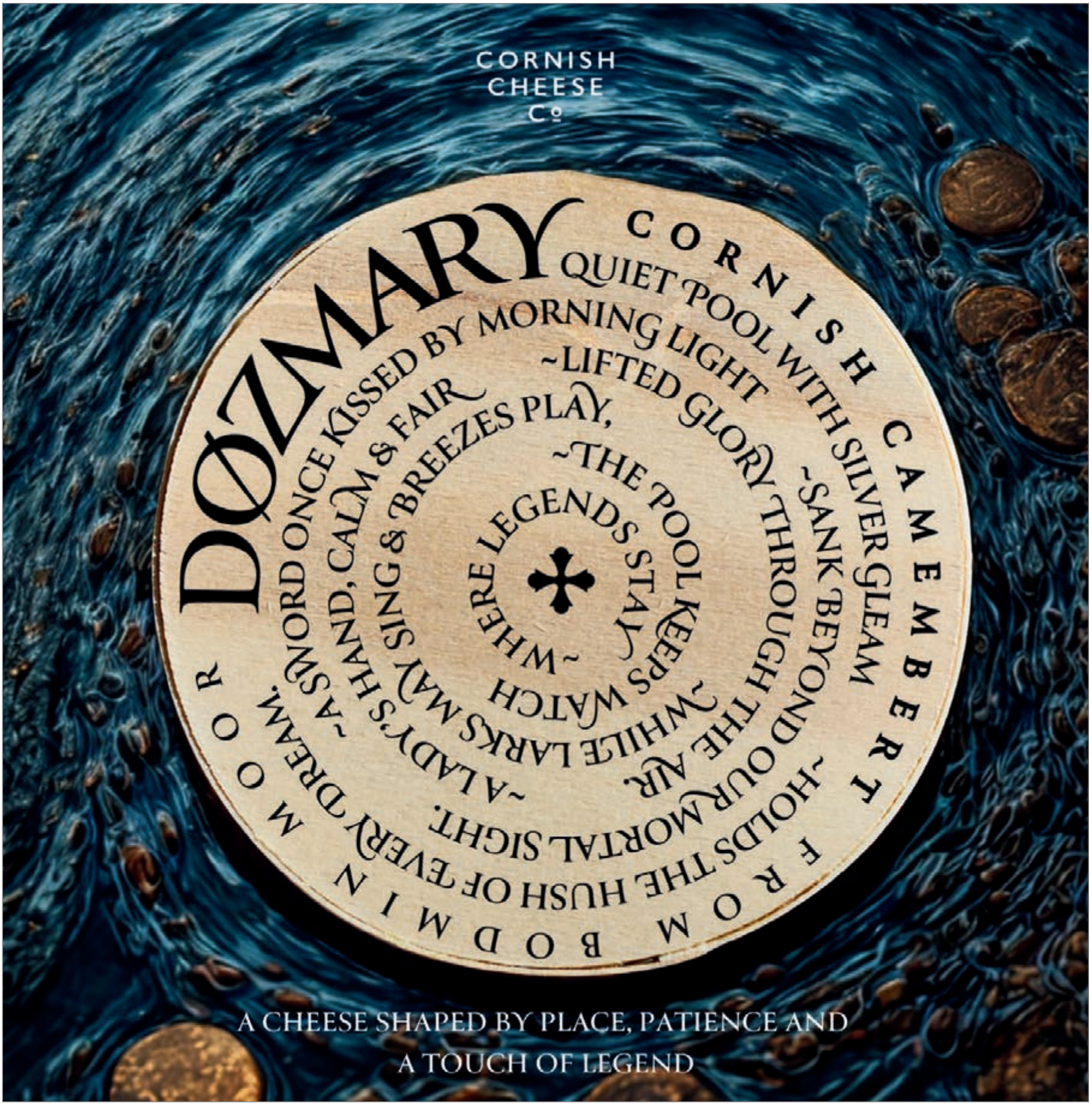
SPECIALITY FOOD

PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS



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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the October issue of *Speciality Food*. Autumn is well and truly here – golden sunshine is making way for chilly nights, and consumers across the UK are hunkering down and starting to plan for Christmas.

In this issue we share plenty of inspiration to get you ready for the most valuable season of the year, from the trends worth knowing to help shape the offering on your shelves to merchandising hints and tips to inspire you to make the most of what you have (and create a little magic in the process).

We also share some of our favourite gift-ready products that will fly off the shelves when your customers get into gifting mode, tell the story of one of the Christmas cheeseboard's most iconic centrepieces, and highlight the joys of excellent British cheese – complete with plenty of pairing suggestions to help boost your cheese counter sales.

All that, and we delve into the opportunity that party season represents, too – from the products to stock and why to how to merchandise and upsell them, it's a great read.

Until next time.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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Don't Underestimate The Lipstick Effect

Foodluxxing, the latest foodie iteration of The Lipstick Effect, is a powerful force in food right now. Here's why

The world of fine food is a beautiful one – filled with expertly crafted products, attractively packaged and sold at prices that are fair but can often seem luxurious – so it's only natural that it would spawn its own take on The Lipstick Effect.

Originally coined by Estée Lauder's Leonard Lauder to describe the penchant for shoppers to opt for smaller, more affordable indulgences when budgets are tight – a luxe make up item as opposed to a designer handbag, new car, or glamorous holiday, for example – the latest take on the trend is foodluxxing (or 'little treat culture' if you're on TikTok), a social media-driven movement new for 2025 and set to stay thanks to the heady combination of the cost-of-living crisis and great marketing.

These days, a luxurious bar of chocolate, or a single origin and artfully roasted bag of coffee beans transformed into the ultimate (latte art-topped) flat white, are as likely to be a hit on socials as a far-flung getaway – and this provides a valuable opportunity for fine food retailers.

A profitable trend

"The numbers tell the story," says the team at Hot Pickle Innovation Lab. "67% of consumers globally say they seek out small indulgences to manage stress or reward themselves (Mintel). Over the past five years, indulgent new product launches in Europe have grown at around 10% a year, well ahead of the global average of 7% (Statista & Innova). And mood is the biggest motivator: Innova found that the top reason EU consumers choose indulgent foods is to boost mood, followed by sensory pleasure and novelty. Nearly half of Europeans now eat indulgent snacks once a day or more, with enjoyment, comfort, and reward driving the habit."

"This is a phenomenon that has been around since the Great Depression," explains Andrew Niven, strategic market intelligence manager at The Knowledge Bank. "It delivers a psychological lift, offering a sense of normality and reward during the cost-of-living crisis, while also feeding into the culture of sharing small luxuries online. In its current guise foodluxxing has also taken up the Insta-everything baton – it's about being the first to find an indulgent, affordable treat and sharing your discovery online."

For Tom Gatehouse, senior strategist at Egg Soldiers, the foodluxxing trend doesn't have to warrant carting in reams of decadent food and drink products – simply leveraging the range you already stock, perhaps merchandising them as 'moments', is all that's needed.

"Food and emotion are inexorably linked. So too, sadly, are food and finances. The happy middle ground for many? Moments of pleasure and joy in small quantities," he says.

"That connection is known across the food industry, from trendy bakeries and street food pioneers all the way up to the likes of Erewhon in the States peddling a $19 strawberry. Less said about the strawberry in terms of 'trend longevity' the better…

"For the grounded consumer in the artisan retail space, it's about spending that little bit more on the jar of 'Nduja paste they just know takes a pasta dish to new heights; the premium bedtime tea infusion to nail a night's rest; or the small batch bagel chips for a movie night treat. Maybe we should call it bite-sized escapism…"

A golden opportunity

Self-gifting is on the rise across the board, but the opportunities for consumers to indulge in foodluxxing are even richer at Christmas – as is, therefore, the chance for retailers to profit. "The golden quarter, and Christmas in particular, provides huge opportunities for speciality retailers. With the latest ONS data on household spending indicating that consumers remain cautious, we're likely to see shifts away from bigger-ticket items and the 'Lipstick Effect' play out strongly across fine food and drink," says Elinor Tyler, head of consumer brands at Storm Communications.

"While some shoppers are cutting back, many will still be looking for ways to bring joy and indulgence into their celebrations. Whether that's a bottle of wine with a beautiful label, an artisan wax-wrapped cheese, posh chocolates or small-batch spirits, there are plenty of ways retailers can offer that sense of affordable luxury."

Branding plays a key role here. "When we purchase these products, we're not just buying taste, we're buying the story, the status, and the shareability that comes with it," says Kelly Mackenzie, founder and creative director of White Bear Studio. "Branding done right conveys quality, it justifies a premium price point, and lets the buyer feel like they're part of something bigger; a club, a culture, a lifestyle, a moment worth sharing. Social media is our best friend here: a beautifully designed pack doesn't just sit in a cupboard, it takes centre stage on the table at a dinner party and has it's own IG story. Design is no longer a functional decision, it carries emotional weight, it's a status symbol in its own right."

"In many ways, branding has become a form of social currency," she continues. "Brands that get this are design-led storytellers. They know that every detail, from pack to logo to colour choice, is part of the luxury people are really paying for."

"The lesson for retailers is clear: in tough times, indulgence sells. Whether it's a restaurant brand on a supermarket shelf, a 'traded-up basic, or a functional sweet with benefits, consumers are looking for products that deliver joy, comfort, and a sense of reward at an accessible price point," conclude Hot Pickle Innovation Lab. "In uncertain times, small luxuries matter more than ever — and food is where people are finding them."



"Rise in the fall"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

The British Prime Minister in the late 1950s, Harold Macmillan, used a phrase summing up the state of the nation post the second world war. It was 'most of us have never had it so good'.

The remark has left a notable legacy in the lexicon of British politics, and funnily enough I often have recalled it when working at Partridges in Chelsea on the Kings Road when I thought we were doing well. Yet on reflection, and for many reasons, we were very lucky to survive there for so long.

Despite the day-to-day challenges in running a speciality food shop known to all of us and the constant threat in dodging so many bullets, suddenly emerging out of the darkness, we had managed to carve a sustainable niche in the community that endured for 53 years. Which, I note, is longer than the life span of an African elephant.

The background to all this is that our lease had come to an end. Our original plan was to stay for as long as possible but circumstances beyond our control intervened. Negotiations for a new lease did not go well and we had to confront the logistical difficulties of closing a large food shop. There was a lot of work to be done at great cost and under depressing circumstances. A redundancy situation, a lot of stock and equipment to dispose of and dilapidations to be considered which in the end were avoided by leaving the fixtures and fittings to the landlord. With a deadline fast approaching timing was everything.

At the end the departure was an extremely costly endeavour. Our shop lease like many others in Chelsea was 'outside the act' which meant no compensation for the tenant on surrender of the lease. On February 2nd we closed our doors for the final time. It was not the best spring we had ever had.

It took us until summer to regroup and fortunately we have another, smaller Partridges just one mile away from our original location. It is a third of the size of our old shop but perhaps more manageable on a human scale. It also needed some attention, and in the summer we carried out a renewal of the shop refrigeration which has cut our energy costs considerably, I am pleased to say. It is a different environment to our old shop and there is still structural work to be done and the usual challenges to endure – we have a rent review this year as an example. But whereas on the King's Road we were focused on managing the very large costs, in Gloucester Road we can concentrate on growing the business – something that has become apparent as we reached the end of the summer.

So now in the autumn there is something to celebrate. With the launch of our new website, online sales have increased above those of our old shop, we have attracted new corporate customers, have received an export order from Japan, been filmed for a Channel 5 documentary and been invited to hold the World Chelsea Bun Awards in a prestigious location and as part of a British Fair in Osaka. We have also been granted a new Royal Warrant from HM King Charles. Plus, our overheads are just 20% what they were in our old shop.

Dare I say it, there may be a growing upsurge of energy and a greater feeling of independence as we head towards our busiest time of the year.

Who knows what lies in wait around the corner in these unstable political and economic times?

But perhaps we didn't have it quite so good in Chelsea as we thought.

> "Dare I say it, there may be a growing upsurge of energy and a greater feeling of independence as we head towards our busiest time of the year. Who knows what lies in wait around the corner in these unstable political and economic times?"



Allergen assessment template created to boost safety and consistency

With instances of food allergies rising across the UK, IGD has created an allergen risk assessment template to improve consistency in allergen procedures and therefore the safety of allergy sufferers.

The new template is the result of collaboration between IGD's Technical Leaders Forum and Network, a group of senior stakeholders throughout the food and consumer good industry.

Kate Reynolds, senior manager, Resilience Programme at IGD, said, "The launch of this allergen risk assessment template demonstrates how industry collaboration can deliver positive change. We understand that adapting to new procedures will involve some policy updates and staff retraining, but we see the template as a positive development, designed to streamline risk assessment, empowering teams to deliver safer food for all."

Ross Dennison, technical director at Bakkavor and Technical Leaders Forum co-chair, said, "Together with the IGD, we are bringing retailers and food manufacturers together to create a consumer first approach to allergen management through a cross-industry framework."

Nadim Ednan-Laperouse OBE, founder of The Natasha Allergy Research Foundation, the UK's food allergy charity, said, "We are pleased that the food industry is coming together to improve allergen management. We welcome the launch of the new guidance and risk assessment template and hope this will give greater reassurance to the millions of people living with food allergies in the UK and their families."





Outlook for plant-based milk category remains positive despite dip in sales

Despite dropping in value by 0.8% over the past 12 months, data has shown that the plant-based milk sector is still viewed favourably by 62% of UK shoppers.

Research carried out by Oddlygood Group found that of the lapsed plant-based milk shoppers who responded to the survey, 53% would return to purchasing it, citing health information (28%), taste (26%) and price (26%) as the reasons to reinvest.

Coconut milk is considered to be the strongest entry-point for non-users (13%), but perceptions of quality are proving to be an issue – with 21% of shoppers describing the taste of plant-based dairy alternatives as artificial, 22% considering them bland, and a fifth feeling that they are overpriced.



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Farmers named second most respected profession

According to the NFU's latest Farmer Favourability survey, UK shoppers value farmers' role in supplying high quality food, caring for animals and protecting the countryside.

For the third year in a row, farmers have been named as Britain's second most respected profession, below nurses. The results from the survey showed that 92% of Britons recognise the value of the UK's productive farming sector; 89% believe that farmers should grow as much food as possible to support national food security; more than three-quarters trust British food more than food produced overseas; and over half feel that the role farmers play in society is underappreciated.

Tom Bradshaw, NFU president, said, "British farming is the bedrock of the country's largest manufacturing sector – food and drink – worth over £150 billion to the economy and supporting more than four million jobs. Just as we rightly celebrate the strength of our food and drink sector, we must also recognise and invest in the people who make it possible: our farmers and growers."

New EU deal set to benefit food sector

The Government has announced its Plan for Change mission which includes improving agrifood trade with the EU.

Food and drink businesses which export to the UK will benefit from an SPS agreement which is set to add £5.1bn to the UK economy annually and increase the volume of exports to the UK by 16%.

The new agreement includes measures to cut costs and red tape on products such as dairy, eggs, red meat and fish to make it easier for British businesses to trade with EU countries, grow exports, create jobs and make supply chains more resilient – helping to reduce pressure on prices. Over 1,500 UK products are currently affected by SPS measures including 100% documentary checks and up to 30% physical checks, but this update will mean that these routine SPS border checks will be eliminated – a boon to businesses like Neal's Yard Dairy which cannot afford delays due to the perishable nature of its products.

David Lockwood, director at Neil's Yard Dairy, said, "Neal's Yard Dairy looks forward to the UK and EU implementing the UK-EU 'reset' agreement as quickly as possible to allow us to focus our core business: selecting, maturing and selling British cheese both within the UK and overseas.

"The additional requirements for export to the EU post-Brexit have cost our business in many ways. A major impediment is the requirement that our EU bound shipments have health certificates for cheese signed off by official veterinarians; this has doubled the time between customers ordering and receiving goods, a very effective cost inflater and sales killer. The removal of this non-tariff trade barrier is greatly anticipated."

Majority of UK adults willing to pay more for high welfare, British meat

A YouGov poll carried out for RSPCA has demonstrated the UK shoppers recognise the value of meat produced to high welfare standards, and are willing to pay more for it than for cheaper imports.

The survey found that 62% of British consumers are prepared to pay the higher prices demanded by products which have welfare markers on their labels – for example, free range, organic and RSPCA Assured – and 38% would go elsewhere if a retailer did not offer high welfare British-produced options.

Charlotte Thomas, regional assessment manager at RSPCA Assured, said, "Every time you choose a product with a higher-welfare label, you help ensure farmed animals live better lives.

"With this one simple choice, you're saying no to cages, no to fast-growing chickens, no to inadequate enrichment and bedding, no to routine antibiotic usage and more. You're also protecting those British farmers who adhere to higher-welfare standards from unfair competition from cheaper, lower-welfare imports."









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It wasn't long ago that fermentation was something chefs whispered about in Copenhagen labs, or a curiosity tucked away in the 'world-food' aisles of Asian supermarkets – where packets of kimchi sat quietly bubbling away. Now, foodies talk proudly about their alive Kilner jars filled with home-made sauerkraut or fiery kimchi. Fermentation has moved from niche to mainstream, riding the twin waves of health and flavour.

