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EDITOR'S LETTER



WE ARE FORTUNATE TO WORK AMONGST PASSIONATE INDIVIDUALS IN AN INSPIRATIONAL SECTOR, BUT IT'S VITAL THAT WE TAKE STOCK AND SHOW GRACE

This may come across as a trite thing to say, but I think it's easily forgotten in the daily stresses of business and I don't think it's recognised often enough: life as a small business operator is hard, hard work.

A few weeks ago many of us attended UK Food Shows where, it's fair to say, we all powered through an energetic three days of connection-making, profit-boosting and all-round enjoyment of the sector we find ourselves working in; stopping at other stands for a sample (or two), and relishing the buzz that comes from being in a room that is quite literally alive with thousands of people and conversations.

It might also be fair to say, as did a few of the professionals I spoke to after the event, that post-event is "where the hard work really begins".

This made me think about how important it is to take stock, not to mention a break, every now and then.

Yes, as those who know me best are well aware, I have a 2.5-year-old boy in tow and therefore appreciate now more than ever the joys of a good period of relaxation, but this isn't a nice-to-have – it's a necessity for us all.

We all know that we don't operate at full power when we're tired/stressed/unwell, yet how often have you carried (struggled might be the more appropriate word) on so as not to let the ball drop?

More to the point, how often has this desire to keep up momentum at all costs been at the detriment of your work or life beyond it?

We are lucky to work amongst individuals who love what they do, for whom passion drives them on – and so getting together at events, big or small, is a genuine pleasure – but in an ideal world we would take pauses now and then to look at where we were, say six months ago, and how far we've come.

Appreciation goes a long way to charging our professional batteries, particularly if it comes from within us – and it's hard to know when to stop when ours is the only voice inside our heads.

So I suggest, at this moment, right now, taking a short while to slow things down, take stock and give yourself some grace – and invite your colleagues and team to do the same.

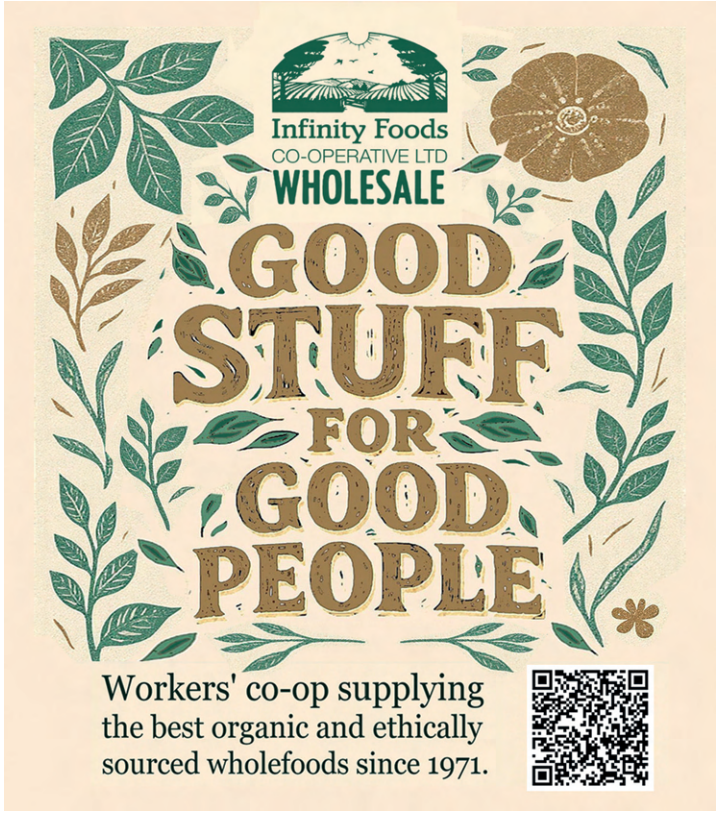
> *We all know that we can't operate at full power when we're tired/stressed/unwell, yet how often have you carried on so as not to let the ball drop?*

Put the kettle on, make a cup of tea for those around you (if you're on your own, add in a biscuit), and show yourself some kindess. We all work hard, but that's something that we can all be better at.

We live in a time of 'hustle culture', and I believe this is especially prevalent in the fine food industry when so many people are running a passion project alongside other jobs and commitments.

It's time for that to evolve.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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What's up with EPOS?

Technology is a fundamental part of running a retail business in 2026, but all too often – and, arguably, increasingly – the multiple cogs keeping operations ticking can create friction.

Each cog working towards differing priorities, functions not quite fitting individual business needs and poor communication can all too easily lead to frustration for all parties, and ultimately it is the small business – most likely working with constrained resources and limited budget – who suffers the most sizeable impact.

We spoke to a retailer, EPOS provider and tech industry expert to glean their views on the current state of play.



JACOB STRAUSS
CTO, CHASELABS

There is ongoing discussion within the industry about improving consistency and predictability around platform change management, particularly as EPOS systems become more central to day-to-day operations. Some commonly proposed improvements include clearer API versioning practices, longer notice periods for non-security-related breaking changes, and more consistent support windows for older integrations.

Data portability is another area of focus. Merchants increasingly expect to be able to export operational data in structured formats that cover not only sales figures, but also product information, tax settings, staff records, audit logs and customer data. In practice, the scope and format of available exports depends on the platform.

Offline capability is also an important design consideration. Many systems provide some form of offline or fallback mode, but the level of functionality available without connectivity varies. As a result, resilience during outages depends on both system design and operational preparedness.

In terms of service expectations, most SLAs focus on system uptime and availability rather than specific business outcomes such as completing individual transactions. Some stakeholders argue that future service frameworks may need to better reflect real-world trading impact, but this is not yet an industry standard.

"Some argue that future frameworks need to better reflect real-world trading impact"



ANGUS JACKSON
CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER AT STOREKIT

EPOS providers built their businesses around a simple idea: put the till at the centre, and everything else orbits it. For a long time, that was the right idea. The POS was where the money moved, where orders lived, where the operation ran. Building an ecosystem around it made sense.

The big shift, the one that changes the whole conversation, is in how operators are buying technology in the first place.

The smarter operators are now starting with the guest – what does the experience need to be, what technology touches the guest directly, and working backwards from there. The POS comes later in that list, chosen for how well it fits into the stack, not as the foundation everything else is built on. The operators who are building something worth coming back to have stopped putting the till at the centre.

"Those building something worth coming back to have stopped putting the till at the centre"



MARK KACARY
THE NORFOLK DELI

For a small independent business, technology isn't a luxury – it's the backbone that many rely on. Whether it is the EPOS system, payment terminals or e-commerce for many small businesses these technologies are proportionally expensive. These costs are paid for in daily trade. In our case, that means selling a lot of cheese just to stand still.

The problem isn't just the cost of keeping systems running. It's the cost of change. When platforms shift or integrations are dropped, the impact is immediate. New hardware may be required; you can guarantee that this will be unbudgeted. Not that many small business employ technology experts so external experts may be needed, these are all costs many small food and drink retailers simply can't absorb.

And this is where the issue becomes unacceptable. Expecting a small business to make fundamental operational changes with as little as seven days' notice is not reasonable. It shows a complete disconnect from how independents actually operate.

Most small businesses aren't technical. They rely on providers not just for functionality, but for reliability and foresight. That means clear communication, transparency, and a roadmap of what's coming and when.

Because without that, to try and enforce change isn't progress. It's disruption. And disruption at this level doesn't just cost money. It costs trust.

"Technology isn't a luxury, it's the backbone that many independent small businesses rely on"



The Feed.

Insider intel from the world of fine food

The big freeze



OLIVER LLOYD
CONSULTANT

Last weekend, after a family walk at a nearby Woodland Trust site, we stopped in at Goodies Food Hall in Pulham, Norfolk, one of my favourite food halls. A chicken was already in the oven at home, the roast potatoes had been par-boiled, but clearly something was missing. My son spotted a chest full of delights from Fieldfare, and zoned in on the frozen Yorkshire puddings in the cabinet. An hour later, four of them joined the roast, ready in six minutes, and transformed a simple Sunday lunch into something that felt properly generous. It was a shortcut that added rather than subtracted, and it got me thinking about how much the world of frozen food is changing.

For decades, the freezer aisle carried a bit of an image problem, the place you turned to when fresh had run out, when convenience trumped quality. That is beginning to change, and it's happening at both ends of the market simultaneously.

In grocery, established players and ambitious startups are arriving with genuinely fresh thinking. Itsu's frozen range has helped reframe what frozen Asian food can be, with grocery revenues growing 20% to £57m in 2024. Trü Frü, the Mars-backed brand, achieved £7.4m in retail sales within its first nine months by doing something deceptively simple: real fruit, double-dipped in chocolate and hyper-chilled, tripling UK distribution to nearly 7,000 stores by 2025.

Frozen has always had the potential to be more than a fallback. The brands arriving in this space are finally proving it and retailers see it too

Pack'd has expanded its organic frozen fruit range to include pomegranate seeds, recognising that the fresh version carries a short shelf life and a lot of prep. And Griddle Bakery is quietly building something compelling with frozen wholegrain waffles and a new brioche French toast that belongs in this new conversation about what frozen can be.

Cook, the B Corp frozen ready meals brand, perhaps best illustrates how far the category's ambition has travelled, from its own shops to Co-op partnerships and now into smart vending machines across offices, hospitals and travel hubs, offering dishes like portobello mushroom risotto.

For farm shops, the opportunity is equally real. Brick Pizza brings hand-crafted Neapolitan pizzas to over 350 independent stockists. Fieldfare's loose, individually portioned model allows you to scoop what you need and no more. They are quietly reframing what premium looks like in a way that also reduces waste. Field Goods delivers frozen ready meals that belong proudly on any quality shelves and are at Fortum's!

Frozen has always had the potential to be so much more than a fallback. The brands arriving in this space are finally proving it and retailers see it too.





How to improve category performance

The evidence from consumption patterns to four areas where brands and operators can improve category performance. The first is segmentation. A range that reflects distinct occasions, time of day needs and functional intent will consistently outperform one built around breadth alone. The second is restraint. Overloading a range with broadly similar products in adjacent subcategories dilutes the clarity that drives purchase decisions. Fewer, better differentiated options tend to produce stronger overall category performance. The third is benefit clarity. The products that convert most reliably are those where consumers can identify the relevant benefits within a few seconds of engagement. Functional claims buried in the small print, or premiumisation cues that require prior category knowledge to decode, represent a missed opportunity during the decision-making process. The fourth is placement by occasion. Where the physical or digital environment allows products to be positioned in a way that reflects their most natural consumption moment, conversion rates improve and consumer satisfaction with the overall range increases.

Elyas Coutts, chief executive at Connect Vending, on how retailers can strategically plan their product range

UK food and drink export: in numbers

Food and Drink Federation



While exports increased 6% in volume terms, food and drink exports are still below their pre-Brexit peak



25.6bn

The value of UK food and drink exports rose to a record high in 2025, reaching £25.6bn



Non-EU imports now make up 30.9% of the UK's total imports, increasing from 29.3% in 2024



"British food and drink is sought after worldwide – it is known for its high quality, innovation, and connection to our cultural heritage. It's good to see some British products flying in overseas markets, and others holding their own in tough trading conditions."

Karen Betts, chief executive at The Food and Drink Federation (FDF)

In the **UK** around **1.5 million** people are now using **weight loss** injections, contributing to **little** and **often** eating with a greater **focus** on **nutrient-dense** foods and smaller **portions**

Cornell-Numerator GLP.1 Papers

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The Feed. Operations

As food inflation rises, FDF is calling on government to introduce time-limited, bespoke Food and Drink Energy Support including a cap for energy prices for food and drink manufacturers.

18.8%
Prices rose for beef and veal (18.8%), whole milk (12.7%) and confectionery (11.1%)

3.7%
Food and non-alcoholic drink prices rose by 3.7% in the 12 months to March 2026

Source: Food & Drink Federation

The UK's **National Living Wage** has **risen** to **£12.71** per hour — a **4.1%** uplift — for **eligible** employees aged **21** and **over**. This will **raise** the gross **earnings** of the **2.4 million** low-wage **workers** on this rate of pay by **£900** per year

gov.uk

DRS is a valuable opportunity for small retailers



"The proposed exemptions framework is a welcome and pragmatic step in recognising the operational challenges many smaller retailers face, particularly in urban locations where space is at a premium.

"At the same time, innovation in reverse vending technology means participation is becoming more accessible.

"It's also encouraging to see targeted financial support being introduced.

"Smaller businesses will need this additional backing to manage upfront costs and operational considerations, especially in the early stages of the scheme.

"There is a real opportunity for those smaller retailers that do participate. Hosting a return point can help drive increased footfall, create new customer touchpoints, and deliver procurement efficiencies.

"However, as the scheme develops, there remains a clear need for education and guidance to support smaller businesses, which currently remains limited.

"Providing them with better information on costs, requirements, and potential benefits will be essential to help them make informed decisions and participate confidently."

Travis Way, managing director at RVM experts EcoVend responding to the news that the UK's official Deposit Return Scheme organisers Exchange for Change have shared more details on how it will support smaller independent shops in taking part in the Scheme.

New era for WBC

Wine Box Company (WBC) has refreshed its brand identity alongside launching a dedicated packaging studio encompassing an innovation studio.

A CAD table will be on-site to enable more effective consultations and develop packaging concepts, as well as support sampling.

The Crawley facility will be open to the public and offer the chance to collaborate on packaging solutions with expert teams.

Simon Wright, managing director of WBC, said, "This rebrand is more than a visual change. It reflects our commitment to the Group's long term vision for packaging. Alongside investments such as our new Innovation Studio, we are strengthening our ability to deliver more innovative, solution led, bespoke support that helps our customers grow, while continuing to deliver the quality and service they expect from WBC."

International Inspiration



ADRIAN BEALE
BUCKLEY & BEALE

One of the strengths of the UK's food culture lies in its diversity – regional specialities, small-scale producers, and a growing focus on provenance and craft. That's something worth protecting and championing. But shoppers today are also more curious than ever. They travel more, they cook more adventurously, and they're increasingly open to new formats, flavours and ingredients that don't always originate on our shores.

Contrast, not competition

Imported food can play a role here, not as competition, but as contrast. In many cases, it brings ideas shaped by different food cultures or by markets that are further along in certain areas - whether that's plant-based innovation, functional ingredients, or alternative approaches to everyday staples. These products often reflect specific consumer needs or lifestyles that have developed at pace elsewhere, and which are now beginning to resonate more strongly in the UK.

There's also something to be said for perspective. Seeing how a familiar category is interpreted in another country can be refreshing – sometimes it's a new ingredient, sometimes it's a simpler formulation, sometimes it's just a different way of thinking about the same product. That sense of discovery is valuable, particularly in independent retail, where differentiation and storytelling are part of the appeal.

