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April 2024 £3.25

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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the April edition of *Speciality Food*. After a long, damp winter of endless rain and grey skies, I can feel the positivity of spring on the horizon. With better weather, comes the opportunity to get out and about, exploring the growing world of artisan food. The team and I are looking forward to attending a bumper Farm Shop & Deli Show in Birmingham at the end of the month. We've got a fantastic guide to the event in this edition - make sure you pop along to see us! With sunshine in mind, there's plenty throughout these pages to inspire your summer buying decisions this year - with focuses on barbecuing and ice cream. Both categories are experiencing huge growth, and we shine a light on some interesting trends for you to pick up on - apparently pork tomahawks are all the rage! Finally, we're proud, once again, to bring you, alongside this magazine, our Inspirational Cheese Retailers of 2024. This very special supplement pays homage to cheesemongers and delis who go the extra mile to inspire their customers, while celebrating artisan makers.

CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS | EDITOR (MATERNITY COVER)
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The big cash or card debate

Is it time to ditch coins in favour of all-card sales? Or does cash still have a big part to play in fine food retail? *Speciality Food* reports...

There has been much chatter over the past few months on social media around the use of cash versus card in independent retail. As smaller shops struggle to keep the lights on in the face of rising costs across the board, some have pleaded with customers to use 'real' money at the counter, in a bid to avoid card charges.

However, with banks shutting at a rate of knots, and some consumers still wary of handling money, are these retailers just holding back an inevitable tide?

The answer is tricky...at the moment. While cash machine network operator, Link, reveals £81 billion was withdrawn from ATMs in 2023 (a huge sum), its statistics also show this is a decrease from £83 billion in the previous year. A notable decline. The Cash Supply Alliance, set up to promote cash as a continued valid payment option, believes it's imperative shoppers are given a choice, with steering group member Nigel Constable saying it is critical deposit and withdrawal facilities are maintained. "For many it is also about the freedom to use cash, for personal budgeting, or as a desire to avoid card data being captured and monetised."

In the USA, the Payment Choice Act was passed in 2022, making it illegal for businesses to refuse cash payments valued at under $2,000.

Greg Strolenberg of Lavenham Butchers would welcome such a move in the UK, and his business is just one independent that's been asking customers to use cash where they can. "For me, it's more about not being pushed into a society that we don't want," Greg said. "People seem to be walking into this blindfolded as if it's a good thing. We want to take cash. We pay our suppliers cash. Why should we give to banks and card machines for doing nothing but eating away at our profits? All we get here is bills, and it's frightening. You can't make a living!"

Paula Bui, of Fusion Chocolate, agrees. "It's hard," she said. "I can understand why post-Covid everyone ended up using cards, but from a small business perspective, it's another cost we have to factor into pricing. For me, one of my smallest products only costs £2.50, but if 2.5% of that goes on card processing fees, it's quite a chunk to miss out on." More needs to be done, Paula added, to not only regulate card charges, but to 'push on the payment times'. "One of my systems can take three to four days before money pops through and that is frustrating, certainly as I've been with them for the best part of three years!" The British Retail Consortium (BRC) backs British businesses, such as Paula's, in their concerns. Hannah Regan, the consortium's payments policy advisor, told *Speciality Food*, "Ineffective competition in the payments market has led to high fees across the board. Retailers paid £1.26 billion to process card transactions in 2022. This includes high cross border interchange fees, as well as high scheme and processing fees, all of which have risen significantly in recent years."

Hannah says the BRC is calling on the PSR (Payment Systems Regulator) to "implement meaningful reforms to increase competition and reduce costs in the payment market. Furthermore, the Treasury should conduct a full review of interchange fees to examine if they are fit for purpose in the UK market."

Mark Kacary of The Norfolk Deli said card payments are the inevitable future of retail. "When we used to bank cash as a business we were charged by the bank every time. Possibly less than card charges, but the difference was not that great. Now that the banks have closed what are our options for being a business relying purely on cash transactions?"

Mark conceded that if most transactions are sub-£5, card costs could create pain. But then there is the argument in fine food retail, he continued, that if people spend with card, they will generally buy more. Businesses just need to, he said, factor the cost of using card machines into their prices.

East Street Deli in Dorset has only ever accepted card payments, and owner Simon Warren said he hasn't found any negative affects being cashless. But he does agree there should be standard payment terms across the board. "We were using one terminal and the money from American Express would take several days. Now it happens in one lump payment on the same day and goes through the next morning." Key, he said, is regularly checking rates, and perhaps even joining forces with neighbouring businesses to ensure you're all accessing the best deals. "We monitor rates quite regularly. It's something I've always got my eye on. You could be in trouble if you haven't been watching them. In this street half a dozen of us are all on the same payment supplier and we talk quite closely about what they are doing!"

"It's been interesting to see the cash versus card debate in a post-Covid moment," said Edward Berry of The Flying Fork. "It is clear that, of all consumers, Millennials seem most keen to give up cash altogether and pay directly with a card – with many ready to abandon coins and notes in a completely cashless society. However, whilst card usage has increased, so do the costs associated with accepting these payments."

On the other side of the coin, he said, shoppers can become frustrated with cash only businesses "even taking their custom to card accepting competitors".

"I'm glad to say that it has become rarer to be forced to pay a minimum value transaction to use a card. While I understand the rationale, particularly any fixed per transaction costs to the retailer, it displays a lack of competition. If you hand everything to the chain who can afford it, your days may be numbered. How many transactions are cancelled by customers who do not appreciate being forced to buy unnecessary items?"

Cash, Edward reflected, is not free. "Time spent visiting the bank is time paid. You also need to factor in forged notes, petty theft and errors. Some business owners have found that going to a cashless model has been cheaper."





Spring Budget 2024:
Food and retail sectors react

What do the Chancellor's latest announcements mean for food, retail and farming businesses? *Speciality Food* finds out

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt set out the government's 2024 Budget on 6th March, including a cut to National Insurance, and a freeze of the alcohol duty, but no change to the planned hike in business rates.

The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that inflation will fall below 2% in the coming months. "This will provide some relief to small, independent food businesses who have been particularly struggling with rising costs," said Emma Jones, founder of small business support platform and membership community Enterprise Nation.

However, she believes the Budget was a missed opportunity. "This was a budget for a general election, not for small business growth."

Here's how others in the food, farming, retail and hospitality sectors responded to the headline figures.

SMALL BUSINESSES STILL FACE SERIOUS ISSUES

Two positive announcements for small businesses were the decisions to raise the threshold at which they must register to pay VAT from £85,000 to £90,000 from April, and to cut self-employed National Insurance contributions.

Tina McKenzie, policy chair at the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), welcomed these and a package of other measures for small business owners, including commitments to make progress on the HMRC administrative burden and on the national roll-out of the Business Energy Advice Service, as well as extending the Recovery Loan Scheme under a new name: the Growth Guarantee Scheme.

"That said, many of those running businesses face serious challenges – not least through rapid hikes in labour and input costs – and many will have understandably hoped that there would be more measures announced that would help ease the tough decisions small employers are having to make day-in day-out to keep their businesses going," Tina said.

In particular, Tina said the Employment Allowance should have been uprated to keep pace with the National Living Wage, and more help with rising costs would have been welcome.

Enterprise Nation's Emma added that the new British ISA is an "innovative step that could boost investment in UK businesses and assets" and the 2% cut in National Insurance announced for April would put more money back into the pockets of working people and the self-employed.

"But more direct action is needed to tackle the key issues holding back small businesses," she continued. "Late payment remains a major crisis, with many businesses struggling with poor cash flow as a result of being paid late.

"Founders have unrealised potential to sell, export, hire and innovate, but they need a rallying cry to inspire them. The Budget did not provide that," Emma said.

CHANCELLOR DOESN'T SHARE AMBITION' OF RETAIL SECTOR

Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium (BRC), agreed that the retail sector, which employs three million people, is making strides towards a more positive future, but she added, "It seems the Chancellor does not share in our ambition, and the Budget will do nothing to deliver a better future for retailers and their customers."

The BRC had called for the government to "fix the problem with business rates" as they had set out to do in their election manifesto. Now, Helen said the lack of action will cost the retail industry £470m extra every year. "How can a whopping 6.7% tax rise in April be justified, when the Chancellor himself is saying inflation is forecast to be nearer 2%?"

What's more, while the Chancellor said burglaries and violent crime had halved in the retail sector, Helen said this "simply doesn't tally with the experience of thousands of those working in retail. The number of incidents of violence and abuse rose to 1,300 per day in 2022/23 from 870 the year before, according to the BRC.

"The Protection of Workers Act in Scotland already provides additional protection to retail workers, so why should our hardworking colleagues south of the border be offered less protection?" Helen asked.

And with retailers facing billions in additional costs as a result of new government policies – from higher business rates to the deposit return scheme – Helen said this will feed into prices. "Government must consider the cumulative impact of introducing all these policies, and more, in such a short space of time, or else risk a second wave of inflation impacting households."

Like retailers, restaurants, cafes and other hospitality businesses are dealing with high costs, inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, and Kate Nicholls, chief executive of UKHospitality, agrees that the increases to business rates in April will only contribute to inflation, as businesses will be forced to pass these costs on to consumers. Kate said the government needs to take a different approach and "bear down on the never-ending rising costs" that are forcing businesses to shut.

"The National Insurance cut earlier this year was intended to boost disposable income to generate growth and didn't have an impact. A different result can't be expected this time around," she said.

'OUR COUNTRY NEEDS A STRONG FOOD AND DRINK SECTOR'

Food and Drink Federation (FDF) CEO Karen Betts agreed that the difficult environment is having an impact on food producers too, with the costs of recent turbulence being "illustrated in stark terms by a steep fall in investment in food and drink manufacturing, which declined by a third last year compared to 2019.

"Our country needs a strong food and drink sector – which underpins our food security, as well as hundreds of thousands of jobs and forward-looking science and innovation. For this we need joined-up, constructive government policies to shore up our strength and to create the conditions for investment. This was in short supply in this Budget."

Instead, Karen said, the sector is being held back by a "muddle of poor regulation", such as 'Not for EU' labelling, which she predicts "will have a chilling effect on investment and exports while tying UK food labelling once again to EU rules."

DRINKS SECTOR WELCOMES FREEZE TO ALCOHOL DUTY

In another spot of good news, the Chancellor chose to freeze alcohol duty until February 2025, and Miles Beale, chief executive of the Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA), said the sector was "relieved".

"Six months ago, alcohol duty was subjected to the largest increase in almost 50 years. Those tax increases fuelled inflation and had a negative impact on sales, which in turn has seen Treasury lose around £600 million in alcohol revenue. We are pleased that government has now recognised that duty hikes are bad for businesses, bad for consumers and bad for the exchequer." He added that the pattern for raising alcohol duty at both the Spring Budget and Autumn Statement is "very unsettling" for the industry, and a once-a-year announcement would give businesses more certainty.

"Freezing, or even better cutting, alcohol duty supports British businesses like mine and boosts revenue," added Karl Mason, founder of Masons of Yorkshire Gin.

However, wine businesses will still be faced with "complex and costly changes" to the way wine is taxed from 1st February, 2025.

"The changes to taxing wine have been described as 'un-administrable' and 'sheer lunacy' by our members," the WSTA's Mike said, adding that scrapping the easement for wine duty will see price increases for 75% of red wines sold in UK. "It's going to be a very costly mistake," he added.



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'Trying not to let rain stop play'



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

Early spring has often been a challenging and gritted teeth time for us as speciality food retailers.

And the beginning of 2024 has proven to be one of those. Even though it is possibly the warmest on record.

Just when you think it is safe to dip a toe in the waters of the New Year something comes out to bite you.

In our case somethings plural have come out to bite us.

We are not yet at Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse time – still more like Four Pony Trekkers – but here is a list of things that have not helped us in getting off the starting blocks quickly this year.

Obviously having the wettest February on record was not good news. The 50 yards of distance we are set back from the King's Road on the Duke of York Square on a rainy day become an obstacle like the Berlin Wall at the height of the Cold War.

Heavy rain stops pay (at the tills) in a disproportionate way.

I would have also liked to claim it has been colder than previous years. But apparently it has been the warmest on record for Southern England. I can only counter that by saying Saturdays (our busiest day of the week) suffered the worst weather.

In addition, it has certainly been a period of doom and gloom for anyone who has had the misfortune to listen to the news, and this inevitably restrains the celebratory aspects of spending in our shop - as the thought of a General Election round the corner probably does as well. Sales on Pancake Day and Valentine's Day were both underwhelming this year. Only a slight bounce for our Lunar New Year activities brought some cheer.

And then there are a few local issues for us to confront as well.

There have been major roadworks in the area. Bus and traffic flow disruptions in parts of Chelsea are the equivalent of a butterfly flapping its wings in the Brazilian rainforest for an anxious local retailer like myself.

Finally, our largest local supermarket has emerged from a period of refurbishment and has upped its offer again, which is a very annoying trait they all share in common from time to time.

Although February was perceived to be a disappointing month in terms of overall retail sales, food sales actually rose by 6% in the UK according to the British Retail Consortium. Commentators acknowledged that customers were buying less products, but I am not sure if any consideration that February was in fact a 29-day month compared to last year was taken into account regarding volumes.

Our sales were not close to that level I am sorry to say. Although bearing in mind the celebratory nature of a lot of our customer visits, it is important to note that the hospitality sector of the economy showed a contraction of 13.4% in February and that spending in bars, pubs and clubs only rose by 1%.

But, of course, we have been here before. Every year pretty much. And over analysing is an annoying compulsion during quiet times.

February has always been our quietest month, and in the past it has proven not to be a groundhog month which predicts sales in the rest of the year.

In fact, a poor February has often been followed by a good March, and an early Easter, such as this year, has also been helpful too.

So we still remain positive for 2024 despite all the background noise, the temperamental weather and the local traffic jams.

After all there is no alternative. It may seem like a perfect storm but let's hope in a teacup.

> "The 50 yards of distance we are set back from the King's Road on the Duke of York Square on a rainy day becomes an obstacle like the Berlin Wall at the height of the Cold War"

Government must do more to help UK manufacturing sector

A new report released by the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) shows that food and drink manufacturers underpin the UK's manufacturing strength across all regions and nations, contributing over £35 billion in GVA alongside providing a strong platform for skilled jobs everywhere.

However, critical investment in the sector has seen a sustained decline over the last few years. ONS data shows that in the year to Q3 2023, investment was down 33.2% compared to the same period in 2019, contrasting with the UK as a whole where investment rose by 5.4%.

This threatens growth and food security in the medium and longer term. The government needs to act now to create the circumstances for further investment and sustained growth, says the FDF, which is calling on the government to work with the sector to agree policies that foster vital private investment, which could unlock further productivity growth, boost experts, and secure the future of British-made food and drink.

Karen Betts, FDF chief executive, said, "This report sets out how critical a thriving food and drink manufacturing sector is to the UK's broader economy, as well as to everyone's daily lives. Unlike many industries, ours is spread evenly across the country, with regions of real strength like the Midlands, North of England, Scotland's central belt and South Wales, where we provide good jobs and great careers in big companies and small."

But the government should not take the industry for granted, she added. "Our sector urgently needs investment – in science, innovation, automation and new technologies – if it's to remain the powerhouse that our country needs it to be into the future. We need a strategic approach from government looking at attracting new investment and building productivity – to set the conditions for success into the next decade. Government must also look at how we are regulated – muddled regulation, like 'not for EU' labelling, a poorly functioning Apprenticeship Levy or badly executed packaging recycling reforms, is deterring investment and will damage local prosperity."

Cottage Delight acquires Fosters Foods

Cottage Delight recently announced its agreement to purchase Fosters Foods from Moguntia Food Group.

The business has transferred to the Cottage Delight site in Leek, Staffordshire, from its current base at Market Harborough and all orders, deliveries and sales will now be managed by Cottage Delight.

Paul Yeates, one of the owners, and a group board member of the Monguntia Food Group, said, "This divestment is part of our strategy to focus on our core activities. We are committed to growing our Moguntia Food (Sherriffs Foods and Hay Hampers) business, which will continue to operate from our Market Harborough site. We will be working closely with the Cottage Delight team on a smooth transition."

Vickie Milligan, managing director at Cottage Delight, said, "In 2024, Cottage Delight is celebrating its 50-year anniversary by looking forward to the next 50 years. We have invested to build a more efficient operation, and more sustainable product. This acquisition allows us to grow our range and our sales to make the most of this investment and we are very happy to do this with such an established brand."

The priority has been to ensure a smooth transition and maintain customer service. If you have any questions, contact Cottage Delight.



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Farm Retail Award 2024 winners announced

Farm shops and farmers' markets across the UK have been honoured by the Farm Retail Association

The best farm retailers in the UK have been revealed in the Farm Retail Awards 2024.

Winners of the prestigious awards were selected by the Farm Retail Association (FRA) which was formed 45 years ago to support the industry.

Awards were presented by Derbyshire dairy farmer and after dinner speaker Peter Slack to outstanding farm retailers at the ceremony (sponsored by specialist retailer COOK), held at the Holiday Inn Peterborough West as part of the FRA's annual Stronger Together event.

The Farm Retail Awards are solely judged by fellow farm retailers, and celebrate the best farm shops, farm cafés and restaurants, farmers' markets and trade suppliers in the country.

And the ceremony is part of a three-day annual FRA conference, which includes farm shop tours, an AGM, expert guest speakers and topical workshops.

FRA chair Emma Mosey said, "Congratulations to all of our winners whose dedication and passion is reflected in the standard of their businesses. We thank them for their commitment to the industry which they help to grow and thrive."

This year's winners

LARGE FARM SHOP OF THE YEAR:
FARMER COPLEYS
Pontefract, West Yorkshire
Judges said it is "a fabulous Yorkshire farm shop focused on Yorkshire produce, with the majority of their sales being from their own produced goods. A very strong retail offer, alongside a fantastic butchery and deli, plus their new addition, Copleys Kitchen, combines to create a wonderful site for their customers.

SMALL FARM SHOP OF THE YEAR:
ALDER CARR FARM SHOP
Needham Market, Suffolk
Judges said, "Alder Carr Farm Shop champions local produce, and especially takes pride in its own award-winning produce. A coherent space for the café, butchery and farm shop teams to support each other, and their customers."

FARM SHOP BUTCHERY OF THE YEAR:
WELBECK FARM SHOP
Worksop, Nottinghamshire
Judges said, "The winning factor for Welbeck Farm Shop is its locally sourced meat, with a majority of the meat coming from the estate. The team running the butchery are friendly and knowledgeable, providing high quality service."

FARM CAFÉ/ RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR:
RUNCTON FARM CAFÉ
Chichester, West Sussex

RISING STAR OF THE YEAR:
RUNCTON FARM CAFÉ
Chichester, West Sussex
Judges were, "Impressed with what Runcton had on offer for such a new part of the business. The use of solar power across the business was also a highlight of the entry, showing innovation is at the heart of Runcton."