The health angle is impossible to ignore. Post-Covid, gut health and immunity have become front-of-mind for consumers. Fermented foods carry a functional halo – it's tough to resist sauerkraut, kefir, or kombucha when they feel alive, wholesome, and purposeful. The global fermented foods and beverages market is projected to grow from just over £300 billion today to more than £430 billion in the next five years. In the UK, growth is even stronger, fuelled by plant-based demand, premiumisation, and wellness awareness.

Chefs, naturally, were ahead of the curve. Fermentation has become a language of flavour in Britain's most inventive kitchens. Stuart Ralston in Edinburgh experiments with barley and chickpea misos – reinventing them in veloutés, glazes, and even ice creams. In Soho, Ramael Scully runs his restaurant as if it were a fermentation lab, using pickles and fermented condiments to transform the everyday into the extraordinary. And just around the corner, at Dram in Soho, miso has invaded breakfast – scrambled eggs aren't just scrambled eggs: they're served on sourdough with a miso butter that adds richness and surprise to your first meal of the day. That must be the definition of a deliciously healthy breakfast if ever there was one.

Fermentation's rise isn't limited to pro kitchens – it's thriving at home, too. All you really need is a sterilised jar, salt... and patience. The TikTok generation has made ferments as mainstream as avocado toast, with bubbling jars, kimchi tutorials, and sauerkraut hacks flooding feeds. There is a real opportunity for those retailers who are selling quality vegetables to champion this trend and encourage their customers to preserve and enrich the best of British seasonal veg, particularly as we look towards the arrival of winter.

Retailers are also increasingly spoiled for choice when it comes to offering a pre-made ferment. Brands like The Cultured Collective specialise in premium, unpasteurised kimchi and sauerkraut. Their approach is rooted in traditional processing methods and authentic recipes, producing fresh, live ferments that remain vibrant and full of flavour. They seem genuinely committed to helping more people incorporate fermented foods into their diets, not just for the taste, but for the gut health benefits they provide.

Kombucha, too, has become ubiquitous across UK retailers – and it's evolving fast. The UK kombucha market is worth well over £150 million today and is forecast to more than triple within the next decade. No longer just a "health drink," kombucha is being redefined for mass appeal. Loads of interesting brands are elevating the category and creating unique flavours, from Norfolk-based Oichi to Boo Chi with their fresh strawberry and Korean ginseng mixes. There are also home brewing kits emerging from brands like Bruusta. Their sleek home brewing kit removes all the intimidation from kombucha – no messy SCOBYs, no explosions, no guesswork.

Miso is also enjoying a quiet revolution in the UK. Once confined to Japanese restaurants or tucked on the bottom shelf of Asian grocers, it's now appearing everywhere from food trucks to delicate dining tasting menus. Its appeal is obvious: just three simple ingredients – soybeans, salt, and koji – yet the flavour is endlessly deep and versatile. Foodies are stirring it into soups, salad dressings, and even pasta sauces as a healthier, natural alternative to stock cubes. At food shows, I've even come across miso used in caramels and ice creams, proving its potential goes far beyond a comforting bowl of miso soup.

So, what does this ferment craze tell retailers? The opportunity is ripe. Consumers want health wrapped in indulgence. They're drawn to products with provenance, ritual, and story – plus shelf appeal. Kombucha is already standing tall in fridges, but there's room to expand into kefir, miso, kimchi, tempeh, and more niche ferments.

> "Kombucha is already standing tall in fridges, but there's room to expand into kefir, miso, kimchi, tempeh, and more niche ferments"

Steep rise in food and drink inflation predicted

The Food & Drink Federation has updated its predictions around food and drink inflation for the remainder of 2025, stating that it will rise to 5.7% – a jump from its most recent forecast of 4.8%.

Data has shown that food and drink inflation has risen higher than overall UK prices, at 37%.

The sectors experiencing the steepest rise are milk (46%), sugar (56%), cheese (31%) and flour (19%).

The FDF stated that rising production costs have played their role in the increase in inflation – for example, agricultural commodity prices rose 51% and UK gas prices quadrupled between 2020-2023 – but the continued rise is down to Government regulation and policy decisions including changes to employer National Insurance Contributions (which costs the food and drink sector £410m a year) and the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) packaging tax (costing £1.1bn). Together these factors are bringing UK food inflation far above our European neighbours – while the UK's sits at 4.9%, food inflation in France is 1.8%, Germany is 2.7% and Spain is 2.8%.

Dr Liliana Danila, lead economist at The Food and Drink Federation said, "Food and drink inflation has been climbing steadily all year, with no sign of easing. Looking at the longer-term picture, today's prices are steeper than anything in recent decades. The five-year average is running at more than double the rate seen between 1990-2010.

"Inflationary spikes between 2020 and 2023 were driven by geopolitical shocks which created supply chain disruptions and sharp rises in energy and raw ingredients. With most of these costs now stabilised, this new inflation surge is fuelled by the financial impact of domestic policies, now trickling down to supermarket shelves."

Gen Z demonstrating entrepreneurial spirit

According to organisers of the Small Business Saturday campaign, Gen Z is more likely to consider running their own business than older generations – presenting a valuable economic opportunity.

Joint research conducted by Small Business Saturday UK and American Express found that 71% of individuals aged 18-24 are interested in running their own business, compared with 56% of 35-44-year-olds and 27% of 45-54-year-olds.

31% of Gen Z told researchers that running their own business is a closely-held dream.

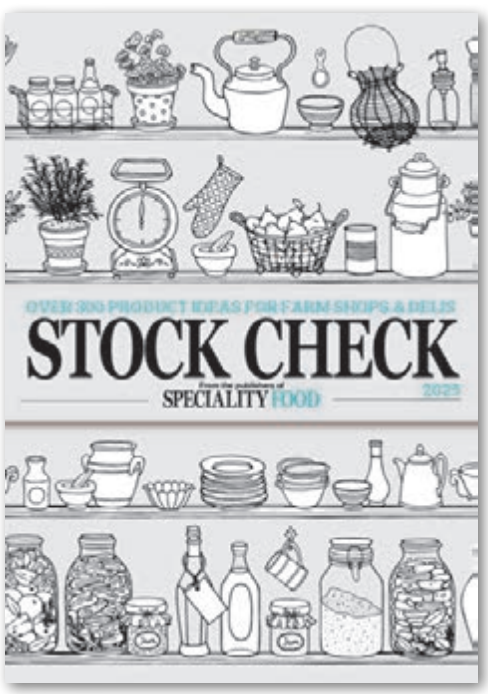
A separate piece of Amex research released earlier in 2025 found that many individuals in this generation considered themselves to have the skills necessary to run their own business. 87% are confident in their collaboration skills, 82% in their innovative thinking, and 80% in their leadership skills.

Michelle Ovens CBE, Director of Small Business Saturday UK, said, "It is extremely encouraging to see this trend of entrepreneurial ambition among young people, as they have huge potential for innovation and could power the UK's economic growth through starting their own businesses. [Our work] is all about supporting our nation's small businesses. During the campaign season and beyond, we need to empower everyone on their journey in entrepreneurship, no matter their age or circumstances."

Dan Edelman of American Express, said, "Gen Z's appetite to set up by themselves is heartening as they are vital to ensuring small businesses continue to thrive into the future."

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HFSS legislation has changed shopper behaviour

New research conducted by Vypr, ahead of the volume-based promotion restriction coming into place in October, has demonstrated that the way consumers shop has evolved since the launch of the first phase of HFSS legislations in 2022.

39% of respondents stated that they would purchase fewer HFSS products when the promotion restriction comes into force on 1st October, and 61% said that they thought the restrictions were a positive move.

While in 2022, 61% of UK shoppers said they would purchase HFSS foods while they were not on promotion, the latest study showed that that figure has now dropped to 27% – demonstrating the impact inflation is having on shoppers' habits.



When asked which products should not have promotion restrictions placed on them, 46% of respondents said fizzy drinks, 34% said cakes and biscuits, 33% said ready meals, 23% said pizza and 22% said ice cream.

The research also showed that British consumers are placing a greater emphasis on healthier foods – while 17% of shoppers stated that they regularly buy healthy food in 2022, that figure rose to 24% in 2025.

58% of shoppers said that they check product ingredients labels, down from 73% in 2022, which suggests that there is a greater understanding around nutrition and healthier food options.

While value and taste remain the key considerations for consumers when purchasing food and drink products, low levels of salt and/or sugar has moved from fourth to third place.

Ben Davies, founder of Vypr, said, "On the surface, this latest consumer insight shows that HFSS regulations as well as recent public focus on things like ultra-processed foods have been a huge success in terms of helping the nation to eat more healthily. We also asked what consumers' opinions are of the new promotion-based restriction and the top answer was that they think the volume ban is 'babying consumers' and that they should be able to make their own decisions. This was followed, significantly by shoppers claiming that it would help other people cut down, but they don't need to.

"It all shows that there is still a long way to go for consumers to be truly aware of what they are eating and drinking and more headway for brands to make changes and reformulate their products so they still taste good but are healthier. A very similar number of consumers from 2022 to 2025 (41% and 37% respectively) expect brands to be changing their ingredients to stay within HFSS guidelines showing there is a huge opportunity for those brands who can do so and communicate it quickly."

Value of genuine food markets highlighted by new campaign

The Farm Retail Association (FRA) has announced the launch of the second phase of it's More than Food campaign, supported by celebrated chef and TV presenter Prue Leith.



The campaign is designed to highlight and celebrate genuine FRA-accredited farmers markets.

Accreditation ensures that markets meet strict standards in terms of authenticity and provenance, quality and freshness, and trust and reassurance, meaning that shoppers can be confident that they are buying locally and seasonally-produced food from the people who created it, and that the market is professionally run.

Prue Leith said of the importance of supporting genuine farmers markets, "Food tastes better from a farmers market because it's fresher. Supermarkets have a long food chain, so it can take days or even weeks for food to reach us, whereas if you buy from a farmers market, it will taste fantastic. It's important to get great food but farmers markets bring something else. It's the best day of the week, it's when the while village turns out and communities come together. It's a social event and it's glorious! If you've never been to a farmers market or farm shop, give it a go! It's fun and you'll come with a lot more than you meant to!"

Emma Mosey, chair of the Farm Retail Association, said, "We're proud to highlight the difference that accredited Farmers Market make. Many of our Farmers Market members are celebrating 25 years this September which is a testament to how they strengthen rural economies, reduce food miles, and give people access to real food they can trust. With Prue's support, we can show just how powerful markets are in bringing people and communities together."



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NEXT GEN TEA

The tide is turning when it comes to tea

Us Brits may be a nation of tea lovers, but the days of the classic builder's brew being our cuppa of choice could well be numbered... With younger generations moving away from traditional black tea blends towards herbal and/or functional infusions, there's never been a better time to refresh your tea range.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE UK TEA MARKET RIGHT NOW?

According to Mintel/Cicada's *Tea & Other Hot Drinks* report, fruit and herbal teas are on a striking upwards trajectory, with a value of £139 million and a YOY growth rate of 14% – in stark contrast to the black tea sector, which while worth £377 million is only seeing half of that growth annually.

Black tea sales may be dropping, but there are plenty of other opportunities out there for discerning retailers and the shoppers they serve. "Whilst it is true that retail sales of black tea are down, consumer uptake of other categories i.e green and white teas, is on an upward trend," agrees Carri Hecks of the UK Tea Academy.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE GROWTH IN HERBAL TEA?

"Older age groups are looking to wellness blends, herbals and functional teas/infusions to help combat ageing and to stay in step with recent health trends," explains Carri. "Wellness podcasts offer really great insights into all the products available and how well they perform."

"The growth of herbal teas, organic choices, and innovative blends reflects a global shift toward wellness and sustainability," explains Suranga Herath, CEO of English Tea Shop. "At English Tea Shop, this has always been our focus and we use an extensive range of organic ingredients, and we're committed to making it even better with every blend we create."

AREN'T HERBAL TEAS A LITTLE... BLAND?

Offering a flavour-packed alternative to the often bland and dusty fruit teas in the mainstream market was a key driver for Craig Harries, managing director of Flavourhead. With professional experience within the taste-driven world of cocktails, he was inspired to produce a format that let a perfectly balanced blend of ingredients sing. "Cocktails are a carefully curated balance of ingredients, and like fine wines, a really great quality one has distinct layers of flavour," he says.

Inspired by popular cocktails like negronis and tequila sunrise, Flavourhead blends deliver the taste promised by their aromas – a feat all too rare in the herbal tea realm – and this is what customers are looking for now; particularly those who are looking to step away from mass-produced brands towards a carefully crafted experience.

HOW ABOUT MATCHA AND BUBBLE TEA?

"The growing awareness of the many benefits of matcha is fuelling interest alongside a massive presence on social media – particularly TikTok and Instagram. In fact, the hashtag #matcha currently has 9 million posts," says Carri. "Meanwhile, bubble tea is behind a generational shift challenging coffee as Gen Z and Millennials are influenced by migration patterns, social media influencers and food trends, according to Ruby Tandoh in her book All Consuming."

WHAT'S BEHIND THE HEALTH CLAIMS?

"Tea is packed with polyphenols – which is a current buzzword in gut health," says Carri. "Also known as antioxidants, it has been discovered that they help combat gut inflammation which can lead to serious diseases and health issues. There is also a magic ingredient in tea called L-Theanine, an amino acid which calms the brain, whilst the lower levels of caffeine keeps us alert but not overstimulated. Which probably accounts for why we often have a cup of tea first thing in the morning or later in the day, rather than coffee, which can over stimulate and give us the jitters or prevent us from sleeping."

"THE FUNCTIONAL TEA MARKET COULD BE WORTH £12.2 BILLION BY 2032"

HOLLAND & BARRETT 2025 TRENDS REPORT

WHAT IS 'CLEAN' CAFFEINE?

Caffeine is the talk of the town right now, and with many shoppers opting for decaf blends – to improve sleep or reduce symptoms of stress – decaf products or those boasting 'clean' caffeine are worth exploration.

In a nutshell, 'clean' caffeine is a health-led trend that ticks a lot of speciality retailer boxes. The buzzword refers to caffeine that has a natural and minimally processed source. A high quality, low/no sugar or chemically-treated tea is more likely to have 'clean' caffeine than a mass-produced, highly processed one, and is less likely to cause unpleasant side effects such as the infamous 'jitters'.

WHAT ELSE IS TRENDING?

Believe it or not, teapots are back in vogue. According to a recent study by Yorkshire Tea, Gen Z is more likely than any other generation to use a teapot while making a brew. Indeed, more than a quarter (26%) of 18-24 year olds use one every day, compared to 14% of all age groups. This could be in part down to the reputed health benefits of using a teapot such as contributing to your iron intake (if you brew usng a cast iron teapot).

Having said that, nearly a fifth (19%) of UK consumers own a teapot and don't use it, so don't put all your eggs in the loose tea basket just yet.

> "The growth of herbal teas, organic choices, and innovative blends reflects a global shift toward wellness and sustainability"



The Life & Soul of the Pantry

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Charcuterie from Europe



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THE EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORTS CAMPAIGNS THAT PROMOTE HIGH QUALITY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

ENJOY IT'S FROM EUROPE

PRODUCT NEWS

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up



Bistro Chef revamps indulgent ready meal range

Bistro Chef, the premium ready meal brand headed up by chef Christophe Lacroix, has revealed that four new freezer-to-table dishes have been added to its range.

Inspired by British and French cuisine, the selection now includes Basque Country Chicken, Red Tractor-assured chicken legs braised in a rich sauce with chargrilled peppers, white wine and tomatoes; Lamb Provençal, lamb shoulder cooked with olives and sundried tomatoes; Sea Bass Fillets with roasted vegetable ratatouille and garlic and basil butter; and Cottage Pie, a combination of tender British beef slowly cooked with leeks and onions, and creamy mashed potato with Cheddar and panko breadcrumbs.

The brand has also announced a bright and bold new look to encapsulate the quality and personality behind the chef-founded family business. Every item in the Bistro Chef range is presented in 100% recyclable packaging.

bistrochef.co.uk

Halloween cider hits shelves



Pulp Cider, the Herefordshire-based independent cider makers, has launched a limited edition flavour for Halloween.

Smooth, buttery and sweet, the cider is made from apples said to be harvested from trees grown in the Devil's orchard and is an innovative play on the classic autumnal flavour of toffee apples. Every bottle is produced 'pip to pint' within five miles of the farm, which has been managed by the same family for seven generations.

Susan Vaughan, director at Pulp Cider, said, "At Pulp, we're all about fun and playfulness, and we simply couldn't resist releasing this tasty limited edition flavour for Halloween. Autumn is simply bursting with flavourful opportunities and we hope Pulp fans and cider drinkers alike enjoy tasting this nightmarish nectar."

pulp-cider.co.uk

Happy Pear releases Organic Super Greens Pesto

The "champions of veg power" brand has announced the launch of its first organic product: Organic Super Greens Pesto.

The new product is gluten-free and plant-based, and combines certified organic spinach and kale with toasted cashew nuts for a sauce that can be used as a base cooking sauce, a dip, on pasta or as a spread on bread.

Darragh Flynn, director of The Happy Pear, said, "With The Soil Association confirming that the UK market for organic food and drink is outperforming conventional food and drink products, the introduction of organic lines into The Happy Pear portfolio represents a natural progression. This move is of course also consistent with the brand's support for ethical practices, as demonstrated by The Happy Pear's four-acre organic, regenerative farm in Ireland, and the company's recent approval for official Certified B Corporation status."

thehappypear.ie



New Special Edition from Tracklements



The Wiltshire-based brand has announced the release of Shallot & Garlic Jam – the latest in its line of Special Edition products.