Curating balance

Of course, none of this diminishes the importance of supporting local producers. In fact, the two can sit very comfortably side by side. A well-curated range often blends the best of both – local products that speak to provenance and seasonality, alongside carefully chosen imports that bring a broader view of what's happening beyond the UK. For many retailers, it's this balance that keeps a fixture interesting and relevant.

A sense of discovery is valuable, particularly in independent retail, where differentiation and storytelling are part of the appeal

Ultimately, importing food is about widening the lens rather than shifting the focus. It's about recognising that good ideas can come from anywhere, and that today's shoppers are looking for both authenticity and discovery in equal measure. When done thoughtfully, it adds depth to the overall offer – complementing what's already strong, rather than competing with it.



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The Feed. Retail

Government steps up fight against retail crime

According to Reveal Media, abuse against retail employees is costing retailers at least £235m in HR costs annually, while the most recent annual survey from retail trade union Usdaw shows that nearly 80% have experienced verbal abuse and 10% have been assaulted.

The Government is attempting to make assaulting a retail worker a standalone offence as part of the Crime & Policing Bill and has scrapped the "shoplifters charter" that imposed an immunity for thefts with a value of under £200.

It has placed an additional 3,000 police officers with "stronger powers" on the streets, "making the abuse and assault of retail workers a specific crime and giving you the same protections as emergency workers."



Your customers aren't complaining – they're just not coming back



CHRIS CARTLEDGE
INSIGHT6

In a sector built on quality, provenance and passion, most independent food retailers already get the product right. But today's customers are more selective than ever. If the experience doesn't match the product, they rarely complain - they simply don't come back.

From the outside, everything can look healthy – steady footfall, familiar faces, reliable sales. But beneath the surface, small friction points are quietly eroding loyalty and revenue. Individually, these moments seem minor. Collectively, they shape how a customer feels – and whether they return.

Having worked across both hospitality and retail, the difference is clear. In hospitality, problems surface quickly. Empty tables and direct feedback make it obvious when something isn't working. In retail, you can operate in the dark for months. No complaints doesn't mean a good experience. More often, it means no one is telling you.

This creates a gap between what the business believes is happening and what customers are actually experiencing. And in independent retail, where margins are tight and loyalty matters, that gap is costly. A customer who doesn't return represents lost lifetime value – and that's where the real impact lies.

There is a gap between what the business believes is happening and what customers are actually experiencing

The issue isn't usually the team. It's inconsistency. Most people haven't been shown what "great" looks like in a clear, repeatable way. When the basics aren't delivered consistently – greeting, engagement, product knowledge — performance drops.

The good news is that improving the customer experience doesn't always require a major investment. In many cases, measurable gains come from simply tightening the basics. It starts with visibility. If you don't know what your customer experience actually looks like day to day, you're relying on assumption – and assumption is expensive.

Step back and look at your shop through your customer's eyes. Where are the friction points? Where are the moments that matter most? Often, it's the simplest actions that have the biggest impact.

The most successful retailers don't just sell great products. They create experiences that customers choose to come back for.



Evolution of 'value' for UK shopper

2026's consumers are redefining what 'value' means, according to Lumina Intelligence's report *The Modern UK Consumer 2026*.

According to the study, price is no longer the dominant driver and shoppers are instead judging value through consistent quality, good taste, reliability, experience and emotional payoff.

Fairness and consistency are now considered more important than ultra-low prices, which was found to erode trust when not backed by strong fundamentals.

Sensory experience was found to be a shortcut to a perception of value – freshness, taste and presentation instantly translated to quality, outperforming detailed credentials and certifications in justifying price and influencing choice.

Invest in connection for growth

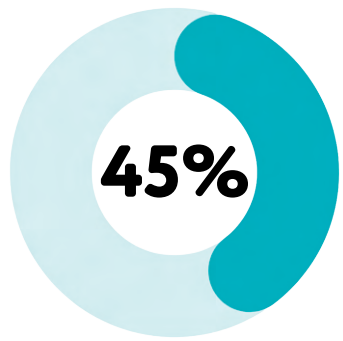
Voices of Retail, Faire x Spring & Autumn Fair



Retailers investing in brand storytelling are 19% more likely to grow



Improving in-store experience and local sourcing each deliver a 13% uplift



45% of declining retailers have pivoted towards lower-price products, highlighting the risks of competing on price



"Retailers competing on price are more likely to be under pressure, while those investing in experience, quality and connection are pulling ahead."

Jackson Szabo, portfolio director, Hyve Group



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5 ways to inspire customers to buy British produce



HALEY BELL
FOOD AND NUTRITION CONSULTANT

Farm shops, delis and food halls are well placed to help customers discover British produce and understand when it is at its seasonal best.

Highlight seasonal moments
Consider marking the start of a season with simple displays like a seasonal calendar poster, to help customers recognise when produce is at its best throughout the year.

Support customers to cook with seasonal ingredients
Many shoppers want to buy seasonal food but may be unsure how to prepare it at home. Retailers can help build confidence by offering recipe cards, deli counter suggestions or simple serving ideas.

Champion lesser known British varieties
ritain produces a wide range of ingredients that receive little attention. Showcasing produce such as damsons and kohlrabi can help introduce customers to something different while creating a distinctive offer.

Consider inviting local growers for informal in-store conversations, which can help bring these ingredients to life.
When used thoughtfully, British produce can help independent retailers create a shop environment that feels seasonal, knowledgeable and closely connected to the people who produce the food, while giving customers a reason to return throughout the year.

Farming "forgotten again"

The NFU has stated that food manufacturers have been "forgotten again" after the Government announcement that 10,000 manufacturers will benefit from the British Industrial Competitiveness Scheme (BICS) excludes the agricultural sector.

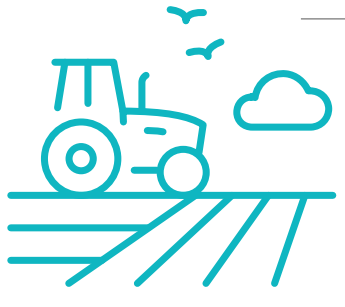
The new measures will cut electricity bills by up to 25% for some businesses, but British farming remains illegible for the support.

"It is deeply frustrating that food has been forgotten again by the government despite acknowledging the crippling impact of high energy costs on other industries," said Tom Bradshaw, NFU president.

"Parts of the horticulture sector, for example, are incredibly energy-intensive growing tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers in heated glasshouses, and are grappling with the same global price volatility as any factory - yet are being left to face these surging costs alone.

"By excluding farming, the government is effectively putting a handbrake on investment and our ability to produce a supply of sustainable, high-quality food ministers claim to support. This is a major missed opportunity to bolster national food security at a time of significant geopolitical uncertainty."





British **farmers** manage over **70%** of the **landscape** and produce **food** for **70 million** people

NFU



Confectionery

TASTE
SWEET



Stockleys
Heritage Jars
Sweet Selection, Mint Selection, Toffee Selection and Berries & Cream confectionery in 450g jars, perfect for gifting.
stockleys-sweets.co.uk



Popcorn Shed
Cinnamon Roll Snack Pack
A comforting blend of sweet cinnamon, butter and icing sugar coating each piece of caramel popcorn for a cosy sweet snack.
popcornshed.com



Biona
Dark Chocolate Coconut Bar
A chewy coconut centre wrapped in dark chocolate and sweetened with coconut blossom sugar.
biona.co.uk



The Protein Ball Co
Peanut Butter
Multipacks of protein and fibre-rich sweet snack balls containing fibre and no gluten or added sugars.
theproteinballco.com



Rise of premium confectionery

The United Kingdom confectionery market size was valued at **USD 16.98 billion** in **2025** and estimated to grow from **USD 17.85 billion** in **2026** to reach **USD 22.91 billion by 203**1, at a **CAGR** of **5.12%** during the forecast period **(2026-2031).** This growth is supported by increasing demand for premium products, a shift toward healthier product formulations, and consistent interest in seasonal gifting, despite challenges like rising raw material costs and stricter High in Fat, Salt, or Sugar **(HFSS)** regulations. The sharp **80%** rise in cocoa prices in **2024** impacted profit margins, but manufacturers adapted by reformulating recipes, diversifying supply chains, and carefully managing price increases.
Mordor Intelligence



The flavours tempting fine food consumers in 2026

I think we will see more interest in unusual origins of cocoa amongst gourmet consumers as they realise the flavour available and the pleasure in comparing the different taste profiles from different makers and origins and percentages.
But always unusual inclusions and flavours will attract initial purchase for what's often a high price point purchase in the minds of many consumers."

Jennifer Earle, founder of Chocolate Ecstasy Tours, on the top trends in chocolate in 2026

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New support for startups

Tastebuds Collective, The Forge and Opply are joining forces to provide hands-on growth programmes for emerging businesses.

The Campaign Bootcamp sessions are designed to provide tangible value for founders, who will work with industry experts to create real-world campaigns that will leave them with actionable take-homes that they can apply to their own businesses.

The project aims to support startup businesses beyond the business hub of London, where many resources are concentrated.

Louis Halpenny, head of partnerships at Opply, said, "There is always a lot of noise online surrounding food and drink, but it is often London-centric. We live in an amazing country full of food and drink talent, with strong regional communities. We want to support those founders who may not be attending trade shows – but are creating incredible products and looking for ways to take them to the next level."

Thank you for backing the underdogs



SIMON GREENWOOD-HAIGH
MAKIN MIGHTY

Challenger brands aren't just a conversation-starter; done well, they're a bottom-line driver too. Here are five ways to work with them and help them... to help you.

1) Serve a valuable shopper
The person who's willing to spend a bit more of their money to try something new is exactly the kind of shopper you want coming back. Challenger brands attract curious customers. Stock them well and you're boosting the 'this shop has great things' feeling.

2) Give them a peek behind the curtain
Make founder stories visible and simple: a photo, a short line on why they started, what makes it special and where it's made. Then take it one step further: tastings, demos, a weekend 'meet the maker' hour. Curiosity turns into trial very quickly when people can taste and ask questions.

3) Create easy, practical theatre
This doesn't need to be a song-and-dance. A tasting table. A 'new and noteworthy' shelf. A staff pick card. A little bit of POS that makes the product impossible to ignore. Challenger brands are hungry to learn fast, so they'll often invest time, samples and content if you give them the chance. And if you can share what happened afterwards, not a fancy report, just sell-through, best times of day and a few snippets of what customers said, you'll be surprised how willing they are to come back and do more.

Challenger brands are hungry to learn fast, so they'll often invest time, samples and content if you give them the chance

4) Become a challenger destination
Challenger brands tend to hunt in packs.
They're usually up for partnerships because it helps them grow faster and it helps you build bigger baskets with very little effort. Think in occasions, not categories: pasta + sauce + wine. Crackers + dip + posh soft drinks. You're not just selling items, you're making it easier for customers to buy a whole moment.

5) Build long-term partners, not one-off suppliers
Even when they scale, the best challenger brands remember the stores that gave them their first break. They often choose independents first for new flavours, limited runs, seasonal drops, and small exclusive activations because you can move quickly, tell the story properly and get real feedback.

THE INNOVATORS

Our round-up of new launches from the tastiest UK startups



Bwblin Parsnip Spread
A avoury spread made with organic British parsnips naturally fermented for depth of flavour and gut-friendly goodness.
bwblin.com



Cups Full Coffee Bags
A premium option for shoppers wanting to enjoy their coffee on-the-go.
cupsfull.co.uk

5 MINUTES WITH...



RUPERT DERHAM
FOUNDER OF SPICE DEPT.

What would you be doing if you weren't in the food industry?
My dream from the age of 13 was to be an opera singer. I gave it a good go but never quite made it. Classical music is still my guilty pleasure, and the radio is always tuned to Radio 3.

What was your first job?
I did the usual teenage restaurant and pub work although I was always a terrible waiter and barman so used to get sent into the pub kitchen that I worked in. I think this is where my interest with the food industry started.

What inspires you?
Purpose. I find working towards something seemingly unachievable is much better if there is a real purpose. Supporting our farmers and giving our customers incredible tasting spices is what drives me.

What's your favourite part of the job?
Spending time with farmers across India and Sri Lanka. It's a tough job, but someone has to do it!

And your least favourite?
Admin! My dyslexic brain just can't cope with it.

How about the food industry?
It feels like people are cooking real food from scratch again and enjoying the pleasure that this brings.

What's your motto?
I'm not really a motto kind of person, but the phrase 'fail forwards' always sticks with me. Don't be afraid to take risks – as long as you learn from the mistakes you make, you will always keep moving forwards.

Startup **ambition** is **high** amongst **24** to **35** year olds, where almost **two thirds** cite their **desire** to **start** their own **business**

Archimedia Accounts



Build together



YASMIN WYATT
BAKED. ON EARSHAM STREET

We haven't been open much longer than a month, but we've learned so much during that period. My two founding colleagues and I have experience working in a larger-scale bakery business, and while we learned a lot there – especially in terms of hospitality – it's been a whirlwind adventure to set up on our own. We're giving Dolly Parton a run for her money!

We're open seven days a week and there's a clear differentiation between our weekday and weekend customers. We're based in a quiet town in Suffolk, and during the week our customer base tends to be older locals who come in at the same time each day for a cup of tea and maybe a sausage roll – but primarily for a conversation. A lot of them live alone so they appreciate chatting about their day and their dog, and want to know about us too.

Our weekend customers, however, are much younger and have most likely travelled to us after seeing us on Instagram. They want something fun that they can post on their on social accounts, so every week we produce a couple of specials to keep them excited about what we do – for example, tiramisu white chocolate iced lattes and banana cruffins (these sold out in eight minutes). They want the cold foams and matcha as a replacement for the cocktail-fuelled nightlife environment; they're after an attractive morning coffee and pastry instead, a slower way of living...

We don't want to have a queue outside our café but for the town to be dead – we should all benefit together

The power of social media has been really eye opening.

It's been a cycle of long hours, big volume, and constantly finding a new recipe that works at scale without losing our high standard. Just because we've had a successful opening month doesn't mean we're always going to be successful, so we have to keep momentum going.

Community is key

The younger, social media-driven, generation are key to our growth, but the locals are vital to our success, so we've been proactive about building relationships with our local community. Our town contains a number of independents, and as a local myself I've known a lot of the business owners as a customer for years, and having that supportive framework has been great – but, until now, they haven't been hugely collaborative when it comes to social media.

They've been precious about their accounts, only promoting their own products and services, but our approach is to support them all – and this has already had tangible benefits, with some saying they'll open on additional days as they've witnessed the town's growth in footfall. We don't want to have a queue outside our café but for the town to be dead – we should all benefit together.