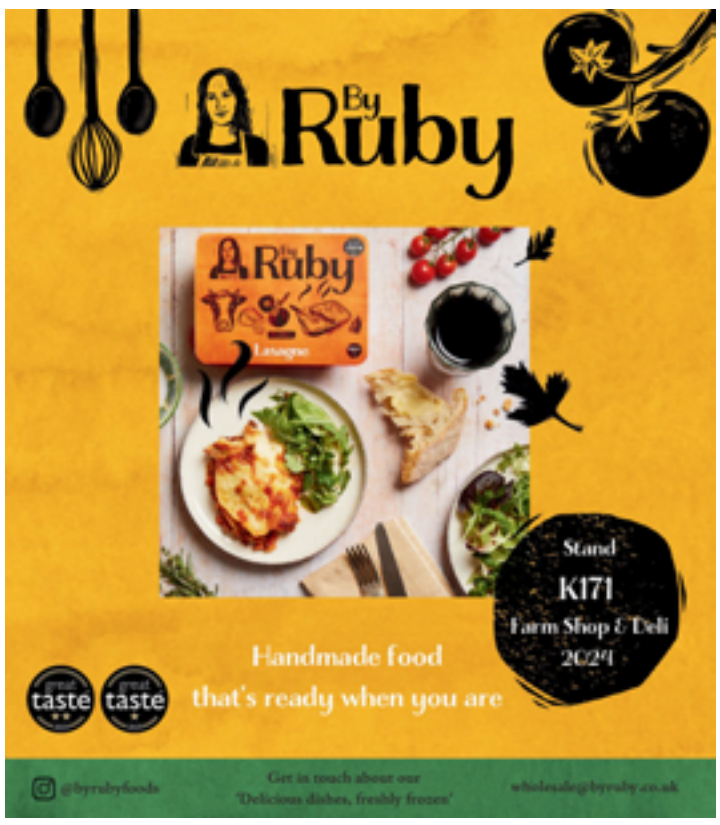
FARMERS' MARKET OF THE YEAR:
BARNARD CASTLE FARMERS MARKET
Barnard Castle, Co. Durham
This is a "fantastic high street-based market, run and managed by the stall holders," said judges. "A wonderful range of stalls and goods, with outstanding customer interaction, supported by great local facilities.

PICK YOUR OWN OF THE YEAR:
FARMER COPLEYS
Pontefract, West Yorkshire

ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE YEAR
FRESH RETAIL GROUP LTD
"Fresh Retail's testimonials spoke volumes about the service they offer, standing at as a preferred industry consultant," said judges.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
JANET HARRISON
Abbey Leys Community Farmers Market
"This award recognises someone for their outstanding contribution to the farm retail sector," said judges. "Janet has championed the farmers' market cause, even representing UK farmers' markets internationally, which supported the forming of the World Farmers Markets Coalition. Her own farmers' market has been extremely successful, supporting many small farms and producers in the area."







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STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE

Fantastically, huge amount of coverage supporting Mrs Kirkham's Cheeses over the past months has flooded the artisan airwaves, and crucially it has made its way into the mainstream media too.

I suspect this has been because of the gallows gaze of journos chasing the potential story of another 'deadly cheese' ruining Christmas - did someone say 'raw'?

I hold huge respect for the infrastructure that pre-empts and protects our communities from issues arising from what we eat, but once again, it does illustrate the potential damage to individuals, families and our sector.

However, perhaps more importantly, the full story has underlined the strength of the comradery within the speciality food and drink world, that so many rallied round, and support of all kinds has worked through this period.

With due process completed (illustrating that initial considerations were unfounded) and a clean bill of health delivered, still the impact has to be considered.

I remember growing up, and how the health checks and the teams that brought them were so feared. There was a real tension – 'they are out to get us!'

That has evolved over the past decades, step by step, as our sector has been more valued, and state practitioners understand their roles to protect the community.

Being there to support best practice, and so allowing us to cherish these hugely important social currencies together, each of us playing our role correctly.

Yes, the potential damage done to a cheesemaker can be huge as the process kicks off, but managed effectively and with the support from our community, the natural, correct conclusion occurs and cements the value of the process, and the very product that was at the heart of it... narrative-rich, delicious cheese.

It is a concern that we are seeing impacts to potential food checks and controls through Brexit and economic degradation, resulting in fewer eyes on the game.

It does mean that the responsibility sits evermore squarely with us as an SME cohort. Best practice and support has to be shared.

As the independent, speciality sector we are the librarians and gatekeepers of our people's stories, we are the guardians of the shared social identity.

Businesses gain scale by stepping up into the larger channels, essential to drive our economy, but these large channels are the first to drop anything that sits out of the easily manageable norm.

We strive to keep these narrative-rich touch points, yes because they are delicious, but also because they are living icons of who we are and how we live.

The tactile process of gathering milk, produced from the land, remains the same, as farming methods change around it.

The making of the young cheese, again running through real hands, leading through to it ageing in the very land from which it grew, is so hugely powerful in balancing the human and the natural, reminding us of generational truths.

Walking through racks of cheese in affineurs' cellars, each of the 'rounds' is an instance in time, perfectly captured, nurtured and cared for, to then be passed on, to deliver its moment of reality to the future, and with it all it held on to. Not just a nostalgia, but the reality of the very time in which it was created – portals to our passing existence, reminding us of the fragility of the future and why we must protect it.

The prosaic spirituality of continuity is through the sharing of stories...our food and the produce we have shaped from our land enhances and captures these shared narratives, passing on their importance from person to person, family to family, generation to generation.

As shopkeepers, mongers and stall holders we protect those that nurture and steward these stories, without this network these embodiments, talismans, of who we are, would faulter and disappear, and the stories they hold with in them too.

Risk is so essential.

It stimulates thought, it makes us assess the importance to us of all that is around us, of who we are and what we do; it pushes us to hold on to what is really important, no matter what...and why it is so important.

I don't want to be categorised by bland, block, plastic-wrapped generics...for me it is the living, breathing, mould-ripening cheeses of our territories, with the suggestion of risk, that represent us and our stories and I want to share that forward...oh and they taste amazing too!

> "We strive to keep these narrative-rich touch points, yes because they are delicious, but also because they are living icons"

Unions welcome new dairy legislation

More than a decade on from the NFU's SoS Dairy Campaign, and UK farming unions first calling out what they said were unfair practices and abuses of power in the supply chain, new legislation being laid in Parliament will ensure fair contracts for dairy farmers in the UK.

In response to ongoing campaigning by the UK farming unions, a government consultation found unfair practices within the supply chain, linked to buyers having the power to set and modify the terms of a contract with no negotiation with the producer and little notification.

The new regulations, a commitment set out at the Prime Minister's Farm to Fork Summit last year, will establish transparency and accountability across the dairy supply chain by stopping contract changes being imposed without agreement. There will also be a system in place to enable farmers to verify the calculation of variable prices. The regulations also include an enforcement regime, backed up by the ability for the Secretary of State to impose substantial financial penalties in respect of any breaches.

NFU dairy board chair Michael Oakes said, "It became clear to us back in 2012 that the voluntary code of practice still left many dairy farmers open to unfair practices and abuses of power, so [this] marks a significant step in a long road of campaigning by the NFU and the other farming unions to improve fairness across the supply chain.

"For a long time, unfair milk contracts have held back many UK dairy businesses, and these changes will help give dairy farmers much needed business security and confidence. While progress has taken far longer than any of us hoped and expected, I am confident that we are finally on the right path to building a stronger, more resilient future for the UK dairy sector. Notwithstanding the progress that is being made, the NFU believes that representative organisations, such as producer organisations, will play an important role in helping farmers negotiate contracts within the dairy sector and we will continue to support the development of representative structures like these to help improve trust and collaboration across the supply chain.

"We will continue to work with government and the wider dairy industry to not only benefit farm businesses and the dairy supply chain, but the millions of people who value access to quality, sustainable, nutritious British milk and other dairy products on a daily basis."

NFU Scotland milk committee chair Bruce Mackie said, "NFU Scotland and the other farming unions have been pushing for contract reform since 2011 and welcome the bringing forward of legislation to regulate dairy contracts. This has been a key ask of the industry for many years. There will be a long road ahead and statutory contract legislation on its own will not solve all our problems.

"However, for too long, dairy farmers have had very little influence or power with regards to the terms under which they sell their milk, but they now have an opportunity to come together and make the most of what this legislation offers by way of strengthening their hand.

"We will continue to work with the UK Government, other farming unions and the dairy industry in supporting our dairy farmers using this legislation to make their businesses more sustainable, progressive and create fairness in the supply chain."

Ulster Farmers Union dairy chair Kenny Hawkes added, "It is a major milestone following years of immense lobbying alongside the UK unions, that new legislation is being laid in Parliament to achieve more fairness and transparency in the dairy supply chain.

"The new regulations will go a long way to enhancing the position of the primary producer by establishing a legally binding, minimum standards of contractual practice, while also providing businesses with much needed certainty in terms of their supply agreement with processors. It will help to build a stronger, more resilient future for the Northern Ireland dairy sector, so farming families can continue to produce high-quality milk."

NFU Cymru dairy board chair Jonathan Wilkinson said: "The introduction of this legislation represents a massive step forward and is a once in a generation opportunity to change the way the dairy supply chain operates."



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GUT HEALTH

Know your prebiotics from your probiotics to capitalise on the latest trend says Sally-Jayne Wright

You know a trend has reached the mainstream when it appears in Marks and Spencer. In collaboration with the retailer, professor Tim Spector of King's College, London launched Zoe's kefir gut health shot in January. There's a Zoe programme, too, where consumers pay to have samples tested and learn about nutrition.

WHAT IS A ZOE GUT HEALTH SHOT?

A fermented milk and berry drink with prebiotic fibre, plus over five billion live cultures from 14 different strains of bacteria.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE GUT HEALTH TREND?

Scientists have discovered that the trillions of bacteria in our gut impact not just digestion but also every aspect of our health from obesity to depression. We are born with a unique colony of bugs called a gut microbiome. When bad microbes outnumber good, it leads to imbalances and can contribute to ill health, even autoimmune disease.

PROBIOTICS ARE GOOD BACTERIA, AREN'T THEY?

Correct, and prebiotics are what they feed on. Probiotics like a varied diet of wholefoods, fibre, pulses, fruit and vegetables. Bad bacteria enjoy the sugar, sweeteners and emulsifiers found in ultra processed foods.

ENOUGH SCIENCE! WHAT SHOULD WE STOCK TO CAPITALISE ON THE TREND?

Offer chilled, naturally fermented foods such as kimchi, kombucha, kefir, sauerkraut, tempeh, live yoghurt and miso. The process of fermentation makes nutrients more accessible. Be aware that there is no regulation of what can be labelled kombucha. Some so-called kombuchas and kefirs are not fermented; carbonisation provides the fizz.

OUR CUSTOMERS ARE KEEN TO TRY KEFIR AND KOMBUCHA BUT FEAR THEY WON'T LIKE THE TASTE

Doubtless this is why the Zoe shot comes flavoured with fruit and why the makers of Biotiful Gut Health kefir felt obliged to launch coffee, mango and raspberry variants. We prefer the original, plain Biotiful kefir and it is still their bestseller.

The most delicious kombucha we have tasted, by far, is Real Sparkling Tea Royal Flush which comes in gift-worthy, corked bottles.

I'VE READ NATURAL FERMENTS ARE HARDER TO PRODUCE ON A COMMERCIAL SCALE SO A GOOD PRODUCT FOR INDEPENDENTS. SHOULD WE MAKE OUR OWN?

At the Broughgammon Farm Shop in County Antrim, co-owner Becky Cole makes water kefir and kombucha as well as kimchi from farm fresh kohlrabi, beets and cabbage. She teaches about four fermenting classes a year and says, "Classes are part of our business plan. They attract repeat students and more footfall to the shop and café. Twelve students pay £55 each for a morning's course." Becky also sells Amberline Preserves made in Northern Ireland from award-winning eco-farmed produce.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE TOP-SELLING GUT HEALTH PRODUCTS?

Elin Roberts, co-founder of Better Nature tempeh, reports sales are up almost 80% year on year to January 2024. We like the BBQ variant which won a Great Taste Award star.

The chilled kimchi and pickles category, of which Vadasz has a 93% share, grew 70.6% in value and 75.9% in volume YOY to December 2023.

Bone broth is another product thought to support gut health. Sales of Borough Organic Bone Broth at Waitrose rose by almost 50% in the three months to February 2024. Our favourite is the award-winning Chicken Pho, from which you can make a Vietnamese soup.

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER?

According to research by the yoghurt brand Activia, nearly two-thirds (65%) of Brits admit they need to take better care of their gut health, yet only 12% feel very confident they know how to. Decide if your customers belong to the 12%, or whether they want healthy convenience. Most likely, you have a mix.

Well-informed customers will look for 'living cultures' and avoid sweetened and ambient products because they know pasteurisation kills beneficial bacteria.

Fans of convenience will see fibre-enriched chocolate or a pre-biotic soda as healthier than confectionery and sweet fizzy drinks. This is the market at which Fhirst living soda is aimed. Fhirst won Best Functional Drink at the World Beverage Awards in 2023. Pro and prebiotics are micro-encapsulated for longer shelf life, a natural stevia infusion provides the sweetness and there are three variants plus new Lemon and Lime launching April 2024.



55% OF PEOPLE ARE NOW (2024) MORE ACTIVELY AWARE OF THEIR GUT HEALTH THAN LAST YEAR (2023)

CONSUMER RESEARCH BY HOLLAND AND BARRETT

HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE GUT HEALTH TREND?

- Host talks by an expert.
- If an item on your cafe menu benefits gut health, say so.
- Know your stuff. Around 70% of the immune system is found in the gut, and since the pandemic consumers really care about immune health.
- Contact the Fermenters' Guild for local and new fermented foods to stock. We love the eye-catching jars of Hackney-made, Kim Kong Kimchi.

WILL THE TREND LAST?

We predict strong growth followed by an inevitable dip. Gut health is complex and there's a lot still to learn. Scientists already know specific bacteria benefit specific conditions, which is why you can buy tailor-made nutritional supplements. The good news is that independents who sell aged Parmesan and blue cheese already stock sources of probiotics. There's more research needed, but perhaps now is the time to tell your cheese-loving customers that cheese may be good for their gut. Not the outside, maybe, but the inside.

> "Well-informed customers will look for 'living cultures' and avoid sweetened and ambient products because they know pasteurisation kills beneficial bacteria"



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Exclusive to Rowcliffe

PRODUCT NEWS

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

New brewed gifts from Cottage Delight

Artisan food manufacturer, Cottage Delight, has unveiled a selection of new beer and cider gifting solutions. The Bottle Shop by Cottage Delight is a range of 500ml single bottles and trio packs, with bold, eye-catching looks across three strands – comedy beers, traditional ales and craft ciders – each created in partnership with specialists.

There are 10 bottles in the comedy range, alongside beer and tankard duos and five gift packs. In the traditional selection are three bottles and a gift pack that tap into the craft beer trend. And nine craft ciders and three cider trio packs complete the new offering. These have been created by a single estate cider producer with a collective fermenting history of more than 100 years. Alongside artisan apple ciders the range includes unique flavours with fruity and cocktail twists.

Marketing director, Sarah Williams, says, "Our much-loved comedy beers have been a bestselling gift range of many years now, so we knew there was scope to develop the brand into something even more shoppable for consumers. We are confident that our trade customers will benefit from the easy-to-select and display range of beer and cider presents, making purchasing alcohol gift solutions extra easy. We have worked with our longstanding brewery partners to ensure the quality of ingredients remains extremely high, whilst creating a contemporary brand that will appeal to existing and new shoppers."



cottagedelight.co.uk

A touch of spice from Lodge Farm Kitchen



The founder of Lodge Farm Kitchen, Louisa Stout, says she is overjoyed to launch the premium ready meal brand's new Indian curry range. Inspired by a trip to Kerala, where her palate was "screaming with excitement and delight" every time she sat down to eat, Louisa spent a great deal of time carefully developing her recipes, all made with the best ingredients, by hand, and sold in compostable wooden trays. The range includes Chicken Tikka Masala, Jackfruit Jalfrezi, Lamb Rogan Josh, and Squash Curry. Louisa says, "People who don't cook often, or enjoy cooking, feel curries are difficult and time-consuming to make, requiring many ingredients. This is not necessarily the case, but a view held by many nonetheless. But they are so delicious, and it is a pity to miss out, so we created this range. We have put in the time to research, and the patience to practise. We make it all from scratch – our own marinades, our own pastes – nothing comes out of a jar."

There are vegan, vegetarian and gluten free options within the offering, which they hope will become much-loved favourites for their customers.

lodgefarmkitchen.com



Fieldfare has continued to grow its award-winning range in 2024, with the launch of six new products in the first quarter – all sold frozen, and loose, offering a high level of convenience for retailers and consumers.

Range expansion for frozen food leader

The new additions include buttery French Apple Tarts that deliver a bright burst of sweet apple flavour, while looking attractive enough to serve guests as a generous individual portion, or sharing dessert.

The brand expects its Golden Apple Fritters, which encase fresh apple rings in a crisp golden batter, will become a customer favourite. And it's very excited about the new Fruits of the Forest Strudel, which packs oodles of berries into a sweet pastry casing.

There are three savoury launches too. Crispy Calamari Rings in a golden panko crumb, to recreate those holiday vibes alongside a pot of garlicky aioli, a classic Viennese-style Chicken Schnitzel, and the return of Fieldfare's very popular Herby Parmentier potatoes, with a hint of basil and parsley.

field-fare.com



Versatile new addition at Wild & Fruitful

'It's an ideal condiment for serving with a selection of cheeses, white fish and meats and is equally tasty stirred through risotto and pasta sauces to give a real hit of rich umami flavour," says producer Wild & Fruitful of its new Caramelised Onion & Black Garlic Relish.

The incredibly versatile product combines onions that have been slowly, slowly roasted and caramelised to release their sweetness, with the unmistakeable characteristics of black garlic. With black garlic increasingly gaining popularity with consumers, this is a choice shelf filler for 2024.

All Wild & Fruitful products are made in small batches, with all-natural ingredients in the Lake District, under the direction of award-winning chef Jake Winter.

wildandfruitful.co.uk



Juicy new launch from Coldpress



Pioneering fresh-pressed juice brand, Coldpress, has just brought a new citrussy bottle to the market. Its Mandarin flavour (in a 750ml sharing format) uses only the most fragrant, sweetest Spanish fruits and, says the brand, fits in perfectly with the ongoing 'juice renaissance'.

Andrew Gibb, of Coldpress, says, "Clearly the pioneering work of our HPP facility in Spain, coupled with access to incredible local fruit, means that our fresh-tasting sweet mandarin really pops! It's also worth noting that mandarins are a fantastic low calorie winter fruit, jam-packed with beneficial vitamins and minerals. The deliciously distinct sweetness of mandarins also supports our juice's expanding 'beyond breakfast' appeal."

coldpress.co.uk

Kallo expands into plant-based crackers



Natural snacking and stock brand Kallo has debuted into the crispbread market with its new crackers made from plants.

Veggie Thins are crunchy snacking flatbreads, crafted with chickpeas, making them a high fibre source of plant protein. The products are free from gluten, suitable for vegans, and contain no artificial colours, flavours or preservatives.

Available in Beetroot & Mixed Seed, Rosemary & Sea Salt, and Mixed Seeds, the brand hopes they'll prove as successful in the healthier snacking category as its award-winning Veggie Cakes, which have helped the business expand over 75%.

Marketing director, Adele Ward, says, "It's at Kallo's core to deliver delicious, healthy products, suitable and accessible for all, while making sure it's the right thing for the planet. We're also meeting the rising consumer demand for plant-based and gluten-free products that can be enjoyed at any occasion.

"Our goal is to continue transforming snacking with healthy and innovative products that don't compromise on taste. With Kallo Veggie Thins, consumers can be proud to enjoy them both at the dinner table, and as part of the ultimate sharing board."

kallo.com

Tracklements spices up its offering for 2024



In addition to unveiling its new-look labels in February, Tracklements has launched a raft of new products in the early part of 2024.

Following shopper feedback, the brand's Fresh Chilli Jam is now available in a larger, 345g jar, sitting alongside the classic 210g and heart-shaped jars. "After going to shows around the country, and listening to people asking for a bigger jar of our best seller, we're very pleased to be able to offer fresh chilli jam in this new, bigger format," say Becky Vale.

The first special edition of the year, Chimichurri Chilli Relish, is also now available. Steeped in South American heritage, the brand describes it as a 'fiesta' of coriander, oregano, parsley, garlic, lemon juice, and Bird's Eye chillies.