Rich, savoury, and subtly sweet with a gentle chilli warmth, it combines deep umami flavour from slow cooked shallots with mellow sweetness from garlic puree, raw cane sugar and balsamic vinegar. A slight acidity comes from cider vinegar, while red chilli, sea salt and black pepper add gentle heat and optimum seasoning. It pairs perfectly with pork sausages and seasonal cheeseboards.

Liz Cuff, marketing director at Tracklements, said, "Tracklements Special Edition products are perfect to create interest on shelf or by the till. Not only do we make sure they get seen in foodie press to drive shopper demand, this Autumn's offering is ideal for seasonal eating – adding easy flavour to pork chops or a warming hake & bean stew as the nights close in."

tracklements.co.uk

TENZING launches Peach & Honey Melon variation



The drinks brand have released the new flavour, featuring real fruit, for a natural energy boost that sets it apart from conventional energy drinks.

Like the other products in the range, the new launch is 100% natural and plant-based, and contains antioxidants and no artificial sweeteners.

It's a blend of natural caffeine from unroasted green coffee beans for steady energy, l-theanine from green tea for focus, electrolytes from Himalayan rock salt for hydration, and acerola for antioxidants.

The brand is built on sustainable foundations – it is B Corp-certified, it sources ingredients responsibly with Rainforest Alliance, and is the first carbonated drink globally to introduce on-pack carbon footprint labelling.

Huib van Bockel, founder, said, "With Peach & Honey Melon we wanted to create something bright, refreshing and exciting – but also proof that real ingredients, real energy and a better way forward, are possible. This cultural shift is already happening. From students to young professionals to the adventure community, the next generation is already leaving Artificial Energy, with its high sugar, artificial ingredients and short buzz, behind."

tenzingnaturalenergy.com



The Original Black Garlic unveils new look

An exciting new chapter for The Original Black Garlic has begun with the launch of its refreshed brand identity and website.

The new look features a modernised logo and striking packaging redesign as well as a user-friendly website to stand out on retail and online shelves and honour the business's commitment to quality, authenticity and exceptional taste. An online wholesale shop has also been developed to make it easier for trade customers to order in bulk, with favourable pricing.

Katy Heath, founder of The Original Black Garlic, said, "We've been producing black garlic for over a decade, and this rebrand is about celebrating everything our customers already love while making sure we're ready for the next stage of our journey. It's not just about looking fresh – it's about giving chefs, food lovers and retailers even more reasons to bring black garlic into their kitchens."

blackgarlic.co.uk



New festive offering from Albion Tea

New British brand Albion tea has announced the arrival of its new Autumn-Winter collection, inspired by traditional festive flavours and a continuation of its mission to deliver high quality, authentic loose leaf tea.

The range includes Christmas Chai, a 100% natural blend of black tea, cardamom, star anise, ginger and zesty orange for a warming and aromatic brew; and Mulled Wine Fruit Infusion, full of the natural flavours of spiced citrus, tart berries and warming cinnamon.

albiontea.com



Chilli No. 5 announces olive oil range

Award-winning gourmet chilli sauce brand Chilli No. 5 has revealed the launch of its new Picante Olive Oil Collection.

Made using premium Spanish extra virgin olive oil infused with bold chilli flavours, the range is bottled in matte black glass to shield the oil from light and in doing so protect its flavour and freshness.



In the range are: Picante Classico, infused with garlic, chilli, rosemary and thyme for a balanced and versatile blend of heat and Mediterranean aromatics; Picante Garlic, infused with natural garlic and chilli extracts to bring depth to dishes; and Picante Truffle, a luxurious blend of earthy truffle and chilli which enhances without overpowering.

Rumble Romagnoli, co-founder of Chilli No. 5, said, "This is a turning point for Chilli No. 5. We've built our reputation on award-winning chilli sauces, but olive oil is the heart of Mediterranean cuisine. By combining premium Spanish olives with our signature chilli flavours, we've created something truly unique – oils that are as bold as they are beautiful."

chilli-no5.com

Versatile new launch from Mr Trotter's

Premium pork scratching brand Mr Trotter's has released a new product designed to be a time-saver for busy families.

Mr Trotter's Bacon Bits are designed to add flavour and texture to a wide range of foods including baked potatoes, carbonara, fish pies, scallops, salads, pizza and soups.



Air-fried for lightness and to reduce fat content while enhancing flavour, Bacon Bits contain 37% protein and 0.9% carbohydrates per 100g. They have an ambient shelf life of six months.

Graham Jebb, co-founder of Mr Trotter's, said, "Frying up that last minute pancetta is a thing of the past. We have created Bacon Bits to take pork – that highly versatile and delicious meat – to a new level. Mr Trotter's Bacon Bits will offer cooks a quick and easy answer by adding colour, texture and flavour to foods in a highly convenient fashion."

mrtrotters.com

100% traceable Coffee Concentrates now available

Lost Sheep Coffee has released a new duo of products in its mission to make speciality coffee more accessible to UK households.

The new barista-crafted Espresso Coffee Concentrates are made with 100% traceable coffee – the same award-winning speciality grade Get to the Hopper blend found in the brand's other RTD drinks – and available in Pure Espresso and Caramel variants.

The concentrates can be blended with milk for an iced latte or water for an iced long black, and offer full farm to bottle traceability, meaning consumers can follow the coffee's journey from bean to brew.

Stuart Wilson, founder of Lost Sheep Coffee, said, "With almost half of coffee drinkers choosing coffee at home over take out, concentrates are set to explode in 2026 as consumers look to recreate coffee shop quality at home. What they offer is the opportunity to create café-quality craft coffee in the comfort of your own home, with no expensive equipment or barista skills required.



"Made with our signature Get To The Hopper Coffee – a blend of the highest quality Guatemalan and Brazilian Speciality Grade Arabica beans, which are traceable from origin and freshly ground, brewed, and crafted into our bottles – there is simply no other coffee concentrate on the market that can match us in terms of quality, depth of flavour and provenance."

lostsheepcoffee.com



THE PROOF IS IN THE BAKING

British shoppers are seeking out quality alternatives to mass-produced, commodity baking ingredients – and indies are set to benefit



> People are looking for clarity around origin and grain type, and honest descriptors when it comes to language around sustainability and terms like 'sourdough'

COMMENTATORS



TUDOR EVANS
HOLLEYS FINE FOODS



ALICE HOLMES
TATE & LYLE



BERTIE MATTHEWS
MATTHEWS COTSWOLD FLOUR



NERENE WILLIS
RH AMAR

The Great British Bake Off Effect might have lost its sheen, but The Covid Effect is still driving shoppers to bake sweet and savoury creations at home. We all remember empty shelves during the pandemic, with the home baking aisle particularly stark, but since then the appetite for quality has risen – indeed, perhaps, at least in part, thanks to the time consumers finally had spare to explore, understand and appreciate the markers of higher quality baking ingredients.

"Home baking as a category undoubtedly peaked during Covid, but it's left a legacy behind," agrees Tudor Evans, head of commercial at Holleys Fine Foods. "Lockdown introduced a lot of new customers to home baking and to a degree that mark is still there. At Holleys we focus on the higher quality brands such as Wessex Mill, Marriages and Wilton Wholefoods, as well as Vermont maple syrup, and Menier and Green & Black's chocolate."

According to recent research conducted by Tate & Lyle, UK shoppers recognise that good quality baked goods have premium ingredients at their heart. The study found that one third of consumers believe taste to be the most important factor when judging the quality of a bake – and when you add fine food consumers' recognition of the other markers of quality (for example small-batch, traditional methods, artisanal), this proves to be a valuable opportunity for *Speciality Food* readers.

Alice Holmes, brand manager at Tate & Lyle Sugars, explains, "Great bakes start with great ingredients. It's something we see time and again – when bakers commit to using high-quality ingredients, the results don't just taste better, they sell better. Today's consumers are more informed and more interested in where their food comes from, which gives bakeries, coffee shops cafes and hotels a real opportunity to differentiate themselves."

Bertie Matthews, managing director of Matthews Cotswold Flour, agrees. "Overall, in-home baking occasions dipped last year as people chased convenience, but value in the category held up and even nudged up as shoppers traded into products that work better and tell a story (origin, craft, sustainability). That's what we see in our own sales, and it mirrors wider market signals: flour expenditure rose while usage occasions fell, which screams fewer bakes, better bakes."

There are two possible drivers of this, says Bertie: "Skills and standards in post-lockdown bakers; they now care about protein, performance and consistency. Speciality baked goods (think sourdough) are still pulling value through the aisle. Plus, trust and transparency or the 'sourfaux' debate – this has made shoppers more ingredient literate and willing to pay for the real thing. We lean into that, short ingredient lists, honest specs, and clear milling and farm stories."

Consistency and reliability are cornerstones of what shoppers are looking for from their bakes, and they increasingly trust high quality ingredients to deliver this better than their poorer quality, mass-produced counterparts. "The shopper who purchases high quality flour is purposeful, judges on bake results and is happy to pay a little more for reliability," says Bertie.

One of the reasons consumers might opt to bake items at home is that they can trust that the ingredients list is short and processing minimal. The same goes for the items that go into their creations. "We sell to ingredients label-readers who want clear provenance and minimal processing, especially after the sourdough labelling spotlight," says Bertie

Plus, although a customer may be a supermarket own brand-buyer now, this isn't to say that they've nailed their colours to the mast. "We've seen shoppers move from own label to named brands like Matthews Cotswold Flour," says Bertie. "This could be for something different or looking for a more sustainable option like Regen flour. Specialist flours are where brands are outperforming own label on volume in home baking."

Seasonality sells

To some extent, we can all pinpoint on a calendar when certain home baking ingredients are going to fly off the shelves. Stir Up Sunday, which this year falls on 23rd November (mark your diaries), will no doubt see sales of dried fruit rise, but beyond that home baking tends to be a reasonably steady stream of opportunity.

Jam making, however, is an underutilised opportunity for retailers. "September and October is peak jam-making season," says Tudor, "and whether or not people are preserving their homegrown produce or not we always see a spike in preserving sugar sales."

The characteristics of quality

Whether customers are familiar with the world of fine food or dipping their toe into it every now and then, there are key markers to great quality ingredients. Attractive packaging is one, says Tudor. "The branding of Menier chocolate is clearly high-end so appeals to shoppers looking to level-up their home baking ingredients, plus the stitched top of Wessex Mill flours adds to their appearance of being artisanal and high quality. People are of course going to need to spend more on these products than on what they'd buy in the supermarkets, but I believe that people have more confidence in these products. They trust that they'll get a high quality and consistent result, and that is worth paying more for."

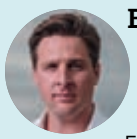
Consistency is also a matter of vital importance for the team at Matthews Cotswold Flour. "People are looking for stable protein and performance across batches in terms of loaf height, crumb and dough handling," says Bertie. "They're also looking for clarity around origin and grain type, and honest descriptors when it comes to language around sustainability and terms like 'sourdough'."

With dairy products, particularly milk, being so commoditised, some education is required for consumers to really understand the value of high quality produce. The Estate Dairy is facing this challenge head-on, producing proudly unhomogenized milk, butter and yoghurts in a bid to do better for shoppers as well as the farmers making milk with an eye to tradition and quality.

"Our butter is cultured and milk and yoghurts unhomogenized, and this makes such a difference to the taste and final quality of the bakes

BAKING TRENDS

Bertie Matthews, Matthews Cotswold Flour



RYE AND HERITAGE GRAINS:
Flavour, fibre and a point of difference; good rye is back in chefs' and home bakers' rotations. We see this in our spelt/rye lines.

REAL SOURDOUGH BEYOND BREAD:
Sourdough pasta and cross-over ferments are moving mainstream. Expect shoppers to seek authenticity on-pack.

CREDIBLE "REGEN":
Retailers are asking for measurable, UK farm-led regen flour not just a logo, so our commitment to turn to majority regen with our traceable British Regen flour is the future.

PIZZA-GRADE FLOUR AT HOME:
The Ooni generation keeps growing; "00" remains a gateway to premium flour.

BRANDS THAT TEACH:
With baking occasions down year-on-year, the brands winning are the ones removing friction (clear recipes, hydration guidance, troubleshooters) and turning one-off bakes into habits.



our customers create," says Lauren Feather, head of creative at The Estate Dairy.

A mission to create better quality dairy products was at the heart of the brand when it very first launched, explains Lauren, with its founders keen to demonstrate the difference that sourcing from passionate, small-scale farmers can make. This dedication to quality shines through in the final products, with their investment of time and time-honoured skills in terms of culturing their butter and not homogenizing their milk clear for all to see and enjoy.

"Our products bring a richer flavour to home bakes," says Lauren, "and the fact that they're more natural than mass-produced dairy ingredients means that they're more enjoyable to work with, too."

Every detail counts

When it comes to flavouring bakes, quality is just as important as it is with the foundational ingredients says Nerene Willis, brand manager of Taylor & Colledge at RH Amar.

"Shoppers are increasingly health conscious and looking for clean ingredients decks, which is where Taylor & Colledge extracts really shine," she begins. "Natural ingredients and a lack of artificial flavours and colours are more attractive than ever to British shoppers, and while vanilla is our hero flavour" – and, arguably, the most popular flavour in British home baking – "our customers are also looking to experiment with other tastes."

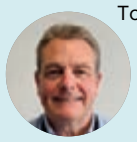
The brand already has a hugely popular trio of flavours beyond vanilla – including almond, lemon and orange – but there is even more for home bakers to get excited about, with the launch of coconut and rose extracts on the horizon.

With consumers getting more adventurous than ever, such extracts could become invaluable for time-poor shoppers who want to make great tasting and high quality bakes from store cupboard ingredients.

Plus, shoppers – particularly those purchasing ingredients in fine food shops – aren't any more likely to compromise when it comes to provenance of their extracts than they are their flours, so Taylor & Colledge's 120-year history and sound sustainability credentials will stand them in good stead when it comes to consumer trust.

> "Natural ingredients and a lack of artificial flavours and colours are more attractive than ever to British shoppers"

SEASONALITY SELLS



To some extent, we can all pinpoint on a calendar when certain home baking ingredients are going to fly off the shelves. Stir Up Sunday, which this year falls on 23rd November (mark your diaries), will no doubt see sales of dried fruit rise, but beyond that home baking tends to be a reasonably steady stream of opportunity.

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STOCK CHECK

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE • 2025



FOODIE FLAVOURS CHAI

Natural chai flavouring, ready to enhance cakes, icings, ice creams and even hot and cold drinks.

foodieflavours.com



ALL THINGS BUTTER CINNAMON BUN

Sweet, creamy and packed with all the delicious notes of cinnamon bun, this is wonderful used in frostings and fillings. Made using 100% British butter.

allthingsbutter.co.uk



POTION DE V MADAGASCAN PURE VANILLA EXTRACT

Grade A vanilla pods mingle with Bourbon and are aged for a minimum of 18 months for the most intense vanilla flavour. As a bonus, the beans are in the jar to use too.

potiondev.co.uk



THE LONDON HONEY CO PURE LONDON HONEYCOMB

Straight from beehives on London's rooftops and urban corners. This has bright, warm, citrussy notes. A wonderful way to finish a cake, muffins or traybake.

londonhoneycombcompany.com



CANE & BEAN LEMON CRYSTALLISED SUGAR

Freshly zested lemons combine with rich demerara sugar, delivering a tart, refreshing sweetness and deep caramel notes suited to all kinds of baking.

caneandbean.uk



THE BOTTLE BAKING CO COOKIES & CREME MUFFINS

Hand crafted in Yorkshire. This handy bottle helps users create up to 16 yummy muffins packed with creamy Belgian white chocolate and Oreo pieces.

bottledbaking.co.uk



MATTHEWS COTSWOLD FLOUR REGENERATIVE ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR

The first four of its kind in the UK, made using regenerative wheat. Suits all kinds of baking, from biscuits, cakes and breads to pancakes.

cotswoldflour.com



NIELSEN MASSEY TAHITIAN VANILLA BEANS

Picked and cured in Tahiti, these beans are hand-selected for their floral, fruity, cherry-like flavour, to enhance all kinds of dishes and bakes.

nielsenmassey.com



CRAFT & CRUMB BAKE & STAMP BAKING & CRAFT KIT

Ideal for keeping youngers busy in the kitchen, this kit contains everything you need to bake, decorate and personalise delicious biscuits.

craftandcrumb.com



THE ESTATE DAIRY UNHOMOGENISED WHOLE MILK

Pure, natural and full of character, and left untouched to allow its rich and golden cream to gently rise to the top of the bottle.

theestatedairy.com

CENTRE



Make the festive season extra special with this selection of Christmas gifts

1 DRIVERS PICKLES
CUSTOMISABLE GIFT BOX

Delight in the art of personalised gifting with Drivers Pickles' latest offering – the Customisable 4 Jar Gift Box. Drivers invite you to handpick from their exquisite selection of 350g jars, each brimming with flavour and age old family recipes. Presented in an elegantly designed, shelf-friendly stackable box, it's the perfect foodie gift for any time of year but especially during the festive season.
pickle-lovers.co.uk