THE THREE FORCES REDEFINING EATING OUT

According to new data from Lumina Intelligence's Operator Data Index, there are three key aspects which define how UK consumers choose where to eat in 2026.

• Premium with proven quality
While consumers are considerate of their tighter budgets, they are still spending on eating out when an experience has markers of high quality. These include seasonal innovation, inspiring narratives and enjoyable interiors.

• Value-led food-to-go
While chicken-based dishes are the key order of the day, simplified value and health-driven concepts are attractive to younger consumers who are seeking value and excitement.

• Coffee and sandwiches are booming
Both craft and everyday coffee/bakery concepts are booming, and major players are utilising seasonal innovation to grow.

85% of consumers say coffee quality influences where they eat or drink

NESCAFÉ and Nestlé Professional UK & Ireland

How to cater for time-poor café customers

According to insight from The Original Baker, café operators have just seconds to influence a customer's purchasing decision.



The study showed that customers are looking for visual cues, familiarity and simplicity when in fast-paced café and restaurant settings, suggesting that operators should simplify their messaging and menu choices to suit consumer needs.

"Many cafés are trying to offer too much choice," said Kevin Walton, head of marketing at The Original Baker. "In reality, simplifying the offer and making products easier to understand can have a much bigger impact on sales."

Familiar product formats, easy-to-read menus and consistent product presentation were found to lead to stronger overall performance and improved conversion.



The **2026** edition of our annual exploration of the UK's snacking market – **Snack Buyer** – is currently in production.

If you'd like to get involved, email **hello@specialityfoodmagazine.com**



The Latest.

Stay up to date with our feed of the latest food & drink product news

TRENDING PRODUCTS



OUR EDITOR'S PICKS OF THE HOTTEST PRODUCTS TO HIT THE MARKET RIGHT NOW



GLOW TO GO

Willy's ACV's new Eureka Glow Shots are a boon for the retailer looking to cater for wellness-seeking and time-poor shoppers. Each little bottle has been specially designed as a daily ritual for those seeking to glow from within. "We've taken our Eureka Tumeric Apple Cider Vinegar and carefully blended it with our premium olive oil to create a natural, golden blend that tastes as good as it feels," said Hattie Young of Willy's ACV.

willysacv.com

STROOPWAFFLES GO GLUTEN-FREE

Organic gluten-free stroopwaffles are now in the UK courtesy of Stroop Club, bringing the popular chewy biscuit format to those following gluten-free diets.The brand also produces Traditional Caramel and Chocolate Caramel variants, both suitable for vegans. "Baked in a (pea) nut free kitchen, this one is leaving nobody out," said Chantal Piet, founder. "Available in small handy two-packs and eight-packs to share with your tea.

stroopclub.co.uk



Protein-rich pasta hits UK market

Buckley & Beale have brought Canadian brand Otelia's pasta to the UK. Available in Black Bean, Edamame Bean and Soy Bean & Chickpea, each product is made using only organic beans and water. "It exceeds expectations on two things shoppers are actively looking for: protein and fibre, which is by far the highest in the UK," explains Adrian Beale, CEO and co-owner.

buckleyandbeale.com



Cherry Tree Preserves reveals cheeky side

Handcrafted in small batches and designed to bring a little humour to the table, the new Lustful Larder range is made using premium ingredients. "We wanted to create something that makes people smile as much as it satisfies their tastebuds," said Mark, founder. "Food should be fun, and this range definitely doesn't take itself too seriously."

lustfullarder.co.uk



Kent Crisps celebrates provenance

Kent Crisps' new Beef Brisket & Stout crisps have been produced in collaboration with Shepherd Neame. One of the brewer's newest beers – Iron Wharf Stout, a nitro stout inspired by Faversham's historic shipbuilding industry – has been used to flavour the crisps, and its malt character complements the deep notes of beef brisket. Laura Bounds MBE, owner, said, "Our ethos has always been to champion the very best of Kent, from exceptional local producers to the county's world-class visitor destinations, and this launch brings all those elements together in a way that truly reflects our values."

kentcrisps.com



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Yumm Singha launches with new name and product

Singapore-inspired brand Homi Kitchen has rebranded to Yumm Singha after a legal dispute with Warner Bros. Megan Tan, founder, explained, "This transition hasn't been easy, but it's given us the opportunity to come back stronger, clearer, and even more focused on what we do best, which is flavour." The third product in the range is now launching, too – a Laksa Curry Sauce, which forms the foundations of a deeply aromatic and bright curry with notes of ginger, garlic and lemongrass within a creamy and savoury base. The sauce features the characteristic graininess of Southeast Asian curries for an authentic experience.

yummsingha.com

Hawkshead Relish launches pasta sauces

The Lake District-based business has expanded to launch two pasta sauces. The pasta sauces – available in Tomato & Herb and Tomato & Chilli variants – are designed to offer a high quality, convenient solution for everyday cooking, and are gluten-free, nut-free and suitable for vegans. "We're delighted with the response we've had to these two new pasta sauces so far," said Maria Whitehead MBE, co-founder. "We're always looking for ways to mix convenience with quality flavours, making it even easier to prepare a delicious home cooked meal with very minimal effort."

hawksheadrelish.com





All Dressed Up collaborates with Wahaca

The brand has partnered with the Mexican restaurant group to create Jalapeño Green Goddess Dressing, where tarragon, coriander, parsley and green jalapeño blend with citrussy freshness from lemon, lime, cider vinegar and creamy soya milk. Tess Reed, founder, said, "Our mission is to get people obsessing over dressing, and this collaboration felt like the perfect way to do that, bringing bold, exciting new flavours you'd normally experience in a restaurant and make them easy to enjoy at home."

alldressedupdressings.com

Going for gold



CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS
GREAT BRITISH FOOD AWARDS

The final countdown is on for the Great British Food Awards.

What makes British food and drink so special? We can think of a number of things. For starters, the absolute quality of ingredients. Our farmers and producers bring to the table an enviable array of gorgeous things – from spears of gloriously green asparagus, and sunshine-infused strawberries, to spring lamb fed on marshlands, pasture-raised beef, and cheeses revered the world over.

Then there are our makers. Drawing on both regional inspiration and the UK's melting pot of cultures, they are constantly innovating and reacting to trends. Consumer shopping baskets are just as likely to be packed with homegrown kombucha, kefir, freeze-dried fruit snacks, quirky spreads and bean to bar chocolate these days as they are meat and two veg.

Our celebrity and expert judges really do know their onions - former entrants say their input has made a measurable difference to their businesses

The Great British Food Awards are an opportunity to celebrate all of these passionate, inventive, forward-thinking folk – and there are just a few weeks left to enter this year, with the 2026 Awards closing at the end of May.

Not only are the Great British Food Awards a chance to be better recognised within the industry, but they're rigorously judged by experts (feedback is available). Bearing a GBF logo on your packaging really is a badge of honour.

There are more than 60 categories to enter in 2026 – including new categories for Organic and Sustainable products. So, what are you waiting for? Enter at greatbritishfoodawards.com

Brand New from Atkins & Potts

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Counterpoint.

SPONSORED BY PETER'S YARD



Celebrating Seasonal Cheese

Through smart pairings and considered care, seasonal cheeses can inspire a raft of new shoppers to buy from your counter

The moment the sun starts to bring some warmth to proceedings, the majority of shoppers' thoughts turn from rich and fudgy blues which warmed their cockles and palates during the colder months to resolutely lighter cheeses. Creamy, milky cheeses with less heavy flavour profiles really come into their own during spring and summer, their versatility perfectly suited to the array of dishes consumers whip up at the slightest hint of sunshine.

Catering for warm-weather dishes (and appetites)

"In the summer months, everything shifts towards freshness, simplicity, and lighter, more vibrant flavours," says Nina Narramore of The Norfolk Cheese Company. "Customers naturally gravitate towards foods that feel easy and refreshing, and we see that reflected clearly in what sells well in the deli. Crisp salads, bright ingredients, and cheeses that complement rather than overwhelm really come into their own."

"For me, the real stars of summer are those fresh, light cheeses that just seem to belong on a sunny day," says Jen Grimstone-Jones of Cheese Etc/The Pangbourne Cheese Shop. "Our counter is currently filling up with softer cheeses and picnic-ready lighter firm cheeses such as a French Tomme or our local Witheridge in Hay. We sell a lot more Mozzarella and Burrata in the summer too."

Goats cheese is also worth a fresh look in spring. "All of our British goats cheeses are incredibly good at the moment and I tried a Buffalo Halloumi-style from the Newt in Somerset last week which will definitely be my go-to BBQ cheese for the summer," Jen continues.

The style in which people eat evolves too. "People tend to move away from heavier, heartier meals and instead lean towards more relaxed, informal eating," explains Nina. "The classic "picky bit" tea becomes a firm favourite – a spread of cheeses, olives, breads, and little extras that can be shared and enjoyed at a slower pace. This shift doesn't just boost sales of summer-specific products, but also creates a gentle uplift across other cheeses that work well in this style of eating.

"One of our true seasonal standouts is Burrata," says Nina. "It's a cheese we tend to reserve just for the summer months, when its delicate, creamy centre can really be appreciated at its best. Served simply with ripe tomatoes, a drizzle of good balsamic vinegar, and perhaps a touch of basil, it embodies everything people want from summer food – fresh, indulgent, but never heavy."

A British take on Feta also proves popular at The Norfolk Cheese Company, says Nina. "Mrs Temple's Wighton cheese is our local hero. It's a fantastic example of a cheese that fits perfectly into summer dining. With its crumbly texture, similar to Feta, and its clean, fresh flavour, it pairs beautifully with sun-dried tomatoes, salads, and light Mediterranean-style dishes. Add a chilled glass of rosé, and you have something that feels effortlessly seasonal and satisfying."

IN THE KNOW

SUMMER CHEESE CARE AT A GLANCE

WARMER WEATHER REQUIRES ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS TO KEEP CHEESE AT ITS BEST, SAYS JEN GRIMSTONE-JONES OF CHEESE ETC/ PANGBOURNE CHEESE SHOP

It is a bit harder in the warmer weather to keep your cheeses in tip top condition. I always travel with a cool bag for any unplanned cheese purchases!

We offer reusable ice packs to customers, especially those that pop in having moored up on the Thames for a few days.

All of our online orders get extra ice in with them and we do everything we can to make sure the cheeses are kept cool in transit."

Whereas in the winter we suggest customers get their cheeses out of the fridge an hour or two before eating, in the summer that advice changes to 30 minutes as the cheeses (especially the softs) don't need nearly as much time to come up to eating-temp.

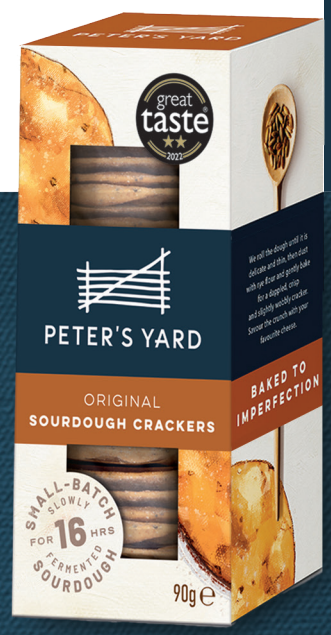
> *The real stars of summer are those fresh, light cheeses that just seem to belong on a sunny day. Our counter is currently filling up with softer cheeses and picnic-ready lighter firm cheeses*



PETER'S YARD

IT ALL RESTS ON A GREAT CRACKER

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The Cut.

The latest launches, news and views from the world of cheese

Spring cheese, shared properly



STEPHEN FLEMING
GEORGE & JOSEPH

There's something about spring that invites people back round the table. The evenings begin to stretch out, Easter and bank holidays appear on the horizon, and suddenly we're looking for excuses to gather again - lunch with friends, drinks in the garden, or a simple supper that feels generous without being fussy. For me, that's where good cheese comes into its own.

Too often, cheese is treated as an afterthought: brought out at the end, almost apologetically, or relegated to Christmas as if it only has one proper moment in the year. But cheese deserves better than that. It can be a starter, a centrepiece, a conversation starter, or the thing that turns a few bits on the table into something memorable. And spring is one of the most exciting times to eat it, particularly when you look to the best British and Irish makers, whose cheeses offer freshness, character and a real sense of place.

If we want to elevate cheese in this country, we need to stop treating it as an extra and start giving it the place it deserves

A natural shift

After the heavier, richer food of winter, we start looking for brightness: green vegetables, fresh herbs, lighter wines, crisp ciders, young leaves, radishes, peas and asparagus. Cheese fits beautifully into that way of eating. It doesn't always need to arrive with heavy chutneys and port. In spring, it can be lighter, livelier and much more versatile.

At this time of year, I find myself drawn to British and Irish cheeses that feel alive and full of energy. A goat's cheese such as Dorstone from Herefordshire has exactly the kind of brightness spring calls for - fresh, citrussy and delicate, brilliant with asparagus, peas, broad beans or simply spread onto warm sourdough. Add a drizzle of good olive oil, a few herbs and a glass of something chilled, and you've got the sort of dish that looks effortless but feels incredibly generous.

Equally, a beautiful sheep's milk cheese like Corra Linn from Scotland brings a lovely elegance to the table: buttery, nutty and just the thing with a chilled glass of white wine. Sheep's milk cheeses often have a quiet richness to them, and Corra Linn is a brilliant example of how British and Irish cheesemaking can sit comfortably alongside more famous European styles while still having its own identity.

Spring is also when I like to remind people that a great territorial cheese can be one of the most sociable things you can serve. A well-cut piece of Kirkham's Lancashire, made in Lancashire from raw milk, has freshness, crumble and a lactic brightness that makes it wonderfully food-friendly. With good bread, chutney, radishes and a few slices of ham, you've got a lunch that feels both abundant and unfussy.

For something softer and more luxurious, Baron Bigod is made for sharing. It's a cheese that asks very little of you: let it come to room temperature, bake a loaf, open a bottle, and let people gather round. That, to me, is how cheese should be eaten - not as a performance, but as a centrepiece. It doesn't need elaborate plating or cheffy flourishes. It just needs to be in good condition, served at the right temperature, and given the space to do what great cheese does best.

The role of independent cheesemongers

We can help customers move beyond the default cheeseboard and think about cheese as part of the whole meal. We can suggest seasonal pairings, talk about texture, explain how a cheese will behave when it is ripe, and help people choose something that suits the occasion rather than simply filling a gap. For customers who love good food but are short on time, that guidance matters.

There is also a bigger point here. If we want to elevate cheese in this country, we need to stop treating it as an extra and start giving it the place it deserves. British and Irish artisan cheesemakers are producing cheeses of real quality, individuality and integrity. They are shaped by milk, landscape, skill, season and patience. Spring is a wonderful moment to celebrate that, because the food we want to eat naturally becomes more relaxed, more social and more open.