And it's followed, this month, by the re-appearance of Tracklements' Wild Garlic Sauce – so popular in 2023 as a special edition, that it is now being added to the main range. Synonymous with British springtime, the gluten-free, vegan-friendly sauce is a great partner in crime for lamb, pork, chicken and steak – making it an essential, especially for farm shops.

tracklements.co.uk



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PETER'S YARD



HOW TO SELL CHEDDAR

It is considered one of the crowning glories of the cheese counter – but how can you really make the most of your Cheddar offering and get customers excited about it? The experts tell us more

Cheddar makes up around 50% of all cheese bought and sold in the UK. A staple of the fridge, it's many people's go-to for a quick sandwich. But much of what lands on the shelf alongside that tub of butter, and bag of salad leaves, is mass produced.

And this, says cheese expert Charlie Turnbull, presents an excellent opportunity for the independent retailer when new customers file in the door – perhaps looking to upgrade from their usual supermarket block.

"Many of them," Charlie says, "will have a view of Cheddar that doesn't cover all Cheddar can be. They might not know about traditional cloth wrapped Cheddar, or Cheddar aged in caves and cellars, which has so much character. I've always found people are surprised at how different it can be to the supermarket. And that's the joy of being a cheesemonger. You can really demonstrate that point of difference."

"One of the main things that sets artisan Cheddar apart is that the milk is largely from a single herd," adds James Grant of No2 Pound Street, and organiser of the Great British & Irish Cheddar Challenge.

"We know, as cheesemongers, the provenance is right. We trust the milk, and the cheesemaker's work with the milk, which is often produced by cows fed on good lays such as white clover and red clover." There is, James says, the environmental aspect to consider too when stocking artisan Cheddar as "a lot more farms are looking to sequester as much carbon as possible, and they see the benefits of using the best milk because they want a fantastic product. They are not just about winning awards. They want to make products that reflect the fauna and flora of the landscape."

How to select Cheddar

If you're new to the cheese world and beginning to consider your counter selections, as far as Cheddar is concerned James thinks seeking out traditional farmhouse cheese will "put you in good standing".

He says, "Searching for those will point you in the direction of the good ladies and gentlemen of the cheese world that shine, like Keen's and Montgomery's and Quicke's."

Having a range of truckled or flavoured Cheddars is an important part of the counter too, adds Charlie, who explains that cheesemongers need to offer something that bridges the gap between supermarket cheese and more artisanal varieties. Products that are familiar. "The step up for most is to go for Snowdonia or Godminster. They sell really well, and they're accessible," he says, adding that you ignore them at your peril. "They are very popular and very value-driven, and their relatively cheap price point makes them great gifts. Many artisan cheese appreciators look down on them, but I don't look down on profits – ever!"

Sometimes, Charlie adds, "you need people to get to your funky Montgomery's and Westcombe, and they can't go straight from the supermarket to get there. First they need to pass through some middle ground, and I consider those cheeses very valuable."

Making the sale

Your average consumer, used to plonking mild, mature, or vintage cheese in their basket, has a whole new world to discover in the artisan cheese shop or deli, where experts can indulge their senses in the various gradings and maturities Cheddar has to offer, showing them the distinct nuances between makers and ages.

"Cheddar is relatively fresh at nine to 12 months," says James. "You're looking here at a cheese with still a good moisture content, and that buttery richness and Cheddary taste. From the outside you'll get some light Dijon mustard notes where the lard breaks down against the cloth."

As you get to Cheddars of around 18 months things get "more complex. Those cheeses are picked due to their initial flavours when the artisan cheesemakers taste them to know which direction they should be sold at. At 18 months you're looking for a more complex taste, with more horseradish and mustard notes under the halo.

"Any further than this and the cheese takes on almost candied fruit notes. And the exciting thing is you can then take it on a journey into 24 months, where you'll then have a creamy centre, with more brothy, umami, deep notes towards the rind."

Each wheel of cheese, adds James, can give a few 'bites of the cherry'. Cutting from the centre will please customers who prefer the buttery flavour of Cheddar, while serving up the outer parts should satisfy those who really appreciate the mushroomy notes the rind delivers.

Charlie says Cheddars aged over 24 months could be at the 'point of no return' for some. "They can pick up Parmesan or Gouda notes. It isn't that they're not delicious, but you're then moving noticeably away from Cheddar as we recognise it – that salty, savoury, agricultural rural flavour with some meadow, straw and cider apple. I personally don't like to buy over 13 months except in unusual circumstances, but that's just my own preference."

When he was in retail Charlie liked to make a 'thing' of a Cheddar's age, keeping the makers' tags so the cheeses' birthdays could be celebrated. He thinks this is a nice touch, and a good way to encourage a bit of activity around the product. "We'd occasionally get a cheese 'born' on 24th December, so 12 months later it would be sold at Christmas. Or, if it was 'born' on 25th December we might call it 'cheesus'. You've got to have fun with it!"

Another selling device Charlie found useful was having two of the same Cheddars in the counter, which allowed customers to see the variables between products. "It was so they could see Cheddar is not a process, it's a creation. And that's such a good show point for customers."

The way you display and cut your Cheddar plays into the 'theatre' of cheese, Charlie continues, saying he would always make a big deal of unwrapping it. "Make it a feature. Tell people about it on social media. Depending on the cheesemaker there could be six of seven pieces of cloth to unravel."

And then, he says, there is the joy of cutting the Cheddar in half. "You get a smell you'll never smell again. A unique freshness opening it for the first time. If you are opening a Cheddar, get your customers involved. Get them smelling it, and they will have a piece."

Most important of all, Charlie adds, is to "prove you know your stuff. Cheddar is just the best cheese to work with. We've got this huge diversity of tastes, and the best cheesemakers. It's all to be celebrated."

> "Artisan cheesemakers want to make products that reflect the fauna and flora of the landscape"

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Authenticity is increasingly important to consumers. They want to know, when they are choosing artisan products, that what they're putting on the table for their family has been made with care, quality, tradition, and respect for the environment in mind.



A cheese that meets all these criteria is gaining popularity in markets across the world, from the USA, to the Far East. Asiago PDO can boast a truly ancient heritage, with the first written testimony of cheesemaking in Italy's Asiago Plateau dating to 983 AD, when milk was collected and crafted in mountain huts, or 'malghe'.

This history, and Asiago PDO's unique characteristics, are fiercely guarded by the Asiago Cheese Protection Consortium, which was founded in 1979 by an association of producers and maturers to ensure only cheese that complies with a strict set of production specifications can be recognised and sold as Asiago PDO.

"The institutional tasks of the consortium," says director Flavio Innocenzi, "are to promote knowledge of the product, protect it from any attempt at improper use, and ensure that the consumer can always, when purchasing, be certain of the originality of the product Asiago PDO."



"The Protection Consortium," he continues, "is constantly engaged in the promotion and communication of Asiago PDO. Among the many activities, we are currently organising wine and cheese tastings – a formula that has interesting potential."

Asiago PDO can only be produced in a designated part of Northern Italy, stretching from the meadows of the Po Valley, to the lush, rugged mountain pastures of the Asiago Plateau in the Veneto area, up into the Trentino region.

Milk used in the process must be sourced solely from cows that graze in Vincenza, Trento, and parts of Padua and Treviso.

Once collected, the milk is transformed into either fresh (fresco) or aged, semi-cooked cheese.

Asiago PDO Fresco comprises of whole milk, and is noted across Italy and beyond for its sweet, delicate, lactic flavour. The cheese is typically matured for 20 to 40 days, with Asiago PDO Fresco Riserva spending longer in maturation rooms, at 40 days or more. These forms of Asiago are open textured, have a pale, straw-like colour, and reveal similar flavour profiles to yoghurt or butter, with a clean, delicious acidity that pairs well with honey, berries and light wines.





Aged Asiago PDO, on the other hand, brings more oomph and body to the cheeseboard. Made with partially skimmed milk, and rested for at least 90 days from the date of production, it is naturally lactose and preservative free. Aged Asiago PDO has more 'bite', and a lingering, stronger flavour that increases through the maturation process, where it is sold as Mezzano (four to 10 months), Vecchio (10 to 15 months), or Stavecchio (over 15 months). The cheese has a closer texture than fresh Asiago, with aromas of bread and toasted almonds and hazelnuts, and a rich, moreish, savoury taste that deepens towards the rind. It's wonderful matched on a cheeseboard or antipasti platter with slices of fresh melon, ripe figs, and rich red wines.

A further variety of Asiago PDO to explore is cheese labelled as a Mountain Product (Prodotto della Montagna), which can only be produced using milk from, and facilities based at, 600 meters or above. Each of these cheeses across age profiles has huge versatility, which is why Asiago PDO is recognised as one of the most sold and best loved products in Italy. Whether melted into al forno dishes, grated over pasta, or eaten as an appetiser, it has a place in every kitchen and every cheese counter.

Discover more at asiagocheese.it

> "The institutional tasks of the consortium are to promote knowledge of the product, and ensure the consumer can always be certain of the originality of Asiago PDO"

"Cheese - the principal ingredient"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

There has been a lot of talk about what to drink and eat alongside your cheese in recent years...and I think we need to praise the chefs that are working with cheese and making it a feature on their menus in increasingly delicious ways.

Last year a fellow cheesemonger and I attended dinner at The Artichoke - a Michelin Starred restaurant in Amersham - to present an inspired dinner, with each course paying homage to an artisan cheese.

The art of the chef is being able to work with ingredients, whilst carefully preserving the nuances.

For the tasting, The Artichoke matched beautiful spears of poached asparagus with toasted hazelnuts, artichoke purée and Mrs Kirkham's Lancashire cheese. This was sublime, and worked in such harmony. The chefs' palates were aligned, allowing each ingredient to shine. Recently I was also thrilled to have attended Pearly Queen in Shoreditch.

Tom Brown's food is amazing, and my last course had to be cheese. He had picked Cashel Blue, served with warmed gingerbread and homemade treacle and whisky syrup. The deep buttery and salty piquant flavour of the blue cheese married perfectly with the syrup and warm cake.

Recently I met with the Guild of Fine Food, The Royal Academy of Culinary Arts and The Academy of cheese. All of which I have been associated with for many years. It is clear that for many restaurants, cheese training needs to be put on the agenda. So, with the brilliance of these associations and positive collaboration, I am on a journey to help educate the teams that serve up excellent food and wines.

As a cheesemonger it is my goal to engage my wholesale customers in restaurants and talk about the product and why it tastes like it does. All wholesale cheesemongers should be on the same page. The buck shouldn't stop when the sale is made.

I was recently at a restaurant in Soho. At the end I ordered the cheese. Wigmore and Hafod arrived. Sadly, the waitress only knew that one was Welsh and the other English. No more information was offered. No mention of the milk type or background or even a brief description.

I left feeling let down, as if the cheese was just something that had to be on the menu. As people are waking up to real cheese and wanting to know about provenance we need to take heed.

I don't blame the chef, but the wholesaler for not talking to their customer or helping guide their choice.

As chefs are inspired by ingredients, they are also inspired by cheese as it is a principal ingredient. If we want more artisan cheese to be sold then let's help educate our fabulous chefs and restauranteurs. Check out The Artichoke and Pearly Queen restaurants as these chefs are helping to promote the brilliance of cheese.

Exiting NPD news from Butlers



While Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses in Lancashire is still very much in recovery mode following the fire which destroyed much of its stock at the end of 2023, owner Matthew Hall says it's onwards and upwards for the cheesemaker in 2024.

In addition to having built a temporary packing facility at the dairy, and recently purchasing Hampshire Cheese Company (maker of Tunworth and Winslade) blue cheese is back in production, and the team will soon be bringing a new series of products to the market.

"It's a big milestone," Matthew explains. "We had these plans, before last November when the world went a bit topsy turvy, to create a bigger movement within blue cheese. And we're about to unleash those plans. For us, it's all about saying 'blue cheese goes mega at Christmas, but it kind of drops off a little bit throughout the rest of the year'. What is the driver behind that? Why does that happen? Blue cheese is a great product, and as a category people are interested in it, but what can we do all-year-round, to make it even more accessible and relevant?"

Through research, the team discovered consumers still very much want to include blue cheese in their occasions, but they crave convenience, and a more portable product that could be used easily in picnics, as part of a grazing board, or in a burger.

Blacksticks Blue has formed a jumping point for the NPD process. "It's perfectly positioned for cheeseboard usage," says Matthew, "but it's messy to cut. So we've developed Blacksticks Every Day. You get all of the flavour in terms of that rich, umami savouriness and creaminess, but when you take it out of the packet you can slice it thinly and grate it."

Next in the line-up are Blacksticks Mega Melts – a pack of four 80mm Blacksticks slices "perfect for popping straight on top of a gourmet burger."

"Burgers as an occasion are massive," says Matthew. "And the black and blue burger trend coming across from the States is mega but, actually, taking a wedge of blue cheese and trying to slice it is difficult. This new product totally ticks the boxes for convenience and flavour."

Completing the new trio is Blacksticks Dip, which picks up on the growing desire for dips and on-the-go options in fine food retail. "Cheese is consumed by 98% of households, but there isn't a premiumised cheese offering in this space. Generally those who make dips are into food manufacturing, so you're looking at processed dips, and those don't fit in with consumers looking for something for premium occasions."

Nothing is added to Blacksticks Dip. "We take Blacksticks Blue as a base and mix it into a softer version of a blue cheese in dip format," says Matthew. "It's just two ingredients."

Speaking of ongoing plans for 2024, he adds, "We're still very much in the midst of trying to rebuild back from the fire, but we've got a great team of people to implement this and we've got the energy and enthusiasm to drive forward."







New product launch from Graceburn founder

Blackwoods Cheese Company, founded more than a decade ago by cheese-loving friends, has not only ramped up production in 2024 as it recovers from flood damage, but is in the throes of launching a brand-new cheese.

Based in Kent, Blackwoods uses only organic milk from regenerative farms in its products, including Graceburn (a unique marinated soft cow's milk cheese) and Edmund Tew – a Langres style product imagined by co-founder David Holton during his time working in Neal's Yard Dairy's maturation rooms.

Fans of the product, a winner of many awards, will be glad to hear it's back in production, following on from the return of Graceburn last summer.

Cheesemaking was halted at the dairy in December 2022 when a spate of icy weather caused the plumbing to burst, causing mass destruction. "It flooded the entire building," recalls David. "What we thought would be 10 weeks out of action just kept dragging on and on, and it turned out to be more like 40 weeks." The team were back doing what they do best in a new and improved dairy at the end of August 2023, though David adds it hasn't been easy to "relaunch the business after such a tricky time, in what is a tricky market for any cheesemaker." Edmund Tew is now available once more. "It's a washed brine cheese, relying on diverse microbes for its flavour profile, and that changes a lot with age," says David. "We start selling it at three weeks. At this stage there's a little bit of funk, and some savoury peanut butter and charcuterie notes, but it's quite mellow with a clean, lactic, milky core. As the Tew ages out, those savoury flavours become more and more evident."

A new kid on the block is Blackwoods' Hever – a lactic, washed-rind cheese in a slightly bigger format than Edmund Tew at 250g. "It's like Edmund Tew's naughty cousin," laughs David. "It's a bit stronger, a bit feistier and funkier. It really packs a punch. We've modelled it after the washed-rind cheeses of Burgundy, like Epoisses."

David says they're still working on the recipe and tweaking the cheese's maturity, but that samples are now available for distributors, who should get in touch if they'd like to give it a try. As for the dairy? "We're not 100% out of the woods yet. But we've got a few months under our belt now, and coming into spring and summer things are feeling quite promising."

Irish goats' cheese makes a return

Siobhan Ni Ghairbhith, owner and director of St Tola Goat Cheese, says she's delighted St Tola Karst is back in production. "Spring has come around again, and we're so happy to see our goats kidding again, especially as that means lots more raw milk here on the farm," she says.

St Tola Karst is an ash-coated variety, made only with raw milk from Siobhan's herd on the Atlantic Coast in County Clare.

The ash slows down the development and maturation of the cheese, which forms a silvery skin of geotrichum candidum and penicillium moulds. "The silvery grey rinds reflect the limestone landscape of The Burren, here in County Clare," says Siobhan. "It's an area recognised as a UNESCO Geopark, famed for its beauty, and the unique provenance of its food."

Karst is aged for two weeks, and has a fluffy, creamy texture, with note of sweet cocoa. "It makes a stunning addition to any cheeseboard," Siobhan adds.

Yorkshire dairy opens its own smokehouse

Boasting three decades of natural cheese smoking experience, the Wensleydale Creamery at Hawes in the Yorkshire Dales, has recently made a significant investment with the addition of a brand-new cheese smokehouse.

In response to increased market demand for 'real' smoked cheese, the facility allows the business to more than double its current output, at a time when data from Google highlights a 43% increase in search for smoked cheese in the UK in the last quarter alone.

Marketing manager, Sandra Bell, says, "Our investment in the business' smoking capabilities marks a major milestone for us. We're starting to see increased interest and demand for naturally smoked cheese, and as a category it provides real growth potential for our business. The investment firmly cements our commitment to innovation in this area, and by more than doubling our capacity allows us to further develop our expertise and grow."



Offering the latest smoking technology, the new smokehouse provides full end-to-end production and has allowed the creamery to increase its range of finished smoke flavours to include oak, beech and hickory, using FSC certified, sustainably sourced wood.

The new operation is open to contract, smoking hard pressed cheeses for other makers, with the natural process not requiring any added flavourings, colours or preservatives.



New format for Stinking Bishop

Stinking Bishop, produced by Charles Martell & Son, has undergone a transformation with a new, smaller format now available to increase its accessibility and versatility.

The pungent cheese, named after the pear variety used in its production, can now be purchased as a 250g grab-and-go option. Director Sasha Martell, says, "The smaller size enhances its appeal as a shareable appetiser or an accompaniment to a curated cheeseboard. The creamy texture and tangy undertones create a memorable tasting experienced, ensuring that the essence of Stinking Bishop is not compromised in its downsized form."

Sasha adds that the cheese's "portability makes it an ideal companion for picnics, gatherings, or simply as an indulgent treat on its own, or paired with crusty bread, fruits or nuts."





‘I’m feeling optimistic about the future of food in the UK’

As we continue to delve into the world of sustainability at *Speciality Food*, we speak to Henry Dimbleby MBE on the state of British farming, food security, public health and more



Henry Dimbleby is a busy guy. Fresh from writing 2023’s Ravenous – a timely book reflecting on how we can get both the planet, and ourselves, into shape – he has recently launched venture capital firm, Bramble Partners, supporting businesses that improve food security, have a positive impact on health and nutrition, or that break new ground in agriculture.

These are all areas Henry has found himself hugely invested in over the past few years – and a large part of what drives him forward. The curiosity and keenness to identify the ‘big issues’, with the resolve to not just sit back and complain, but actually do something about them.

This tenacity, and problem-solving nature, is part of the reason Henry was asked to write 2020’s National Food Strategy and its follow up in 2021 – an engaging, jargon-free, absorbing book of recommendations for government, that honed in on farming, UPFs, food security, and our public health crisis. Although there is a lot of doom and gloom to pick through, particularly when it comes to revitalising the health of the nation, Henry says overall there is a lot to be positive about, with changes afoot that could improve British food production for the better.

A course for Henry’s path was set during his time at Leon – though it was, he says, entirely accidental. “It [Leon] was a bit of a selfish pursuit in that it was about how you can eat fast food that tastes good and does you good,” he says. “But because of the way that we spoke, people assumed we were doing all sorts of things we weren’t doing. They assumed we were organic, and then we felt we had an obligation to either live up to that, or explain we weren’t doing that. So we had to train our staff to tell people, if they ask ‘is it organic?’, to say ‘no’.”

At the same time, Mark Sainsbury of London restaurant Moro, approached Henry about the “absolute nightmare” of sustainability in the industry, and with a vision to form a group (The Sustainable Restaurant Association).

“The idea,” explains Henry, “was to take the burden away from you, as a restaurateur, trying to keep your restaurant open while doing everything else. We would just tell you ‘you need to do this, and this’.”