2 THE COTSWOLD CARDILLO
PANETTONE AND BISCOTTI

Celebrate Christmas with The Cotswold Cardillo's artisanal delights: award-winning Panettone in Tradizionale, Chocolate, and Pistachio varieties, and four exquisite biscotti – Almond & Cherry, Hazelnuts & Coffee, Orange & Chocolate, and Pistachio & Bergamot. Clara and Matteo blend Italian tradition with Cotswold ingredients, crafting festive treats that honour heritage while embracing bold, modern flavour. A fusion-inspired journey of taste!
cotswoldcardillo.com

3 HAWKSHEAD RELISH COUTURE
CHRISTMAS GIFT BOXES

Hawkshead Relish's Couture Christmas Gift Boxes are the perfect foodie gift. With three seasonal products presented in fancy 'couture' jars, designed to bring elegance to the festive dining table. Available in Grande (£27.95) or Petite (£20.95) sizes.
hawksheadrelish.com

4 WALKERS NONSUCH
DELUXE SHARING JAR

Discover the joy of Walker's Nonsuch this Christmas! From English Creamy to Banana Split, the deluxe sharing jar overflows with an irresistible mix of twist-wrapped Assorted Toffees and Chocolate Éclairs. Made in England since 1894 using the original recipe, these gluten-free, vegetarian-friendly treats are great for giving, perfect for sharing. Every bite delights, showcasing tradition, quality, and festive indulgence!
walkers-nonsuch.co.uk



5 SNOWDOWNIA CHEESE
LUXURY CHEESE TOWER
Beautifully presented in recycled cellophane tied with a branded ribbon, this Luxury Cheese Tower makes the perfect Christmas gift for cheese lovers – or a centrepiece for the festive cheeseboard. A truckle of Black Bomber (Snowdonia Cheese's signature extra mature Cheddar) forms the base of the tower, topped with the vintage Red Leicester, Red Storm, and a mini Truffle Trove, combining extra mature Cheddar with with black summer truffle.
snowdoniacheese.co.uk

6 BALLANCOURT
PREMIUM GIFT BOXES
Ballancourt is excited to introduce their premium authentic pâté and terrines gift boxes, available in three delicious varieties: Game, Farmhouse and Fish. All include 3 x 180g jars of their bestselling pâté and terrines. A beautifully presented gift for any pâté lover. Can be supplied in either Ballancourt or own-label branding. Long life and ambient storage. A perfect addition to any Christmas display.
sales@ballancourt.co.uk

7 WBC
WICKER HAMPER
If you're looking for the perfect way to display curations of your finest food and drinks offerings this Christmas, then a stylish wicker hamper from WBC is just the ticket. Sustainably sourced and timelessly elegant, they create an unboxing experience that will be remembered for years to come. Available with brandable cotton liners in a range of convenient sizes.
wbc.co.uk

8 BOOJA-BOOJA
CHOCOLATES
Irresistible chocolate gifts? Exceptional free-from treats? Look no further than Booja-Booja. New Orange Scrunch Chocolate Wonders are truffley chocolate orange and honeycomb bites. Bursting with festive flavour, they're the ultimate stocking filler. The new Booja-Booja Winter Special Eight Truffle Box is a double feature of deliciousness, containing fruity Cherry Bakewell and bestselling Hazelnut Crunch Truffles. All dairy-free and organic.
boojabooja.com

MASTER FESTIVE MERCHANDISING

Immerse your customers in the magic of the season for optimum Christmas sales

COMMENTATORS



EMMA HUNT
COTSWOLD FAYRE



ELINOR TYLER
STORM COMMUNICATIONS



STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE



BRUNO ZOCCOLA
VALENTINA'S DELI

The magic is in the detail during the festive season, and while your year-round toolbox of merchandising tricks is ripe for reuse, in 2025 customers are expecting that little bit more pizzazz. Sounds and smells are just as important as the sight your audience beholds as they step through your doors, experts say, but the old adages still ring true – cater to your unique audience, stay true to the philosophies they know and love you for, and don't over-invest. This may be the busiest, and most valuable, time of the year for retail, so use your resources wisely. "Speciality retailers' efforts are always elevated compared to the multiples, but by putting more time and energy into it for Christmas it should help to sustain them right through to the next key season," says Emma Hunt, head of marketing at Cotswold Fayre.

Indeed, as Elinor Tyler of Storm Communications says, "The Bank of England calculates that the UK spends 22% more on food in December than in other months of the year. Combine this knowledge with the fact that 40% of shoppers start their festive shopping before Halloween, and it's clear that the run up to Christmas provides a golden opportunity for speciality food retailers to delight customers, showcase unique products and, all-importantly, boost sales."

As a speciality retailer, your customers undoubtedly expect to be offered a cornucopia of delicious and indulgent food and drink to help them see out the festive season in style – but equally they need to know that you have their best interests at heart. "Especially around Christmas, retailers need to turn their attention to solutions – customers expect independents to do the right thing, not just try to upsell their most expensive items," says Emma. "Now is the time to ensure that customers are trusting that you are providing the right kind of products and thinking about how to give them the solutions they need."

Time your stock strategically

"Take advantage of 'Christmas creep' by introducing festive lines from October," suggests Elinor. "The nights are drawing in, temperatures are dropping, and shoppers are looking to get ahead, so lean into this and ensure your shop is positioned as a destination for seasonal indulgence, through traditional festive staples as well as luxury alternatives for those customers looking to trade up."

While getting into the Christmas spirit in plenty of time is important, remember that the theme has a clear timescale so it might be worthwhile investing in communications about winter – think 'winter warmers' – as opposed to straight-up Christmas for anything and everything. "Quite often, stocking fillers aren't overtly Christmassy, so this is something you can be creative about – for example, stocking products which have removable festive sleeves," suggests Emma.

The gifting season starts earlier than you might think, according to Elinor. "Premium and giftable items should be stocked early, targeting those shoppers who plan ahead and are looking for indulgent gifts. Self-treat products can sell steadily from October to the end of December, whereas smaller novelty items, ideal as stocking fillers or impulse buys, are best introduced much closer to Christmas, capitalising on last-minute shoppers."

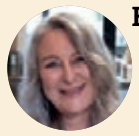
Think like a time-poor shopper. "Everyone remembers the turkey, the hams and the potatoes, but a lot of people forget important elements like the gravy so this is the kind of item to display clearer as the big day nears," says Emma.

It makes sense to get Christmas stock out early to catch those early bird shoppers, but planning out your display themes ahead of time can really reap rewards. "A couple of weeks ahead of the big day, clearly display the real essentials in one place – stuffing, bread sauce, cranberries and chutneys – just so it's as easy as possible for customers to stock up last-minute," she recommends. Theme your displays around shoppers' culinary calendars, for example, Christmas Day brunch, using up leftovers and planning for parties.

Leverage novelty and exclusivity

"Speciality retailers are ideally placed to offer unique and innovative products that set them apart from the more standard festive products found in the multiples," Elinor explains.

SEASONAL CHANGES



Emma Cyrus from WBC shares tips on how independent fine food retailers should approach festive merchandising differently from year-round campaigns

- Good spatial conceptualisation, clear signage and a festive atmosphere are all crucial, so plan your store layout and countertop displays well in advance
- Research consumer buying trends before you start – they'll give you insight into what people want
- Create a sense of urgency with "limited deals" that drive impulse buys. Whether consumers are shopping ahead of the rush or making last-minute purchases, building up some time-related pressure is an effective motivator
- Offer bespoke gifting solutions alongside your product mix (like wicker hampers or branded wine boxes). Not only do they contribute to impactful countertop displays, but they also save consumers time, which in turn breeds brand loyalty





"Limited edition items tap into consumer curiosity and help drive sales spikes, as well as being ideal gifts or stocking fillers. Novelty items, such as festive selection packs or branded merchandise, can also help increase sales."

Paying more attention to the messaging around your range can pay dividends, says Stefano Cuomo, CEO of Macknade. "The effective use of labelling and language is vital – you don't want to share information for information's sake, but it's a vital part of educating customers and driving sales." Stefano recommends keeping the intel on displays relatively brief – focusing on the headlines that you know will land with your audience and justify the product's price point – and following through with more detailed information on your other platforms. "Your narrative needs to be continuous across your social media, newsletters and website so that when people visit in-store your efforts are converted into a sale."

Curate festive cheese and pairing displays

Your cheese offering can be a last-minute goldmine, says Elinor. "If you stock cheese, Christmas is the time to let it shine! Unlike other purchases, while shoppers may plan their cheeseboard ahead of time, they are more likely to buy it closer to the big day. Cheeseboards are central to Christmas entertaining, and merchandising cheeses alongside complementary products – gourmet crackers, artisanal breads, chutneys, dried fruit and nuts, wine and port – can encourage incremental sales. Highlight pairings and create thematic displays to inspire customers and help them envisage the perfect spread."

"Make it as easy as possible for your customers by making links clear," says Emma. "This not only gives them the solution they're looking for, but also ups basket spend easily."

Time is at a premium for all of us, all year round, but at Christmas – with more events to plan for, gifts to buy, and people to feed, giving customers what they're looking for within a minimal timescale is crucial. This means that now is the time to optimise your signage. "Signage really comes into its own at Christmas because people need to see at a glance where the stocking fillers are or where the dinner essentials are," says Emma.

It's not just a case of making things pretty, says Stefano, it's making them proactive. "If people are walking past a beautifully curated display and it's not telling a story or offering a solution, it's pointless. It's lovely to create a wonderful-looking display, but you need to also approach it strategically to make it work for you."

Make it an immersive experience

Smells and sounds are also an important pieces of the festive merchandising puzzle, says Stefano. "We're increasingly seeing experience being a core part of our offer, and merchandising lends itself to that first initial sensuality that drives sales. With food and drink we tend to think about taste first, whereas it's actually the last sense we use when making a purchase. How things look, smell and feel is all part of the shopping experience so need to play a key role in merchandising.

"Play Christmas music, have festive scents in-store and offer your customers a chance to sample food and drink in an immersive environment," says Elinor. "Sampling is a powerful tool year-round, but consumers are typically more receptive to try new products at Christmas, so offer morsels of chocolates and sweets to whet your customers' appetites. Plus, well placed signage should enhance the experience by highlighting bestsellers, giftable products and new arrivals."

RETAILER INSIGHT



Bruno Zoccola, owner of Valentina Deli, shares his dos and don'ts of festive merchandising

At Valentina, our approach is all about mixing tradition with a bit of trial-and-error as we try new things and see what works best.

DO CREATE A SHOWSTOPPER WINDOW DISPLAY OR AREA

We always start with a dramatic window. We stack our panettone and pandoro from floor to ceiling. The panettone window always looks really impressive and often stops passers-by in their tracks as they walk past. We also group other Italian Christmas treats together such as torroni, panforti and luxury chocolates which really helps build a sense of discovery.

Ultimately, we've found that keeping things simple, bold and generous makes the biggest impact.

DO USE HEIGHT AND DRAMA FOR IMPACT

Our lower-priced panettoni hang from the ceiling, adding visual drama while making the most of every inch of space. This vertical display also draws customers deeper into the store.

DO GIVE INDIVIDUAL BRANDS THEIR MOMENT

We think some products deserve a spotlight of their own. Cartwright & Butler, for example, always gets its own dedicated section: it's a really popular range for us, the packaging is eye-catching, and it almost creates a ready-made display that customers are immediately drawn to.

DO BALANCE TRADITION WITH NEW-NESS OR TREND-LED PRODUCTS

Customers love returning for the classics, but they're also looking for something they haven't tried before. Each year we introduce a handful of new or trend-led products. Not only does this keep things exciting, but it gives regular customers another reason to explore and discover something new.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO MOVE THINGS AROUND

From the start of November to all the way through December, we're constantly tweaking and reshuffling.



Festive merchandising isn't static – products sell through at different rates, and displays need refreshing to keep them looking full and tempting. We also want to remind regular customers and passersby of how much we have on offer and encourage them to come back in again and again.

DON'T OVERCROWD THE SHELVES

Yes, Christmas is about 'fitting it all in', but balance is key. By displaying things together in similar categories and maintaining some structure, it's possible to keep the sense of abundance whilst avoiding chaos or overwhelm!



> "If people are walking past a beautifully curated display and it's not telling a story or offering a solution, it's pointless. It's lovely to create a wonderful-looking display, but you need to also approach it strategically to make it work for you"



STAYING HOME IS WHERE IT'S AT

Brits are continuing to enjoy entertaining at home. *Speciality Food* reveals what they're putting in their baskets and how to engage with them in-store



COMMENTATORS



SHERILYN CHU WAI CHOW
PARTRIDGES



SCOTT DIXON
THE FLAVA PEOPLE



SANGITA TRYNER
DELILAH FOOD HALL

Dinner parties are firmly back on the agenda. The excitement of being able to go 'out out' again, following Covid lockdowns, appears to have waned, and this, coupled with rising food inflation impacting the cost of eating out, means more and more of us are popping corks and switching on the stoves at home when it comes to entertaining – especially around key events like Christmas and New Year's Eve.

The last time dinner parties peaked was in the 70s, when cubes of pineapple and Cheddar on toothpicks, prawn cocktail, steak Diane, and angelica and glace cherry strewn trifles frothed with whippy cream ruled.

Nostalgia is firmly on the agenda for UK consumers (as they grasp onto comfort in uncertain times), so retro food is very much making a comeback. But it's more the ritual of staying in that's striking a chord – an ever-younger crowd putting their own spin on dining in, taking cue from social media trends and global travel.

According to Lakeland's 2024 report, 75% of 25 to 34-year-olds have hosted a dinner party in their home, while AHDB reports more than 70% of British dining occasions take place at home.

And it's dinner that's firmly in their sights – with more and more out-of-home dining happening at breakfast, brunch or lunchtime, which are not only perceived to be better value for money but also mean those sleep-conscious Millennials and Gen-Zers can get home at a decent hour for their eight hours of shuteye.

Scott Dixon, managing director at The Flava People, says the cost-of-living is hard to ignore when it comes to our dining habits. "Everything is geared towards value. Customers are more concerned with how far they can stretch their money. If they're eating out, they're placing higher expectations on the value of the experience, which can fall short. There is an associated risk with dining out and that's a key driver for the eating in trend."

Both Sherilyn Chu Wai Chow, head of marketing at Partridges, and Sangita Tryner, owner and managing director of Delilah Fine Foods in Nottingham, say they've noticed a 10% increase in the sales of pre-prepared and picnic/party foods in the last year.

"We believe consumers prefer the convenience of pre-prepared foods and still want to serve high-quality foods to their guests," explains Sherilyn. "Purchasing pre-prepared foods from trusted retailers saves valuable time in the kitchen and can seem more cost-effective than cooking from scratch."

"We use the phrase 'carpet picnic' a lot," reveals Sangita. "We have a lot of people come in on a Friday saying, 'I'm having six people over for dinner and I want to give them a grazing platter, can you suggest three or four things I can make into canapes?' They're not only eating more at home, they want to eat interesting things, and things they can share." The beauty of independent retail is customers know they can reach out for advice, she adds. "So, if they buy finocchiona salami, they don't just want slices to slap down on the table. We can make suggestions. How they can roll it up with fig chutney and a cube of Baron Bigod in the centre. Customers don't want a plain grazing board anymore, they want to make things more interesting, which I'm loving!"

What's on the menu?

Shoppers are no longer purely being led by their appetites or instincts when they shop for party platters – they want to demonstrate their foodie prowess by showing off the latest social trends to their guests.

"This is especially true for younger customers under 40," Scott explains. "They over index on the research they put into recipes online, going down rabbit holes for content, and dishes they can make that align with their dietary requirements and those of the friends dining in their group." It pays, then, to keep on top of the recipes that are trending so you can help them find the products they need.

As well as tapping into 'what's hot' on social media, Scott adds that consumers are very keen to replicate what they've eaten at restaurants in a home setting, with Japanese dishes exploding at the moment as home cooks' exploration and confidence grows.

At Partridges, Sherilyn is noticing a definite steer towards the classics such as smoked salmon, cheese and charcuterie. "Our signature smoked salmon has been a customer favourite for over 50 years. And on our counter customers can find duck mousse and chicken liver pâté with brandy to pair with The Fine Cheese Co Toasts for Cheese range." Making things extra easy for consumers is part of the trick when it comes to being on their party radar. "We stock a selection of ready-to-fill bases, including Rahms Mini Croustades, and the 3 Toques range of pastry shells and vol-au-vents," Sherilyn adds, which are ideal for shoppers to embellish with their favourite toppings. Also catching party planners' eyes are Torres Black Truffle crisps, What A Date Dates with Pistachio, and the store's variety of quality olives.

Making merchandising count

Cross-promotion is king in independent food retail, says Sangita. It's a more thoughtful way to show customers you've actually considered how and why they are shopping with you. As Christmas and New Year party season approaches, it's time to ramp up these kinds of activities. "When I look at products to put out on the shelves," Sangita says, "I'm always thinking about what people will use them for, and can I range items next to X, Y, Z. For example, putting carbs, like noodles and dumplings near stocks, broths and sauces. That gives people an idea of what they can do with things."

Times really have changed, she reflects. "In the olden days of merchandising, people were used to breaking categories up, so jams went with jams, but you can make so much more of these products. Like fig and orange jam goes beautifully with cheese, so put it near the cheese counter. I think you need to be telling customers what they can do with food – that's what they want."

Sherilyn says it pays to be armed at the deli counter with suggestions customers can cherry pick from too. Ready priced savoury and sweet platters (perhaps of your charcuterie, pies, pastries, cheeses or cakes) to take the hard work out. "Retailers can showcase platter menus at counters, as well as online through their website and social media channels to increase customer awareness," she adds.