So this spring, don't leave cheese until the very end. Put it at the heart of the table. Keep it generous, keep it simple, and let the cheese do the talking.



UK-wide cheese knowledge tour launches

A group of independent producers have joined forces to develop the Cheese Knowledge Tour – a free training initiative – in response to the growing pressure around the cost and accessibility of training across specialist food retail.

The training has been designed to provide independent fine food retailers plus hospitality teams and buyers with the knowledge to confidently work with cheese through guided tastings, practical experience and direct access to producers.

Topics cover cheese handling, pairing and selling and range planning.

Cheese expert Tanny Gill will deliver each session, which will combine practical skills with learning that can be applied in retail environments.

Tanny Gill, programme director of the Cheese Knowledge Tour, said, "Training has become one of the biggest challenges for independent retailers. The cost of properly training even one member of staff can be prohibitive, and in many cases it simply does not happen. That has a direct impact on confidence, on sales and ultimately on the sustainability of businesses.

"The Cheese Knowledge Tour is about changing that. It has been built with a group of producers who all believe that better knowledge leads to a stronger, more confident cheese market. This is just the beginning — the aim is to grow the programme and bring more of the industry together, while keeping it practical, open and accessible to anyone working with cheese."

As well as building individual knowledge and confidence, the programme aims to strengthen connections across the sector, bringing producers and the trade closer together through shared understanding and practical collaboration.

33%

Soft Continental varieties account for 33% of the speciality cheese market

WORLDPANEL DECEMBER 2025

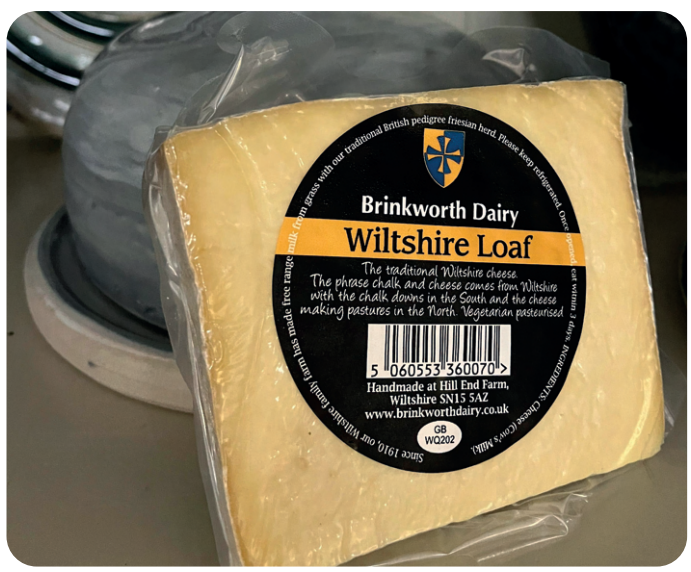
Brinkworth Dairy revives Wiltshire Loaf for spring

The cheesemaker has brought back the territorial cheese that until now had all but disappeared from British cheeseboards.

Made with milk from the farm's own closed Friesian herd in Wiltshire, it is a hard cheese with a waxed natural rind and a firm but supple paste. The flavour is rich and savoury with a gentle nuttiness and a light chamomile-daisy note – familiar in style to classic British territorials, but with a distinct character shaped by Brinkworth Dairy's grass-fed herd and the Wiltshire landscape.

"Wiltshire Loaf is particularly significant to us because it represents both a revival and a continuation: the return of a lost regional cheese, and a way of expressing the character of our farm through a traditional British style," said Ceri Cryer, director of Brinkworth Dairy. "Everything is made on site with milk from our own cows, which gives us complete control from pasture to cheeseroom and allows the cheese to reflect both seasonality and place.

"Wiltshire Loaf is our way of bringing back a true regional British cheese and giving it a future. It's rooted in the history of this county, but it also tells the story of our farm today – our herd, our pasture and the way we make cheese here in Wiltshire. For us, it's about proving that traditional territorial cheeses still have enormous value, both culturally and commercially."





Tom Walker & Sons brings award-winning Fiorella to UK

German cow's milk cheese Fiorella is a soft speciality cheese which delivers exceptional richness and indulgence – an ideal option for consumers looking for premium Continental cheeses that are approachable in flavour and format.

Its distinctive flower shape means that the cheese matures slowly, developing a distinctive flavour and texture, and creates an impressive cheese counter centrepiece.

The launch comes as the UK speciality cheese market continues to show resilience and opportunity, with the sector up 1.5% in value year-on-year, and soft continental varieties accounting for 33% of the speciality cheese market (Worldpanel, December 2025).

Fiorella's award wins will also inspire sales; it received the 2023 Superior Taste Award in Brussels, plus gold and silver awards at the International Cheese & Dairy Awards 2025.

Dominique Delacour, head of UK marketing strategy at Tom Walker & Sons, said, "We are incredibly proud to be introducing Fiorella into the UK market. As specialists in bringing exceptional Continental cheeses to British retailers, we are always looking for products that combine quality, craftsmanship and strong visual appeal.

"Fiorella delivers on all three – its rich triple crème indulgence, award-winning credentials and distinctive floral shape make it a true standout for deli counters and speciality retailers. With soft Continental cheese representing a third of the speciality market and continued value growth in the category, we're excited to offer our partners a premium product that helps them differentiate and drive incremental sales.

1.5%

The UK speciality cheese market is growing 1.5% in value year-on-year

WORLDPANEL DECEMBER 2025

Entries for the Cheese and Dairy Show now open

The Cheese and Dairy Show, part of The Great Yorkshire Show which takes place Tuesday 14th July to Friday 17th July at Harrogate's Great Yorkshire Showground, is welcoming entries.

Three digital classes have been added, covering Champion Cheese Board, Grazing Platter and Cheese Celebration Cake.

Caroline Bell, chief steward of the Great Yorkshire Show's Cheese and Dairy Show, said, "It's so exciting to be taking these classes out into the community in a way that makes it easy for businesses to be part of the Great Yorkshire Show and showcase their talent.

"It is another great way to shine the spotlight on a food that is produced with amazing craft and skill and is enjoyed by cheese-lovers across the country."

Entry forms are available on the Great Yorkshire Show website.





CHEESES THAT I LOVE

LUCY KNOCK
THE CHEESE SOCIETY





PARMIGIANO REGGIANO PDO

As a cheesemonger I feel it's essential to mention Parmigiano Reggiano PDO, the godfather of all cheeses. I've loved Parmigiano Reggiano PDO for as long as I can remember, as a child I used to eat shards of it on its own and adored the caramelly, rich salty flavours. My favourite is 18-month aged Parmigiano Reggiano PDO and it's a cheese that sells itself. There's not a lot to really add here, it's a cheese everyone knows, a cheese most people love and one that shows incredible history. I have some exciting content in the works with the Parmigiano Reggiano PDO brand ambassador, Gennaro Contaldo, which I'm excited to be sharing soon!



LINCOLNSHIRE POACHER

We love Tim and the team at Poacher and have the privilege to visit their amazing farm whenever we can. Lincolnshire cheeses are our best-sellers by far, being a Lincoln-based cheese shop. The complexity, depth of flavour and texture of poacher is what gives it so much character. With flavours of toasted walnuts and that reassuring, rich herbaceous flavour that lingers on the back of the tongue with each bite. We are proud to have such an incredible local cheese.

GORYWYDD CAERPHILLY

This has always been top of my cheese list. With its silvery silky rind, soft as a rabbit's ear to the creamy texture that develops around the rind, then the crumbly unctuous middle, this is a phenomenal cheese that we will always have in the counter. The flavours are like mushrooms cooked in butter, earthy and moorish. A raw milk, naturally rinded Caerphilly cheese, originally made by brothers and business partners Todd & Maugan Trethowan on their farm near Llanddewi Brefi in the Teifi Valley, but now made by Maugan and his wife Kim Trethowan in Somerset.



SWALEDALE

A cheese we've stocked for a long while now and has firmly become a team favourite. Another lactic, open-textured, crumbly cheeses. Fresh lemony buttery flavours flood the mouth while the texture has bundles of moisture for a cheese of this style. Truely unique and a cheese we love introducing to our customers. Made by a father son team Richard and Ned in the rich Swaledale meadows and pastures of Yorkshire. An extra-matured, naturally rinded cheese that should be a staple on all cheeseboards far and wide.





Fine Food in an AI World

In 2026, smart businesses are straddling fine food philosophies with modern technology – to great effect

CONTRIBUTORS



STEFANO CUOMO
MACKNADE



HEATHER COPLEY
FARMER
COPLEYS

For Stefano Cuomo, CEO of Macknade, utilising a carefully curated blend of experience and technology is key to a successful future for fine food businesses. "As we go forward as a society that is more conscious of budget than ever before, experience is increasingly important to shoppers – especially when it comes to food and drink. This works to independent fine food retailers' strengths, so consistency and doubling down on what you do is vital."

As an example, at the start of each year Macknade sources incredible citrus fruit from a producer in Sicily which is unlike anything his customers can buy in supermarkets. "The fruit have pips in and are incredibly intense in flavour, and we try to create an experience around them both in-store and on our digital channels." While customers in the shop can indulge in their aromas first-hand, the Macknade team are creative in their pursuit to sell the story of the fruit on social media.

"Stories are vital when it comes to connecting people with the produce we sell, whether it comes from the UK or overseas," says Stefano. In a digitized world, these connections are more important than ever – and increasing numbers of consumers are seeking them out.

"Quality, story and human connection are not optional extras, they are the foundation of a sustainable fine food business"

"Digital experiences are available all the time, but tactile, tangible experiences are a very valuable thing that people are looking for – particularly at the weekend, when they've had the 15 seconds of visual stimulation from social media throughout the week then want to be within the real-life space and understand it, experience it – the smells, colours, textures."

Digital data and the likes of social media necessarily feed into the experience Macknade provides, however, whether as a mode for inspiration or a way to innovate and evolve efficiently via – for example – AI tools.

At Farmer Copley's, says co-owner Heather Copley, digital assets will never take the place of in-person connection – as useful as they are for building the business.

"Social media has been a significant footfall driver for us," she begins. "We combine seasonal thinking with digital trends to create limited edition products that generate excitement both on social media and in store." The Farmer Copley's team has got the balance right and is skilled at turning profile visits into on-site attendance. "When something gains traction digitally, it translates directly into visits, and consequently repeat visit, as customers come to try the latest flavour or concept."

While the team uses digital tools for the benefit of the business, they are aware that their customers are utilising them too – which could spell a win. "We're aware that consumers are increasingly using AI-powered search tools to decide where to go," says Heather. "That has pushed us to strengthen our digital presence, improve SEO and ensure we are visible and accurately represented online.

"However, while many businesses are turning to AI-generated imagery, we have consciously chosen not to. We believe customers can tell the difference. We pride ourselves on showcasing real food from a real place, created by real people. Authenticity remains more powerful than perfection."

In a busy and often distracted world, connection and education are more important than ever. "If independent retailers lose those pillars, they risk becoming generic," says Heather. "And if we became generic, we would lose what makes us distinctive and ultimately why people choose to visit us.

"Quality, story and human connection are not optional extras, they are the foundation of a sustainable fine food business."

EXPERT VIEW

"Use AI as a tool to create time to do the things you want to do"

Thomas Akintan, co-founder of Avalon Insights



Speciality Food readers should see AI as a tool to create time to do the things they want to do – whether that be being creative, connecting with their customers or growing their business.

"Maintain your creativity and uniqueness and you will be able to enter the AI era without sacrificing the heart of your business"

The right AI tools – such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity – can take care of the more mundane tasks, and people shouldn't feel that they need to invest money into them. You can do 70-80% of the work you want to do using the free tools, and if and when there are specific paid-for features you'd like to utilise, that's when you can start to spend some money.

It's important to allow plenty of time to trust AI. The more you use it for small tasks, the more you'll trust it with more responsibilities.

A key point is to not let AI take over the core of your business. People shop with fine food retailers because they appreciate human connection, so maintain your creativity and uniqueness and you will be able to enter the AI era without sacrificing the heart of your business.

Trendwatch.

SPONSORED BY Tracklements



Honest Indulgence

Treating yourself is no longer something to feel guilty about – so long as you're tucking into quality

So healthy is out, naughty is in?

Not quite. What's out is the additive-packed food that has been filling shelves for decades. Think confectionery packed with sweeteners instead of sugar, or hydrogenated fats used in place of proper dairy butter in baked goods.

Why the sea change?

As consumers become more interested about what they're putting in their body and sources of information – trustworthy or not – abound across the internet, ingredients that are impossible to pronounce are no longer hidden in plain sight on the backs of packets. They're being put in the spotlight and rejected in favour of the good, honest – and yes, potentially high in fat – alternatives your grandmother would have cooked with in her prime.

"Previously diet-culture steered shoppers away from full fat butters, cheeses, sugar etc. but now the rise in awareness around ultra-processed foods (75% say UPFs are amongst their top three concerns when it comes to food [Food Standards Agency) has led to shoppers indulging in/trading up to traditionally made produce, made with best ingredients," explains Becca Chapman at Tracklements.

Considered indulgence is the order of the day. "Ever-growing awareness of ultra-processed foods and quality injections across categories means indulgence is becoming more considered," says Tom Gatehouse of Egg Soldiers. "Consumers still seek craveable experiences but are increasingly swayed by options that feel 'worth it' on quality, rather than defaulting to heavily processed products laden with 'no and low' claims that often hide greater evils in the shadows."

"Consumers still seek craveable experiences but are increasingly swayed by options that feel 'worth it' on quality, rather than defaulting to heavily processed products laden with 'no and low' claims that often hide greater evils in the shadows"

What else is feeding into the hunger for treats?

It will come as a surprise to nobody that life is a little tough for many at the moment. The 'lipstick effect' is back in full force as shoppers seek out affordable indulgences, and quality food neatly fits into that bracket. Ditto the taste for nostalgia, with consumers harking back to simpler times with comforting flavours.

"There's a growing move towards – or should that be back to – honest, real, properly delicious indulgence," says Louise Collins of Booja-Booja. "Little treats keep us all smiling when life is tough and they offer much needed balance in a busy, hard-working life. And if you're going to treat yourself it makes sense to do it with style."

"More and more people are recognising the value of simple ingredients and embracing the delight you get from enjoying real treats, bursting with real flavours and really delicious tastes and textures."

And delis are the best place to find that, right?

Absolutely – *Speciality Food* readers are in prime position to benefit from the move towards 'real' ingredients and honest indulgence, and the reality is that most of the products stocked by indies fit the profile already.