Later, Henry would be asked by government to devise the School Food Plan. “And off the back of that I was asked to do the National Food Strategy almost 10 years later. It was at the time when we’d just come out of the EU. And it was about how we create a food system that produces enough food, and sequesters carbon, and is secure.” It was during the two-year process producing the strategy that Henry really got “under the bonnet. And I began to feel a much stronger need to explain what’s going on to the wider world. It dawned on me,” he says, “when you looked at how destructive the food system was to health and the environment, that no one really knew about it. And we had a COP at Glasgow which was meant to be about biodiversity, and food wasn’t mentioned. I just thought, ‘why is no one talking about this?’ It’s central to two of the most critical issues facing society. You begin to feel a bit insane. Is it me, or them?”

A big leap that’s taken place in recent history, which Henry says can only be for the good, is growing, mainstream interest, particularly around food security and sustainability. “You look out and see the fields are underwater. When it’s outside your window you cannot avoid it, and I think that is now really coming home to people. In a way, the fact it’s now so obvious makes me optimistic, weirdly. You can’t ignore it [climate change] anymore.”

The most urgent matters for the UK right now, he says, are health and the environment. “We have 2.8 million people out of work, and they’re predominantly out of work due to musculoskeletal problems, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and mental health. Three of those are directly related to food, and one of them is exacerbated by it. If we don’t get this right, it’s going to make us both poor and sick. It’s a disaster, and we have the ability to fix that.”

HFSS (high fat, salt and sugar) regulations are one of just a handful of recommendations the government has enacted so far from Henry’s report, alongside Healthy Start, and Community Eatwell, with a programme following the Community Eatwell guidelines in London finding that children previously achieving 5% of their five a day, were getting up to 64% of their recommended intake. A major piece of feedback from the scheme was parents saying they felt they could have a fruit bowl at home, without it feeling like a waste of money.

Henry admits more needs to be done on the health front. “Not only do we need to increase these kinds of schemes and trial them more broadly, but we need to increase the free school meal threshold, which is outrageously low.”

When it comes to the environment, Henry says we face a global disaster, but that green shoots of hope are peeping through. However, we cannot rest on our laurels and assume that just because we’re making the right noise and looking to do the right thing on home turf, other countries are following suit. It’s down to the UK to show producers and policymakers worldwide what good looks like, he explains.

“We could do farming really well in this country and still climate change can carry on because we are a small part of the picture. Even if we got it right here, gradually the UK could sink underwater. I think our role in this is exciting. Yes, to fix our biodiversity problems, but more it’s to show that it is possible.”

Already, Henry says, others are beginning to follow where the UK leads, and the pattern of recent farmers’ protests has been telling. “England and Scotland are two of the countries who haven’t really had farmers’ protests, and Scotland hasn’t done a lot of the changes yet. But England has done a lot of change, and politically the ups and downs have been handled pretty well. Whereas if you look at protests in Wales and across Europe, I think a lot of them are explained by well-meaning but bad policy. I think that, actually, we are showing a way policy can be done





to bring farmers with you."

Does he believe there are enough people 'at the top' across parties in government to make continued, meaningful changes to farming and the environment?

The answer is a strong 'yes'. "When Truss did the Australia trade deal and was then Prime Minister, you saw how fragile the coalition was, and what a good job Gove and then Eustice had been doing. Then there was quite a big wobble, and now Steve Barclay is getting the balance right, and there's been a settling down of things. Whoever gets in next, I think fundamentally there is now a consensus on what needs to be done. I'm very optimistic on the environmental side, and pessimistic on the health side."

Henry does believe that we can rebalance the books on food security in Britain, but adds it has to be approached in the right way. While inflated quotas could have a negative impact, aiming for around 60% of food to be produced in the UK seems the most sustainable solution.

"If we look back in history, 100% of food was produced here. With the repeal of the Corn Laws this went down as we produced more cloth and wool, and sold garments, buying our food from Canada and South America and other places.

"After the war it went up again, and then at the beginning of the Common Agricultural Policy it went up too much. We need to have a balance of our own production and import routes, so if we have a bad harvest we can still import stuff from elsewhere. I think it's important to make sure we do continue to produce food, while keeping a close eye on what's happening in production. One thing we are more insecure on is fruit and veg, but I think that is something we can lean into a bit more," Henry says.

A regenerative and biodiverse solution is needed to improve the growth of these crops in the UK, and already plenty is underway as more farmers adopt regenerative techniques. Henry sees the future as being the 'Three Compartment Model' laid out in the National Food Strategy, saying that getting farming right relies on a simultaneous equation that not only produces enough food, but sequesters carbon and restores nature. This involves freeing up pockets of land for re-wilding, while managing highly productive farming alongside lower-yield farming using regenerative measures. We may still have mono-cropping, Henry says, adding that to mitigate environmental concerns, those farms growing single crops might "have bigger borders, or encourage natural pest suppression. Fundamentally the role of environmental land management schemes is to incentivise farmers so they can make the right decisions."

It is important, Henry adds, to continue to support and champion British farmers – particularly as 'buying British' is something that resonates with the buying public.

He recalls a conversation with former Sainsbury's CEO, Justin King. "He said if you look at consumers and sustainability labelling it really doesn't work. They've got so much going on in their lives that it has marginal impact on their shopping decisions. It's all about quality and price." The label that really does 'stick', is the British flag. If a product carries a Union Jack, King advised Henry, "people are more likely to buy it." Henry's own work with focus groups found that "farmers are among the most trusted people in our society. People really trust farmers, even though over 50% of us have never met a farmer. We still have a sense of ourselves as a food growing nation. I think there is something quite fundamentally rooted in our sense of identity as British people of being a farming nation."

Retailers have a huge role to play in supporting, and promoting British-grown food, ensuring it continues to end up on the nation's plates. Henry says many retail giants are now plotting out their Scope 3 emissions to 2050, but they need to consider the power of British produce and biodiversity alongside their pursuit of Net Zero. "I think they have quite a lot of freedom of movement, in that they can do plenty to support farmers," he explains. "And they can source better. I'm fundamentally quite pessimistic about any public-owned company doing anything unilaterally that doesn't make a dent in profits – that's why we need policy and regulation." Change would "take more effort", he adds, but could be achieved without hugely impacting retailers' bottom line.

On the whole, Henry says he feels good things are happening, and they need to be embraced. "One of the reasons I set up Bramble Partners is because I think there is a lot going on. Yes on health, but particularly on environmental solutions and food security."

There are some "amazing" ideas being trialled that need capital to make them happen on scale. "Whether that's regenerative farming, and someone like Wildfarmed thinking about how they can upscale, or whether that is on the food security side, thinking about how to, in countries like Egypt, produce food without the soil to do it, or in the UK how can you have seeds and plants protected against volatility. I'm most optimistic about the fact there is recognition of the problems we face, and a lot of people are doing quite a lot of creative stuff to prove it."







Store cupboard essentials are the bread and butter of any good retailer worth its salt, helping your customers to make a meal of their purchases

1 STOCKS
TRUEFOODS

TRUEfoods stocks have been perfected by chefs, and provide a great base for sauces, gravies, soups and casseroles, offering a rich depth and lasting levels of flavour. All TRUEfoods stocks are made using British bones, with no artificial colours, flavours or preservatives, and they are completely allergen free - making them the natural, healthy choice for cooking.
truefoodsltd.com

2 SPICE BLENDS
SPICE KITCHEN

Versatile enough to work with meat, fish and vegetables, Spice Kitchen's blends can instantly transform even the most mundane of meals into something truly memorable. Perfect if you are a newbie to spices, but also great for the more experienced home cook. The range includes Berbere, Ras El Hanout and Jerk.
spicekitchenuk.com

3 CHILLI OIL
BANHOEK

Banhoek Chilli Oil is a handcrafted, premium grade, artisan infused oil made from just two ingredients – the highest quality rapeseed oil, and dried Thai birdseye chillies. The golden-hued oil is 100% natural, GMO free, and contains no preservatives, delivering just the right level of spice to a variety of dishes.
banhoekchillioil.com

4 OAT PASTA
SUMA

If you're looking for good quality pasta or intriguing new organic ingredients, Suma's delicious oat pasta is for you. It's certified gluten free and ideal for consumers with gluten intolerance. The eye-catching packaging is made using cardboard from a sustainably managed forest, and is fully recyclable and 100% plastic free.
suma.coop



5 DIJON MUSTARD
GREY POUPON

Crafted in the iconic city of Dijon since 1777, Grey Poupon is the mustard for those who seek the best quality in their ingredients, produced only with the finest brown mustard seeds and white Burgundy wine from local vineyards to create a perfect blend of piquant heat and creaminess. A spoon of Grey Poupon will instantly transport you to the streets of Paris.
greypouponmustard.com

6 NATURAL VANILLA PASTE
LITTLEPOD

LittlePod's Natural Vanilla Paste has been hailed as a 'much-needed evolution for the kitchen – no more splitting and scraping vanilla pods!'. Suitable for vegans, Kosher and gluten free, each 100ml tube is equivalent to 20 vanilla pods, seeds and all. Why not look LittlePod up online and join its Campaign for Real Vanilla?
littlepod.co.uk

7 GLUTEN-FREE GRANOLAS
JUST LIVE A LITTLE

Just Live a Little Gluten-free Granolas are made using wholegrain gluten-free oats, baked together with nature's rich and juicy nuts, fruits and seeds. The range has four flavours, each in 360g resealable, recyclable packaging - Maple & Toasted Pecan Granola, Raspberry, Coconut & Cashew Granola, Cocoa & Hazelnut Granola, and Peanut Butter & Apple Granola
justlivealittle.com

8 MUSHROOM KETCHUP
GEO WATKINS

Geo Watkins Mushroom Ketchup is a versatile sauce that infuses meals with the rich, savoury taste of umami. It's a perfect addition to stocks, gravies and sauces, or use it to enhance ramen and stir-fries with a delicious kick. Elevate your culinary creations with the distinctive taste of Geo Watkins Mushroom Ketchup - a must-have for any flavour enthusiast.
geowatkins.com



INNOVATION SHOWCASE

The Innovation Showcase is the first stop for finding the latest launches on the market.

As well as discovering the latest innovations across food, drink, health, lifestyle and living, it's the place to vote for the best products to win in the Natural & Organic Innovation Awards, where winners will be announced in a prestigious awards ceremony at the end of day one (for exhibitors and press only). The Food Showcase is split into the following categories:

- **BEST NEW FOOD CATEGORIES**
- **FOOD PRODUCT**
- **ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCT**
- **SNACK PRODUCT**
- **SPECIAL DIET PRODUCT**
- **VEGAN FOOD PRODUCT**
- **DRINK PRODUCT**
- **ORGANIC DRINK PRODUCT**

THE NATURAL FOOD EXPO RETURNS TO LONDON THIS APRIL

Everything you need to know about the UK's biggest gathering of natural and organic food and drinks producers

Part of the pioneering Natural & Organic Products Expo (NOPEX), Natural Food Expo is the home of natural and speciality food and drink. From the latest plant-based innovations to the hottest planet-friendly snacks, Natural Food Expo is the place for buyers from across the retail, hospitality, foodservice, manufacturing, import and export sectors to discover the latest products for their customers.

Visiting buyers will get a firsthand look at the emerging trends in the thriving natural and organic food and drink industry from over 500 exhibitors. Reserved exclusively for industry professionals, witness the future of the sector with products you won't find anywhere else!

"Plans are well underway for the next instalment of Natural & Organic Products Expo, which has a brand-new look for 2024," comments Annie Lindsell, the newly appointed event director.

She continues, "This influential event has united the sector for over 30 years! The Natural Food Show at Natural & Organic Products Expo is set to offer even more for 2024. Anticipate celebrity keynote speakers, a vibrant festival-style atmosphere, the introduction of a VIP and influencer programme, and the addition of two Launchpad Zones for new challenger brands yet to be discovered."



Explore the Launchpad Zone and Vegan World

The Launchpad Zone is set to be a dynamic showcase of innovation and creativity, spotlighting new startups and challenger brands making waves in the natural and organic industry. This dedicated space will provide a platform for cutting-edge trends, revolutionary ingredients, and sustainable solutions that are shaping the future of natural food, beauty and wellness. Brands to see here include Wavy Wonders, Reach the Children, Lucid World, SUPERKEEN, Holy Berry, Bee Made, All Real Nutrition, Quirky Monkey, Rytes Wellness, and more.

Vegan World, an integral part of the Natural Food Expo, is where to find plant-based brands at the forefront of the vegan movement. This dedicated section boasts a diverse array of companies, each offering innovative and delicious products ready to captivate the market.

From plant-based snacks to wholesome meat substitutes, Vegan World celebrates the power of healthier plant-based food and drinks pushing through a crowded but thriving market. Brands confirmed here include Brain Foods, Belvas, Pachamama, Ancestral Superfoods, Bardo Ventures, Snacksy, Dirty Organics, Chicago Vegan Foods, Bardo Ventures, Riverside Naturals, Tofurky London Nootropics, and many more.

Headline speakers

The show will also feature a free keynote programme full of insights and inspiration.

The first headline speaker to be announced is renowned retail expert, broadcaster, author, and activist, Mary Portas OBE. During her inspiring keynote (which will be in the style of a 'fireside chat' with author Janey Lee Grace) Mary will







> "We had a great time at NOPEX, the biggest showcase for retail professionals bringing together new business and thousands of pioneering natural, organic, sustainable, free-from and healthy products from across the industry"
>
> HOLLAND & BARRETT





delve into the ever-evolving landscape of the natural and organic products industry. With a focus on sustainability, ethical practices, and consumer trends, she will share invaluable insights into building successful
retail businesses, and will address the challenges and opportunities faced by the sector.

Mary says, "Our high streets are at the heart of our economy and are the lifelines for our communities, playing a role in people's wellbeing and sense of identity.

Although they are experiencing unprecedented challenges the opportunities are huge.

I look forward to sharing my insights and to answering your questions in front of this important audience at NOPEX in April."

Another speaker to be announced is Renée Elliott, founder of Planet Organic, and co-founder of Women Tree. Renée founded Planet Organic, the UK's first organic supermarket, in 1995. With her mission to promote health in the community and support the earth's biodiversity, Renée challenged conventional retailing and showed that values-led, commercially driven business is good business.

At the show, Renée will journey through her story of founding, fighting for, growing and losing Planet Organic, plus the miraculous turn of fate that brought it back to her. In her honest account of the rollercoaster of entrepreneurship, visitors can share poignant lessons and truths she's learned across her career.



Renée says, "I'm thrilled to be at NOPEX this year.

I'm delighted to be speaking, reconnecting with the natural products family and exploring innovations in the sector. I'm excited to make it a brilliant year by working together."

Other industry speakers confirmed include the co-founder of Carbon Gold, Craig Sams; former director of sustainable business for Marks and Spencer, Mike Barry; author and nutrition expert, Patrick Holford; founder of Viridian Nutrition, Cheryl Thallon; head of food and beverage development at Holland & Barrett, Rachel Chatterton; award-winning entrepreneur and author, Daniel Priestley; and panels with Soil Association and many more.

"NOPEX is the centre of excellence for suppliers in this space," says Rachel Chatterton, head of food and beverage development at Holland and Barrett.

> "There's an unbelievable energy and feeling of community at NOPEX. As a buyer we see many new products come into our inbox. I wish I could spend all my time replying to brands, so it's really nice to meet the brands all-together, under one roof"
>
> **PLANET ORGANIC**

'Indie Focus'

The show will also facilitate an exciting initiative to help reward and celebrate the work that independent retailers do for communities around the country. The programme will offer a carefully curated seminar programme, reimbursed travel and special onsite networking opportunities for independent retailers.

REGISTER FOR A FREE TRADE TCKET TODAY

Natural Food Expo will take place alongside Natural & Organic Products Expo and Natural Beauty Expo at ExCeL London on 14th to 15th April, 2024. To register for a free trade ticket, visit **naturalfoodexpo.co.uk**

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‘We run the world’s only on-farm egg restaurant’

As part of our Daring to Diversify series, speaking with farm shops and delis doing something a little bit different, we head to Yolk Farm



Running any kind of business can be considered an adventure. And Ben and Emma Mosey’s journey, from their university halls, via the Australian Outback and tropical jungles of Indonesia, circling back to North Yorkshire, has all the hallmarks of the best kind of adventure story. One filled with excitement, jeopardy and discovery.

Together, the couple run Yolk Farm Shop in Minskip – home to their ‘world first’ on-farm free-range egg restaurant, where everything from the decor to the menu is inspired by the daily delivery of sunshine-yolked beauties from their flock of 500 hens.

What they’ve managed to create is, says Emma, truly far-removed from what they imagined life would look like when they met in their university days – her studying English, and Ben engrossed in geology. “My idea of what ‘countryside’ meant completely changed when I visited his home. I was like ‘oh, THIS is the countryside!’”

Emma was struck by the contrast in their upbringings. “I’d never been to a farm before I met him,” the now chair of the Farm Retail Association says. “You’re either born into a farming family, or you marry into it.”

Farming was left far behind when they moved to Australia for five years, following Ben’s career as a geologist searching for signs of copper and gold in the wild, unforgiving landscape of the Outback (unfortunately he didn’t strike it lucky).

The pair then moved to Indonesia, with Ben becoming almost a modern-day Indiana Jones, working his way through the humid junglescapes of Jakarta, and flying off at a moment’s notice while Emma settled down to write and finish her debut novel, How to Be a Good Wife (published as Emma Chapman). In 2015, though, they made the bold decision to pack up their exploring ways and return to the UK to help Ben’s dad out on the farm.

Something about farm life hit a nerve for Emma. In fact, it felt like something they both innately needed to do. They had all kinds of new-fandangoed ideas and aspirations. “But Ben’s dad wasn’t ready to retire, and there wasn’t room for Ben to do what he wanted,” Emma says. The hunt was on, then, for their own place, and they stumbled across Minskip Farm Shop which offered them room to expand, and grow something that would be their own.

Central to their plans, says Emma, was ensuring that whatever they did, it appealed to families, and inspired the next generation of farmers and shoppers. She recalls the total excitement she felt visiting Ben’s dad’s farm, feeding the lambs. “So many people don’t get access to this environment,” she says. “I found that quite striking, and I wanted to make somewhere people could learn about farming in an interactive way. Something wholesome that would also support the local economy.”

The shop, as it stood, had a lot of potential, but it lacked the family audience Emma and Ben were so keen to reach – an audience that has become crucial to farm shops collectively in the UK.

Emma laughs when we ask about their retail experience. They had not a jot between them when they started the first stage of expansion in 2017, while looking after their inherited flock of thousands of hens. “It took us about a year to learn what on earth we were doing,” Emma laughs. “It was just us. I was going to the produce market twice a week and working in the shop while Ben worked on the farm.”

Animals were always destined to be part of the Yolk Farm story, and one of the very first things Emma wanted to do was introduce Kune Kune pigs, which remain incredibly popular with visitors. “People have been coming to feed the pigs for the last seven years. Some of them are now adults which is quite interesting. Having pigs is, I think, one of the first major things we did. Then we added a Christmas gift grotto that year too to gain a bit of extra retail space.”

Looks are everything, and throughout the project, at each stage, Emma says they have very carefully considered their branding and how any changes ‘fit’. “We worked with an agency and talked about our target market and who they would be in 35 years, and those meetings are where the name Yolk Farm was conceived. We knew the direction we were going in and who we were targeting, and that made other decisions a lot easier,” she explains. “We could say, ‘is the younger family we’re targeting going to like that?’. If it was a ‘yes’ we’d do it, if it was a ‘no’ we wouldn’t.”

Lots of reorganisation had to happen before the shop expansion fully opened, to ensure everything was just-so. “One of the simple but effective things we did was that we moved the fruit and vegetable section so it’s the first thing customers see when they come through the door, because that’s our crowning glory. It really gets customers in the mood to start filling their basket with fresh, delicious food.”