Three dining in trends to tap into this Christmas:

CHEESE

We're hearing more and more from delis and cheese retailers that their customers are making cheese the main event at dinner. Grazing and cheeseboards are still popular (after all, what's easier than bringing cheese





to room temperature on a platter with cured meats, fruits, chutneys and crackers?).

Also capturing cheese lovers' attentions are fondue and Raclette parties, while Morgan McGlynn-Carr from Cheeses of Muswell Hill caused a stir on social media recently with her idea of cheese s'mores, warming cheeses over open flames, and squidging them between crackers with their ideal pairing.

And scooping Gorgonzola is riding a wave of appreciation that cheesemongers shouldn't miss. Consumers love the theatre of buying it and showing it off to their friends.

What to stock: If you have space, stock beautiful serving boards and signpost to them – you'd be surprised how many people don't own one. Selling or renting out fondue or Raclette machines, say the retailers who have them, will pay dividends too. Otherwise this trend is more about being well-stocked, and engaging customers with pairings and suggestions at the counter. Demonstrate how cheese can be used beyond the board both in-store and on socials. Be their source of inspiration.

GOURMET READY MEALS

A huge hangover from Covid is the creation of a new wave of excellent quality premium ready meals, which are miles apart from what most supermarkets offer. These new makers' priorities are real ingredients, crafting in small batches 'home style', and focusing on sustainability. All customers need do is turn on the oven and sit back with a glass of wine.

What to stock: Seek out brands using excellent ingredients and eschewing additives. If you can find products in compostable packaging, all the better. Format-wise, it is worth having a range of portion options, from single (for those entertainers who need to prepare different dishes for different diets), to portions for two (date night), up to family-sized.

Some of the most popular choices of ready meal are lasagne, stew/casserole and chicken tikka masala.

MEZZE AND TAPAS

We've put these two small plate dining styles together because, quite frankly, that's what modern shoppers are doing too. When comprising their parties, they're not really worried about whether a platter of cous cous will look out of place alongside neatly built pintxos.

What they're after is colour, vibrancy and exciting flavour combinations. They also put stock in quality, and that will lead them to you.

What to stock: Mezze and tapas suitable products are often the backbone of delis – especially those with a continental steering. To keep customers coming back invest in the best you can afford to stock, and go for variety – after all, many of these types of items have a long shelf life. Excellent olives are absolutely essential, but also: SunBlush/sundried tomatoes, anchovies, jars of roasted peppers, jars of grilled/preserved artichokes, freshly prepared dips, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean-style salads in your counter, barrel-aged Feta, halloumi, stuffed vine leaves, jars of giant beans in sauce, cured Spanish meats and whole chorizo. Provide pointers and recipe cards, especially in your fresh aisle.

STOCK CHECK

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE 2025



RUSTLE SNACKS TRUFFLE CRISPS

The thickest, crunchiest truffle crisp on the market, made with real Croation truffles. They pack a powerful punch.

rustlesnacks.com



BUTLERS FARMHOUSE CHEESES BUTTON MILL BAKING BRIE

The easier way to enjoy melty cheese. Simply pop the reusable ramekin in the oven, bake, and scoop up with crusty bread and pickles.

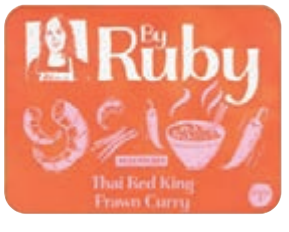
butlerscheeses.co.uk



SEA SISTERS WELSH COCKLES IN EXTRAORDINARY CHILLI OIL

Sea Sisters have teamed up with Poon's to make one of the most unique conservas on the market – hand gathered Welsh cockles married with the salty, spicy taste of chilli oil.

seasisters.co.uk



BYRUBY THAI RED PRAWN CURRY

The authentic flavours of Thailand run through this rich dish, filled with plump prawns, and made with all-natural ingredients.

byruby.co.uk



WHAT'S TRENDING FOR CHRISTMAS 2025

Four experts weigh in on the factors shaping the food and drink world this season

COMMENTATORS



MATT HOPKINS
IND!E



ISOBEL SMITH
FLOWER & WHITE



TOM GATEHOUSE
EGG SOLDIERS



TASH JONES
FAIRFIELDS FARM CRISPS

Some aspects of the festive season feel as though they've been around forever – and that's part of the joy of Christmastime – but even the most tradition-rich of annual celebrations has space for innovation. This year, say the experts, smart retailers will be satisfying their customers' demands for tradition with a twist (which can come in all manner of guises).

"Looking at Christmas 2025, consumers are showing a clear appetite for both comfort and adventure; they want the nostalgic flavours they know and love, but also new twists that make festive gatherings feel special," explains Matt Hopkins, founder and CEO of IND!E.

Guilt-free indulgence

"Christmas is still the season of treats, but this year there's more demand for smaller formats, permissible indulgence and value without compromise. People want to feel good about what they're serving and sharing," he continues.

Isobel Smith, marketing manager at Flower & White, agrees. "How would you define guilt-free indulgence when it comes to food and drink? For us, indulgence should always be joyful, not something you feel you need to justify. It's about enjoying quality treats made with care, using honest ingredients, and finding balance. When food feels lighter, more natural, and thoughtfully portioned, it makes the experience uplifting rather than overindulgent."

What should retailers be looking out for? "Shoppers are looking for products that allow them to enjoy a little luxury in their everyday lives. Retailers should look for treats that are beautifully made, well-portioned, and crafted with high-quality ingredients. Consumers increasingly want choice – options that feel special without being heavy or overly processed," she continues.

"We see a continued shift towards mindful indulgence. People want to enjoy treats that fit seamlessly into their lifestyle – lighter, balanced options that still feel like a moment of joy. Innovation will come from reimagining classic indulgences in new, exciting formats that deliver on taste, quality, and feel-good enjoyment."

International fusion

"From a flavour perspective, you could say it's nailed on for festive versions of the Dubai chocolate phenomenon to appear during Christmas 2025, both in the mainstream and artisanal space," says Tom Gatehouse of Egg Soldiers.

"Its trajectory in trend terms has been stratospheric, with the concept having only been born just three years ago in the Middle East. Major retailers jumped on the bandwagon earlier this year, and it's the versatility of the magical pistachio, syrup-soaked knafeh pastry and milk chocolate combo that really gives developers scope.

"Then there's Asian-inspired offerings, which are surely set to play another notable role in Christmas 2025. The likes of bao buns, gyoza and spring rolls are now festive table mainstays, with their tenure giving developers licence to gently keep pushing the culinary boat out further within Asian each year, with Korean and Thai flavours and formats an area to watch."

Dessert-inspired tastes

"Classic desserts are inspiring whole new product ranges. From puddings to patisserie-inspired flavours, consumers are drawn to the familiar but in exciting new guises," says Matt.

"Retro, nostalgic, old-school – call it what you like, but the flavours (and the feelings you get from those flavours) could not be more in," agrees Tom.

"Such feeling-filled flavours – from the warmth of sticky toffee to the icy delights of knickerbocker glory – provoke feelings of comfort and nostalgia regardless of demographic. Taking a stand with innovative formats for these familiar flavours could be a shrewd move," he says.

"Meanwhile, the UK-US link has grown stronger these past few years, with NYC-style pizza and bagels headlining what is a new wave of interest and success from across the pond. Banana cream pudding, spumoni baked alaska, key lime pie – could one of these US desserts steal the show during Christmas 2025?"

QUICKFIRE TRENDS



Intel from Matt Hopkins, founder & CEO of IND!E

REGIONAL LOCALISATION & CULTURAL TRADITIONS

A rising theme is consumers leaning into the traditions of specific regions, not just broad global cuisines. We're seeing growing curiosity about celebrating the diversity of cultures at Christmas, from regional bakes and drinks to authentic recipes that tell a story of place. This speaks to a wider trend where food isn't just about taste, but about connection to heritage and culture.

SEASONAL SPICES & BOTANICALS

Cinnamon, nutmeg and clove will always dominate the season, but they're increasingly paired with authentic spice blends and lighter botanical notes in teas, soft drinks and spirits. These flavours bring warmth while also balancing the richness of festive food. The Gingerbread and White Chocolate cookies from M&S are already out there.

TRADITION WITH A TWIST

"Christmas shoppers want the comfort of tradition but also something to talk about. This year it's about taking the familiar and giving it an innovative spin, whether that's balancing sweet with savoury, or putting a modern twist on a well-loved classic," says Matt. "For example, we've seen the Yorkshire Kitchen take the Christmas favourite Brandy Butter and experiment with really cool new flavours.

"Heritage flavours remain the anchor of Christmas. But we're seeing them reimagined in modern formats, Honestyolk's bottled eggnog is a great example of how a traditional festive drink can feel fresh, premium and ready for the table."

"Tradition and innovation aren't clashing this Christmas, instead, they are working in harmony," says Tash Jones, commercial director at Fairfields Farm. "Innovation is enhancing the classic festive flavours we all know and love, rather than replacing them. Classic tastes continue to drive shopping habits, however, consumers are increasingly craving novelty alongside nostalgia. This has led to the 'newstalgia' trend, where older, classic and well-loved tastes are reimagined with modern twists. It's an evolution of last year's nostalgia wave, but this time with a fresh twist for consumers who still want comfort, just with a bit more edge."

FLAVOUR INNOVATION

"One clear shift we've seen is in flavour profiles," says Tash. "Shoppers are becoming increasingly adventurous, yet they still want the comforting flavours that make the season feel special. The rise in social media food tasting trends, including unboxing themed packaging and reviewing flavour pairings, highlights the excitement of products and creates a buzz with the opportunity for products to go viral.

"This year, the most successful Christmas products will be the ones that manage to feel both familiar and exciting. Retailers should focus on bold flavour innovation and dietary inclusivity to meet the moment and make the most of this evolving consumer mindset."

"The complexity of flavour is something we're really seeing right now," explains Tom. "Hot honey kicked it all off – now everyone is after the next big mashup of core profiles, sophisticated or otherwise.

"Hot honey will again play a role during Christmas 2025 (and beyond), and I'll be interested to see the sweet/spicy concept being explored further in terms of traditional Christmas spices and flavours, from cinnamon to gingerbread. And as a move-on from hot honey, and with a festive link, hot maple is bubbling gently on the horizon. But that might be one for Christmas 2026..."



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PETER'S YARD



HOW TO SELL SCOOPING GORGONZOLA

Sales of the Italian delicacy are up. Here's how (and why) you should be tapping into this top cheese trend

While compiling the 2025 edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*, a huge number of specialist cheese shops and delis told us their standout best-seller was scooping Gorgonzola.

Cheese as a dining occasion, whether used on grazing platters or melted into a fondue, has been soaring in the last 12 months, and this form of Gorgonzola, with its unctuously creamy texture and dramatic appearance, is certainly climbing up the food trend leaderboard on social media.

Carron Lodge director, Tom Rhodes, says the wholesaler's sales of scooping Gorgonzola have more than tripled this year. "It's without doubt been one of the standout trends we've seen, quickly moving from a niche product to something with broad appeal."

The Cremoso scooping Gorgonzola range has gone down a storm with Carron Lodge customers, available in regular, truffle or pistachio varieties.

"I think part of the appeal is the theatre of it," Tom continues. "Seeing the cheese being scooped adds a sense of occasion, and it allows shops to be directly involved in the process. It's interactive and engaging, which makes it more than just a purchase – it becomes an experience."

Produced using pasteurised cow's milk in Italy's Lombardy region, scooping Gorgonzola (Gorgonzola al Cucchiaio) is crafted using the same methods as every other variety of this cheese, with one difference – the rind is removed from the paste after 60 days. Aged on for several weeks, the processes of proteolysis and lipolysis break it down, softening this cheese to the melting, oozing quality modern customers love.

TOP OF THE BLOCK

Peter Pooley, owner of Cheese & Bees, says there's something wonderfully indulgent about a soft, creamy blue cheese, and adds he has been inundated with requests for scooping Gorgonzola. Agreeing with Tom, he says, "Customers do enjoy the theatre of it. I think it gives people a feeling of a fresher and more special product. The Gorgonzola's history, combined with its rich, buttery flavour, also suits the current appetite for comfort foods with a touch of luxury."

Valentina Fine Foods' Bruno Zoccola thinks scooping Gorgonzola is 'having a moment'.

"It's incredibly indulgent, visually striking, and offers a unique sensory experience," he says, adding that customers are drawn to its texture and rich flavour. "It feels luxurious but approachable," appealing to consumers' desire for bold, authentic and artisan-driven products.

Watching a cheesemonger dip into the core of a Gorgonzola is part of the fun for customers, says Jessica Summer of Mouse & Grape. The product only being available in this format in delis and cheese shops could be one of the factors driving younger customers into speciality retail. If you're not stocking it – you could be missing out!

"Unless you have a whole wheel at home, it is not something you can easily recreate yourself, which makes it feel special," Jessica says. "It is also such a fun way of presenting the cheese, almost ice cream-like." At home customers can get creative with toppings, she says, such as drizzling with honey, scattering with fresh strawberries, adding a splash of balsamic, or even a few basil leaves. "It is interactive, playful and delicious."

CHOOSING YOUR CHEESE

Bruno says the best variety will be glossy, with an almost buttery paste, and a good marbling of blue veining throughout. "The cheese should yield easily under gentle pressure and have a deep, creamy aroma – not overly ammoniated. A high-quality scooping Gorgonzola will be voluptuous, slightly sweet, and complex without being overly sharp."

TAKING CARE

With an average shelf life of around 60 days, it's key to position this cheese so customers can see it, be intrigued by it, and ultimately buy it within a good timeframe.

Tom's main advice for retailers is to ensure it's properly sealed with a lid at the end of service, keeping it away from open, white-rinded cheeses. "It also benefits from being worked a little each day, which helps maintain the right texture, and makes it even more appealing for customers."

Keep it in the box to maintain its shape, Jessica adds. "It works well displayed on top of the counter, especially in the cooler months. For serving, you can scoop it into ice cream pots with little spoons, which is a fun and memorable way to enjoy it."

Peter likes to showcase his scooping Gorgonzola right in the centre of the counter, with a spoon in it, ready to serve. "It draws the eye immediately and sparks conversations," he says. "Keeping the surface neat between scoops helps with visual appeal, and offering tasters is essential. It goes a long way in converting curiosity into sales."

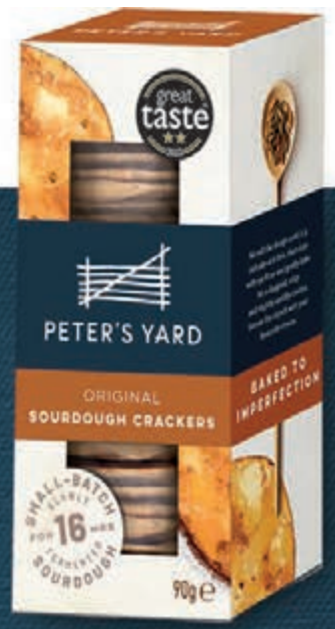
Temperature is everything, Bruno reveals. "Keep it cool – but not cold. We often bring it slightly closer to room temperature before serving so the texture is just right for scooping."

MAKING A SALE

This cheese, displayed properly, sells itself, say our experts. But they all recommend sampling it in a way that demonstrates and showcases its beauty and luxurious appeal. Peter suggests drizzling it with honey and serving it with wedges of pear at the counter during tastings, while Bruno thinks you should offer it with some fig and toasted walnuts, or spread thickly over pieces of crusty bread, drizzled with aged balsamic.

With a fridge life for customers over a few days (having been sold at the peak of perfection), offering recipe ideas and serving suggestions beyond grazing and cheeseboards is a fantastic way to create customer loyalty and engagement, Bruno adds. "It melts like a dream into risotto or polenta, and makes a decadent topping for grilled peaches or pears."

> "Customers enjoy the theatre of scooping Gorgonzola, and it gives people a feeling of a fresher and more special product"


PETER'S YARD
IT ALL RESTS ON A GREAT CRACKER
At Peter's Yard, we know good things take time. Our sourdough crackers are made from a 45-year-old sourdough starter, fermented for 16 hours before each batch is baked. Crafted without shortcuts or artificial ingredients for award-winning flavour and crunch.


A CHRISTMAS CLASSIC

Le Gruyère AOP is a cheeseboard favourite for shoppers of all ages, and the festive season offers the perfect opportunity to let it shine

For generations, the internationally-famed cheese Le Gruyère AOP has been made by expert hands using time-honoured skills passed down through the centuries. The picturesque western cantons of Switzerland are the home of this iconic cheese, and its makers are proud to uphold the highest standards to ensure optimum enjoyment for customers of all ages.

The history of Le Gruyère AOP begins in 1115, when the inhabitants of five neighbouring regions of Switzerland – the town of Gruyères in the Canton of Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Jura and Bern – transformed the milk of their cattle herds into cheese. In the 900 years since then, the knowledge and techniques established by its original makers have been upheld to the delight of cheese lovers across the world.

A worldwide reputation

By 1762 the cheese was officially named and its provenance noted in the dictionary of the Académie Française, but despite this, the style of the Le Gruyère AOP was often imitated to create lesser quality wheels until – following discussions held across Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – it was awarded AOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) accreditation across Switzerland then certified AOP (Protected Designation of Origin) across Europe.