"'Honest indulgence' sits nicely within the broader mindset of consumers trading up for better," agrees Tom. "Quality, viewed through the lens of craveability, is the primary driver of this shift, with higher-quality, crave-worthy options becoming increasingly accessible.

Offering products which tick both the 'real ingredient' and 'indulgence' boxes – whether that be in terms of richness of taste, luxe textures or all-round 'treat' experiences – are where readers can shine.

"We know that 'best taste' and 'best quality' are the two main drivers for purchase in the condiments category," continues Becca, "for example, Tracklements use unrefined raw cane sugar because of the incredible, treacly-rich flavour profile – this can't be matched by sweetener alternatives."

So, what should I stock?

Our advice? Don't overthink it – because you're probably already stocking exactly what this trend is calling for.

As we enter barbecue season, opt for smokily luscious condiments with minimal ingredients, ice creams with the texture of clotted cream that showcase local produce, and chocolates that contain little more than cacao, cocoa butter and sugar for optimum lip-smacking flavour.

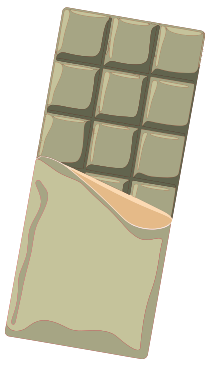
Extra points for items that come beautifully presented for the ultimate self-gifting opportunity.



Sales of unhomogenised whole milk have risen by

56%

Waitrose Food & Drink Report 2025-2026

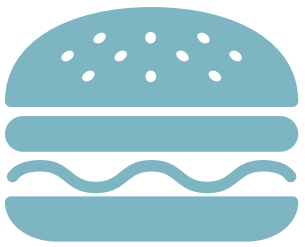


Sales of premium chocolate are expected to grow by

6.45% BY 2031

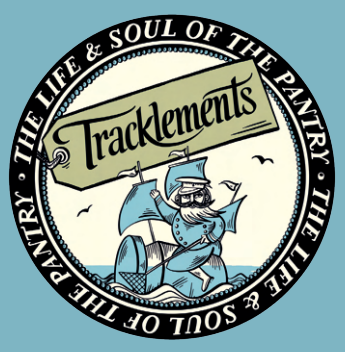
– the fastest growing price segment during the forecast period

Mordor Intelligence



"The steakhouse burger represents the middle of the Venn diagram between indulgence and craft"

British Vogue



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Feeding the Family

Indies play a valuable role in providing healthy, convenient food that shoppers of all ages can all enjoy



CONTRIBUTORS



RICH CLOTHIER
WYKE FARMS



BEX NEALE
SUFFOLK FOOD HALL



EMILY WARBURTON ADAMS
NUUDA

In the fine food world of artisanal cheeses, premium snacks and single-origin coffee and chocolate it can be easy to forget the opportunity offered by the younger generations – those who likely won't be tempted by a punchy chutney with a short ingredients deck, or a speciality tea created by the masters. But families are big business in the world of food and drink – and that's before you get to the benefits that can result for making your site more kid-friendly.

Food and drink products that are nutritionally-rich and family-friendly, while ideally offering a dose of convenience, are the order of the day for many consumers across the UK – and the good news is that the fine food industry has moved far beyond the additive-packed pouches of yore to provide genuinely tasty, and goodness-packed, meals and snacks that can be enjoyed by all ages.

The desire to enjoy food as a family, for multiple generations to sit around a table to eat delicious food together, is one of the simplest pleasures around but that's not to say that it's not worth tapping into. "Families are moving away from ultra-processed foods, reaching instead for real, nutritious options that are rooted in tradition. Sharing authentic, quality food – like our family's traditional Cheddar – brings everyone together and makes mealtimes truly special," agrees Rich Clothier, third generation family member and MD at Wyke Farms.



AROUND **70 PER CENT** OF BRITISH FAMILIES WITH **DEPENDENT CHILDREN** HAVE BOTH PARENTS IN **EMPLOYMENT**

Office for National Statistics

"Many households have less time than ever to shop for high-quality produce and cater to different dietary needs. It's easy for 'quickest and easiest' to trump 'healthiest"

Emily Warburton Adams, NUUDA

"Given the rise of healthy eating, we believe that families are now looking for higher quality foods which have less ingredients, are less processed and have less additives," says Bex Neale, marketing manager at Suffolk Food Hall. "Because our produce comes from local farms and producers, they have significantly less additives and can be considered healthier. Additionally, we make and stock as many items as possible that are made on-site by our chefs using only fresh ingredients, so you know when you're eating at Suffolk Food Hall that you're getting a good quality munch."

At Suffolk Food Hall, family-friendly food plays a big role. "Whilst our focus is on local, quality food, we also take into account the family-friendly element of our Food Hall and make sure to have food and drink options for children as well as adults. We even have our own Dine at Home range of family meals you can cook at home that are made fresh on-site by our chefs."

"Nutrition is fundamental to family food, and the home is the first place where children form deep-rooted habits and emotional relationships with food," begins Emily Warburton Adams, co-founder of NUUDA. "Childhood is a critical window for growth and development, yet we now live in a time when families are often overfed but undernourished, the food we eat at home is critical to changing this and laying the foundation to long term wellbeing."

"Awareness is rising, but so is confusion as there is so much conflicting nutrition information available and so many different sources – families struggle to know who or what to trust.

"At the same time, many households have less time than ever. In over 70% of British households, both parents work and have limited time to shop for high-quality produce, cater to different dietary needs, and staggered mealtimes, it's easy for 'quickest and easiest' to trump 'healthiest'."

"Retailers and producers can support families by offering high-quality, thoughtfully sourced options that take the effort and stress out of healthy eating."

EXPERT VIEW

"We have a spot for parents to sit while their children play"

Bex Neale, Suffolk Food Hall



At Suffolk Food Hall we love welcoming families through the door and, therefore, we have several ways that we cater for the younger ones. We have the ever-popular bouncy pillow outside, as well as a slide and children's games. This is a beautiful spot for parents to sit with a coffee while their children play. Our home department has a wide range of children's toys and gifts, including the legendary JellyCat toys. We also run colouring competitions throughout the year for children to enter which are available in our café and restaurant.

"We love welcoming families through the door and, therefore, we have several ways that we cater for the younger ones"

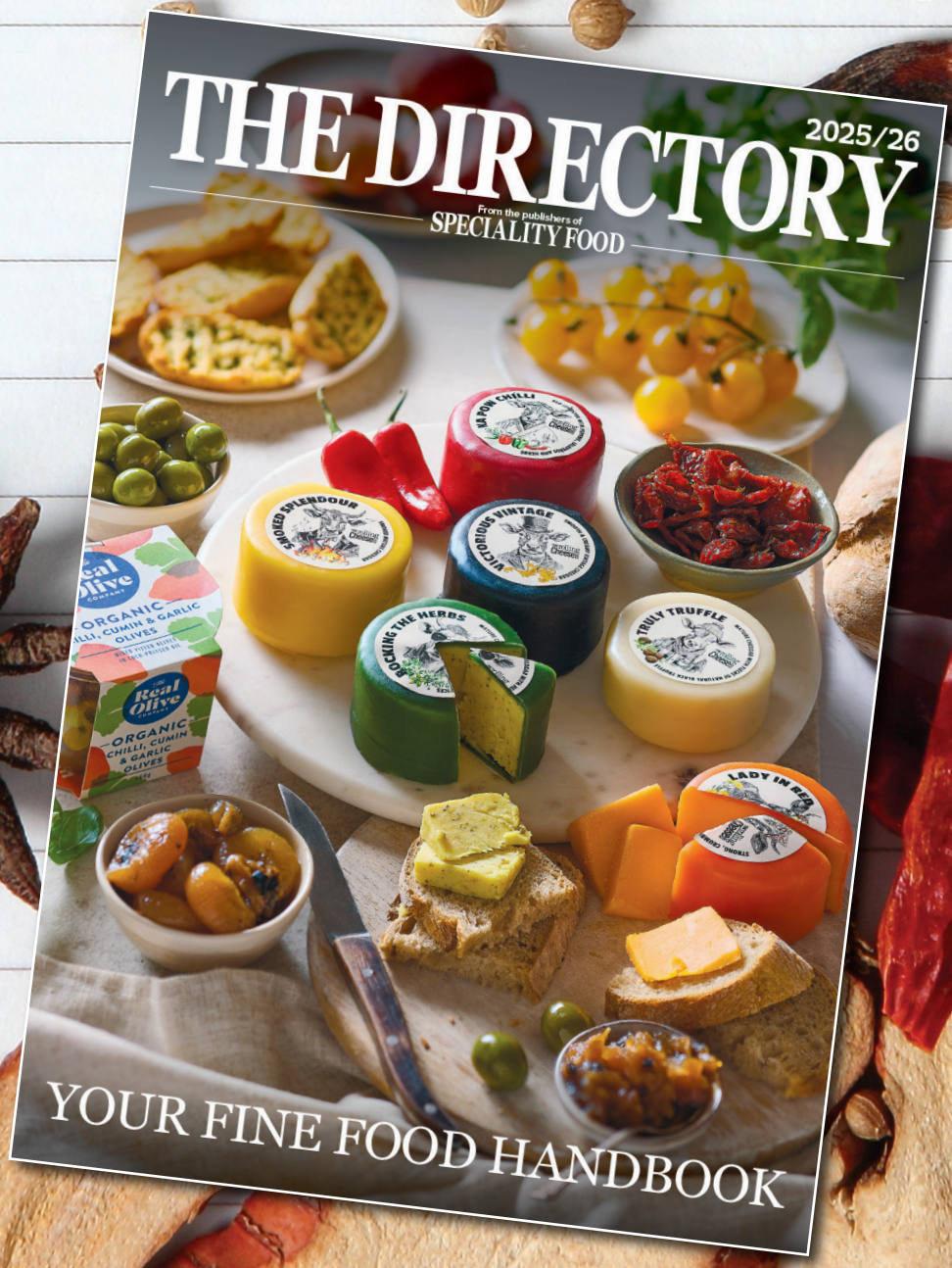
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Selling Summer

Consumers are still hungry for familiar flavours, and tradition with a splash of innovation is proving to be a heady mix for fine food shoppers

HOW TO SELL

- ***Make some of your range grab-and-go***
Shoppers want to maximise their time outside when the warmer weather hits, so create graze boxes full of picnic favourites – pastries and sandwiches, quiches and scotch eggs, plus snacks, cheese and a chutney – so they can feast with minimal effort
- ***Refresh your drinks selection***
People are looking for fruity fun in summer on the soft drinks side, and light and elegant options when it comes to spirits and wines. Bonus points for displaying alongside fresh mint and citrus fruit to inspire them to level-up their tipples
- ***Consider family options***
When the school holidays begin families will be looking for low-cost ways to entertain and feed their kids, so provide easy and great value snack and meal kits plus consider making use of your outdoor space with kid-friendly toys

This is the season of picnic blankets, clinking ice in glasses and wafts of barbecue smoke in gardens across the land. Consumers of all ages are slathering on the sun lotion and excitedly awaiting their next opportunity to eat al fresco, whether that be a social occasion or a simple switch of indoors to outdoors for a family supper in the garden.

When the sun is out decisions need to be swift to make the most of the weather, and at Flourish Foodhall, the team is passionate about making decisions as simple as possible for their customers. Barbecue boxes are proving popular, providing value and a tastebud-tempting selection of meats that allows them to personalise their baskets.

With ease the name of the game, Flourish has made sure to bring everything their customers need for a summertime occasion within arms' reach – from the charcoal to feed their barbecues to the marinades to make the food upon them sing, as well as the drinks and nibbles to turn the meal into a party.

Ultimately, it comes down to service – and with shoppers choosing to shop at an independent fine food retailer instead of a supermarket for the transaction at hand, it pays to make it a positive experience all round. "It'a all about the people," says Flourish's Sam Riddington. "They want to be able to have a conversation with the butcher about the meat they're buying, to be advised on how best to cook and serve it. If people are going to spend more money they expect to receive a little love and care from us as retailers."



What's hot for summer 2026

At online retailer Farmfetch, offering a sense of seasonal adventure is all part of the fun. Their range varies from fresh meat to exciting ambient items, and Lauren Johnson-Ginn, founder, is finding that many of their items are being utilised for outdoor eating – from picnics to grazing as well as barbecues.

"Sea Sisters are really popular for us right now, with their stunning tins of fish in really beautiful oils and seasonings perfect for sunny weather eating," she begins. Hot sauces are popular year-round but come into their own during the summer when customers are hungry for new.

> *If you're wanting to level up your barbecue and do something a bit different with a lot of flavour, there are some really cool brands bringing that to the market this year*

"We stock hot sauces from The Lazy Scientists, a London-based producer who use the most funky ingredients like miso and seaweed, which are going down well."

"If you're wanting to level up your barbecue and do something a bit different with a lot of flavour, there are some really cool brands bringing that to the market this year."

Naturally, it pays to cater to shoppers – and their summertime guests – who are following plant-based diets. Lauren recommends Nettle, a producer of vegan products, in particular their "Haverstock White. It's almost like a Feta, but made with cashew and it's incredible on a picnic spread."

All of this fabulous food deserves something great to wash it down with, and Lauren finds that Farmfetch's customers are particularly on the hunt for "bubbles they can enjoy in the garden. We sell some lovely sparkling wine from English vineyards that we list on the site," she says. "I find that pre-mixed cocktails are also becoming much more popular now, as well as cider" – so long as it has quality and provenance, as the sector is still shaking off potentially negative connotations – "and drinks that utilise locally-foraged ingredients. High quality production is key here."

Al fresco opportunities

If your premises has an outdoor space, there are plenty of ways to make the most of that. At Flourish's Farleigh Road site, they've found it's smart to think of how to maximise that as much as you would your indoor retail space

– especially during the summer.

"We put a lot of thought into how we make our outside space into a place where our local community can enjoy themselves and have a great time – particularly our reward card holders," says Sam. "We host barbecues and family fun days, where we have lots of toys outside and a bouncy castle."

On non-event days the space proves to be just as popular, with customers coming into the shop to pick up picnic and grazing boxes – the falafel scotch eggs and savoury croissants are hot tickets this year – to take outside with a blanket to enjoy al fresco.

New to the events roster this year is a reward card holders-only day, whereby the Flourish community will join to test out new inventions created in-house in the team's production kitchen – giving them VIP access to what's to come at this destination retailer.