In the redesign fruit and vegetable lines were added, zero waste dispensers put in place, and a big row of fridges slotted in, enabling the shop to sell more deli items and meat. “We don’t have a butchery and deli counter,” says Emma, “so it was very important to have that space.”

Yolk Farm ramped up its own-branded products, introducing home baked sausage rolls and pork pies, and working with a trusted local producer to create the shop’s own range of jams and chutneys – more than 100 of them.

The selection of bakery items and alcohol were also increased. Other retailers might tell you anecdotally, the more you have, the more customers will spend, and this was certainly the case at Yolk Farm. After the expansion and with the addition of new lines, “customers that already came in put more stuff in their baskets,” says Emma.





As many other farm shops, business boomed during lockdown, which hit less than six months after expansion, delaying the opening of the on-farm restaurant.

"It was lucky that we had expanded," Emma reflects, "because we were able to capitalise on that footfall."

Restaurant staff were folded into the farm shop operation until food service was allowed to continue. The restaurant was inspired by the chickens Emma and Ben inherited, and represents the tide change they have made on site. "When we moved here there were 6,000 hens supplying supermarkets. We did that for the first two flocks over three years, but we soon realised the money we were making from supermarket contracts covered costs, but didn't make any money. Using the eggs in a restaurant setting we have complete control over the cost, and can make money and add value!"

The flock was reduced to 1,500 birds, and then to 500. The birds were also moved out of their big barn due to the risk of avian flu, and switched to a mobile unit which automatically opens every morning, giving them plenty of space to roam free inside and out. "It's very high welfare," explains Emma. "They have loads of room and they are safe. We call it the 'hen spa'. They love it down there." The hens even have their own bodyguards in the form of a group of alpacas, who guard them from foxes. "They're pack animals, and they'll make a loud warning noise to scare them off," Emma smiles.

Moving the flock had another benefit, in that it allowed the couple to transform the old chicken barn into an indoor/outdoor play area with farm-themed play stations (including a farm shop and grow-your-own veg), a sand pit, and a coffee bar for weary parents. "This all goes back to our vision of reconnecting people with food," says Emma. "And that really needs to start with children."

The chickens at Yolk Farm spend their days foraging in the grass, and gnawing on waste vegetables from the shop, which makes the yolks "really orange. It's partly because they go outside and get their Vitamin D and eat grubs and scrap around. It's better for you if they are eating more nutrients because the eggs are healthier."



Eggs are literally the crowning glory on many of the dishes coming out of Yolk Farm's kitchen, which caters for around 100 people at full capacity (inside and out). "It's quite niche," Emma admits, saying that's part of the reason they went for it. "We talked a lot about whether we should open a tearoom and do a standard farm shop menu but, for us, it was really eggs that were at the centre of the farm. We thought we'd go hard on that as a concept. It's also quite difficult to replicate unless you happen to have 500 free-range hens!"

Design throughout the eatery is playful and thoughtful. "Toilets have duck egg blue tiles with yolk drips running down," explains Emma. "And on the toilet doors it says 'laying' instead of 'engaged'. The whole place is clad with wood, and we've got apple crates upside down as lights, and swing seats. The designer does themed attractions like Warwick Castle, and they've got a lot of experience with theming, that's why we chose them. It's supposed to be a great environment for grown-ups as well as kids. It has to work for both. We have lots of kids come with their families, but also lots of couples who just enjoy our food."

Service in the restaurant begins at 9am, with an all-day brunch menu on offer. The bestseller is the kitchens' chicken pancakes. "That's fried chicken with buttermilk pancakes, hot hollandaise sauce, maple syrup and bacon. Then we've got dishes that are a bit more garden-based. Fresh sweetcorn fritters with poached eggs...and a buddha bowl with all seasonal produce and an egg on top."

Breakfast is incredibly popular, says Emma. "People come in just for our bacon sandwiches and breakfasts. Also, our cakes are amazing. They are all made in-house. We'll have around three types of whole cake, from cheesecake to lemon meringue pie, and an amazing range of brownies, cupcakes and muffins in all different flavours."

Appealing to all ages, younger diners can choose smaller versions of most things from the main menu, in addition to having their own menu, with options for toddlers and weaning children.

Adding the dining space has proved a huge success story for Emma and Ben, drawing in large crowds. It's hard to think, Emma says, that when they started out there were only five car parking spaces, the shop was half the size, there was nowhere to eat, and the farm itself was closed to the public. "Now we're so much bigger, we have the pigs, goats, alpacas, chickens, the farm is fully open with a farm walk, and there are dog walking fields you can rent."

Emma very much sees farm shops as a huge part of the conversation around the future of food and shopping in the UK, and says they have, just in their own little corner of the world, seen growth in sales and interest, particularly in products they make themselves. "What customers want from farm shops," she adds, "is good value local produce, and things made on site. That real, genuine connection to food. That's why when we bake something it's made by our chefs from our own produce, and that's quite rare to find, but it's something lots of farm shops do. That's what makes them so special. And we need to shout about that more."

Emma thinks more can be done to support farm retailers in their mission to supply local people with genuinely local fresh food. "There's no voice for our industry apart from the FRA," she says. "But we need someone else standing up to say we're doing this properly, and supporting communities, we don't break the bank, and shopping with us is more than putting something in a basket."

Her advice for other farm shops looking to innovate, expand and broaden their appeal? "You have to like people," she laughs. "If you are diversifying your farm to invite the public in, the family members within the farm have to want to do it too as often some of them will live on site." On the flipside, she says, "It's a hugely rewarding thing to do. Ben and I have learnt so much in the last seven years. I never would have predicted this. It's been an amazing journey."

Not being afraid to try new things is her mantra.

"We didn't know anything when we started this, but we've learnt a lot along the way, and that's one of the most freeing things. When you have the necessity, you will work things out because you have to. It's a great feeling to know whatever happens we can deal with problems that arise and solve them together."

> "I wanted to make somewhere people could learn about farming in an interactive way. Something wholesome that would also support the local economy"





PREPARE FOR A BUMPER FARM SHOP & DELI SHOW

The UK's specialist retailers are preparing to come together for the biggest food and drink trade event of the year

Farm Shop & Deli Show joins Food & Drink Expo, The Restaurant Show, National Convenience Show and The Forecourt Show to bring together the very best of the grocery, specialist retail, wholesale, foodservice and hospitality sectors under one roof at the NEC, Birmingham, from 29th April to 1st May.

Promising a world of advice, insight and innovation shared through the lens of this specialist industry, visitors will leave with unique understanding and practical information, as well as hundreds of innovative new products, to take with them into their businesses in 2024 and beyond.

Farm Shop & Deli Show is a unique event in the specialist retail sector diary, allowing professionals to gather and digest the state of the industry, sharing successes, discussing challenges, and ultimately helping futureproof the sector in its entirety. Whether you're new to the fine food market, or a seasoned pro, there is simply something for everyone.

Events and awards

A number of favourites return to the event in 2024, including the much-anticipated Farm Shop & Deli Show Product and Retailers Awards. Announced ahead of the show, the Product Awards showcase the very best products available to the specialist retail sector, from a taste, branding and commercial viability perspective. These products are not only great tasting, but they are also well placed to sell within stores. Join in as some of the award gold winners take to the stage on Wednesday, 1st May at 1.30pm, to showcase their products, giving you the opportunity to try for yourself and ask any burning questions you might have.

Meanwhile, the Retailer Award winners will be unveiled on the Farm Shop & Deli Show Stage at 3.15pm on Monday, 29th April - recognising the speciality retailers leading the sector in customer service, innovation and community involvement, as well as the achievements they have made in the independent sector this past year. See who is crowned Farm Shop & Deli Retailer of the Year for 2024 live on stage. The only event for all bread bakers, loaf lovers and artisan aficionados, Britain's Best Loaf competition will be back once more. With judging taking place on the day, the winners across a variety of categories – including innovation, sourdough and gluten free – will be announced on stage on Tuesday, 30th April at 3.15pm. A brand-new event is also being launched this year: Britain's Best Cake, sponsored by Kluman & Balter. A celebration of the wonderful cake Britain has to offer, it's a competition for professional bakers, judged by professional bakers and industry experts across different categories. The winners will be announced in a very special ceremony on The Grocer Stage on Monday, 29th April at 3.15pm.

Dragons' Pantry, the ultimate retail test, is also back after popular success last year, with a new batch of brave entrepreneurs facing big characters and big questions as they aim to secure a listing in The Grocer. With several pitching sessions lined up, see what's looking promising for 2024 at 1.15pm on Monday, 29th April; 12pm on Tuesday, 30th April, and 12.15pm on Wednesday, 1st May.



WHO'S EXHIBITING?

With a sold-out show floor, expect to see the latest trending products from across the sector as well as the essential services designed to help businesses stand out.
Some of the most significant exhibitor names include:

BURREN BALSAMICS (STAND N199)

Passionate about championing Ireland's exceptional produce, Burren Balsamics carefully crafts innovative, premium pantry products using the finest local ingredients. Packed with flavour, the range is loved by home cooks and hospitality industry alike and includes infused and aged balsamic vinegars, preserves and seasonings.



CANO WATER (STAND S151)

Created by three friends from London as an alternative to plastic bottles of water, Cano Water was born after a trip overseas showcased an international plastic problem. Recognising the benefits of aluminium packaging, it introduced the UK's first canned water brand to the market.

BELVOIR FARM DRINKS (STAND T238)

Found deep in the Leicestershire countryside, Belvoir Farm made its first bottle of elderflower cordial almost 40 years ago. Today, its premium range extends from still cordials to gently sparkling drinks – each crafted by taking simple ingredients full of the flavour of nature.

SILENT POOL GIN (STAND J199)

Purveyor of artisan spirits, Silent Pool Distillery, is bringing its latest range of drinks to Farm Shop & Deli Show. Visit the brand to experience everything from the original Silent Pool Gin to newer innovations including Silent Pool Black Juniper Gin, Silent Pool Rose Expression Gin, Green Man Wildwood Gin and Green Man Wildwood Vodka.

ECO GREEN LIVING (STAND S268)

A pioneering provider of eco-friendly packaging solutions, Eco Green Living is committed to advancing sustainability in the supply chain. Offering a certified compostable bin bag range, compostable cling film, bamboo kitchen roll and lavender laundry sheets, it will be showcasing a portfolio of innovative products.

ENGLISH LAKES ICE CREAM (STAND R220)

Based at the gateway to the Lake District, English Lakes Ice Cream has been producing multi award-winning ice creams and real fruit sorbets for nearly three decades. Proud to have been awarded with 12 Great Taste Awards over recent

> "We are a bakery, deli, foodshop and cafe and we come here every year looking for new products. We like artisan, independent products that aren't readily available in supermarkets, so this is a good show to attend as those smaller businesses are always here – we're really happy with what we've found."
>
> **FRANKIE DYER, DIRECTOR, BARBAKAN DELICATESSEN LTD**



> “I’ve travelled here all the way from Guernsey for the three days of the shows and it’s been really worthwhile. I’ve seen some amazing ideas and had some great samples too. Overall, I’m leaving very positive”
>
> **STEPHEN ROBERT, DIRECTOR, COBO BUTCHERS**

years, the company offers an extensive range of classic, luxury and vegan ice creams and fruit sorbets all made using the best possible ingredients, free from artificial colourings and flavourings.

GORGEOUS CHEESECAKES (STAND H215)

A small independent family-run company, Gorgeous Cheesecakes, started from a Blackpool home kitchen in 2014. Now a dedicated team of professionals supplying over 20 high end outlets including Selfridges, its signature product is the individual cheesecakes with a ‘not for sharing’ policy.

GRANOLA KITCHEN (STAND G200)

A family business based in South Manchester, Granola Kitchen is on a mission to change the idea that granola has to be hard, brittle and bland. Its soft-baked granola comes in different flavours including Honey & Cinnamon and Vegan Apple Cobbler.

MR ORGANIC (STAND K231)

A plant-based and organic brand specialising in store cupboard staples for conscious foodies, Mr Organic’s range includes tomatoes, pastas, rice, condiments, beans and pulses. Formed 15 years ago by three friends who realised that switching to organic agriculture would result in better taste, better health and better environment, Mr Organic has always been about more than just food.

OCEAN SPRAY (STAND K151)

Founded amidst the cranberry-rich soils of Massachusetts in 1930, Ocean Spray is a unique co-operative with 100% of profits going back to farm owners and a commitment to innovation and quality. Delivering a diverse range of cranberry-based products including cranberry juice, cranberry sauce and dried cranberries, it now offers an expanded range to include blends with other fruits.

ORIGINAL BISCUIT BAKERS (STAND J160)

Only the finest ingredients are used to create gingerbread biscuits from Original Biscuit Bakers, before they are hand-iced by a team of talented artists to create a wide variety of fun and beautiful designs, perfect for every occasion and season including Christmas, Halloween and the summer.

PIEMINISTER (STAND S150)

Still an independent family business, Pieminister began in Bristol in 2003. Brothers-in-law Jon and Tristan started making and selling their pies from a small shop to an ever-growing queue of people, and since then Pieminister has grown from having its legendary pitch at Glastonbury and stall at Borough Market to opening 17 pie shops and selling pies to the finest pubs, retailers, delis and cafés across the UK.

WOMERSLEY FOODS (STAND G193)

An independent, artisan maker of fine fruit and herb vinegars and jams that has been delighting home cooks and chefs alike for many years. Womersley Foods’ premium fruit vinegars and jams come in an eclectic medley of fruit and herb combinations. Now, the range includes jams with 40% less sugar.

WILD OATS BRITISH BARISTA OAT DRINK (STAND BB239)

Created using highest quality British oats sourced from a co-operative of farms, Wild Oats is a new milk alternative with a flavour and texture beloved by baristas in the know. The family-run team will be on hand to show off their award-winning Barista Blend, giving show visitors the opportunity to sample the oat milk described by coffee geeks as ‘the very best out there’.











CXCS (STAND J224)
Designed to help small and medium-sized businesses work safely and efficiently, CXCS offers bespoke health and safety and HR management services, tailored to meet the requirements of the specialist retail sector. Its experienced team provides businesses with the required documentation and simplifies complex issues, giving them peace of mind that they are compliant with the latest legislation.

THE FARMER'S SON (STAND G189)
Based in the heart of Scotland, The Farmer's Son uses the finest all-natural Scottish ingredients to produce its award-winning artisanal Haggis, Black Pudding, White Pudding and Lorne Sausage. Handmade using ethically sourced ingredients and sustainable farming practices, its range is crafted in small batches for the finest quality and freshness.

BRECKLAND ORCHARD (STAND F228)
Family-owned soft drink company, Breckland Orchard, has the simple aim of making the best soft drinks ever with an award-winning range that includes Ginger Beer with Chilli, Pear & Elderflower, and Strawberry & Rhubarb. A small artisan company, it has proudly not supplied supermarkets since starting in 2009, instead exclusively supplying delis, farm shops and cafes acros the UK

PAYST (STAND F224)
Born after exploring and experimenting with Thai street food over many years, Payst uses the freshest produce from the best farms across Thailand and the UK to create incredible pastes and sauces. Its team of chefs at Farang, a Michelin Bib Gourmand restaurant in Highbury, North London, mortar and pestle their ingredients, season them perfectly, then pot them up, ready for you to make the best curry you have ever tasted at home.

WESSEX COUNTRY GAMMONS (STAND K150)
A family-run business that is still thriving today, Wessex Country Gammons employs over 35 colleagues who are all part of the Wessex family. Producer of the finest tasting cured and cooked ham, and British produced pastrami, the company offers range a variety of deli products, along with further Italian and Spanish ranges, bacon and black pudding.

ANGUS & OINK (STAND Q249)
Born from a love of food and travel, Angus & Oink started as a brand dedicated to barbecue rubs and sauces but has since diversified, now producing an astonishing 50 world flavours.

ALL DRESSED UP DRESSINGS (STAND F214)
Made with all natural ingredients and no refined sugars All Dressed Up dressings come in four delicious flavours: Everyday House (the 'classic' one); Tahini & Lime (the 'zesty' one);

> The Farm Shop & Deli Show has been excellent and I've really enjoyed my visit. I've actually found some new suppliers and seen lots of things I haven't before. It's a great platform to showcase new products and I'd definitely come back again.
>
> **JOHNATHAN COBURN, BUTCHER, COCKBURNS BUTCHERS**



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SESSIONS AND SPEAKERS

The Farm Shop & Deli Stage will play host to some of the most inspirational and knowledgeable players in the industry, each primed to offer their expert take on the sector's most pressing issues and thought-provoking topics. Industry heavyweights including John Gill, head of procurement and marketing at Booths; Renée Elliott, founder and owner of Planet Organic; and Julia Kirby-Smith, executive director of Better Food Traders are all signed up to offer their expert take.

Key highlights of the schedule's programme include:

MEETING THE NEEDS OF CONSUMERS IN THE SPECIALIST RETAIL SECTOR, MONDAY, 29TH APRIL, 11.15AM:
What are the latest consumer trends impacting the specialist retail sector? Join this session with some the leading retailers from across the industry, discussing the changing needs of consumers. Understand how behaviours have changed, the outlook for the future, and how these operators are adapting.

THE KEY TO BUILDING AN AWARD-WINNING STORE, MONDAY, 29TH APRIL, 2.30PM:
What does it take to be crowned the best in your field? In an exclusive interview, the show is in session with Farm Shop & Deli Retailer of the Year, James Cunningham of Cunningham Butchers, Food Hall & Steak House. Find out what makes Cunninghams stand out from the crowd, James' views on the future of the industry, and how Cunninghams is adapting to the challenges the sector is facing.

A FORCE FOR GOOD: WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS AND HOW YOU CAN DO YOUR BIT, TUESDAY, 30TH APRIL, 10.30AM:
The need for action in the fight against climate change is becoming increasingly urgent, and we all have a responsibility, whether that be as businesses or consumers. Join the expert panel, as they discuss consumer expectations around sustainable practices, and hear from leading retailers and manufacturers on how they are driving change and the impact it has had on their business.

SUPPLYING WHOLESALE: DISSECTING YOUR BIGGEST ROUTE TO MARKET, TUESDAY, 30TH APRIL, 11.15AM:
Whilst the wholesale route to market is vast and can be, at first, daunting, it is the quickest journey to growth for a manufacturer looking to scale-up its business within the specialist retail sector. In this session, the event is joined by some the UK's leading wholesalers to discuss the channel in depth and understand what they are looking for when deciding whether to list a product or not. If you're looking to grow your opportunities, this is not a session to miss.

PLANET ORGANIC: LOOKING TO THE LONG-TERM, TUESDAY, 30TH APRIL, 1.15PM:
In April 2023, Planet Organic was saved following a last-minute rescue deal led by the chain's founder Renée Elliott. In an exclusive interview, Renée discusses the specialist retail sector, the changing needs of consumers, the turnaround at Planet Organic and what the future looks like for the business.

ROSEMARY'S JOURNEY: FROM FOODSERVICE TO RETAIL (AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN), TUESDAY, 30TH APRIL, 2PM:
One of the most recognisable celebrity chefs in the industry, Rosemary Shrager's career has seen her present TV shows, judge cooking competitions, release numerous books and launch a range of products within retail. In an exclusive interview with Adam Leyland, editor-in-chief at The Grocer, Rosemary discusses her career, her new product range, the changing needs of consumers, the importance of the specialist retail sector and what the future holds.

THE IMPACT OF THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS ON THE SPECIALIST RETAIL SECTOR, WEDNESDAY, 1ST MAY, 10.30AM:
Smaller baskets? Increased prices? Reduced footfall? There is no doubt that the inflationary pressures on both businesses and consumers have had an impact across the UK food and drink industry. But to what extent has it impacted specialist retail? In this session, a panel of experts unpick the consequences of the cost-of-living crisis, how the industry is adapting and the outlook for the future.