The 160 dairies which produce Le Gruyère AOP play a vital role in maintaining the quality of the cheese. The accreditation requires that they uphold the rigid specifications set at every stage of the process – from the production of the milk used to make the cheese to its ageing – in order to maintain the internationally-renowned flavour and quality of Le Gruyere AOP. Distance and speed are also key; milk must be produced within 12.4 miles of the cheesemaking site, and must have been transported from the farm to the vat within 18 hours.

A unique taste of the Alps

Due to the simplicity of Le Gruyère AOP – its only ingredients are milk, salt and animal rennet, not to mention time and expertise – the environment from which the milk comes is of paramount importance. Thankfully, the Swiss pastures on which the cows graze are full of natural herbs and flora, imbuing the cheese with a unique taste of the Alps. This attention to quality doesn't pause during the colder seasons; instead of silage, the cows are fed hay when temperatures are too low for grazing.

Its consistent flavour has played a huge part in earning and maintaining



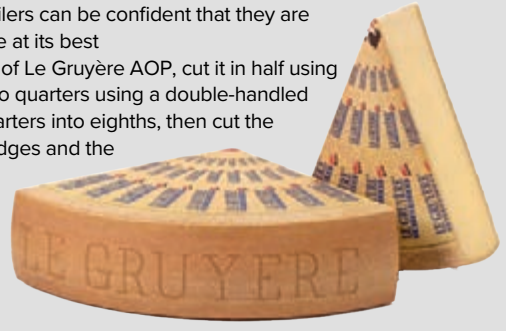


the worldwide popularity of Le Gruyère AOP, as well as numerous awards. Its distinctive yet subtle flavours are both unique and versatile, making it popular with consumers of all ages as well as delicious served in a number of ways, from a flavourful addition to a cheeseboard to melted in a fondue.

HOW TO SELL LE GRUYÈRE AOP

By utilising the right tools and time-honoured skills to cut Le Gruyere AOP, retailers can be confident that they are presenting the cheese at its best

To portion a wheel of Le Gruyère AOP, cut it in half using a cheesewire then into quarters using a double-handled knife. Halve these quarters into eighths, then cut the top half into three wedges and the bottom into six slices. Wrap the cut portions with clingfilm in order to avoid the cheese coming into contact with the air.



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

Le Gruyère AOP is a deliciously versatile ingredient; visit **gruyere.com/en/recipes** for a host of serving suggestions

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

THE PERFECT FESTIVE CHEESE

The three ages of Le Gruyère AOP offer subtle differences in flavour

Understanding the versatility of Le Gruyère AOP will aid cheesemongers in selling it. There are three distinct varieties of the cheese available – see below – and all boast a number of serving suggestions. Of course, all can be enjoyed on a cheeseboard, but by recommending delicious recipes which showcase Le Gruyère AOP, including the Swiss classic, fondue, retailers will be sure to boost sales. Upselling is a valuable tool in the independent's arsenal, and as party season approaches, smart stockists will be recommending drinks pairings for their customers to enjoy alongside Le Gruyère AOP.

- **Le Gruyère AOP Classic** (aged six-nine months) is nutty, floral and sweet – perfect for lovers of milder cheese
- **Le Gruyère AOP Réserve** (aged 10 months and up) is flavour-packed and aromatic – complex and mature, it boasts a slight crystalline crunch
- **Le Gruyère Alpage** showcases the floral notes of the high pasture of its origin and is available seasonally



LE GRUYÈRE AOP.
HEAVEN ON TOAST.

DISCOVER THE RECIPE:

LE GRUYÈRE®
SWITZERLAND
AOP

THE TASTE OF SWITZERLAND SINCE 1115.

SCHWEIZ SUISSE SVIZZERA SWITZERLAND

Switzerland. Naturally.

AOP

Cheeses from Switzerland.
www.cheesesfromswitzerland.com

"Cheese pairing for the pros"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

Since The Real Cheese Project began I have been busy finding condiments to pair with cheeses. The key to pairing is ensuring that you get the right balance, for example, sweet condiments work with salty umami cheeses such as honey and Stichelton, a raw milk blue cheese from Nottinghamshire. Tangy and spicy options can pair well with mild and creamy cheeses, like a cumin spiced mango chutney and Kirkham's Lancashire (seriously great partners).

Creating interesting, fun and informative tasting events is a fab way to get to know your customers. Recently I put on a tasting with the awesome comedian, actor and importantly cheese lover Marcus Brigstocke. I thought that I would throw everything at this tasting and literally the guests were blown away by how unique it was. It was sensory in every way possible, the setting was beautiful, there were musical scores written about each cheese being tasted, a different and unique condiment to pair with each cheese, plus a Master of Wine (Katherine Dart MW) who skilfully paired everything together perfectly. At the event the cheese and condiments I selected were also accompanied by the cheesemakers and producers, so Marcus could also interview everyone and find out the stories behind the produce. Katherine Dart MW then presented each wine alongside the cheese and condiments and explained why it worked. It was a fabulous evening with a lot of happy customers taking home a lot of newfound knowledge about the art of pairing.

My take home over the last year of finding perfect pairings is to not be afraid of trying something totally different. This really captures the consumer and is further banked for their own cheese board adventures. Try this one for example: Cheddar cheese with creamed horseradish. This works perfectly as the rind of a farmhouse Cheddar is generally rubbed with lard to protect the rind and as the lard is absorbed into the muslin that cloths the cheese it adds to the Cheddar's surface microflora. The taste just under the rind is of horseradish and mustard, hence the pairing. The creaminess of the horseradish works well with the savoury and buttery Cheddar. Horseradish brings a clean, almost, sweet hot bite that lifts those earthy Cheddar flavours. Horseradish highlights the tang of Cheddar while cutting through the richness, creating a bold and balanced flavour hit.

Another awesome pairing recently was with the famous Welsh cheese Saval produced by Caws Teifi in Llandysul, with Two & One olive oil. The fats in Saval give a creamy, buttery mouth-coating texture. The olive oil layers on a liquid grassy fat that softens and amplifies the cheese's texture. The oil extends the finish in your mouth. So, get your pairings written down and share them with your friends and customers. Make great cheese an experience whilst supporting fabulous producers of condiments and wine by creating the perfect combinations.

London to host the biggest gathering of Irish cheesemakers in four decades

The finishing touches are being put in place for a very exciting cheese event in London this month.



Bord Bia, in collaboration with Cais, working alongside the SCA, will bring 15 farmhouse Irish cheesemakers to Browns Covent Garden on 16th October, in celebration of the country's rich and varied cheesemaking history, and to mark the beginning of new relationships in the industry between Ireland the UK, opening up trade routes that will help bring more Irish cheeses than ever before to our shores.

It is the biggest meeting of Irish cheesemongers in Britain since the early 1980s.

Tim Rowcliffe, representing the SCA, has been heavily involved in the project, and says he, Bord Bia, Cais, and the makers themselves, cannot wait to demonstrate to buyers, wholesalers, and independent retailers the breadth and beauty of Irish cheese.

"For many, many years, Irish and British farmhouse cheesemakers were joined at the hip," Tim explains. "We all know recently there's been a terrifically great story to tell about English and Scottish farmhouse cheeses, but Irish cheeses have drifted. I hate to blame these things entirely on Brexit, but it did make it much more difficult to import into the UK and, as a consequence, Irish cheese dropped off the radar."

Now, Tim is delighted to confirm, those logistical issues have been solved. "We no longer have the same obstacles and we're on the brink of a great opportunity for Irish farmhouse cheeses to reappear on the British market, which is great news, on both sides of the water."

Irish cheeses are, he adds, an untapped market for many cheesemongers in the UK. "This is a new era for the industry, and such great news. We think there will be really good demand here from independent retailers to buy in more Irish cheese, and we also know larger retailers are keen to see it coming back. At the event there will be a lot of products the vast majority of buyers don't know exist."

Attendees include: Bo Rua Farm, Boyne Valley Farmhouse Cheese, Carrigaline Farmhouse, Cashel Farmhouse Cheese, Coolattin Cheddar, Cooleeney Farm, Durrus Farmhouse Cheese, Hegarty Cheese, Killeen Farmhouse Cheese, Knockanore Farmhouse Cheese, Leitrim Hill, Milleens Cheese, Rockfield Dairy/ Velvet Cloud, St Tola and Toonbridge Dairy.

Registration for the event (buyers, wholesalers and retailers only) is still open. Email estelle.alley@bordbia.ie or lucy.donegan@bordbia.ie

> "We all know there's been a great story to tell about English and Scottish farmhouse cheeses, but Irish cheeses have drifted"



Mobile cheesemonger opens first bricks and mortar shop

Luke Maslen, founder of The Cheese Connection, is thrilled to have opened his first shop, at Wapping Wharf in Bristol.



Open seven days a week at Cargo 2, the brand initially launched as a food truck selling cheese in 2022, with Luke dedicating the last three years to introducing cheesemakers' stories and products to customers via markets, festivals and pop-ups around the city.

In his new, permanent location, Luke will be able to further grow these connections, while reaching even more cheese lovers from Bristol and beyond.

The shop's core range focuses on the best of the South-West, including products from Westcombe, White Lake Cheese and Bath Soft Cheese Co, branching out to represent cheeses from the rest of the UK and Ireland, as well as gems from Europe.

And the shelves are lined with ambient goods sourced from as many local brands as possible, from Spiegel & Peach to Easton Chilli.

In addition to cheese sales, customers will be able to swing by for cheese platters, drinks, pre-dinner aperitivos, and 'date packs' to take away.

"We're lucky to have so many incredible cheesemakers here in the UK, supported by an enthusiastic and growing clan of artisan cheese fans," Luke says. "It's been my privilege to help connect these two communities as a mobile monger – over cheeseboards, cheesy street food and lots of storytelling. The new shop is the next step in our journey, and we can't wait to start serving up some of the very best handmade artisan cheese on the harbourside."

New blue sheep's milk cheese launches

White Lake Cheese has completed its trio of blue cheeses, launching Shepton Blewe. Made using Somerset sheep's milk, and already proving popular at markets, the cheese has a mild, sweet flavour, and subtle salty edge, with a smooth, firm, slightly crumbly texture that makes it ideal for cooking.



White Lake Cheese founder, Roger Longman, says, "I've wanted to create blue cheeses for a long time now as there aren't many West Country blue cheeses on the market. And now we've created three in one go! Each has its own merits, and we're delighted to now be able to offer this selection of blue cheeses for our customers."

Meet The Crafty Herd

Ilchester Cheese Co, one of the UK's leading blended cheese manufacturers, has announced the expansion of its branded offering, launching The Crafty Herd. Injecting a bit of fun and attitude into its offerings, the maker says The Crafty Herd is on a mission to bring a fresh approach to flavoured cheese, with innovative flavour profiles designed to pack a punch.

The initial launch will be over the festive period, promoting The Crafty Herd Advent Calendar, featuring 13 original blends including Wensleydale with toffee, maple and caramel biscuit, with chocolate & orange, sriracha & honey, and apple, sage & onion.



Designed to be displayed in the fridge door, each calendar features 25 windows, and can be split in half once the first 12 days have been opened. A QR code will allow consumers to pick their favourite flavours, informing the brand's future NPD.

Ilchester Cheese Co managing director, James Catchpole, said, "We are incredibly proud of The Crafty Herd. The brand is original, bold and adventurous. Loyal consumers (of flavoured cheese) are on the lookout for more interesting and innovative flavours, and we know that people who buy less often are more concerned about how to use them so as not to have waste. This new brand can really deliver against these needs in a relevant and exciting way."





Popular Scottish cheeses back in production

There was sadness within the cheese community at the beginning of the year, when Pierre Leger of Strathearn Cheese announced he was halting production and closing, citing rising costs and the inability to find suitable premises for a much-needed expansion programme.

This left cheesemongers and customers at a loss, with multiple award-winning varieties no longer available.

However, *Speciality Food* is delighted to report that two of the maker's most revered cheeses – soft, lactic, wild garlic infused Lady Mary, and whisky-washed Strathearn – will be gracing counters once more from 2026, thanks to the passion of young cheesemaker Ben Hodgson, who took over Strathearn Cheese this spring.

The ambitious 25-year-old entrepreneur is already in production with Wee Comrie – made with locally sourced ingredients – and is committed to crafting all the cheeses with an eye on reducing carbon emissions, using 100% Scottish milk to reduce food miles, and sticking to traditional methods, from hand-ladling curds to hand-turning each batch of cheese.

"My dream has always been to create a cheese that fully resonates with the British palate," Ben explains. "We're not just making cheese, we're creating a culinary experience, yet also an everyday essential most households can't live without. I don't think there are many people my age with a passion for cheesemaking, but it shows the multi-generational appeal of the simple cheese."

Ben adds that the feedback so far for Wee Comrie has been "phenomenal", and says he's keen to get cracking on Lady Mary and Strathearn, with a strong appetite from customers for both cheeses to make a return. "Our first batch of Lady Mary will be ready soon. This cheese has a really faithful following, and I hope it will attract lots of new customers when it goes on sale."



COMMENTATORS



EMMANUELLE METZ
METZ CHEESEMONGER



PETER POOLEY
CHEESE AND BEES



PAUL DONOUGHUE
GREEN & LOVELY

THE BEST OF BRITISH

Retailers across the UK are rightly proud of our dairy heritage and ever-growing collection of cheeses. *Speciality Food* discovers more about this passion, and what's attracting customers to the counter



Dainty, ripple-edged goats' cheeses with mousse-like pastes. Fudgy blues, mottled with painterly waves of penicillium roqueforti. Dense, savoury, brothy Cheddars. The cheese landscape in Britain is remarkable. A constantly evolving patchwork of more than 800 varieties (and counting).

Where 30 or 40 years ago, the average deli or high street cheese shop would look to the Continent to furnish its selection, drawing upon the great Bries of France, and enormous wheels of Parmesan from Italy, supplemented by a smattering of West Country Cheddars, today the tables have turned. Britain's vast and unique collection continues to take centre stage.

An edible slice of history

One of the biggest draws to British cheese, for both cheesemongers and customers, is its heritage, old and new.

"I always say, whenever I do tastings, that cheese is such a big part of our history, culture, nature and science, all together in one bundle," says Peter Pooley of Cheese and Bees in King's Lynn.

"We've been making cheese here since at least the Roman times, and the sheer variety we do is just phenomenal – especially when you think about the fact cheesemakers have been through so much adversity throughout the years for a variety of reasons."

Something Peter personally loves about the industry is the finding and revival of ancient handwritten recipes, which really do point to the past. "For example, Monkland Cheese Dairy in Hereford are making Little Hereford cheese. The recipe went missing and was found in someone's loft. I think that's incredible. There could be hundreds and hundreds of unknown cheeses lost in history, and it's amazing when they get brought back to life."

Reviving these cheese recipes, as they are found, proves a great source of pride for makers, Peter adds, saying he feels an equal sense of pride being able to give customers a taste of the past. "I think these cheeses say something about the British way of not giving in, not giving up."

French native Emmanuelle Metz of Metz Cheesemonger in Farsley naturally has an ingrained affinity with the cheeses of her home country, but has fast fallen head over heels for British varieties, becoming a staunch supporter of the makers working around her in the North of England.

She feels part of her 'calling' as an independent cheese retailer is to raise awareness of British cheese – how delicious, and how important it is.

During a recent Heritage Open Day at the historic mill the shop is based within, Emmanuelle made it her mission to educate as many people as possible. "I was saying to them 'celebrate your culture, these are your roots'."

In a globalised world, where consumers can easily buy products from the most exotic and far-flung of places, Emmanuelle feels shopping local, and supporting local, homegrown producers is more vital than ever, particularly when it comes to health.

"The importance of British cheeses is to bring back the right food on our plate," she explains. "If you eat something that is made with a slow process, with respect through the chain for native animals, the land, the farmer, that has to be better for you."

Until just five years ago, the cheesemonger says she had no concept of the breadth and quality of British cheese, adding that she's buoyed by the "vibrant energy" of makers here, and attracted to the fact cheeses in the UK have their own identity.

"They have their own names and their own vocabulary. I really think we should stop saying, 'it's like a Reblochon, or it's like a Brie', stop comparing British cheeses to Continental ones. Sometimes I hear people saying British cheeses are substitutes for French cheese but I don't agree with that. They are unique. The uniqueness comes from the grass and the soil right on our doorstep."

Paul Donoughue of Green & Lovely only opened his shop in East Molesey three years ago, but says what has struck him most about the cheese industry, apart from its importance in British culture, is the kindness he's experienced. That is something he thinks should absolutely be celebrated.

"It's the only industry I've ever known where people are so completely supportive of one another. In other industries competitors are competitors. You like it if something goes wrong for someone else. But in cheese, if something goes wrong,

A RETAIL PERSPECTIVE



Robert Bowden, UK sales manager at The Fine Cheese Co, gives his take on British cheese

ARE CONSUMERS SEEKING OUT MORE BRITISH CHEESE?

Where once we were a nation happy with a mild Cheddar or a supermarket Stilton, customers have become more discerning and are seeking out British-made cheeses but with unique character, a story, and something a bit different.

There is a lot of enthusiasm around alpine-style cheeses like the excellent Burford from King Stone Dairy, Raclette-inspired cheese like Ogleshield from Montgomery, and also grass roots cheeses like Yoredale Wensleydale from Curlew Dairy are seeing growth.