EXPERT VIEW



We put a lot of thought into how we make our outside space into a place where our local community can enjoy themselves and have a great time – particularly our reward card holders. We host barbecues and family fun days, where we have lots of toys outside and a bouncy castle

SAM RIDDINGTON
FLOURISH

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Summer PICKS

Suma
Edamame Beans



Suma's organic edamame beans are canned from fresh to lock in flavour, colour and nutrition, delivering a convenient ready-to-use plant-based staple. With 10g protein and 8g fibre per 100g, they boost everyday meals and are versatile, nutritious and convenient. Add to salads, blend into a guacamole-style dip as a lower air-miles avocado alternative or make hummus.
suma.coop

Emilia's
Crafted Pasta



Emilia's Crafted Pasta captures the spirit of Italian heritage, where simple ingredients shine and every dish feels special. Featuring three classic shapes – Casarecce, Rigatoni and Bucatini – each is crafted to hold sauce beautifully. Perfect for summer dining, from pasta salads to light, vibrant dishes, it brings authentic Italian quality and effortless elegance to every table.
emiliaspasta.com

NutraTea
Spearmint & White Peony



A refined pairing of cooling spearmint and delicate white peony, creating a light, crisp infusion for everyday enjoyment. Crafted with whole botanicals and no flavourings, this clean, elegant blend can be enjoyed hot or cold, reflecting NutraTea's focus on purity, balance and simplicity. Enjoy each tea bag up to three times!
nutratea.co.uk

Eviedale Bakehouse
Beremeal Crackers



These sourdough crackers celebrate Orkney heritage with a modern twist. Fermented slowly for depth of flavour, they carry a gentle tang and nutty sweetness from ancient Bere barley. Vegan-friendly, these nutritious hand-crafted crackers deliver crisp texture and complex flavour, bringing a taste of the far north to discerning snack lovers across Scotland and the UK.
eviedalebakehouse.co.uk

Drivers
Pickles



Rooted in family tradition since the late 1800s, Drivers began as a grocery shop serving the local community of Leicester.
By 1906, the family's passion for crafting quality pickles led to the creation of the Driver's Pickle and Vinegar Company. Today, 124 years later, Drivers Pickles continues to proudly produce pickles and vinegars with the same care, craft and heritage that started it all.
pickle-lovers.co.uk

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PRKL



Drink The Season

The season of refreshing sips, fruity flavours and exciting innovation is upon us – here's how to make the most of it

While great quality, thirst-quenching drinks are a must-stock throughout the year, the warmer months offer an opportunity to do things differently – to shake off what's gone before and enter the season with a refreshed offering.

Picnics, barbecues and al fresco eating are now the order of the day, and there are plenty of options to help you quench your customers' thirst this summer.

It pays to think outside the box when it comes to summer sips. "There are some great new whiskies coming out this summer which I am really excited about, and I think the right whisky that has fruit forward, lighter notes can be a perfect summer sipper or refreshing highball, showing whisky is not just for winter!" says Dawn Davies, head buyer at The Whisky Exchange. "Summer sun always makes me feel like rum and some interesting celebrity collaborations will be making their way onto the summer drinking scene."

Fruity serves will ultimately sell well as shoppers move away from more comforting flavours towards refreshing and tangy tastes, so it makes sense to stock a small range of juices to quench the thirst of younger shoppers too – if locally-produced, even better.

A taste for fermentation

Fermented drinks are no flash in the pan; with growing numbers of consumers seeing food and drink as a way to boost their health, kombucha is a clear winner this summer thanks to its gut-supporting credentials and refreshing taste.

"The rise of kombucha and fermented drinks reflects a broader shift in consumer mindset. Drinkers still want something refreshing and flavourful – especially when it comes to summer socialising and alfresco dining – but they're opting for drinks that feel a bit cleaner," explains Steve Behan, general manager at Duvel Moortgat UK.

"This is where fermentation comes in. It's a natural process that creates drinks that are lower in sugar with a gentle sparkle that guarantees a sense of occasion while fitting into a more balanced lifestyle. Kombucha, in particular, has really found its place in the mainstream, sitting comfortably between soft drinks and more premium, grown-up options."

Kombucha's lack of saccharine sweetness has also won plaudits amongst discerning drinkers, who are serving it alongside food as well as as a grown-up alternative to conventional soft drinks. "As the weather warms up, Kombucha provides a versatile summer-serve – best enjoyed over ice with a fresh garnish – suitable from brunch through to evening. It delivers all the ritual and sophistication of a crafted drink, with zero alcohol or artificial additives.

Thirsty for functionality

Of course, when temperatures rise drinks serve a greater purpose than simply enjoyment – they are necessary for hydration and refreshment, which makes PRKL's prickly pear cactus water a valuable addition to your range.

For Simon Elliott, founder of

SPECIALITY FOOD Stock Check 26



Pulp
Berry Lime Blitz
This lively 3.4% cider brings rich blackberry depth, lifted by zesty lime, and a subtle flavour of rum for warmth and complexity.
pulp-cider.co.uk



Sheppy's
200 Cider
Crafted using traditional methods and carefully selected apples from its Somerset orchards for a smooth, balanced flavour.
sheppyscider.com



Belvoir Farm
Hugo Spritz
Crafted with handpicked elderflowers, white grape juice, cooling garden mint and botanical extracts, for a crisp and refreshing spritz.
belvoirfarm.co.uk





EXPERT VIEW

Trending flavours

Dawn Davies, The Whisky Exchange



The Hugo spritz is going to be all the rage this swapping out the orange of Aperol for elderflower with many brands coming to market with new Elderflower liqueurs to capture the essence of British summer time. I am seeing many more savoury style cocktails out in the bars right now, with people using flavours like matcha tea, curry, tomato to add another layer to their drinks. Off a much smaller base we are seeing a growing interest in Eaux de Vie – which capture the fruits of the season perfectly and can be served neat, chilled or with different mixers.

The Hugo spritz is going to be all the rage this summer swapping out the orange of Aperol for elderflower

£ HOW TO SELL

- *"Make the experience fun, ensure you are sampling the product with them and showing them how to use it to create an easy at home drink," advises Dawn.*
- *"Use the summer drinking occasions to do some fun activations, strawberries and cream with gin for Wimbledon, rum and Ting for carnival. The more accessible you can make it and the more you create theatre in your shops the more the customer will be engaged."*
- *"They also want to feel confident talking about the drink so fun 'dinner party' facts can be a good way to give them confidence.*
- *"People, as we know, don't have a lot of money so the more you can give them a sense of value for money or add to their shopping experience the more likely they will be to buy."*

PRKL, nutrition and functionality lie at the heart of his product's launch. "Whilst there were a couple of drinks that utilised prickly pear cactus, it was more from a flavoured drink perspective and they hadn't really understood the fundamentals of the science, which was that prickly pear offers anti-inflammatory properties as well as hydration."

This launch wasn't a case of plastering claims on a label as selling tools; Simon's background as a biochemist and toxicologist meant that he was keen to make sure that each can of PRKL did good. "The dose is what's important, so we had to ensure we had the right amount of prickly pear nutrients in the drink to give those benefits," he says.

With the number of consumers actively seeking out functional, health driven products that also taste great – and deliver a clean label – there is undoubtedly a thirst for naturally refreshing drinks which serve up health benefits alongside refreshment.

Summer PICKS

Suma
Kombuchas



Suma's sparkling organic kombuchas are craft-brewed and traditionally fermented using natural ingredients. The range includes multi-award-winning Cola and Peach & Turmeric, alongside Ginger, Lychee & Lemongrass, Spiced Apple & Plum, Strawberry & Raspberry, Elderflower & Lemon and new Yuzu, Mint & Matcha.
suma.coop

Apeal Wörld
ACV



How the body breaks down glucose is apparently a concern for us all, not just diabetics and those with insulin resistance. Now Apeal Wörld ACV has hit the market and nailed a great tasting and affordable way to take your daily dose on the go. This drink has all the glucose benefits taken before meals, and helps maintain energy throughout the day.
acvdrink.com

Fitch & Leedes
Mixers



Fitch & Leedes blends heritage, innovation and sustainability to craft premium mixers trusted worldwide. Their award-winning range delivers balanced flavour with pristine water and botanical infusions. Expanding across the UK and Europe, they create the perfect serve, elevating every moment with quality, creativity and purpose.
fitchandleedes.co.uk



The Spread.

Create the ultimate 'picky tea' with these premium must-stocks

Olives Et Al

1 Olives Et Al's dressing range has been relaunched and is now made with 100% extra virgin olive oil, completely seed-oil free. A best seller, the range is crafted in Dorset and reflects their commitment to pure, high-quality ingredients, delivering vibrant, full-flavoured dressings that let the richness of Mediterranean olive oil shine through in every bottle.
olivesetal.co.uk

Léonce Blanc

2 For the fine quality jams with prestige heritage, French provenance and an unrivalled 70% fruit content, nothing beats Léonce Blanc. Their jams – including Raspberry, Apricot, 4 Citrus, Pear & Vanilla – provide an exceptionally flavourful taste, all with 30% less sugar than conventional jams.
hello@hoogebrands.com

Stag Bakeries

3 Stag Bakeries' all-butter Cheese Straws are crafted with care in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, combining flaky pastry with some of Scotland's finest speciality cheeses. Available in three varieties: Dunlop, Smoked Dunlop and Strathdon Blue, each one is richly indulgent.
stagbakeries.co.uk

Fairfields Farm

4 Crafted from potatoes grow on Fairfields' independent UK farm. Using regenerative farming and renewable energy, the brand puts sustainability first. Their awards-winning range features eight delicious vegan and gluten free flavours, including Cheese and Onion flavour and Sweet Chilli. Plus, a new limited-edition Cajun Barbecue flavour launching this summer!
fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk

Willow Creek

5 The Mediterranean climate and lime-rich soils of Cape Town's Nuy Valley provide the ultimate terroir for exceptional olives, and Willow Creek's multi award-winning range of extra virgin olive oils is testament to the time and expertise that go into their cultivation.
hello@hoogebrands.com

Rhythm 108

6 A modern indulgent take on the classic Swiss Sablé. Great Taste Award-winning biscuits crafted slowly in our Swiss bakery by Maître Pâtissiers using real organic ingredients. Combining wellness, sustainability, and ethical credentials that today's conscious shoppers demand.
rhythm108.co.uk

Drivers Pickles

7 Proudly made in Leicestershire, Drivers Pickles continues to honour over 120 years of family pickling tradition while developing inventive flavour pairings that keep the British Picky Tea anything but ordinary. Heritage meets innovation across the range of 22 delicious pickle, relish and chutney recipes many of which are certified vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free.
pickle-lovers.co.uk

Tims

8 Discover delicious with Tims. Greek family yogurt and kefir made with fresh British milk and natural ingredients since 1949. Ranges that are ideal for retail, foodservice and hospitality. For a commitment to quality that can only be found in Greek Heritage: British Made.
timsdairy.co.uk




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LIMITED EDITION
RIDGE-CUT
PROUD TO BE CARBON NEUTRAL
fairfields farm
VEGAN FRIENDLY
CAJUN BARBECUE
FLAVOUR HANDCOOKED POTATO CRISPS
GLUTEN FREE
SEA SALT & CIDER VINEGAR FLAVOUR
4
Stag
BAKERS SINCE 1885
GOURMET ALL BUTTER CHEESE STRAWS
Smoked Dunlop
Strathdon Blue
Dunlop
100g e 3.2 oz
3
Willow Creek
GOODNESS IS IN OUR NATURE
Truffle
FLAVOURED OLIVE OIL
MADE WITH EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL
250 ml
PRODUCT OF SOUTH AFRICA
Blood Orange
THYME INFUSED
Balsamic Reduction
150 ml
5
Tims
Raspberry
GREEK FAMILY YOGURT
Vanilla
drivers
SUNDRIED TOMATO CHUTNEY
DILL PICKLE SLICES
7
8

Feed the Hype

There are multiple powers at play within the snacking industry right now, making it a deliciously exciting place to be



CONTRIBUTORS



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TWO FARMERS



TASH JONES
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GEORGE RICE
SERIOUS PIG

In 2026, snacks are far from an afterthought. Instead, they offer taste-filled opportunities that run the gamut from healthy and functional to indulgent – and everything in between – meaning that today's fine food shopper has plenty to choose from when stopping for an informal bite.

There is a growing rift between the additive-laden options in the multiples offering BOGOF-style deals to the higher-end varieties created with craft and premium ingredients, so smart retailers and brands are making a point to share their story and shout about the quality of their fare.

"There is strong demand for snacks that feel indulgent and satisfying, but are made with natural, high quality ingredients," explains Leona McCaugherty, head of marketing at Forest Feast.

"This has led to the rise of what we would describe as permissible indulgence, products that deliver on taste and texture while still aligning with more mindful eating habits."

"Discerning shoppers in 2026 are looking for a balance of quality, flavour, and value, but their understanding of value has evolved. It's no longer just about price point – it's about what sits behind the product," agrees Sean Mason, co-founder of Two Farmers.

"At the same time, flavour remains king. People expect bold, well-executed flavours and a consistently high-quality eating experience. Ultimately, customers want to feel confident that they're getting something worth paying for – a product that delivers on taste, quality, and integrity."

Excitement also helps tempt tastebuds. "Innovation is key to how we bring excitement to the category," says Leona. "Our recent launches such as Matcha Chocolate Almonds made with PerfectTed and Pistachio Crisp Dates reflect growing consumer appetite for more adventurous flavours and textures, while still delivering on quality and indulgence.

"This allows us to create snacks that feel genuinely indulgent, while still being rooted in natural, plant-based ingredients, striking that balance between treat and better for you that today's consumer is looking for."

The rise of at-home snacking

Snacking used to be an on-the-go indulgence – a way for shoppers to sustain, or treat, themselves while they were out and about. But in 2026, there's a myriad a snacking opportunities available to consumers, with many tucking at home. "We have seen particular growth in at home occasions, where consumers are looking for more premium snacks to enjoy as part of a relaxed evening or as an alternative to traditional confectionery," says Leona.



"Premiumisation continues to be a major force within snacking, and we see strong opportunity in creating products that feel like small, everyday luxuries."

The team at Fairfields Farm have also found that shoppers are hungry for higher end at-home occasions. "Reduced demand for dining out is influencing at-home consumption habits, with consumers seeking more premium experiences in the home. Snacks are well-positioned to benefit from this shift, particularly handcooked crisps like our Fairfields Farm range, as premium snacks become a central feature

"These innovations offer consumers a sense of discovery, allowing them to explore new and exciting tastes while still enjoying familiar formats"

SPECIALITY FOOD Stock Check 26



Nibble Simply Lux Choc Nutty Mango Mix
Refined sugar free, and packed with Madagascan chocolate chips, organic dried mango, hazelnuts and almonds.
nibblesimply.com



Simply Roasted Duck & Hoisin
Potato crisps in a vegan seasoning inspired by the restaurant classic. Vegan friendly and 93 calories per bag.
simplyroastedcrisps.co.uk



of at-home occasions," she says. "Affordability and indulgence are key focal points for the snack market to help elevate simple moments into something memorable at home."