Miso & Sesame (the 'zingy' one); and Spicy Harissa (the 'fiery' one). They're dressings that not only look and taste great, but that are good for you too.

THE GARLIC FARM & WILD ISLAND (STAND Q239)
The Garlic Farm on the Isle of Wight is a third-generation brand with a unique range of garlic products – all made in the UK and offering an exciting array of garlicky goods. From fresh, smoked, black garlic and seed bulbs, to its extensive and award-winning ambient collection of mayonnaises, chutneys and pickles even includes garlic beer and garlic vodka.

SORBAFREEZE (STAND K240)
The UK's only BRCGS accredited premier manufacturer of chilled packaging systems, Sorbafreeze can help, whatever your chilled packaging requirements. Providing an extensive and versatile range of off-the-shelf and bespoke insulated boxes, ice packs and temperature-controlled shipping solutions, Sorbafreeze manufactures all its products in-house, reducing customer costs and product lead times.



WHAT ELSE TO LOOK OUT FOR

With five shows under one roof and access granted to all with just one visitor badge, visitors to Farm Shop & Deli Show can benefit from expertise and insight from diverse sectors. Across Food & Drink Expo, The Restaurant Show, National Convenience Show and The Forecourt Show, there are countless more opportunities to witness innovation and get networking, meaning valuable time spent out of the office can have even more of an impact for visitors whose interests go beyond any individual show. Don't miss:

- The dedicated Chefs' Stage at The Restaurant Show which focuses in on the lives and careers of some of the UK's most successful chefs including Akhtar Islam, Kenny Atkinson, Dipna

> "I'm here to see existing customers, as well as network with other businesses which may need services to help them grow. It's bigger than I thought and I would come back again."
>
> **WAYNE MARTIN, DIRECTOR, THRIVE COMMERCIAL FINANCE LTD**





Anand, Brad Carter and Sabrina Gidda.

● A new and exclusive area for book signings. Some of the biggest influencers, chefs and operators from across the industry will be at the shows to give away copies of their latest books. For each of the books, there will be 50 copies that will be given out on a first come, first served basis, as well as the opportunity to meet with the authors and have a photo and get the book signed.

> “This is our first time at the show and it has been really insightful. We have a farm shop, deli, our own butchers and a cheese factory on site, and we focus on local products, so it’s nice to see a further catchment area and make new friends! We’re going to come back tomorrow to see more, but maybe without breakfast this time as there’s lots of samples!”
>
> **GEORGINA FRANCIS, OPERATIONS MANAGER, PUXTON LIMITED**

● After their inaugural success in 2023, there’s set to be a return of Healthy & Natural Zone and Plant-Based Zone to Food & Drink Expo. Healthy & Natural zone will include a range of healthy, wellness and natural products encompassing free-from, vegetarian, low-calorie and organic items to name a few. Meanwhile, Plant-Based Zone will also be making a comeback with everyone’s favourite vegan and plant-based exhibitors showcasing the future of this ever-growing sector.

● In a first for this year, National Convenience Show will host the Retailers’ Den, offering intrepid entrepreneurs the opportunity to pitch their product to a panel of convenience store experts in the ultimate convenience test. Try the products for yourself on Tuesday, 29th April and Wednesday, 1st May at 2.15pm on The Convenience Store Stage.

● Find out how the landscape is changing for women in the industry and how women are continuing to drive change in key areas such as diversity, gender equality and sustainability on The Restaurant Stage on Tuesday, 30th April, at 2.15pm in ‘The female leaders shaping the future’.

● On The Grocer Stage at Food & Drink Expo, hear from TV superstar James Cosmo on how he partnered with Annandale Distilleries to create and launch his own whisky brand, Storyman.

● Lou Pollitt, category and insights director at alcohol-free beer brand Lucky Saint, discusses how changing moderation habits are creating opportunities for growth in ‘Beer for Dry January and beyond’, on The Convenience Store and Forecourt Trader Stage, on Wednesday, 1st May at 12.15pm.

● On Tuesday, 30th April, at 11.45am on The Restaurant Stage, Andy Clarke, resident food and drink expert on ITV’s ‘Love your Weekend with Alan Titchmarsh’, discusses his career in the industry in ‘Andy Clark: What’s hot and what’s not in 2024’.



BOOJA-BOOJA

STAND K249

Booja-Booja is a multi award-winning producer of organic chocolate truffles and ice cream. This is the company’s first time at the Farm Shop & Deli Show and it’s already making a splash, winning two Gold and three Silvers in the Show Product Awards. For 25 years Booja-Booja has been putting deliciousness at the heart of everything it does, creating an impressive range of sumptuous treats and exquisite gifts. All Booja-Booja products are made on one site in Norfolk and are dairy free, gluten free and vegan. Visit the brand at the show to discover its exceptional delights for yourself, including some exciting, yet-to-be-announced, brand new products.



boojabooja.com

JUST GOURMET FOODS

STAND M251



Just Gourmet Foods is your go-to distributor for artisanal Italian products. Beautifully presented extra virgin olive oils rub shoulders with the finest pasta. Organic honeys glisten alongside piles of delicious Italian biscuits. Flavoursome tinned tomatoes are stacked proudly with carefully preserved antipasti. All topped off with a warm Italian welcome that will provide a haven on your journey through the show. Visit Just Gourmet Foods at Farm Shop & Deli Show this year and allow the team to help you choose the best of Italy for your shelves.

justgourmetfoods.co.uk

GODMINSTER

STAND S181

Born in Bruton, Godminster’s range of award-winning organic Cheddars bring the spirit of Somerset to life. The brand’s waxed cheeses have been recognised worldwide as being some of the very best, with numerous accolades from the International Cheese & Dairy Awards, Global Cheese Awards, Great British Food Awards, and many more. From the legendary Vintage Bruton Beauty to the distinctly untraditional truckles, the team at Godminster blend flavour with folklore to make pairings that are perfectly placed at the heart of the cheeseboard.



godminster.com

BYRUBY

STAND K171



Delicious food ready when you are, that’s what ByRuby is all about. The award-winning brand’s dishes are cooked by hand using great ingredients: British chicken, grass-fed British beef and sustainably sourced fish. No hidden nasties – just ingredients a good home cook would have in their pantry. ByRuby prepares all its meals fresh, before fast freezing, ‘pressing pause’ on the flavour and nourishment until you’re ready to ‘press play’ again in time for lunch or dinner.

byruby.co.uk

CLAWSON FARMS

STAND M231



Clawson Farms has recently launched a delicious range of new wax truckle cheeses. The selection combines punchy branding, full of character, with well-loved flavours which have been elevated by using premium ingredients or adding a flavour twist. There are seven products in the range, from savoury to sweet, inspired by over 100 years of cheese making and expertise in pairing and blending flavours together.
clawson.co.uk

RANDOM HARVEST

STAND J161



Random Harvest is a 43-year-old family owned and operated gourmet food brand ranged in some of the finest outlets around the world, including Selfridges, Four Seasons and Harrods. The business is headed up by Matthew, with his children all working within the company. His eldest son, Nick, will be flying over to the UK to exhibit with Sapphire Brands – Random Harvest's sole importer - at this year's Farm Shop & Deli Show. Random Harvest makes more than 100 products, from caramelised balsamics and truffle oils, to handmade confectionery, with luxurious gift packs available too.
randomharvestgourmet.com/au

CAMBROOK FOODS

STAND N241



Cambrook Foods is delighted to be attending the show. Cambrook is a specialist producer of award-winning baked, salted, seasoned and caramelised nuts. It is a Great Taste producer, operating from a BRC accredited (AA grade) factory in Hampshire, offering a range of nuts and snacks to suit all hospitality and retail requirements.
cambrookfoods.co.uk



● The Coronation Food Project was launched in 2023 by His Majesty King Charles III.
The project, in partnership with FareShare, seeks to tackle food waste and food insecurity across the United Kingdom by rescuing surplus food and redistributing it to those needing it most while reducing carbon emissions. Join 'The Coronation Food Project: A King's mission' on The Grocer Stage, Monday, 29th April at 10.30am.

● Find out if demand for plant-based food is waning in 'Where next for plant-based' on The Grocer Stage, Tuesday, 30th April at 3.30pm. Panellists will debate the future of the plant-based category, identifying the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

● For insight into the latest social media craze, join experts on The Restaurant Stage for a 45-minute session on 'TikTok: How to capture an audience in 15 seconds or less'. A tool which can reward users with increased brand exposure, page follows, PR and ultimately sales it's the perfect session for those unsure where to start.

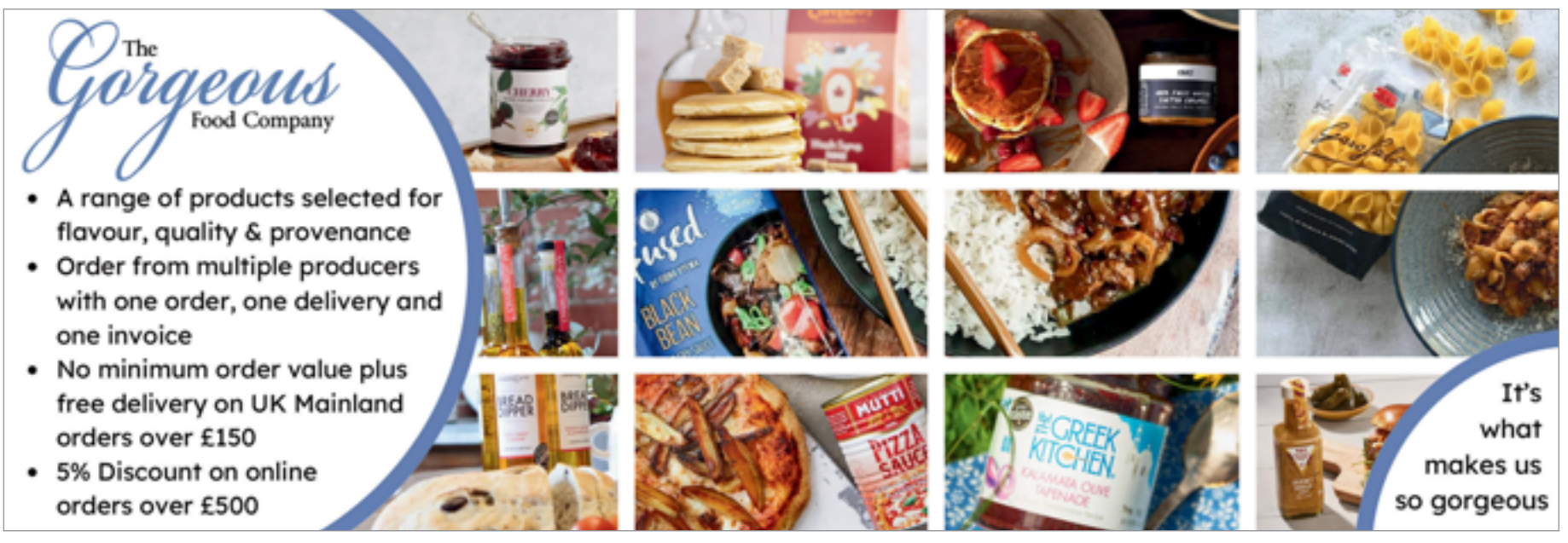
● For those looking for actionable insights to implement into their business, join 'Staff wellbeing: Creating an inclusive culture that allows colleagues to thrive' on Monday, 29th April, 11.15am, on The Grocer Stage.

Covering the entire industry, the UK Food & Drink Shows are unparalleled in their ability to build and foster better relationships, discover business building insight and celebrate innovation, all with the support of the multi-award-winning William Reed brand.



Farm Shop & Deli Show, 29th April to 1st May
Register for your free pass at farmshopanddelishow.co.uk

> "We're a new company and didn't know what to expect as we haven't been here before – we were looking for new suppliers and ideas and it's just been brilliant. The vendor choices are amazing and the event is in the calendar for next year already!"
>
> **CAROLINE COOPER, DIRECTOR, SUNNYSIDE GIFTS LTD**



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WENSLEYDALE WITH MANGO & GINGER
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WENSLEYDALE WITH CRANBERRIES, ELDERFLOWER & MARMALADE
DORMOUSE'S DELIGHT
CLAWSON FARMS

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Introducing Clawson Farms deliciously characterful cheeses. A flavour packed range of seven truckles each made from premium ingredients and represented by a unique personality.

Try them at stand M231 at the Farm Shop and Deli Show, order them from selected wholesalers from 1st May or contact our sales team to find out more - enquiries@clawson.co.uk +44 (0) 1664 822332

COMMENTATORS



RUPERT ASHBY
BRITISH FROZEN FOOD FEDERATION



SALLY NEWALL
SIMPLY ICE CREAM



PAOLO POMPOSI
BADIANI GELATO



DAVID GRIMWOOD
THE FROIZE INN



MATT WHELAN
FIELDFARE

MAKING THE CLASSICS COUNT

In a world that revolves around fast-moving innovation, when it comes to pudding consumers want a fix of tradition



Retro. Traditional. Old-fashioned. Nostalgic.

It doesn't matter how many times trendsetters bang the drum about 'the next big thing' in flavours – what the average consumer really craves is comfort.

And it's rather ironic that what's 'trending' right now across many categories of food and drink is time-honoured treats. Since the peak of the Covid pandemic, retailers and insight analysts have repeatedly cited familiarity as a key sales driver.

Riding on the wings of this 'new wave' of interest in the classics are ice cream and desserts. Kantar reported a growth of 10% in the market during the 12 months to 26th November, 2023, with the British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF) attributing this largely to the re-emerging trend of the 'big night in' as people continue to spend more on entertaining within the home, reserving trips to restaurants for special occasions.

What do customers want from their ice cream?

BFFF CEO Rupert Ashby says sales are additionally being driven by changing consumer tastes, rising demand for dietary-friendly and functional products, and increasing innovation.

"There has been much innovation and diversification in the ice cream and sorbets sector," he explains. "The breadth of variety appeals to all consumers, with both new flavour combinations and comforting classics available."

A key trend, he says, is the rise of vegan, gluten free, lactose free, low calorie and sugar free options. "These products cater to the growing number of consumers who are looking for ice creams that fit in with their dietary needs and lifestyle choices, without compromising on taste and indulgence. As reported by Statista, 28% of UK ice cream consumers said they would be interested in trying vegan ice creams, and 26% said they would be interested in trying reduced sugar ice creams."

Artisan and small batch ice creams continue to be highly sought after – offering consumers a premium and authentic experience.

This appetite for better ice cream chimes with Simply Ice Cream founder Sally Newall, who says the business moved to a new site in 2022 to meet growing demand, while steering into the own label arena.

Simply Ice Cream's main focus is the independent sector, which is important, Sally says, for preserving the art of crafting real ice cream. It is the farm shops, delis and food halls which should be flying the flag for premium products – and in most cases they are the only places where consumers can get their hands on artisan-made ice cream. "Obviously the supermarkets always try to do local," she adds, "and there is a presence of local ice cream in some supermarkets but they are, I think, focusing more on own label now, and taking the market share from the likes of Ben & Jerry's. I think that's going to continue."

Gelato is rising in significance in the UK too. Paolo Pomposi, founder of Badiani Gelato, says sales in his business alone increased by 23.7% between 2022 and 2023. He attributes this to customers seeking products made with natural ingredients.

"The growth in sales reflects not only a trend towards frozen desserts, but also an increasing consumer preference for artisanal, high-quality gelato," says Paolo. "It underscores our commitment to authenticity and quality, which resonates deeply with British consumers looking for an exceptional dessert experience."

Gelato, Paolo adds, is distinct from ice cream, offering something a little bit different to those seeking a frozen treat. "Made with a higher proportion of whole milk and less cream, gelato contains less air and fat than traditional ice cream, resulting in a creamier texture and a more direct delivery of flavours to the palate. The use of natural ingredients, including fresh fruits, nuts and chocolates, enhances the overall taste and appeal, aligning with the growing consumer preference for real, wholesome foods."

Keeping it real absolutely matters, agrees Sally, who thinks a huge part of premium artisan ice cream's appeal is its lack of ultra-processed ingredients, as the presence of UPFs continues to turn off customers. "We're all starting to look more closely at what we are ingesting," she says. "More of us are acutely aware of what is going into our food, and retailers have a duty to be looking at that too. There are some really scary statistics about ultra-processed food, and the fact we are eating so much rubbish in our diets is detrimental."

From the beginning Simply Ice Cream has, like Badiani, been as natural as possible. "Ice cream shouldn't need additives! A lot don't have real dairy – it's skimmed milk powder and fillers," Sally says.

By choosing to work with premium artisan brands, Sally believes retailers can show "they are thinking about where food is coming from. And in return we can be more flexible in terms of flavours and creating bespoke, seasonal and one-off products."

A taste of 2024

While there will always be consumers chasing the latest 'it' flavour, it's childhood favourites that continue to win hearts on the freezer aisle. Mintel puts this down to a desire for reassurance during the cost-of-living crisis, and an ongoing draw towards nostalgia. Its research found 64% of UK adults are looking for premium ice cream in classic flavours such as vanilla.

This lines up with Sally's sales. She says the likes of strawberry, vanilla, chocolate and honeycomb aren't going anywhere anytime soon, while salted caramel has become a 'new classic' and a bestseller. "I know the buyers don't particularly like it," she says, "but actually the public do. It's been quite interesting. A lot of flavours come and go, but salted caramel has stayed a firm favourite – especially in our range. I think people are very much aware of lots of different flavours, and certainly there are people looking for new flavours all the time," Sally adds, "but the majority of sales are always going to be in those simpler flavours."

Paolo's biggest seller is also as simple as it gets. Buontalenti combines milk, sugar, cream and eggs. Alongside its variations, including pistachio, or hazelnuts and hazelnut chocolate spread, it accounts for 55% of his company's sales by volume. "This preference," Paolo says, "underscores a broader trend in the market where consumers are increasingly leaning towards flavours that offer the balance of tradition and innovation, melding classic tastes with novel twists."

If you are going to go 'off piste' it's tropical flavours that are capturing non-traditional customers, says Rupert. "Giving consumers a taste of the exotic, more adventurous flavours,





such as mango, black coconut, passion fruit, lychee, matcha, turmeric and ginger, is growing in popularity. These flavours reflect the influence of global cuisines and cultures, as well as the desire for new and exciting sensory experiences."

Adding cool to your core offering

Upping your ice cream and sorbet game, whether by increasing freezer space, or introducing an ice cream counter, could give your business a boost. This has certainly been the case for Denisa Rance of Mursley Farm Shop near Milton Keynes.

Denisa, who previously operated an ice cream shop in Buckingham, took on the barn and its flock of chickens three years ago, pivoting it into a destination farm shop, with a large cafe and ice cream cabinet filled with iced treats made by her mother using their own eggs, and local dairy.

Around 40 flavours are available, from raspberry ripple cheesecake, to the more unusual Marmite and vanilla. Visitors adore the shop, and attend in droves – particularly during the holidays.

"It's absolutely worth it," she says of the investment. "Customers come here for ice cream all year. It's a driver to the shop. Without that, or the coffee shop, I don't think people would come here for their daily shop and I don't think we would be surviving. We have everything under one roof. So they come for ice cream or coffee, and then pick up some eggs, vegetables or a card. It really works so well."

The proof is in the pudding

Similarly to ice cream, desserts and puddings harking back to what our parents or grandparents might have whipped up on a Sunday afternoon remain bestsellers today.

Chef David Grimwood of The Froize Inn in Chillesford, has been in hospitality for more than 50 years, and offers almost 20 homemade 'sweets' on his menu. "We applaud puddings, and adore puddings," he says. "Over the years I've been making them the classics have always stood the test of time. The bread and butter pudding, steamed sponge pudding, sticky toffee pudding. Trends haven't really changed."

What makes a really good dessert, he adds, is quality, and portion size. "I think size is important for customers. It has to be a reasonably sized portion. But you've also got to please the eye. When someone has a pudding, it has to make them go 'wow'!"