Why the shift? Partly it's driven by foodie culture. TV chefs, TikTok cheeseboards, social media and restaurant menus are expanding what people expect from cheese.

WHICH CHEESEMAKERS ARE YOU EXCITED ABOUT AT THE MOMENT?

King Stone Dairy is quickly making a name for itself with its French-inspired approach and standout new releases like Bibury and Hidcote.

Meanwhile, Fen Farm Dairy, long known for its beloved Baron Bigod, continues to expand its repertoire with Raedwald, a washed-rind cheese that's rich and savoury.

Whilst there are many others, King Stone and Fen Farm are pushing boundaries with the styles of cheese that they are making, especially with the discerning customer in mind.





everybody gathers round and helps. Also, nobody does it for the money. There's something beyond money that keeps people involved. It's a passion."

This passion rubbed off on him immediately. "I love it. It's a bizarre thing getting to see the enjoyment cheese gives people at the counter. I can't imagine any other food item getting the same result, and that's incredible."

Changing tastes

What customers expect from cheesemongers is always shapeshifting. But, equally, what's available to them, especially within British cheese, constantly changes. It's the job of independent retailers, says Paul, to veer consumers away from the 'usual suspects' out of their comfort zone.

That could be introducing them to new blues, sheep's milk or goats' milk cheeses, or opening their minds to better quality, British versions of what they usually buy at the supermarket.

Paul has plenty of regular customers who might have visited once, baulked at the prices of his cheeses, bought them from a multiple, been disappointed, and returned to him, tails between legs, wanting to taste 'the real thing'. "I think, in terms of sales, there has been increased awareness of the value of the products and understanding that, yes, you can go and get them from the supermarket, but at an independent cheese shop they'll always be better," he explains.

A case in point is Cheddar, and Paul says he's seeing an 'awakening' amongst customers that it's not just a 'filler' to be plonked thoughtlessly on the cheeseboard. They're more willing to try a few Cheddars, noticing and tasting their different nuances. The trend here, he adds, is towards mature and vintage types. "People want stronger flavours."

Also experiencing growth, he adds, are British goats' and sheep's milk cheeses. "Lots more people are coming in and saying, 'I don't really want to eat cow's cheese, goats' cheese is kinder to my stomach. And we've seen a complete vanishing of requests for vegan cheeses, I'm delighted to say!"

At Cheese and Bees, Peter has noted that his customers very much want to discover more about the makers and stories of the cheeses he stocks. "They really do want to know about the people behind these products. Someone said to me the other day, 'does Norfolk have a particular type of cheese made in this area?' That's becoming so common. There are so many special regional cheeses, like Caboc from Scotland or proper Caerphilly from Wales, that aren't found in supermarkets, and they are very important to us."

Emmanuelle thinks British consumers are slowly cottoning onto the fact that several native cheeses are seasonal. These types should be heralded, she thinks, anticipated in the same way as the first flush of asparagus or summer berries.

"We should learn to wait for these moments patiently if we want cheese at its best. British cheese is, to me, like a nice clock, with different types coming back to the counter as the months change. I've had people say to me, 'oh, I don't like this cheese' and I'll say, 'when in the year did you try it?'. They might have it again and say, 'I really like this'. We have to help people to understand they could love a cheese in summer and not like it in winter."

A question of territory

Neal's Yard is spearheading a national campaign to raise awareness of British territorial cheeses – the likes of Cheddar, Caerphilly, Red Leicester, Wensleydale, Stilton, Cheshire and Lancashire.

It appears they're an easier 'sell' closer to the places where they are made, for example up in Yorkshire at The Courtyard Dairy, where owner Andy champions them front and centre of his displays.

Down in the South of England where Paul's shop is based, it's hard to veer customers away from creamy, more Continental-style British cheeses.

His greatest success is with Cheddar. "When people say, 'boring Cheddar', they're thinking about the yellow, plasticky ones they've had from supermarkets, and those don't have anything to do with real Cheddar – the likes of Jamie Montgomery or Mary Quicke making the real deal. We're constantly fighting a battle because the word, 'Cheddar' is overused."

Getting customers to try different makers' Cheddars side by side is

> "I always say, whenever I do tastings, that cheese is such a big part of our history, culture, nature and science, all together in one bundle"
>
> **PETER POOLEY, CHEESE AND BEES**

THE NEW **GENERATION**

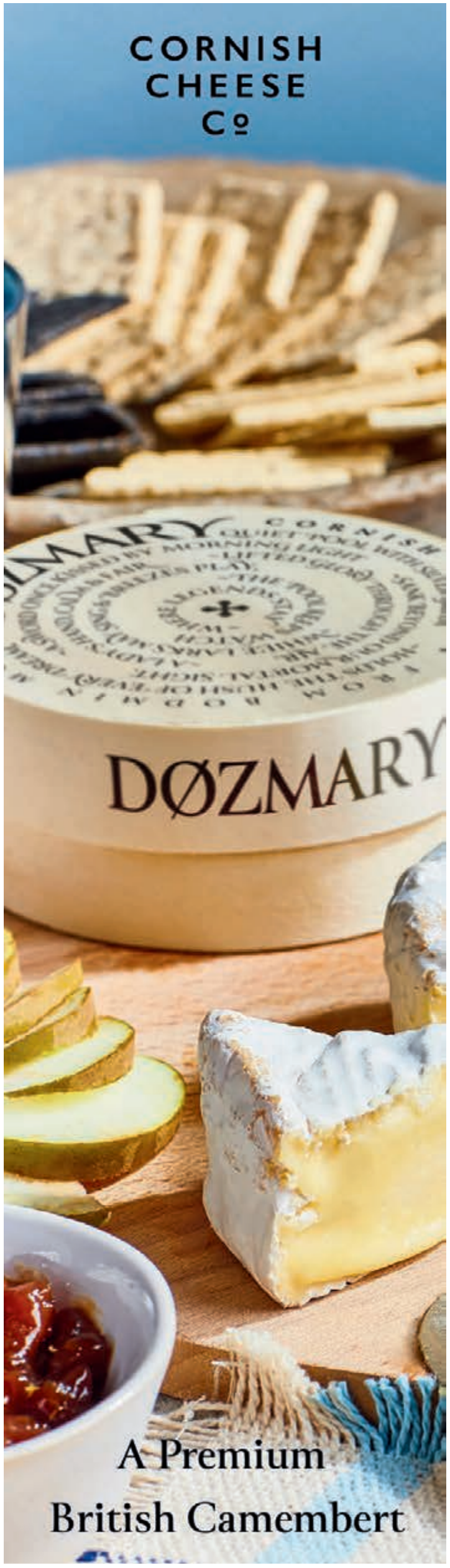


Leona McDonald, director of Golden Hooves, says regenerative farming should be the future of British dairy

Regenerative farming is fast becoming a cornerstone of the UK's food future. By restoring soil health, improving biodiversity, protecting waterways and capturing carbon, these practices help safeguard both the environment and the resilience of our food system. The approach isn't new – it draws on long-standing traditions of working with nature rather than against it – but the urgency is greater than ever as farmers respond to climate change and rising consumer demand for genuinely sustainable food.

Within British cheesemaking, regenerative methods play a vital role. Healthy, carbon-rich soils and diverse pastures create richer, more complex milk, which in turn supports high-quality artisan and larger-scale cheeses. Farmers focusing on regenerative principles also strengthen rural communities by improving long-term productivity and reducing reliance on costly inputs.





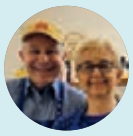
CHEESEMONGERS' **FAVOURITES**

***Speciality Food* asked cheese experts across the UK to share their top British varieties**



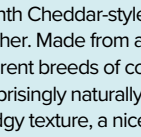
ED HANCOCK
THE CHEESE GEEK:
SPENWOOD, VILLAGE MAID CHEESE

My favourite sheep's milk cheese made in the UK by quite some way, and the most awarded by a country mile. Made in the style of a Pecorino, it is toothsome and fudgy in texture, and ranges all the way from caramel nuttiness to a slight fermented fruitiness earlier in the year.



FRANCISCO AND SABINA PERELLO, THE CHEESE HOLE:
CHEESEMAKER'S SPECIAL, ALSOP & WALKER

A 10-month Cheddar-style cheese like no other. Made from a blend of four different breeds of cow's milk, it is surprisingly naturally sweet, with a fudgy texture, a nice savoury undertone, and a buttery finish. Quite remarkable.



VICTORIA DUNTHORNE, VICTORIA'S CHEESES:
NORFOLK WHITE LADY, WILTON FARM

When it's younger I will add a touch of sweetness with honey, but when riper, the strong vegetal notes need something punchy – Garden of Eva Chow Chow is an excellent pairing.



a useful selling tool, Paul adds. Then they can truly experience the differences for themselves. "I'll tell people the next time they reach for a 'plastic Cheddar' to remember it could have come from 10,000 cows, whereas about 100 cows' milk has gone into a Keens, for example, from the land next door. I think proper Cheddar needs to be properly isolated from the rest of the market to get the recognition it deserves."

In an independent retail setting, consumers get the whole picture behind territorial cheeses, Emmanuelle adds. The beauty of these cheeses is in their stories and their romanticism – things that cannot be explained standing in the bright lights of a supermarket multideck. She gives Stonebeck Wensleydale as an example. "This cheese is just amazing, and they do such a brilliant job. When you give people a piece they say, 'oh wow', and I tell them how it's from a really small farm and you won't find it in supermarket. They appreciate that."

The modern British cheesemonger

It's not enough to simply stock cheese these days – everyone wants an experience, be that cheese and wine pairing events, dine-in options, or even fondue hire. One way a growing merry band of cheesemongers in the UK is differentiating themselves is by diving headfirst into the art of affinage – taking British cheeses and giving them subtle (or bold) treatment, transforming them into something that cannot be bought in any other shop.

Practising affinage is a daily part of running a cheese shop in France, and something Emmanuelle has brought to her own business, working with other producers close by to put a Yorkshire stamp on some of her range. She encourages others to do the same. "I feel like it's transforming something into your own territorial, and you create something new in the identity of your place, your village."

In affinage you should aim, she adds, to create the very best – products you would be proud, she says, to present to your mother. Emmanuelle likens it to a dance. "When you really like a cheese and you want to give it your own little twist, it's like taking it on a dance, you just have to decide on the perfect dance partner. One I've got at the moment is Highmoor soaking in stout. And something very popular was our chocolate bon bons. One was Stilton and quince dipped in chocolate, another one had some triple cream cheese with chilli jam, and one of my favourites was Glaston Brick with candied lemon and verbena in dark chocolate. Chocolate and goats' cheese is just amazing."

To others, Emmanuelle says affinage is just a matter of confidence. "Allowing yourself to do something new can create something very special."

STOCK CHECK



BELTON FARM RED FOX
This is a household favourite, beloved for its rich, unmistakeable flavour and smooth texture. Wonderful on cheeseboards or grilled on toast.
beltonfarm.co.uk



CORNISH CHEESE CO DOZMARY
A new launch for the maker, and already a Supreme Champion at the ICDAs. This striking soft cheese is rich and buttery with a luxurious texture and complex taste.
cornishcheese.co.uk



1912 ARTISAN STILTON
A traditionally made, craft PDO Stilton, made with sustainably sourced milk. Creamy but crumbly with a savoury blue tang. An incredibly versatile cheese.
1912.co.uk



RIBBLESDALE CHEESE GOATISAN
Often likened to a goats' milk version of Parmesan (hence the name). The cheese has bags of flavour, and a salty tang. It melts well and is excellent used in cooking.
ribblesdalecheese.com



GOLDEN HOOVES SMOKED CHEDDAR
All the milk for this creamy Cheddar is from farms that take looking after the soil and nature seriously. Naturally smoked, it's bold, tangy and incredibly moreish.
goldenhooves.co.uk



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“HAVING IT ALL”

Today’s fine food consumer is not willing to compromise on quality or flavour, and the premium ready meal market is ready to deliver

COMMENTATORS



DAVID MILNER
CROSTA & MOLLICA



JACKIE PHILLIPS
BISTRO CHEF



MILLY BAGOT
BYRUBY



HELEN WALLACE
THE CRESS CO

The reputation of ready meals for being poor quality, mass-produced and pretty dire for our health is waning – most certainly in the fine food sector, where there are plenty of options available for discerning retailers wanting to offer their customers time-saving meal solutions that don’t compromise on their desire for better.

“The ready meal landscape is undergoing a fundamental shift. Ready meals and convenience no longer mean a compromise in quality, flavour or ingredients,” explains David Milner, chief executive at Crosta Mollica. “Premium brands – like Crosta Mollica – are growing and creating this ‘third space’ which sits between retail and takeaway. There is clear consumer demand for more premium yet convenient options. The pizza category, for example, is relatively stagnant in terms of growth; however, premium pizza is seeing double digit growth. Our own figures show retail sales increased by £21.3 million in the past 12 months, proving that consumers are responding enthusiastically to more premium options.”

What’s driving this transformation? “Economic pressures are influencing consumer behaviour, but rather than trading down to cheaper alternatives, people are instead looking at how they can recreate restaurant dining experiences at home by trading up in retail for ‘treat’ moments. This creates a new opportunity for ready meal brands, that can deliver genuine quality, to bridge the gap between premium supermarket offerings and dining out.”

Indeed, according to Mintel data, 56% of consumers are dining out less and 50% are ordering fewer takeaways – demonstrating that though the desire for indulgent meals is still strong, the pinch people are feeling around their budgets is potentially stronger... Enter the new generation of premium ready meals.

Restaurant quality, at home

“The term ‘ready meals’ covers such a wide variety of ready to serve dishes, and for a long time has been associated with mass produced, ultra processed food for people who don’t really care about flavour or ingredients and just need a meal that is quick and easy to prepare,” agrees Jackie Phillips, director of C&M Meals, home of Bistro Chef. “Under this guise it has become a staple of the FMCG offering, mainly in the chilled category with a race to the bottom on price. But delve a bit deeper and there are plenty of smaller producers with products that are the complete opposite. Convenience and quality can and do go together. The advantages of a quality ready meal are very relevant in today’s food climate, and not all ready meals are the same!”

The sloppy and salt-heavy ready meals of yore are being replaced – in discerning circles, at least – by premium quality meals freshly prepared by professional chefs. For example, Clay’s Kitchen & Bar, a Reading destination for lovers of excellent Indian cuisine, has recently launched its Clays At Home menu – a varied selection of delicious meals that are prepared on-site and shipped chilled so that customers from elsewhere in the country can experience their chefs’ skills in the comfort of their own home.

Likewise, the Bistro Chef range is the restaurant menu of Bath based Chef Christophe Lacroix, cooked using UK Red Tractor meat and produce from local suppliers in small batches before being blast frozen for a ‘restaurant at home’ experience. “Blast freezing maintains the nutrients and flavour, and the recyclable packs can be cooked in the oven or the microwave so there really is no compromise in terms of speed. And because it is stored in the freezer until it is eaten, there is absolutely no waste from food prep or missing use by dates,” says Jackie.

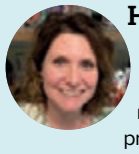
For shoppers choosing not to eat out at restaurants, whether that’s for budgetary reasons or because they would prefer to stay at home, today’s ready meals certainly deliver on taste and quality. Consider the popularity of Marks & Spencer’s Dine In meal deals – especially on Valentine’s Day... Dining in is well and truly seen as a viable alternative to reservations and delivery drivers.

“Ready meals are becoming one of the treats of the week! Eating out is increasingly cost prohibitive for shoppers and as a nation we are clocking up more hours at work than many of our neighbours,” agrees Jackie. “A quick and easy meal that tastes fabulous, is full of nutritious ingredients and can be dished up at home in minutes is increasingly attractive.”

Who buys high quality ready meals?

“Our customers tend to fall into the age bracket of 35 and over,” says Jackie. “Within that there are several segments; higher demographic families with young children, busy professionals looking for convenience and quality, 50 something couples with very active lives who don’t want to shop and

WHOLESALER INSIGHT



Helen Wallace, senior buyer at The Cress Co, shares her take on the chilled food market

While convenience remains the primary driver of this category, I believe the evolution has also been significantly influenced by a younger demographic. This group tends to have less cooking experience than previous generations and shows a greater appetite for diverse and global cuisines—something that has fuelled much of the recent NPD (new product development) in the sector. Additionally, there’s been a noticeable shift in perceptions of what constitutes ‘healthy.’ Consumers are increasingly moving away from a narrow focus on calorie control towards options that emphasise clean-label recipes, high-protein content, and whole-food ingredients.

Operational viability is critical for us. While chilled ready meals provide maximum convenience for the end consumer, their shorter shelf life presents a logistical challenge. We work closely with our suppliers to ensure that as much of the total shelf life as possible is passed on to our customers. The ready meal category enjoys high penetration, so consumer awareness is strong and offering a range that offers a real point of difference from what is available in the major multiples is key for us and our customers.

In the mainstream sector, I expect to see a clearer divergence between two key trends: everyday, balanced meal-prep alternatives that address concerns around ultra-processed foods, and more indulgent, “treat day” products. We’re also likely to see a rise in influencer-led brands appearing on supermarket shelves, tapping into consumer trust and aspirational marketing.

In the fine food market, where our customer base tends to be slightly older, I anticipate continued demand for premium, indulgent options – particularly those cuisines that customers are familiar with but feel less confident cooking at home. Our chilled range of authentically prepared Praveen Kumar curries fits this bill perfectly.







cook each and every day, and also an older segment for whom shopping and cooking has become too much of challenge. They all have one thing in common: they want a meal that is quick to prepare but they want to eat well."