What's trending

"There's a clear shift towards bolder, more impactful flavours," says Sean. "Shoppers are increasingly looking for crisps that deliver a real punch – whether that's savoury depth, spice, or something a little unexpected."

Snacks with a story are equally valuable. "We're seeing strong demand for flavours with character and story behind them, often rooted in local or regional inspiration," Sean continues." At Two Farmers, this has led to the development of flavours such as Herefordshire Sauce, Hereford Sausage and Mustard, and Garlic & Wild Mushroom – all of which offer a more distinctive, elevated taste experience."

"One of biggest trends currently is the rise of swalty, the combination of sweet and salty taste profiles. This is increasingly evident across both crisp and chocolate brands, including our recent collaboration with Temprd Chocolate for Easter, where we introduced Milk Chocolate Potato Crisp-Filled Egg Pieces," says Tash Jones, commercial director at Fairfields Farm Crisps. "'Swicy' (sweet and spicy) also remains popular following its breakthrough moment in 2025, however in 2026, the trend is evolving towards more layered flavour profiles that balance heat with savoury or sweet notes. Looking ahead, 'fricy', a combination of fruity and spicy flavours, is expected to be the next big development."

Consumers continue to be inspired by tastes from further afield, says Tash. "Global influences continue to play a significant role in shaping flavour innovation. In 2026, we are seeing sustained demand for global-inspired profiles alongside increasingly adventurous and unconventional flavours that move beyond traditional shelf offerings. These innovations offer consumers a sense of discovery, allowing them to explore new and exciting tastes while still enjoying familiar formats."

Traditional flavours remain the backbone of the category, says Sean. "They're trusted, widely recognised, and remain top sellers because they deliver exactly what consumers expect.

However, innovation is what keeps the category exciting and relevant. Today's shoppers are more adventurous and open to trying new flavours, particularly those with a strong story or sense of place."

EXPERT VIEW

"A little moment of indulgence"

George Rice, Serious Pig



There is a lot of talk about GLP-1 drugs at the moment, but I don't think that will have too much of an impact on the premium snacking sector. We were pulled in a couple of directions a couple of years ago when the protein trend started to kick off, because some of our products have high levels of protein, but we decided that we would confuse our messaging if we did that. We are about indulgence – treating yourself, having something really nice with a beer of glass of wine because you deserve it. I say to the team, think of ourselves as a chocolate brand, because that way our message will never be diluted. For the people who want a little moment of indulgence with something that packs a lot of flavour, is well made and ethically sourced, that's where we fit in.

"We were pulled in a couple of directions a couple of years ago when the protein trend started to kick off"

Summer PICKS

Forest Feast
Butter Praline Caramelised Nut Mix



Cashews, almonds and pecans are gently tossed in real Irish butter, brown sugar and a touch of salt, then slow roasted to a rich, caramelised finish. Beautifully buttery, sweet and irresistibly moreish, this indulgent blend delivers a perfectly balanced snack, ideal for elevating everyday moments or sharing.

forestfeast.com

Kent Crisps
Beef Brisket & Stout flavour



Kent Crisps' new Beef Brisket & Stout flavour combine's historic Kent brewer, Shepherd Neame's Iron Wharf Stout with slow-cooked brisket for a reassuringly traditional, yet bold and savoury taste. Staying true to their ethos of championing Kent, The Historic Dockyard Chatham features on pack, celebrating the county's shipbuilding heritage, reinforcing their commitment to local collaboration, quality ingredients, and distinctive regional storytelling.

kentcrisps.com

Burts
Mature Cheddar & Caramelised Onion Chutney Ridges



Burts' Mature Cheddar & Caramelised Onion Chutney Ridges are made using local Quicke's Devonshire Cheddar, pairing savoury notes with sweet tang. Growing interest in thicker cut crisps is fuelling the Ridges range, as Burts invests in hand-cooked formats that deliver bold flavour, deep ridges for maximum seasoning and a satisfyingly crunch for a more substantial snacking experience.

burtschips.com



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Keep it Chilled

Summer desserts have come a long way from the days of Mr Whippy and tubs of tri-striped Neapolitan. We speak to experts to find out what's selling now



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The temperatures are rising and thoughts are turning to lighter, brighter foods – and thankfully, summer's fine food larder is packed to the brim with options to tempt customers tastebuds. Gone are the hankerings for cosily-rich puddings and sponges, and in comes the desire for effortless indulgences that cool the palate and can be thrown together in an instant.

"Summer brings a different mindset," agrees Leanne Crowther, founder of A Glorious Mess. "Customers want desserts that feel light and effortless – think barbecue or al fresco gatherings. Everyone instantly leans in when dessert is served. They're looking for easy wins without fuss."

Low and slow cooking may be the order of the day when it comes to barbecued meats, but when it comes to the sweet stuff shoppers are looking for easy wins. "Customers want shortcuts," continues Leanne. "Something they can throw together in minutes, but that still looks and tastes amazing."

"Summer is when our meringues really come alive. They pair beautifully with gelato and ice cream – any flavour goes. Of course, fresh cream and fruit – it's about experimenting. Classic British strawberries, raspberries, kiwi, blueberries, banana. You can't go wrong."

In terms of upselling opportunities, there are plenty. "Curds, compotes and caramel drizzles add an extra something, and if you have roughly chopped nuts, pretzels, crumbled biscuits- well now you've got a showstopper. It's about a modern take on Eton Mess. The ultimate summer dessert."

"Ice cream is deeply tied to nostalgia, from seaside parlours to ice cream vans in local parks, and of course the classic 99 Flake. It represents something playful, familiar, and social, making nostalgia a key part of this cultural movement"

The joy of ice cream

Another perfect instant seasonal dessert is ice cream; it is one of summer's greatest indulgences – and with good reason. Done right, its delectable creaminess and patchwork of flavours is exactly what we fancy when the warmer weather hits... but until now, the mass-produced alternatives have been much easier to get hold of than the good stuff.

Thankfully, options abound in 2026 and innovation is playing a key role. "We're seeing some really creative developments across the UK," begins Katherine McNeil, director of the Ice Cream Alliance. "For example, Lick Gelato in Northern Ireland has introduced canned ice cream, making it easier to transport and is visually striking. In Speyside, Lower Mill of Tynet Farm won Most Innovative Flavour at the Golden Scoop Awards for its Toots Beer Ice Cream, which churns actual beer into ice cream. This kind of experimentation is becoming increasingly common, supported by the UK's strong dairy industry."

Fine food fundamentals

Innovation may be turning heads, but ultimately it all comes down to quality. "There is a strong appreciation for excellent dairy (something the UK is well known for) alongside traditional methods and artisanal production," explains Katherine. "Storytelling also plays a major role, whether it's a multi-generational ice cream parlour or a well-loved independent producer. Innovation may draw attention, but craftsmanship and authenticity sustain long-term loyalty."

Also desirable are clean labels, and when customers know how simple it can be to whip up an ice cream at home they become ever more suspicious of long ingredients lists. Bonus points for locally-produced iced treats, too.

"With ever increasing concern about the health impacts of ultra processed foods, shoppers are looking for minimal ingredients that they recognize from their own kitchens," says Stephany Hardingham of Alder Tree. "Many of our ice creams contain only three ingredients: fruit, cream & sugar, so we are right on trend!"

Plus, she says, "Ethics are no longer optional. Consumers are prioritising brands that use sustainably sourced ingredients, and plastic-free packaging" – so as wow-inducing as a trendy new flavour may seem, it pays to check behind the branding curtain.





EXPERT VIEW

"Elevated finish that really resonates with customers"

Toby Cackett, chef and owner of Tony's Pizza



"Summer desserts are moving towards lighter, more refreshing profiles with a focus on acidity and clean flavours. Burnt citrus, fig leaf and olive oil-based desserts are becoming more prominent, alongside herb-led combinations like white chocolate and basil panna cotta. Soft serve is also evolving, with flavours like brown butter and sea salt offering a simple but elevated finish that really resonates with customers."

"Olive oil-based desserts are becoming more prominent, alongside herb-led combinations"

TRENDING NOW

- ***Nostalgic indulgence:*** *"(coined ' Newstalgia'), the comfort of classic dessert flavours with a premium adult twist", says Alder Tree's Steph*
- ***Botanical:*** *"lavender, hibiscus, and elderflower are providing a 'spa-like' sophisticated profile. Sweet and spicy: Termed Swicy, is having a social-media moment, but not one we are likely to join!"*

SPECIALITY FOOD Stock Check 26



Booja-Booja Caramel Pecan Praline
So delicious. And it's organic, vegan and gluten free too. The smoothest vanilla ice cream is bolstered by scrunchy caramelised pecan praline pieces.
boojabooja.com



Granny Gothard's Strawberries & Cream
The freshest milk from Oak Park Dairy and West Country double cream combine with British free-range eggs, a touch of sugar, and oodles of sweet berries.
grannygothards.co.uk

Summer Staples

Oils, dressings and barbecue favourites are the linchpins of great summer dining. Here, we explore what to stock – and why



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TESS REED
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LAUREN JOHNSON GINN
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Oils and dressings are a must-stock for any smart fine food retailer, but it's all too easy for them to blend into the background without their true value – and potential – being noticed. Speciality Food readers are in a strong position to be seen as a go-to stockist for the good stuff, as the markers of that fit perfectly with indies' philosophies.

"As shoppers become more quality-driven, categories like olive oil and dressings are undergoing a quiet premiumisation. What were once considered background staples are now being actively chosen, scrutinised, and in some cases, celebrated," agrees Patrick Young, managing director of PRS IN VIVO.

"Provenance is playing a central role here. Shoppers are looking for signals of authenticity, whether that's single-origin sourcing, specific regions like Sicily or Crete, or cues around traditional production methods. In a category where quality can be hard to assess at a glance, these markers act as powerful shortcuts to trust."

Health matters

As consumers become increasingly health conscious and aware of the power that food holds over their wellness, it's worth positioning great quality olive oil as a health-giver to help sell it to consumers whose purchasing decisions are driven by that. "Olive oil, in particular, benefits from strong associations with the Mediterranean diet, longevity, and 'good fats'. But what's changing is how explicitly these benefits are being communicated," says Patrick.

"Brands are moving beyond generic health halos and leaning into more specific claims around polyphenols, cold extraction, or purity. This is helping to reposition these products from passive ingredients to active contributors to wellbeing."

Tom Redwood, founder of Good Phats, agrees. "For years, fats have been simplified or even avoided but now consumers are re-engaging with them, both for flavour and function. The stigma around fats being bad for you is shifting so we are helping bring good quality fats back into people's kitchen."

The role of packaging

Don't rely on wider education around health to sell your oils, though, as promotion – including the labelling of the product itself – is hugely important here. "Packaging is doing more of the heavy lifting," says Patrick. "As price points rise, the pack has to justify the spend instantly on shelf. We're seeing a shift toward darker glass, minimalist labels, embossed details, and premium closures that signal care and craft. These design choices are not just aesthetic. They are functional cues that reinforce freshness, quality, and expertise. In a crowded shelf, where many products appear similar, distinctive packaging becomes a key differentiator and a driver of conversion."

Seggiano customers have a desire for "Stunning bottles that become artwork in their own right – something to be proudly displayed when guests come over vs. hidden in a back cupboard (though EVOO is better stored there!)" says Winette Winston, CEO of Seggiano.

Story and value

With premium bottles of oil being sold at an often much higher price point than the more highly processed, mainstream ones, it's vital to justify the extra cost. Tell its story and highlight what makes it such a high quality alternative to what your customers can get hold of elsewhere.

"We find growing interest in oil mills that are investing in regenerative agriculture: biodiversity, cover crops, lowered pesticide and fertilizer usage, carbon sequestration, no-till soil. The ability to "trace their bottle" from the final product to the grove where the olives were harvested," begins Winette.

Seggiano's award-winning range of extra virgin olive oils, sold under its Lunaio sister brand, is a perfect case in point. "The Lunaio story begins in Seggiano, a medieval hilltown on the slopes of Monte Amiata in Tuscany (which our full range is named after!). "Lunaio" is the affectionate nickname for the people of this village, known for harvesting olives by hand under the moonlight each autumn because the cooler temperatures and lack of sunlight helped reduce oxidation to create the freshest oils," explains Winette.

"What were once considered background staples are now being actively chosen, scrutinised, and in some cases, celebrated"

The brand's classic Lunaio Organic Italian Extra Virgin Olive Oil (500mL and 1L) is still crafted in nearby Montenero d'Orcia, where the rare Olivastra Seggianese olive grows – a variety found only at the intersection of Tuscany's Maremma, Monte Amiata, and Val d'Orcia

SPECIALITY FOOD Stock Check 26



Charlie & Ivy's Spicy Chorizo Marinade
This vegan-friendly marinade is packed with hot, smoky and spicy flavours, and a simple way to pack food with flavour.
charlieandivys.co.uk



Oilwell Extra Virgin Olive Oil
Only single-origin Arbequina olives, cold-pressed in Spain make it into the squeezy bottle, designed to be easier to use.
oilwell.co





HOW TO **SELL**

WINETTE WINSTON, CEO OF SEGGIANO EXPLAINS WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN A GREAT OLIVE OIL

Tasting for that spicy, peppery tingle in the back of your throat! It's the polyphenols – powerful antioxidants that signal harvest freshness and support heart and gut health.

PDO or PGI certification verifying where the olives were grown, harvested, and milled nearby to create your freshest EVOO. Preferably paired with a "trace your bottle" feature that enables transparent sourcing info.

A complete UV-blocking bottle to keep the product from oxidization – this can be dark glass (traditional) or ceramic (gaining more popularity).

The region where the olives are harvested – e.g. Rather than "Italy" as a whole, where exactly in Italy?

Olive varietal(s) stated, as more consumers have come to have specific preferences (similar to wine!). Italy has the largest number of native olive varietals in the world; 400+ distinct cultivars represent 40% of the world's biodiversity.

Specific harvest date – Month + Year (e.g. Oct 24) – to verify freshness. Looking for harvests between late October to early December, when the olives are turning from green to blushed purple.

Tasting notes to give a sense of if it's the kind of oil you're looking for – for use case e.g. cookings vs. finishing and flavours e.g. robust vs. light.

"This 'premium for less' dynamic is especially powerful in the current climate, where consumers are more selective with their spending but still seek moments of indulgence"

landscapes. It's one of five predominantly local varieties in the oil, which also has: Frantoio, Leccino, Meraiolo, and Leccio del Corno olives. "It has a delicious creamy density, buttery taste and a balanced hint of pepperiness," explains Winette.