Premium frozen food leader, Fieldfare, sells a lot of croissants, pain au chocolat and other pastries, which are a weekend fixture for many of their customers. The brand says it sees sales of its desserts rise substantially around holidays such as Christmas and Easter, and in advance of high spring it has launched a series of tempting new desserts, offering even more choice to the increasing number of people who are entertaining at home.

"When hosting a dinner party or preparing for a big family Sunday lunch, the pudding is often the one thing that many shoppers will buy in," says Fieldfare's Matt Whelan. "Keeping a good stock of classic desserts that the shopper can just pop in their basket and consider dessert as 'done', is a great way to increase spend.

"Equally, puddings are no longer the reserve of the Sunday lunch. Recently shoppers have been keen to treat themselves and their families to smaller, everyday treats, such as individual puddings or sweet pastries. By offering easy access to individually portioned items such as our loose frozen puddings and pastries, retailers may encourage impulse purchases that increase their shoppers' basket size every time they visit."

One of the main benefits of frozen desserts, Matt adds, is their shelf life, making them a low risk, minimal waste option – something of increasing importance to retailers and savvy customers during the cost-of-living crisis. Matt says these more frugal times have seen consumers cut back on big ticket items, while increasing purchases of more affordable, everyday pick-me-ups – a key driver for Fieldfare's investment in its sweeter selection.

"Smaller, single portion puddings are perfect for such little indulgences. Creating more individually portioned products also offers the opportunity for some truly great product innovation. While many cooks are very accomplished, some classics remain a challenge. The oozy-centered fondant, the perfect wobbly panna cotta, and the painstakingly sliced French apple tart. All our classics are a sure-fire success."

> "A lot of flavours come and go, but salted caramel has stayed a firm favourite – especially in our range"
>
> SALLY NEWALL, SIMPLY ICE CREAM

STOCK CHECK



HEAVENLY HONEYCOMB SIMPLY ICE CREAM

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Individual portions of lightly sugared pastry, bursting with blueberries, redcurrants, blackberries, raspberries, sour cherries and apples.

field-fare.com



WHITE CHOCOLATE AND ORANGE CHEESECAKE JUST DESSERTS

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just-desserts.co.uk

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BARBECUE ESSENTIALS FOR 2024

What's hot...and what's not when it comes to outdoor cooking this year? *Speciality Food* speaks to insiders and experts to reveal all everything you need to know



Us Brits love a barbecue. When the mercury drifts above 21C, it's our cue to shimmy the grill out of the shed, dust the mildew from the garden furniture, and hotfoot it to the nearest farm shop or butcher's counter to bulk buy piles of meat, floury white baps, ketchup and a few bottles of our favourite tipple.

A typical barbecue haul has historically included burgers, sausages, steaks...perhaps a few skewers of marinated chicken breast.

But, say those in the know, our tastes, and our expectations around what a really decent barbecue looks like, have shifted dramatically in the last five years. Consumers in the UK are becoming more discerning, curious and, crucially, braver when it comes to cooking in the great outdoors.

Social media grill king and cookbook author Christian Stevenson (AKA DJ BBQ) believes barbecuing has never been better in Britain than it is now, and points to lockdown as a defining moment for this method of cooking. "You couldn't get a Weber 57 Kettle in lockdown," he says. They were like gold dust. They didn't even hit the warehouses. Because no one could go out or do anything, a lot of people got into live fire cooking, and they branched out from your burgers and sausages and burnt chicken, and started doing pulled pork and brisket – which is the Holy Grail of barbecue!"

According to Mordor Intelligence, 'barbecue' as a category looks set to grow by 3.7% in 2024, while sales of charcoal fired barbecues continue to dominate – accounting for a huge portion of market share (60% in 2022).

James Doyle, head butcher at Hollow Trees Farm Shop, says customers are looking for "convenience, quality, and complementary flavour combinations."

When designing the butchery counter's warm weather offering, James says they ensure everything is tried and tested for ease of use, and accompanied by cooking instructions to take out the guess work. This has proved a successful formula for the shop. "We try to approach things from the customer's perspective," he says. "Not only do we want our products to be good value and using the highest quality meat from our farm – we want them to look inviting too. We often imagine what would pair well with other products available in the farm shop, such as locally produced condiments and freshly baked bread, so only one trip out is needed to gather all the meal essentials."

What's trending in barbecue?

Greg Lewis, development chef at Sykes House Farm, says more consumers are using their barbecue throughout the year, rather than just in high spring and summer, with demand for grill cuts expanding into autumn and winter. "People have also realised if they don't want to go and cook outside, they can even get good results in their air fryer," he says.

Alistair Angus of Thurston Butchers agrees, saying barbecuing today is far removed from what he experienced in childhood. "The weather would hit 25C, my parents would wheel out the barbecue. But they didn't think of barbecuing as a technique. Don't get me wrong, summer is mad for us, and people do tend to cook more in those months, but then we are also getting them coming in all-year-round for barbecue products and joints – even for Christmas Day!"

Brits are embracing American barbecue culture like never before, Alistair adds, saying this is a fast-growing trend in butchery. "People are cooking with larger cuts like a traditional American smokehouse would do. Sales of smokers have gone up no end, and we've got customers coming in wanting a Boston Butt. Five to 10 years ago you wouldn't have heard of that in this country!" Sales of brisket, short ribs and tomahawks have also risen. Customers are after "big statement sharing pieces. Rather than going into a butcher just to get a

TRENDING

BEYOND BURGERS
Consumers are being more experimental, trying different cuts and types of meat, from fattier steaks to lamb ribs and pork tomahawks.

UPF-FREE
Vegetarians and vegans are returning to their plant-based roots, seeking more natural ways to enjoy barbecue food without excess processing. They're looking for innovative barbecue options made with 'real' ingredients, and are experimenting with tofu, tempeh, mushrooms and cauliflower and squash steaks.

SUSTAINABILITY
In the fine food realm, customers want better quality meat from sustainable sources, with an eye on higher welfare.

REGIONAL BARBECUE
If customers are grilling the American way, they are increasingly researching authenticity. For example, the flavours of Tennessee, Texas, Memphis, Carolina and Kansas.

WHOLE CUTS
Learn your Jacob's Ladder from your Boston Butt. Your customers want to go bigger and better with cuts they can cook low and slow, or char over direct heat before braising.



few sausages, people will do a whole brisket, slow smoked and carved into bits like a sharing platter."

Alistair says he's seen consumers' confidence go "through the roof, whereas before they would have veered away from anything large."

James is also seeing an uptick in American-style grilling, saying it's "definitely opening up the barbecue market" and adding that "provenance is key. Customers aren't afraid to experiment, and we love to see how they turn a whole homegrown beef fillet or impressive tomahawk into a sharing barbecue feast for friends and family."

Christian is delighted more people are cooking with cuts like brisket. "They're sourcing these American-style cuts, and getting good results, putting a really nice crust on the outside. The other thing I'm seeing is people are taking the main event outdoors. Instead of doing a Sunday roast inside, they'll take a whole leg of lamb or a topside of beef and do it outside using the direct grill method."

Experimentation is one of the key trends and major factors driving consumer buying patterns, Christian adds. "Two years ago the big thing was the Oklahoma-style smash burger where you get a whole bunch of thinly sliced onions on a ball of meat and smash them in, then hit with yellow mustard. I'm seeing people trying new things and getting more adventurous, and we're seeing more foods from different cultures, like birria tacos – they were so hot last year – and burgers and smoked meats with dips, gravies and consommés."

Another factor butchers and farm shops should take into account this year is the 'low and slow' movement. Greg laughs, saying, "Cows haven't changed that much, but things like brisket are getting more popular every year. And forerib of beef is ideal to cook slowly, but you've got to talk to customers to understand what they need. If you're selling them a lean fillet and they go away and cook low and slow, it's not going to give them the results they want. Pork shoulder is great for this, or lamb shoulder or butterflied leg."

Making the cut

When it comes to meat choices, 'bigger is better' according to butchers and barbecue experts. Greg says the cut of steak customers are looking for changes almost every year. "At the moment I'm seeing a lot more sales of things like picanha steaks," he reveals, adding that people want "a bit more fat – definitely more than 10 years ago when it was all about cooking lean. The picanha is the cap of the rump, with a layer of fat around the top. It's a really tender steak, and until now it's been more seen as a South American thing. But it's very on trend here. We sell so much of it now we end up left with the sirloin or rump steak!"

Greg says there's still an appetite for ribeye steaks – though increasingly he's being asked for them on the bone, or for tomahawks. And steaks are no longer limited to just beef. "Pork steaks and pork on the bone is taking off," he adds. "We sell an awful lot of those, and we're talking loads of pork tomahawks and pork ribeyes."

Pork is "cheaper, but it's been underused over the years. People tend to think about pulled pork, but there's so much more to it," Greg says. There is still a bit of educating to be done at the counter, though, he continues, saying many people are scared of cooking pork, or serving it pink. "We do training days here where we show you can have pork a little bit pink. Medium rare is a bit weird, but a little pink is absolutely fine, and more people are learning that."

Greg points out that, at just a few pounds, compared to upwards of £10 or more for beef, pork steaks present a great, affordable opportunity to lure shoppers who want something that's a cut above, out of the supermarket, and into the fine food realm.

Christian says following on from the popularity of hanger steaks, 2024 is all about tender bavettes and flanks. "We're starting to see bavettes not only in butcher shops, but you can order them on Ocado now!" There appears to be, he says, more interest in the belly of the cow, fattier pieces of meat, and steaks sliced off the shoulder. "I love everything around that shoulder," he enthuses. "It works a bit harder, and there's more flavour there.

"When you cook it down slowly, all that cartilage and fat melts into butter from within." Butchers, Christian says, are being asked more



> "Rather than going into a butcher just to get a few sausages, people will do a whole brisket, slow smoked and carved into bits like a sharing platter"
>
> **ALISTAIR ANGUS**



and more often for bespoke cuts – many of them usually seen as the 'butcher's treat' - such as the 'rump heart' (a fillet cut from the rump), and the 'spider steak' which is "super tender and perfect for asado tacos. That Mexican style is getting more popular. I don't think you can beat beef neck either for the flavour."

The 'bread and butter' of the barbecue

In addition to steak, sausages, burgers and chicken will always be the "bread and butter of the barbecue," says Alistair. "We rarely have an order that doesn't include them. But we've noticed, whereas it was all burgers and sausages 10 years ago and it was hard to get people to buy kebabs, they are shopping differently now. They are trying new things." Alistair has seen a noticeable steer towards marinated products that are easy to cook, such as thin pork steaks and flavoured chicken breasts. "Those are our biggest sellers. Also pork belly strips that have been marinated. Anything that's easy, taking out a bit of the thought process, works really well." The shop has a rotation of around 25 to 30 different marinades, from spicy to sweet, to herbal, so there's always something for everyone. And Alistair sees this as the direction of travel going forward. Simple-to-cook meal solutions.

Over at Hollow Trees, James says the team get through an enormous amount of their best pork sausages and best burgers, made with the farm's own meat, but "another product which always sells well during the barbecue season is our lavender pork ribeye. It's a unique cut and flavour combination. Charring from the hot grill brings a smoky depth to the flavour, complimenting the fragrant herby marinade which has made its way into the meat. It's a real showstopper."

Cheaper cuts of chicken also remain popular, says Greg – particularly wings. "I think people have a bit more appreciation for them now," he explains, putting this down to, like steaks, consumers seeking out more fat in their meat to maximise on flavour and allow for traditional lower, slower cooking techniques.

"People have also become better cooks," Greg adds. "With chicken thighs, they used to put them in the oven forever and they'd go dry, but now they seem to be treating them with respect. They have so much flavour. You can bat them out until they're thin so the skin goes crispy. They're much more versatile than a breast."

> "Pork steaks and pork on the bone are taking off"
>
> GREG LEWIS



When it comes to sausages, Greg says he's finding customers want greater meat content and, crucially, they don't want to be fobbed off with higher prices just because it's 'barbecue season'.

"A lot of places keep the prices the same, but drop the meat content for barbecue sausages. We've gone the other way to keep the meat content high. I'd rather pay 50p more for great sausages." Taking it a step further, Greg has developed a range of frankfurters for his counter as demand for gourmet hot dogs grows, and consumers look for better quality and less additives in these types of products. They appeal to children and adults alike and "they really do fly all-year-round".

What's in flavour with customers?

In addition to American smokehouse-style cooking taking off in a big way, Asian barbecue is having its day. In fact, in 2023 Chinese barbecue became so popular that TikTok accounts putting a spotlight on the city of Zibo and its outdoor grilling techniques, led to it gaining the moniker 'the holy land of barbecue'. Officials began to lay on special barbecue trains to deal with the influx of visitors that ensued, and new food courts sprung up to meet the unexpected demand. Most popularised are the city's shawarma-style charcoal-cooked meats (usually pork belly) served with wraps, crushed peanuts, spring onions, salad and various dips and dressings on the side for dunking – all of which feed into the kind of sharing, experiential dining moments consumers seem to be craving.

"Oriental flavours were really big last year," Greg agrees, saying Chinese and Thai marinades were popular with his customers. "Shortribs and Jacob's ladders take Oriental flavours really well. And chicken wings can be braised in a punchy Korean or Chinese-flavoured broth, cooled overnight in the stock, dried off and put on the barbecue to get some smoke through."

"We sell a lot of Chinese-style pork ribs, pork steaks and kebabs," says Alistair. "I think 'Chinese' as a flavour in butchery, was invented in the 70s. And it's a really good flavour. Another one worth trying is sticky maple. That caters for everyone and is a real crowd pleaser."

Christian is seeing more prevalence of Middle Eastern and North African spicing coming through on the grill. "I think, a few years ago, it was all about the classic American spice rub. But now people are starting to find spices and varieties that weren't so widely available. They want to try those North African vibes of coriander and cumin, and earthier flavours. And there's so much more choice in chillies – I'm always buying dried chillies. Britain is now just such a melting point of all these different countries and cultures which is what makes the barbecue scene here so vibrant and exciting."

Make it smoky

As you've already read, charcoal is ruling the barbecue market in the UK, and one of Christian's biggest pieces of advice for garden centres, food halls and farm shops is to make space to sell charcoal barbecues and their associated kit if you have room. Or at the least choose the highest quality charcoal and

ON THE **SAUCE**

No barbecue or al fresco eating occasion is complete without sauces, relishes and pickles. As a good all-rounder, Alistair recommends Stokes Bloody Mary Ketchup. "It's got vodka and Tabasco and Worcestershire sauce in it. That combined with ketchup is amazing. I'm also noticing loads of people buying into rubs. That's definitely something we're looking to get more of in the lead up to summer."

Selina Talbot at Cottage Delight says retailers with their own cafe or restaurant are in a unique position to showcase the versatility of sauces, chutneys and relishes as the warmer weather comes around. Having an onsite eatery means customers can sample and experience key lines, which could clinch those sales. Maybe offer a hot sauce or barbecue sauce at the breakfast table alongside a full English, or try something different in your sandwich range.

Seeing growth in the table sauce category, the brand has just launched its Smoky Chipotle Barbecue Sauce. "It's smoky, with a bit of spice, and is really geared up to go in burgers and hot dogs, or could be used as a glaze on ribs or wings," Selina says. It sits alongside Cottage Delight's big barbecue sellers – the Hickory Smoked Barbecue Sauce, Peppered Steak Sauce, and Gourmet Burger and Gourmet Hot Dog Sauce, which are a huge hit with customers. "The Gourmet Burger Sauce is a bit like a Big Mac sauce. The same sort of consistency, texture and flavour, but obviously much more premium," adds Selina. "We've been speaking to our customers, and they say our sauces are really strong, and they haven't found anyone else that has the quality we do."

This year she says consumers are looking for something a bit different for the barbecue table and confirms hot sauces and chilli sauces (which can also be used to pep-up braises, chilli con carne and other slow-cooked dishes) perform consistently well for the brand.

Dressings are another consideration for your ambient aisles – something to bring life to the salads that prop up barbecue food. Brits' top five favourites are, apparently, potato salad, coleslaw, pasta salad, green salad with French dressing, and Caesar salad. Though many home cooks delight in making their own dressings, there are equally enormous numbers who prefer the convenience of something pre-made. And if they've gone to the effort of selecting prime cuts for the grill, only the best will do when it comes to the salad bowl.

Philip Marx of RH Amar, suggests Cardini's Caesar Dressing could prove popular this year – especially as it's the 100th anniversary of the Caesar salad. As legend has it, he says, "Caesar Cardini was an Italian immigrant who had a restaurant in San Diego just before prohibition was enacted in America. When that happened, he moved the restaurant over the border to Tijuana so he could serve drinks with the meals and Hollywood A listers, amongst others, would visit his restaurant. One Independence Day he got a big influx of people, more than he expected, and used what ingredients he had to create a salad. And there, in front of everyone, he made the first Caesar salad."

Cardini's Caesar Dressing is made to the authentic recipe (no anchovies in sight), and contains no artificial additives or preservatives. The product has seen significant growth in the last few years, being up 27% in 2023 against 2021 at RH Amar, which is creating a buzz of activity around this dressing for 2024, including in-store promotional plans.







charcoal briquettes, placing them in a prominent position in store for customers to grab and go.

Charcoal, he says, is incomparable to gas, and more people are discovering this for themselves. "I learnt to cook on a gas grill when I was five, but when I got into charcoal there was no going back," he says. "I prefer the flavour you get from it, and the dynamic heat. You're never going to get that intense heat and rich char from gas. Also, there's no flavour in gas!"

Christian suggests aligning yourself with growing consumer interest in sustainability by giving thought to your charcoal supply. He uses Oxfordshire produced Whittle and Flame's charcoal, made from ash trees affected by dieback. "Charcoal is the best for that smoky flavour as it releases the notes from the tree sugars, and using charcoal you can be cooking in six or seven minutes," he says. "Also, you can cook direct or indirect, putting the charcoal in one corner if you're slow cooking. It's all about zoning."

Stocking wood chips for the increasing number of domestic food smokers sitting in people's gardens is a good idea too, Christian says, with a plea to go for wild wood, from fruit trees where possible when it comes to both charcoal and chips. "Use sustainable British hardwood and make sure it's very seasoned. You want 17% moisture rating or less, otherwise you can get some acrid smoke. There are certain trees I do use and certain ones I don't. I love wild cherry, sweet chestnut, ash, alder and oak, and all fruit trees." Apart from wood from commercially-grown and sprayed apples he adds. "I don't want that wood to cook my food!"



STOCK CHECK



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BLACK GARLIC KETCHUP
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A well-balanced, finger-licking, rich sauce with sweetness and depth. Described as the love child between ketchup and brown sauce.

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HICKORY SMOKED BARBECUE SAUCE
COTTAGE DELIGHT

Velvety, sweet and sticky, this rich sauce combines tomatoes, honey, and a delicate blend of herbs and spices.

cottagedelight.co.uk



REFILL: IS IT STILL WORTH INVESTING IN?

It can help stores be more flexible, while minimising waste for retailers and consumers. Welcome to the new refill revolution

COMMENTATORS



AMANDA LEWIS
REFILL



KAREN CLOSE
ALL IS GOOD



ANGUS FERGUSON
DEMIJOHN

Working towards minimising waste, or even aspiring to a zero-waste future, is something fine food retailers are increasingly factoring into their long-term business strategies.

This could involve stopping waste at source in a circular economy by returning containers to manufacturers for reuse, cutting the amount of waste generated on premises, and (on a growing scale), reducing the amount of waste being handled by customers.

There's a lot to be said for refill retailing as a way to achieve this green vision.

Although the refill market seems to have had its 'boom', many retailers are reporting strong success, achieved by folding a refillable option into their existing offering, while creating bold, exciting retail 'hooks' that entice customers through the door, where they can then discover the process of buying loose goods, while reducing their packaging footprint, and often saving money.