For Milly Bagot at ByRuby, families offer a valuable opportunity for the food industry. Tight on time but not when it comes to their appetite for quality food, they are the new frontier when it comes to quality ready meals. Far from being the preserve of solo nights in front of the television, ready meals can offer a delicious, nutrient-rich solution for both parents and children.

"According to Mintel, 54% of consumers say that they have concerns around ultra processed foods, which means that there's a nervousness around anything people buy that they haven't cooked from scratch," she begins. "During Covid, people were cooking from scratch more so got to know the value of good quality ingredients and became more discerning about what goes into the food they eat – especially when they're also feeding it to their children."

ByRuby's family-sized lasagne and fish pie are proving immensely popular – not least because of the time they are saving families who might not have the hours needed to produce a hearty, slow-cooked ragu from scratch going spare. "We like to think that it's allowing people to spend time doing things that they might not otherwise get a chance to," she explains. "So what we really try and encourage people to do is read a book to their children, go on a nice walk, do an exercise class – do something that they might otherwise not have the time for. It's a gift to be able to spend time doing something you like versus slaving in the kitchen."

Just as important is the lack of unnecessary 'nasties' in premium ready meals. "We're really obsessive about ensuring that the ingredients in our dishes are made-up purely of things that you'd find in your own kitchen at home, so no additives or preservatives," says Milly. "Plus, the beauty of freezing is that you just don't need those things."

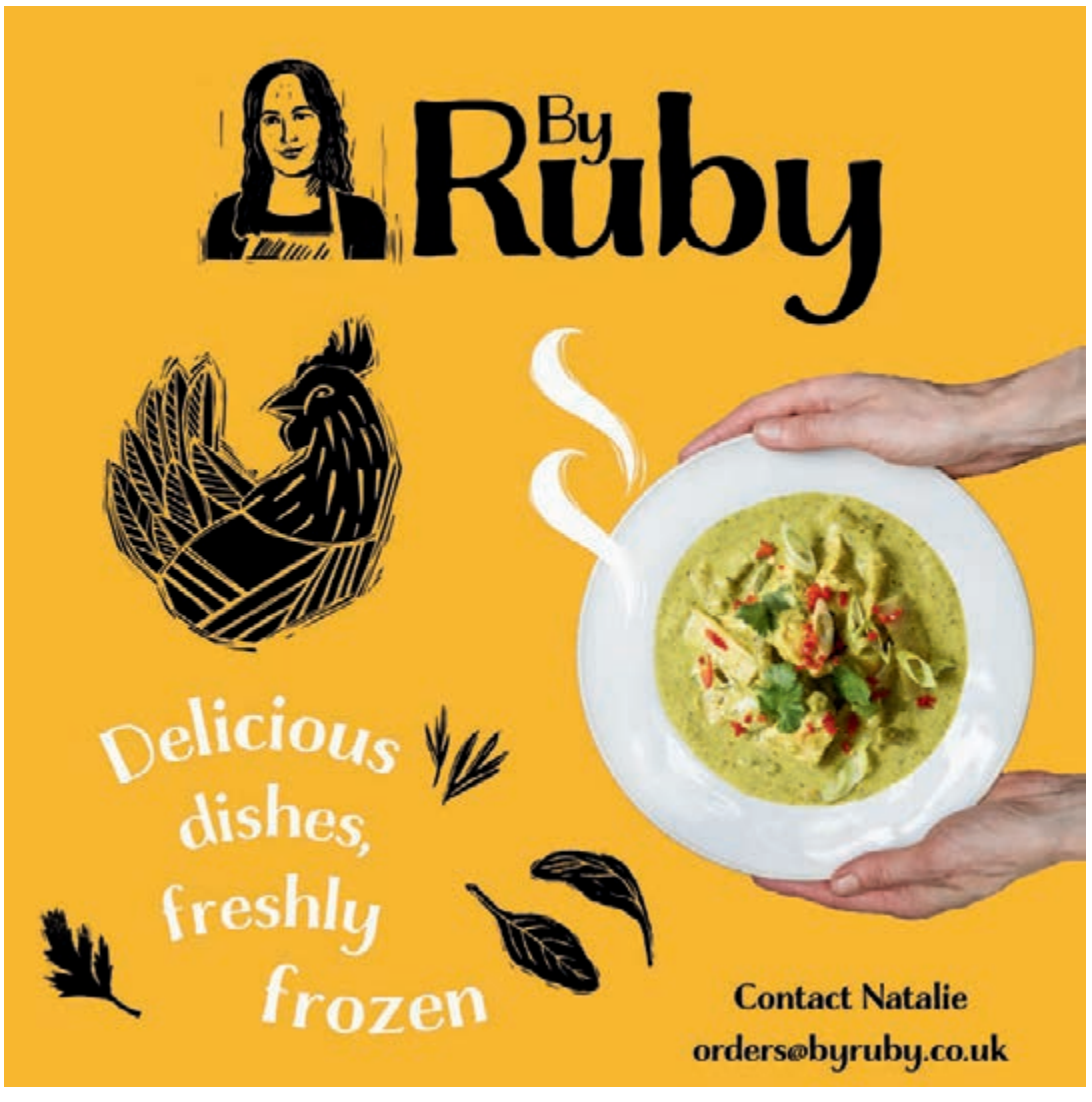
What's to come for the ready meal market?

Jackie believes there will be more brands coming to the fore, offering more choice on food types, special diets and meal occasions. "Consumers will continue to want more variety and flavour experiences," she says. "As eating out becomes ever more expensive the quality ready meal market will benefit. In addition we are already starting to see Bistro Chef in some vending locations and that trend will continue, with consumers expecting 'quality food on the go'."

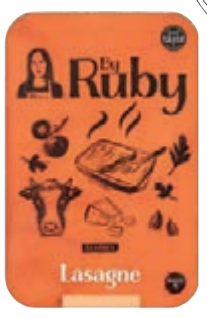
"The British ready meals category has enormous potential," believes David. "We are on the cusp of something very exciting as premium brands, like Crosta Mollica, lead the way and show how this industry can be sophisticated, champion craftmanship and quality, and provide balanced and 'clean' options (that is, not including unnecessary and excessive ingredients). We understand that truly exceptional ready meals, as we say at Crosta Mollica, are 'Non Per Tutti' – not for everyone, but we will remain committed to continuing to elevate and innovate for those seeking something extraordinary in every bite, proving that the ready meals of today can deliver restaurant-quality experiences with the ultimate convenience of home cooking. The industry's future isn't about compromise, it's about having it all."

> "The ready meal industry's future isn't about compromise, it's about having it all"





2025 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE STOCK CHECK



BYRUBY LASAGNE
A family-sized portion of grass-fed beef and pork mince cooked slowly in a rich tomato sauce in-between generous layers of egg pasta and cheesy béchamel.
byruby.co.uk



BISTRO CHEF COQ AU VIN
Tender pieces of chicken braised to perfection in a robust red wine sauce, enriched with smoked pancetta, aromatic vegetables and savoury herbs.
bistrochef.co.uk



CHAPMAN'S SEAFOODS LUXURY FISH PIE
This pie tucks smoked haddock, salmon, cod and prawns under a creamy mash and Cheddar topping, in a smooth bechamel sauce.
chapmans-shop.co.uk



KELLY BRONZE CONFIT TURKEY THIGH
Ethically-reared bone-in confit turkey thigh, slow cooked for hours.
kellybronze.co.uk



FINAL CALL

Where's an autumnal chill in the air. And team *Speciality Food* are here for it.

As much as we all love summertime and its impromptu picnics, garden barbecues and picky teas in the garden with a glass of rose, we're embracing the changing of the seasons.

The cosy knits are out, and we're swapping iced matcha for soothing cups of milky chai, gingerbread latte and devilishly dark hot chocolate.

There's something that feels so good about settling into and embracing the transition between summer and autumn, and we know your customers are going to be ringing the changes as well.

This time of year is a bit of a juggling act in retail, balancing keeping on top of current stock and sales, while planning for the big Christmas push.

But those who DO take autumn under their wing, planning seasonal activities, report great success, especially around the weeks leading up to and including Halloween.

Here are just a few suggestions to help you maximise selling opportunities in store over the coming weeks.

• **It's hot drink tasting time.** There's a lot of great telly coming up, and snuggling under a blanket with a cuppa in front of the latest crime thriller or period drama is practically a national pastime. Help your customers get ready for their TV marathons by sampling out your range of hot chocolate, coffee and tea, perhaps alongside a few of your favourite biscuits for dunking. Positioning the two together is a clever bit of merchandising too.

• **Bolster your butchery.** The butcher's counter will always be a hub of activity in barbecue season, but now's the time to bridge the gap between burgers and Christmas turkey ordering. If you have a cafe/restaurant or a good relationship with a local chef, arrange recipe cards to show customers how they can use those great value low and slow braising cuts, and local game to best effect. Make it easy for them to find other accompanying ingredients they need, from stock to veg, in-store. You could even bundle them together under a special offer.

• **Don't say 'boo' to Halloween.** Consumers increasingly expect Halloween activity in independent retail – especially farm shops. You don't need to offer a maize maze or pumpkin patch, but some gentle theming, thoughtful Halloween/autumnal products, and spooky bakes in any on-site eatery, will certainly draw people in.

We've got plenty more advice on preparing for Halloween (and Christmas) on the *Speciality Food* website.

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

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5 MINUTES WITH

HATSADEE XAYAVONGCHANCH, YOYO LAOS SAUCES



WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
My first job was helping my sister with her beauty salon in Laos. I started working with her when I was 12 and would dry and iron customers' hair and also do pedicures and manicures. She paid me a little bit of money but mostly she just bought me food.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
I'm passionate about raising awareness of Laotian cuisine — a rich and vibrant food culture that's still largely undiscovered.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
When I first came to the UK I struggled to find work. I tried a few different jobs one of which was working in a care home. I enjoyed working with older people, spending time with them and making them happy but there was so little time to spend with the residents and some colleagues didn't show enough care and this is very different from my Lao culture.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR JOB?
The best part of my business is chatting with customers at markets and events.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
It would have to be either those times when I have an endless mountain of ginger to peel by hand (fresh is always best!) or the English weather at events and festivals which can be so unpredictable!

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
It feels like the food industry today is full of opportunity, the growth in Asian food and also sauces is incredible. But sometimes voices from small cultures like Laos can get overlooked.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
This would have to be spicy Lao papaya salad – we call this 'Som Tam' – with a side of sticky rice and lots of chilli of course!

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
Experiences in our lives make us stronger, but do your best today because you don't know what tomorrow will bring.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
I can say that when I came to the UK, I thought cheese was very odd (now I love it) but I guess many people would think that some Southeast Asian food is weird.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
I'm not a reader, but I do love films! I'm going to choose The Rocket which was shot entirely in Northern Laos.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Savoury every time.

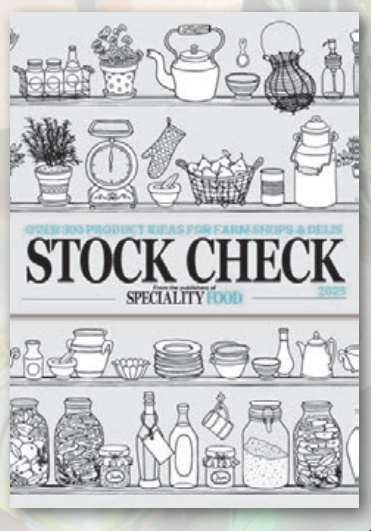
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SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE

- **Wellness 2026:** The health boosting products & trends to know now
- **Italian Food Special**
- **Selling Christmas Ideas**
- **Storecupboard Essentials**
- **Blue Cheese**
- **Hot Drinks**
- **Breakfast Centrespread**

STOCK CHECK
From the publishers of SPECIALITY FOOD

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The final word on fine food

TRIED & TESTED

GOOD GUYS BAKEHOUSE GINGER CRISPY BISCUITS



Healthier biscuits might sound like a misnomer, but with this new product Good Guys Bakehouse absolutely delivers. Their ginger flavour is full of warming punch, so it tastes just like you're eating a traditional – and often calorie-laden – gingerbread biscuit, but thanks to their light texture you know you're onto a good thing. Perfect for sofa grazing or enjoying with a cuppa.
goodguysbakehouse.co.uk

NIRVANA BUTTERCUP DDH PALE ALE

Hop heads around the UK have long had a plethora of double dry hopped beers to relish, but up until now non-drinkers have been waiting for their turn at the bar. By adding hops twice during the beer-making process, the team at Nirvana have produced a heady beer with strong taste and aroma – with just 0.5% ABV. With tropical and citrus notes, this beer is equal parts refreshing and satisfyingly flavour-packed.
nirvanabrewery.com



CORNISH SEA SALT EVERYTHING BAGEL SEASONING



Give me pretty much anything Everything Bagel-inspired and I'm bound to be a fan, but right now this seasoning tops the list. Perfectly balanced and supremely savoury, it adds notes of onion and garlic plus the aromatic warmth of nigella seeds to all sorts of dishes. I've been adding it to avocado and eggs, soup and dips, as it adds instant depth of flavour to anything and everything.
cornishseasalt.co.uk

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Duncan Wales, executive chef at Burleigh Court

At Burleigh Court Hotel, fine dining isn't just about exquisite flavours – it's about a deep-rooted respect for the land, the seasons, and the vibrant community of growers and artisans that surround its historic Georgian country house.

Home to a 2 AA Rosette-awarded restaurant, Burleigh Court is proud to champion a sustainable, hyper-local food philosophy. The kitchen team sources the majority of its ingredients from within a 45-minute radius of the hotel – working closely with nearby farms, producers, and foragers – while also growing a wide range of fresh produce on-site in its own kitchen garden.

Our approach is grounded in integrity. Every ingredient we serve has a story and a purpose – whether it's picked from our garden just hours before service or delivered by a local farmer we've known for years.

Tucked away in the hotel's lush grounds is a flourishing kitchen garden – an ever-evolving, chemical-free haven that supplies the restaurant



daily with seasonal vegetables, micro herbs, and an array of edible flowers and wild plants.

From golden courgette blossoms and vibrant nasturtiums to purple basil and ruby chard, the garden not only reduces food miles to zero but adds a distinctive signature to the presentation and flavour profile of every dish.

Our garden is a living pantry. We grow for taste, colour, and sustainability – prioritising heritage and seasonal varieties that support biodiversity and elevate the plate.

In addition to the kitchen garden, Burleigh Court is home to several beehives, lovingly maintained by the hotel's very own beekeeping directors. These busy pollinators do more than just enrich the surrounding flora – they also provide a regular harvest of golden, floral honey that finds its way into the kitchen.

Our honey is a reflection of the land itself. It's a hyper-local product that enhances both sweet and savoury dishes in the restaurant, from glazes and vinaigrettes to desserts and breakfast offerings.

Beyond the garden walls, the culinary team continues to draw on the Cotswolds' rich agricultural landscape. Carefully selected partners within a 45-minute drive supply the restaurant with grass-fed meats and rare-breed lamb, organic vegetables from nearby farms, artisan cheeses and cultured butter, freshwater trout and game, wild mushrooms and foraged herbs.

For example, we source pork from Quiggly Piggly in Uley, about a 20 minute drive away. These are free-range pigs that are out and about, happy and live outdoors; our venison is from Halls Country Game in Tetbury; and we source a number of locally-made cheeses from The Fine Cheese Company in Bath.

TALKING ITALIAN

Sponsored by Garofalo



ZUPPA SEASON

It's time for soups to shine, and quality and simplicity are key to enjoying them at their best

Italian cuisine may be famed for its freshness and simplicity, but as the weather turns colder our collective thoughts turn to hearty, warming fare – and retailers have plenty to choose from when they turn to their Italian stock this season, too.

Soups and stews may seem thoroughly British, but there are plenty of options you can rustle up with simple Italian ingredients. Health-rich minestrone can be bolstered with all manner of seasonal vegetables, and meat (although not a necessity) can make it extra filling. Chicken soup, a favourite comfort food for poorly shoppers, can be replaced by 'Italian penicillin' – a rich soup full of goodness thanks to vegetables and great quality chicken stock. It's made even heartier, as are many Italian soups, with the addition of pastina – small pasta shapes which make it truly a meal in a bowl.

By now, we're all familiar with orzo – the rice-shaped pastina – but stelline (mini stars), farfallini (mini bow ties) and acini de pepe (mini balls, similar to giant couscous) are also worth stocking up on to offer your customers some filling alternatives.

In terms of the soup itself, the trick is to be led by seasonality and simplicity – most recipes can be adapted according to what's in season. Onion and garlic are mainstays, but peas, courgettes and broad beans in summer followed by squash and root vegetables in autumn and winter keep local farmers happy and menus varied.

Not all recipes require a varied stock of fresh vegetables, though – Pasta e Fagioli, a pasta and bean soup, champions the store cupboard, and good quality lentils also play a starring role.

As ever when it comes to simplicity, quality and merchandising is crucial. With such a short ingredients list, buying the best really does make a tangible difference, so inspire your customers to level-up whenever you can. Stocking tinned legumes from the likes of Bold Bean Co and Biona alongside recipe cards is a smart move, and why not try grouping a range of suitable ingredients together in an Italian-inspired display to get appetites whirring?



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