BE CONNECTED



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Next issue available: October 2024

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SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE

The next issue of Speciality Food includes:

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- Party Food
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- Centre spread: Christmas Gifting

CONFECTIONERY & CHOCOLATE BUYER

with the next issue of Speciality Food



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TRIED & TESTED

TWO&ONE VERDE EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL



As someone who doesn't often drink, particularly so in the past couple of years, my eyes have been opened to the potential for beauty in the everyday ingredients that are a constant in my culinary life. Years ago I switched from mass-produced olive oil to small-batch, expertly produced extra virgin options, so I was delighted to discover Two&One's Verde Extra Virgin Olive Oil. Vibrantly green in flavour and made using young Spanish Picual olives, it brings a signature flavour to everything I've served it with. Spoiler: it's delicious on its own with excellent crusty bread.
twoandoneoliveoil.co.uk



BOOJA BOOJA SALTED CARAMEL WONDERS

I can't deny that when it comes to chocolate, I can sometimes go a bit overboard. So when the team at Booja Booja shared news of their new Wonders range I was more than excited to try them – and they do not disappoint. Just as delicious and satiating as the brand's gift boxes of plant-based truffles, but smaller-scale and ideal for on-the-go indulgence, my favourite in the range – which features Cookie Dough, Hazelnut and Raspberry Scrunch – is the Salted Caramel variety. Rich and unctuous with a perfectly balanced blend of salty and sweet, they're the ultimate way to treat yourself with balance.
boojabooja.com

NATURE'S STRAWBERRIES, TRUFRU

More and more shoppers are steering their trollies towards the freezer section in specialist retailers right now, and this in turn has sparked a tide of innovation, including these delectable little bites. At less than 90 calories per portion, they fit neatly into consumer desire for 'permissible treats'. And we think they taste great too. Fresh frozen ripe strawberries are dunked not once, but twice in sustainably sourced chocolate. Firstly in a layer of creamy white goodness, then finished in milk chocolate. The taste is sweet, cocoa-rich, and a little tart, and we've found these a huge hit with all ages. Containing just two ingredients, with a clean deck, they tick a lot of boxes.
trufru.com



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Renemar Pinedo, head chef of The Feathered Nest



The Feathered Nest is located in the heart of the Cotswolds in the picturesque village of Nether Westcote, boasting stunning panoramic views of the beautiful Evenlode Valley.

Our traditional Cotswolds pub offers 3 AA Rosette cuisine, four boutique bedrooms, a dog-friendly cottage and unrivalled countryside views — all just a 90-minute train journey from London. With plans for eight additional bedrooms approved, in a stand-alone new property on-site, coming in 2025.

Before being appointed as head chef here I trained under the helm of Ollie Dabbous and also Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons. We offer elevated British menus and I fuse this with Caribbean influences (I was born in Curacao), as well as Asian inspiration. My passion is fresh seafood and open-grill cooking.

Being in the heart of the beautiful Cotswolds means we're in the wonderful position of being able to source the finest seasonal produce right on our doorstep to pair with the amazing variety of seafood found around our coasts.

We specialise in sustainably sourced British food, and our menus combine a plethora of local produce. We have a sizable kitchen garden which we take great pride in managing, drawing the bulk of our kitchen herbs and dish garnishes. We're currently experimenting with new potatoes and courgettes.

For anything we can't grow on-site we use Fourseasons Fruiterers.

We get staples such as eggs from Cackleberry Farm just five minutes away from us in Stow-on-the-Wold and our lamb comes from the Gawcombe Estate which is reared in fields minutes from our restaurant.

We see our suppliers as our partners, taking the time to regularly visit their premises and to truly understand the inner workings of their business.

Flying Fish Seafoods source our fish and seafood directly from Cornwall and we get our meat from Aubrey Allen butchers.

We're a quintessential spot for afternoon tea and our outdoor terrace overlooks the rolling Cotswold hills. Our daily afternoon tea is a popular fixture in our restaurant where you can find all the classics including scones, finger sandwiches and petit fours in our esteemed countryside haven. You can opt for Champagne tea which comes with sparkling wine from our favoured supplier Rathfinny Wine Estate.

As well as a restaurant, we're a proper village pub. You can drop into the bar any time for a couple of drinks and bar snacks.

We have one of the largest selections of wines in the Cotswolds and we source the bulk of our wines from the Oxford Wine Company.

We're very fortunate to have some brilliant local breweries on our doorstep too. We have ales from both Hawkstone Brewery near Bourton Under Water and Hook Norton Brewery on tap.

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo

INVEST IN QUALITY TO CREATE AN OCCASION

By investing in quality and freshness, you can afford to indulge in the secret that makes Italian cuisine so special



Ask any food lover to recall the moment they fell in love with Italian food and chances are they'll recount the details of an incredibly simple dish. For this editor, it was a gnocchi pomodoro, off menu, created especially for the English girl who couldn't decipher the menu. Without the time to tinker with the recipe, and with a naive mouth to feed, the chefs undoubtedly kept it simple – to spectacular effect. The softness of the gnocchi and the sweetness of the tomatoes meant that this most basic Italian dish is, decades later, still up there with some of the very best I've tasted – including in Michelin-starred establishments across Europe. The key to the ultimate Italian dish is simplicity. But how can you recreate such magic at home in the UK?

Ingredients. The fresher the better, and the higher quality the better. Consider the difference between a fridge-cold, supermarket-sourced, flown-in-from-abroad tomato and one recently picked from a local field. Still warm from the sunshine, perhaps, its flavour shines through however you serve it. As ever when stocking fresh, local wins out, but Isle of Wight Tomatoes are an incredible option for those without a supplier nearby.

Moving over to the cheese counter, compare and contrast an industrially-made Mozzarella, formed using milk from intensely-farmed dairy cows – dry, rubbery and a bit lacklustre in taste, it's a far cry from the rich, soft and milky texture of freshly-made Buffalo Mozzarella. We rate Laverstoke Park's range, which demonstrate that you don't have to travel to Italy to enjoy an artisanal Italian-inspired indulgence.

No ambient shelf is complete without Balsamic vinegar, but it's all too easy to fall for the wrong one. Be sure to try before you invest in stock; sharp and artificially sweet spells a poor quality product, while unctuous, sticky and verging on jam-like and you're onto a well-aged winner.

Just three staple ingredients these might be, but stocked smartly they can spell the difference between a disappointing meal and one which gets shoppers flocking to your store for an authentic taste of Italy.



PURE CHEESE INDULGENCE



Award-winning cheese handcrafted using the finest natural and fresh ingredients producing extraordinary depth of flavour and creaminess.

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