Going green

Amanda Lewis, of Refill in Leiston, opened her shop six weeks before Covid, having been inspired by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's BBC TV series, War on Plastic.

"I just thought, I have to do it," she says, adding that the idea of driving to the nearest city to the refill products she wanted, was senseless to her.

Over in Penistone near Sheffield Karen Close, founder of All is Good, a refill and sustainable deli, says she, like Amanda, felt it was pointless in her mission to reduce her carbon footprint, to drive to get the loose goods she wanted – especially as she had a background in retail.

Karen was told her ideas were too 'hippy dippy', when she operated an organic vegetarian cafe alongside a vegetable box scheme 20 years ago. "I always felt it was the right thing to do, but possibly I was doing it at the wrong time," she says.

However, emerging out of Covid lockdowns, which followed devastating wildfires in Australia, she said she felt an urgency amongst the public to do things differently, and simply had to jump on that sentiment to do better by the planet.

"Refill is a bit like flares," muses Angus Ferguson, who set up one of the UK's first bottle refilling businesses, Demijohn, in 2004, going on to have three further high street outlets across Scotland and England. During his time in the Army, while stationed in Germany, he says he was wowed by markets where shoppers were able to fill up their own bottles with food and drink.

Introducing the concept in Edinburgh was, he adds, "revolutionary".

"No one had seen anything like it." And this includes the local council authority, which was so amazed by the low amount of refuse generated by the business, it suspected Angus had been hiding or dumping it elsewhere! "We really were breaking unbelievable new ground," he says.

It took a little while to get consumers used to filling the business's attractive keepsake, collectible bottles with their range of premium oils, vinegars, cordials and spirits, but it was a great success. Though in 2017 Angus, noting a decline generally in high street footfall, decided to pivot his business model, switching to ecommerce, last year opening a 'hub' in Southwest Scotland where customers can refill, online orders can be fulfilled, and planning takes place for their rollout scheme, creating concessions in farm shops. Currently Demijohn is in five outlets, with expansion planned into 2024. "It's a nice thing to do," he explains. "Customers turn up to farm shops, refill, and then they might have a bit of lunch or do some more shopping. It's a massive win for both sides."

Setting out your stall

The area Amanda's shop is based in is considered, in her county, a bit of a poor relation to some of the touristy seaside hotspots nearby, but she believed, with a great butcher and greengrocer still in business on the high street, that a refill shop would marry well with the local offering. Spending time building up a social media presence in the months before opening proved fruitful. "Everyone was keen to get involved and liked the idea of shopping in a different way," she says, adding that she's built up a strong band of loyal customers, who followed her when she moved premises to run alongside a nearby social supermarket. "It's great because they can buy surplus stock from supermarkets here and then buy refills of smaller amounts of things they need to feed their family. It helps them to spread their budgets and reduce food waste further."

To maximise sales at All is Good, Karen knew she needed to have an attractive offering outside of refill. "It was very apparent to me that if we went down the refill only route we would struggle to get people through the door," she says, adding that she felt people's perceptions over price, or feeling self-conscious asking for things in specific quantities, might stop them popping in. "I looked at the audience and decided what I needed to do was to create lots of different reasons for people to come into the shop, then they could discover the refill by accident."

All is Good partnered with local artists and makers who'd amassed huge followings on social media during Covid lockdowns, allowing them to display their products in the shop, and charging a small commission for any sales. "It really works for us," Karen says.

Changing perceptions

A big part of the refill prospect is challenging customers' preconceptions – particularly that it's more costly. Angus says he has no doubt the tide is turning. "We have definitely seen a wake up, as people realise they need to do something to help with what is happening with climate change. Everyone doing a small bit really can make a difference. Refilling went up the list of priorities. It is a difficult thing to do, to remember to clean out your bottle and take it to a shop, but once that becomes a ritual, it's much easier. We're finding people are much more receptive to it these days.

Amanda agrees, saying a big part of what she does is trying to ensure as many people as possible feel comfortable with the concept of refill...to make it friendly and appealing. "A lot of people think shopping packaging-free is expensive. But actually, most of my customers think I've forgotten to put things through the till because they're surprised how cheap it is."

Posting pictures (with permission) of a customer's shopping, alongside the receipt on social media is a good way to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of this way of filling up a basket. "But the best way to get the message across is for customers to tell friends and family."

One of the ways All is Good gets customers on side is by encouraging them to bring in their own bottles, rather than buying new in the shop, which might sound counterintuitive, but "that way the initial outlay is low, and people can slowly work their way through the products," says Karen. "We have a Net Zero plan for 2035, and a big part of that is initiatives like this, and educating people. There is a lot of demonisation of plastic, but at the end of the day it takes less energy to produce than glass. It's about how many times you reuse it."

Something else that proves a good selling tool is ensuring customers understand they don't have to lug home a big bag of flour/oats/spices/sugar. "We don't force people to buy 500g or 100g. One of the biggest things we sell is spices. We have a zero-waste spice wall, and people come back to top up their spice jars from home. But if they only want a couple of teaspoons, we can do that. It makes a difference."

Stocking for success

Getting your offering right is essential. Too little refill stock and customers might perceive that it's not worth visiting to top up their weekly shop...while too much will leave you with the mammoth task of shifting stock that, unpackaged, likely has a lower shelf life than if it were sealed in plastic.

Amanda says she's surprised that her biggest sellers in food and drink are snacks, sweets and chocolates, though this tallies with industry insight, which cites both sustainability, and 'treating moments' as big trends for 2024.

"Honestly, it's a shocker. I thought I'd be selling more pasta, rice and pulses." Amanda's shop offers a 'posh pick and mix, with customers able to choose from different nuts and fruits covered in chocolate. "And we have a range of organic and Fairtrade chocolate buttons from Cocoa Loco. They're all hand made. That's a really lovely UK-based family business. We

> "People want to know what they can do to help, to make our lives better, and to make the Earth a better place to live"
>
> **HUGH FEARNLEY-WHITTINGSTALL**

have a few grandparents come in to fill up for when their grandkids come around.

"And Hodmedod's are brilliant. They do a range of snacks in bulk and are one of the only companies in the UK, as far as I'm aware, able to grow quinoa and chia seeds here, which means we're not having to import them."

One of the biggest success stories for Amanda has been working with wholesaler Wigan Wholefoods. "They're supplying more and more stores across the country, and they're happy to provide bulk goods in paper packaging. It's the only place I've come across that does that. I can get 12kgs of pasta at a time in a paper sack!"

Household cleaning products and soaps from Fill are part of the lifeblood at All is Good, says Karen. "The bottles look amazing. People want to display them. We sold so many bottles in the first week we had them in the shop – it was ridiculous." Growth here has been exponential. Starting with a line of six products, with a plan for expansion slowly across two years, the shop was forced to increase its range and volume within just six months, supported by Crowdfunding in the community, which raised £25,000, demonstrating a local appetite for what Karen and her business partner were doing. Washing liquid and handwash are staunch customer favourites. "And in terms of food, it's always nuts and seeds. They go really well. We sell loads of them. Also, the more quirky things like refillable gin - we sell tonnes of that at Christmas."

Christmas is a prime time for Angus as well, with sales of sloe gin and bramble-infused Scotch whisky soaring. "In the spring we usually





see demand for our new harvest extra virgin olive oil - there's nothing like fresh oil, a few weeks' old, when it's luminescent green. It's a bit of heaven." In farm shop settings, oils and vinegars are a hit, especially black garlic balsamic.

"It's fabulous. People find this incredible ingredient, and it transforms their cooking. Use it for beautiful salads, amazing roast veg, or even put it in pasta sauce – and everyone thinks you're Jamie Oliver!"

How to make refill work

Karen says buying in bulk is better – especially when it comes to household cleaning products. "One of the reasons we crowdfunded was, when we originally started, we had 20lt containers with little pumps on. It became apparent they weren't user-friendly. We had to man them ourselves, which took people away from the till. And the more popular it got, the harder it was to manage." All is Good invested in huge barrels of product which, while an expensive outlay, meant customers could help themselves, creating an interactive experience in store.

Amanda's biggest piece of advice is to be aware of how much time refill takes. "A lot of big supermarkets have tried to break into refill, and it hasn't worked," she says.

"They don't have the time or the amount of staff to keep on top of it, and to keep it looking fresh. That's the biggest thing. You have to actually care about doing things this way, and not just see it as a money spinner."

Selling other products alongside refill, repeats Karen, is absolutely vital. Her refillable options account for only 25% of sales.

"You need to dangle something else. We have people coming in for coffee, or for sourdough made a couple of miles away. Then they end up going out with a piece of artwork or more food, or some handwash. They will stumble into the refill area and go, 'oh wow, refillable gin'."

Keeping it local is as important to Karen as minimising waste. "We make sure everything we buy is made by local people, using local products so we are supporting growing the local economy, which is so important as well."

Space is another consideration, says Angus, as refilling can have a large space requirement, especially if you want to do it well. "A lot of retailers are the same in that they want an awful lot of stuff in their shops and will fill them to the gunnels. That can be not so conducive to a good customer experience."

Space between counters, shelving and customers needs to be carefully planned, he adds. "They hate it when they want to look at something and someone else tries to squeeze past. Stand in your shop, watch what happens around your shelving." Perhaps you need to create more space, or move things around to accommodate refills?

"Farm shops tend to have enough space," adds Angus. "And we have been successful with them. If they are doing an expansion and decide to add a new area, they've approached us and said, 'we want to do something now'. I'd say if you're planning to expand, that's the time to really think about refill, so you can tailor the space and create a nice enjoyable visit."

The importance of doing better

Amanda is unwavering in her view of refill being one of many ways store owners and shoppers can live and operate more sustainably. "Obviously we're in the middle of a huge climate crisis, and any small thing we can do will add up," she says.
"It's important companies focus on being more plastic free and environmentally focused. I know it's a fine line for some, but if they can do it, then they should, as this way of shopping desperately needs to be accessible for the masses."





FINAL CALL

At *Speciality Food,* we have summer on the brain. While the rain and chilly weather may be lingering longer than we'd like, we know that sunny days and warm evenings are just around the corner – and that means it's time to start stocking your shop with food and drink fit for everyone's favourite warm weather activities, from the infamous rain-or-shine barbecues to lovely seaside picnics. This year, could you take the festivities up a notch? Why not host an event or create a themed area in your shop around a key selling point, such as a sport-themed Olympics bash or Mexican-inspired barbecue feast?

Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, however, spring has only just sprung, and it's worth stopping to smell the flowers, so to speak. Spring naturally brings with it a sense of opportunity and optimism. We're feeling it at *Speciality Food* – especially after receiving a fantastic response to our sustainability-themed Green Issue in February/March – and we hope you are too. As always, we would love to hear from our readers about their big plans for growing their shop's profile this year, whether that's diversifying into a new area of business, solidifying a brand ethos into firm business commitments or investing more time into defining a USP.

Are you planning to spring clean your business this year? That might take the form of a physical clear-out, deep clean and rework of your shop layout, but it could also be a chance to dig into your finances, review contracts and chase invoices; take a digital cleanse, offering the opportunity to tidy up your website and review your social media performance; or perhaps you could take some time to perform some mental clearing out, by checking in with yourself and your business goals for this year.

Behind the scenes, the *Speciality Food* team is as busy as ever. We're excited to get out from behind our desks to meet new and familiar industry faces at upcoming trade shows. We're also spending some time digging into exciting food industry trends and the forward-thinking brands that are pushing the boundaries. We look forward to continuing to connect with you about all this and more over the months to come.

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

5 MINUTES WITH
CARA LEE DELY, HEAD OF WINEMAKING BOLNEY WINE



WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Adventure and new challenges – when I was growing up I had a fear that one day I would regret not doing something, so I made an agreement with myself to do something at least once to know for sure that I don't like it before writing it off.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
When you have a plan for the day, wine dictates how this plays out. The excitement is that you never have to think of the day being the same. It opens your mind up to thinking on your toes, and allows you watch how diverse the life of a wine can be, seeing it grow into something exceptional.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
The greatest challenges always relate back to what excites you, because wine is so temperamental and is constantly changing, it creates an environment that can be quite unsteady.

You need to be realistic and flexible to the fact that your day could take an unexpected turn in the name of quality and perfection, this can be tough for someone like me who thrives on organisation and planning.

THOUGHTS ON THE DRINKS/ ENGLISH WINE INDUSTRY?
Whilst Bolney has been producing wine for over 50 years – the UK wine industry as a whole is still very young and pioneering.

This creates a platform for such an exciting time ahead, especially for winemakers.

It has opened up the opportunity to be innovative and define the style of the region in order to create wines that are unique to us and launch this further into international markets

TEA OR COFFEE?
Coffee, definitely, how else do you stay awake during harvest? Or red cappuccino which is made from Rooibos tea - this is reserved for when I've had my ration of coffee for the day

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
Sea anemone – it was disgusting. I also had a cocktail that used Blood Curacao which is essentially pigs' blood.

FAVOURITE BOOK?
I know you probably want me to give you an inspirational wine book that changed my life, but actually The Art of Racing in the Rain by Garth Stein – I ugly cried at the end, it was just beautiful.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Haha – we play this game in the winery! Savoury – I can have cheese on anything! But let's be honest, I actually often combine the two, everyone thinks it's very weird but how good is honey and goats' cheese?

BE CONNECTED



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Next issue available: May 2024

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SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE



Inside the next issue of Speciality Food

- Summer Drinks
- Oils, Vinegars & Dressings
- Crisps & Bagged Snacks
- Outdoor Eating centrespread
- Condiments
- Trendsetters





CHEESE BUYER 2024 ISSUE COMING SOON

For more information contact: louise.barnes@artichokehq.com 01206 508629

TRIED & TESTED



POMELLO & ELDERFLOWER APERITIF, POMELLO

This is such a gorgeously elegant drink. Let's talk about the bottle first – which wouldn't look out of place in a 1920s boudoir. The baby pink, ridged glass screams sophistication and certainly catches the eye in store. But, as they say, it's what's inside that counts, and here that's a real treat. Pomello is fresh, aromatic and floral, with an edgy bite of citrus. We loved it neat over ice with a slice of fresh grapefruit, but it also makes for a dreamy spritz with tonic or bubbles – a modern take on the Hugo (which was one of the 'it' drinks of summer 2023). Position it alongside some interesting citrus/floral mixers or, if you have a cafe or restaurant on site, consider this as a bougie addition to your spring and summer drinks menu!

pomello.world



LEMON CHEESECAKE BAR, DIVINE CHOCOLATE

This is part of Divine's bright new dessert-inspired range. We tried the complete trio, from a really fruity Bakewell, to a Tiramisu bar that packed a punch with coffee (in fact it's one of the most delicious coffee-flavoured chocolates we've eaten). But it was Lemon Cheesecake that reigned supreme in tastings. Combining creamy white chocolate with buttery biscuit pieces and a zing of lemon oil, the bar was not too sweet, well balanced, and so fresh. It's like a bite of springtime in every mouthful. Divine only uses 100% Fairtrade cocoa and sugar, all-natural flavours, and is free from palm oil too. A worthy contender to bring a touch of light to your confectionery selection.

divinechocolate.com



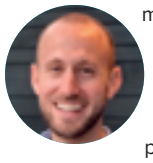
TRUFFLE CHIPS, RUSTLE CRISPS

We found these crisps completely irresistible. Made in small batches using 100% sunflower oil, and cooked at a lower temperature to reduce oil absorption, they are thicker cut, and have the most perfect, toothsome crunch. They're created by chefs, and made in Croatia using locally-grown potatoes from a cooperative of farmers who pride themselves on quality. Available in green jalapeno and paprika flavours, it was Truffle that piqued our interest most. Every single bite was speckled with flecks of real truffle, gathered from land along the Istrian peninsula. The flavour is phenomenal. And the crisps' thickness makes them ideal for scooping and serving alongside dips.

rustlesnacks.com

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Alex Crepy, Amelie



My father Regis and I own Amelie - a restaurant in Cambridge known for flammekueche (a skinny pizza which we've adapted from the traditional Alsace dish and introduced over here). It's a tasty fast food that has attracted loyal customers and numerous awards including the Good Food Guide's 2024 only 'Little Gem' in Cambridgeshire.

We're pleased to have also launched Amelie Distribution, the UK's first flammekueche distribution and wholesale service supplying quality bases to the hospitality and leisure industries. With the simplicity of our dishes, top quality ingredients are key, and having trust in our suppliers to consistently provide that quality is crucial. Over the 30 or so years that my father has been an award-winning chef in East Anglia he's been able to source excellent food, wines and ingredients, and has good personal relationships with fabulous suppliers. Tim Partridge, a farmer in Lavenham, for example, supplies our lamb, which is grass-fed and meltingly tender, almost like fillet steak. Nethergate Wines, the independent merchant near Bury St Edmunds, has recommended wines for my father's restaurants for years. As specialists in sourcing different wines from around the world that are often relatively unknown, we've been able to introduce our customers to a varied and interesting selection and at a good price.

It's always exciting to discover new suppliers doing interesting things. Messiah Mushrooms, for example, is run by Kelly and Arash, whose innovative skills turn waste into high value products. To address food scarcity and demand for fresh non-meat produce locally, they've developed ideal living conditions for fabulous fresh oyster mushrooms, mixing waste cardboard with straw, waste coffee from local cafes, and oyster mushroom spawn. As the mushrooms grow they are bathed in a 528Hz frequency sound and misted with restructured water. The delivery of a basketful of these unique tasting fungi really inspires us to cook.

Hot Numbers Coffee is another great local independent. Being able to offer our customers a really good cup of coffee is a must for us. This speciality roaster in Cambridge loves its coffee! It ethically sources quality beans and trades directly with suppliers to ensure farmers get rewarded for their hard work based on a quality score that each coffee is given.

Working closely with them, we've got a great choice for our customers and can buy at a competitive price to pass on.

> "With the simplicity of our dishes, top quality ingredients are key and having trust in our suppliers to consistently provide that quality is crucial"

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo

A FRESH START FOR SPRING

As the weather gets brighter, our plates demand a lighter touch



The debate over whether fresh or dried pasta is better is one that will likely never be settled. There is one school of thought that pasta made and consumed on the same day is infinitely better. But ask any Italian (they eat an average of 20kg of the stuff per year), and they'll tell you it really depends on the season and the dish you're cooking.

Dried pasta – the artisan bronze-drawn type – really is superior at 'holding' sauces, which cling effortlessly to its porous surface. Dried pasta is often cheaper, easy to store, has a long shelf life, and gives consumers and chefs access to numerous grain varietals.

Fresh pasta eating, on the other hand, tends to fall into two camps. There are the home cooks who want to roll up their sleeves of a weekend, flexing their muscles as they wrestle their own dough into silky folds of pasta sheets or lengths of spaghetti. Then there are the convenientists – who appreciate the snappy cooking time of ready-prepared fresh pasta. Sheets for layering al forno dishes and getting them to the table super-quick. Or filled pastas that cook in minutes, packing a punch of flavour that requires little more than a dressing of oil or butter and a dusting of Parmesan.

Artisanal fresh filled pasta is the perfect solution for today's consumer, who research shows is increasingly looking for easy meal solutions that put quality first.

There's a world of choice in this sector. From the rich, slow-braised lamb-filled agnolotti parcels of the Piedmont region, to delicate-skinned tortellini, and plump, deep-filled ravioli.

Their time-saving quality, and appeal to a broad spectrum of people (from singles, to couples, to families trying to squeeze a decent meal in between swimming lessons and homework) makes these pastas an excellent choice for retailers wanting to tick all the convenience boxes this spring.

Garofalo has six varieties to choose from – all made with the same rich, yolky coloured dough, formed with just flour, semolina and free-range eggs.

Porous and delicate, yet toothsome, each piece is deeply filled for maximum impact, and crafted without anything artificial.





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(spicy & intense)