Making it work

When shoppers are spending a reasonable amount of money on an oil, it stands within reason that they want it to be as versatile as possible – so many people use a single olive oil, perhaps even extra virgin, for multiple purposes in the kitchen. But that's not necessarily a good move, as different oils carry differing functionalities. This is something that GOOD PHATS is keen to educate customers on.

"GOOD PHATS is built around use-case-led cooking giving people the right tool for the job, whether that's searing, roasting, or finishing," explains Tom Redwood, founder. "This mirrors how other categories (like coffee or wine) have evolved, moving from generic to more considered, purpose-driven choices. The benefit is clarity instead of guessing, consumers can choose based on outcome: heat, flavour, or function."

The art of dressings

While a great extra virgin olive oil and premium vinegar can create a delicious flavour boost for salads, some dishes require a little more punch – which is where a perfectly crafted dressing comes in. Thankfully, there are countless options on the market in 2026 which not only serve a purpose, but deliver a kaleidoscope of flavour that a whole meal can be centred around.

"Consumers are looking for dressings that deliver far more than basic functionality," begins Tess Reed, founder of All Dressed Up. "Flavour has become a central priority, with shoppers increasingly drawn to bold, globally inspired profiles that add excitement to everyday meals and make salads genuinely craveworthy."

Mainstream version are all too often packed with additives, but today's consumer is seeking something altogether cleaner says Tess. "Ingredients are under greater scrutiny than ever. Consumers strongly prefer products made with recognisable, natural ingredients and without unnecessary additives, reflecting growing concerns around ultra-processed foods.

"Quality in dressings really starts with the ingredients. People are paying more attention to what's on the label, so shorter, easy-to-understand ingredient lists are a big plus. The best dressings use natural acids like vinegar or citrus, along with real flavour from herbs, spices, or fermented ingredients."

Of course, it's also not just about what goes in them, it's about how it all comes together. "A good dressing should feel balanced, with the right mix of acidity, fat, salt, and depth of flavour," says Tess. "Texture matters too. You want something that's smooth, coats your food properly, and has a nice consistency, rather than being too thin or separating immediately."

Many of us know how to whip up a classic French dressing with a few storecupboard ingredients, but the reality is that too few of us have time to do so on a regular basis – which is why ranges like All Dressed Up, and The Garlic Farm's



EXPERT VIEW

Lucy Chaplin, oils product developer at Suma

The term 'extra virgin' is an official and regulated standard in the world of olive oil and refers to the very highest quality of cold-pressed olive oil.

Consumers who care about the quality of their oils and dressings will likely be looking for these, as well as choosing organic options to ensure no pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides are used. All of these can have a hugely damaging effect on ecosystems.

Reducing packaging waste is important to ethical consumers. Suma bottled oils are available in bulk 5L containers. Consumers are looking to reduce waste by buying in bulk and decanting into glass bottles, reducing waste and environmental impact.



"Choosing organic options to ensure no pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides are used"

selection of dressings including new organic recipes, are so well received by the fine food shopper.

"We recently relaunched our range of dressings, with new organic recipes that have been certified by the Soil Association," begins Barnes Edwards, director of The Garlic Farm. "They're easy to use and versatile with bright, fresh flavours - making them great staples for health-conscious customers. Of course, they all feature a good garlic kick."

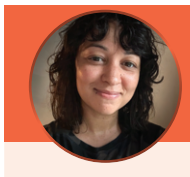
The Wild Island collection of fine oils and vinegars is also created at the farm. "These are crafted with provenance, quality and taste in mind, and can be used on their own or combined to create tempting dressings, dips, marinades and glazes," says Barnes.

Ultimately, discerning shoppers are looking for "great flavour and good quality ingredients," says Barnes, who is at present working towards strengthening the business's environmental credentials. "We're currently in the process of transitioning our products to organic and our dressings bear this label - so customers can rest assured they are made using organic farming practices, which can be better for soil, animal, plant and human health."

What's to come for the oils and dressings sector

"What's particularly interesting is how these products are now straddling two roles," continues Patrick. "On one hand, they remain everyday staples. On the other, they are being positioned as accessible luxuries, small upgrades that elevate a meal without requiring a significant financial commitment. This "premium for less" dynamic is especially powerful in the current climate, where consumers are more selective with their spending but still seek moments of indulgence."

"The net effect is a category that is becoming more considered, more design-led, and more emotionally driven. Success is no longer just about taste or price. It is about how effectively a product communicates quality, origin, and purpose in the few seconds a shopper spends at shelf."



WHAT'S TRENDING FOR BBQ SEASON 2026

"Meat boxes are one of our biggest growing areas – they're ideal for when people are looking to host on a weekend and want to order a mixed selection," says Lauren Johnson Ginn of Farmfetch. "We have quite an interesting range of them, for example our Welsh version which holds lots of beautiful Welsh meat from Douglas Willis."

Covid-19 saw the advent of the at-home pizza oven, and now we're entering the era of incredible slow cooked meat at home. "People are really keen on slow roasting joints, particularly brisket and salt march lamb shoulder, and last year we collaborated with DJ Barbecue who created some great low and slow barbecue tutorials for us," she says. "There's definitely a strong American influence when it comes to barbecue in the UK; we see quite a high number of people looking for things like whiskey-infused barbecue chips."

When it comes to catering for vegetarians, Lauren says it's all about the seasoning. "Cauliflower steaks and jackfruit are great options for vegetarians and vegans, and chances are you'll already have some vegetables that can be grilled in stock." A Mediterranean-style seasoning as well as classic smoky barbecue flavours are going down well at Farmfetch.

Summer PICKS

Clawson Farms *Stilton® Burger Melts*



Newly launched, Clawson Farms Stilton® Burger Melts bring a slice of British heritage to summer grilling. Crafted for perfect melting and bold blue flavour, they elevate burgers, sliders and plant-based alternatives alike. A premium addition for retailers seeking seasonal theatre, indulgence and unmistakable Stilton® flavour.
clawsonfarms.co.uk

Wild Island *Oils, dressings and vinegars*



The artisan Wild Island Collection of award-winning fine oils, dressings and vinegars is crafted in small batches at The Garlic Farm. Use the fine oils, dressings and vinegars on their own or combine to create tempting dressings, dips, marinades and glazes.
wildislandstore.co.uk

Tiptree *Sauces*



Tiptree has a versatile range of traditional and modern sauces, each made in small batches in their nut-free factory in Tiptree Essex, and is free from artificial colours, and flavours. Whether its Barbecue, Brown, Hot Mango, Mustard with Honey, Tomato Ketchup or Quite Hot Tomato Ketchup… add a little Tiptree magic to your plate! Tiptree. As it should be.
tiptree.com



Taste of Sunshine

Mediterreanean food is always on the menu – and even more so when temperatures rise



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JUST GOURMET FOODS

Platters groaning with fresh produce, artfully drizzled with superb olive oil and served with a fresh, milky cheese and maybe a cured meat or two for good measure. Simple pasta dishes showcasing the quality of the ingredients used and presented under lashings of Parmesan. Pillowy pittas to dip into creamy, intensely savoury hummus served alongside buttery olives. To us Brits, Mediterranean food is the taste of sunshine, holidays, happy times – so no wonder it's one of our favourite cuisines to tap into.

Pasta is of course a weeknight staple, able to turn even the most humble of ingredients into a filling feast, but we're branching out too; Spanakopita, an at-once crisp and creamy dish made with light filo pastry, fresh cheese and spinach is becoming an increasingly popular choice for picnics, and the boundaries are shifting to incorporate influences from further afield – star gourmand Ottolenghi masterfully blends Middle Eastern flavours such as tahini and harissa from Northern Africa with salads and grilled dishes that would comfortably sit within Mediterranean menus.

"Fine food retailers should focus on products that offer quality, convenience and authenticity – especially for busy families who want real flavour without compromise"

"Mediterranean food has always held a special place in people's hearts, but its appeal has grown even further since UNESCO recognised Italian cuisine as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2025," explains Clara Cardillo, co-founder of The Cotswold Cardillo. "This acknowledgement celebrates the 'art of cooking' as a daily ritual passed down through generations – a way of life rooted in conviviality, raw ingredient sourcing and biodiversity."

For Rollo Millership, founder of Nourished Communities, Mediterranean food is always a smart stocking choice. "Customers love the quality and flavour of these products, many of which are associated with a healthy Mediterranean diet and holidays by the Med. At the same time brands like Odysea and Belazu deliver a lot of flavour for their competitive prices. Many of the Mediterranean products also lend themselves to communal sharing occasions & means they are also heavily social foods perfect for summer!"

"I think that there is enormous potential in Mediterranean food products in the UK market," says Rollo, who sees a particular opportunity in health-driven customers. "We are seeing a wave of nutritionists advocating Mediterranean food for weight loss, reducing inflammation and managing blood sugar levels. I think we will see Mediterranean food products evolving to be more health-focused bringing together traditional ingredients with modern dietary needs."

MAKE IT WORK



For Gianfranco Perri, CEO of Just Gourmet Foods, the seasonality inherent within Mediterranean cuisine is what makes it so special. "Across the Mediterranean there's a culture of working with nature in the same way as things have been done for generations. You farm your tomatoes and make pasta sauce in the summer. You have olive trees and make oil in the autumn." The warmer climate helps here, ripening produce to its peak.

To make this work for your business:

- Paint a picture with your Mediterranean food – showcase the produce that went into it and highlight its short ingredients list
- Use it within a celebration of the season – don't stock the same products year-round; deliver seasonal interest
- If you know the story behind a product, share it. Much Mediterranean food is produced by a family-run business, which is a key selling point



He provides beans as a strong example: "We are witnessing the renaissance of beans that are high in fibre and rich in protein. With the proliferation of high protein diets, I think we will start to see different flavoured halloumis as we are seeing with butter."



Paint a picture

Put simply, Mediterranean food brings to mind two key aspects for UK shoppers – simplicity which wows thanks to fabulously fresh, excellent quality ingredients, and togetherness. "Mediterranean food appeals because it's simple, fresh, and built around quality ingredients. When it's done properly, it doesn't need to be complicated. The flavour comes from the produce itself," says Daniel, co-founder of Mediterranevm Bay. "Mediterranean food is simple, but the quality behind it is what really changes the experience. There's also a strong social element to it. It's about sharing food and enjoying the experience, which is something people are increasingly looking for."

For Clara, Mediterranean food represents family, tradition, simplicity, and seasonality. "It's the joy of sharing a table, the comfort of familiar flavours and the pride of recipes passed down through generations. When I cook," she says, "I'm transported straight back to my Nonna Pina's kitchen – waking up at 7am on a Sunday to the smell of ragu simmering on the stove while the moka pot brewed the best espresso I've ever tasted. That sense of warmth, love and belonging is what Italian food carries with it."

"Mediterranean food appeals because it's simple, fresh, and built around quality ingredients. When it's done properly, it doesn't need to be complicated. The flavour comes from the produce itself"

As much as there is plenty of Mediterranean food we all know and love, Daniel thinks we're missing a trick when it comes to authentic Mediterranean food. "People know the classics but often haven't experienced them done properly. The biggest difference is in the quality and sourcing, whether it's fresh fish selected daily, or premium cuts like 40-day aged steaks." Plus, he says, "There's also a lot more to explore beyond the well-known dishes, especially regional recipes and traditional ways of preparing ingredients."

Lana Bhikha, managing director of Edesia Fine Foods, has experienced the value of this first hand. "One of customers has been in the industry for nearly 40 years and told us that our marinated artichokes are the best he's ever tasted... It can't be a coincidence that we source them from a family that has been growing artichokes for over 50 years and marinating them for around 40 years."

The artichokes are still hand-sliced and rubbed with the marinade by hand, in the traditional way. "It's very much details like this that make Mediterranean food stand out," says Lana.

EXPERT VIEW



"For fine food consumers, Mediterranean cuisine offers something deeply comforting yet beautifully simple: high quality ingredients, balanced flavours and dishes that rely on just a handful of components – often no more than eight – to create something extraordinary. It's food that feels good for the body and the soul. It's generous, honest, and built around bringing people together"

CLARA CARDILLO
THE COTSWOLD CARDILLO







TRENDING NOW

- ***Flavours from the Middle East and North Africa*** *such as tahini and harissa*
- ***Beans*** *– used in many Mediterranean dishes and currently star sellers thanks to their health credentials*
- ***Fresh herbs*** *– add colour and aromatic flavour to drizzles and couscous or ancient grain salads*

SPECIALITY FOOD Stock Check 26



Falcone
Italian Soft Amaretti
Classic Italian confectionery, made with oodles of almonds, and with a chewy, fudgy bite. Round off dinner with coffee or dessert wine and a plate of these.
holleysfinefoods.com



Ponti
Zero Olio Sundried Tomatoes
Sun-ripened, intense tomatoes are enhanced in a herbal marinade without added oils. Brings sunshine to salads, pasta, grain bowls and sandwiches.
cottagedelight.co.uk



La Drogheria
Italian Herbs Grinder
Fully adjustable, this blend includes rosemary, sage, bay, basil, marjoram and thyme.
drogheria.com



Italicus
Rosolio di Bergamotto
Made using only aromatic IGP bergamot from a UNESCO protected area in Calabria.
rosolioitalicus.com



Familigia Crispino
Sugo Alla 'Nduja Di Spilinga
This all-natural sauce is rich with tomatoes, spicy 'nduja, extra virgin olive oil and sauteed onion.
familigiacrispino.shop



Eat Real
Italian Cheese & Black Pepper Hummus Chips
Plant-based, gluten-free chips with 30% less fat than the average bag of crisps.
eatrealsnacks.com



Crosta & Mollica
Olive & Rosemary Ovali Cracker Crisps
Crispy aperitivo snacks made with Leccino olives and Italian rosemary, finished with salt.
crostamollica.com



Cooks & Co
Grilled Zucchini Rolls
Charred, flavoursome, tender pieces of zucchini are rolled around creamy cheese and herbs.
cooksandco.co.uk



Fish 4 Ever
Anchovy Fillets
Cantabrian anchovies are salted for six months and finished with local organic olive oil.
fish4ever.co.uk



Karyatis
Spanish Pitted Black Olives
Fruity and slightly bittersweet with a firm bite, these Hojiblanca olives are grown in Southern Spain.
odysea.com

Last Words.

THE SOCIAL PUNCH



COURTNEY GOLDSMITH SHARES NEED-TO-KNOW INSIGHT INTO THE WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Whether you've adopted artificial intelligence into your workflows or have proudly steered clear of ChatGPT thus far, you've no doubt come across the ever-growing amounts of 'AI slop' all over the internet. From badly written and poorly cited articles clogging up your Google search results to oddly glitchy animal videos on your social feeds, unfortunately it's a phenomenon that's hard to avoid these days.

Even the socially savvy among us will have lingered too long over a video or image wondering whether it's human-made or too good to be true.

Thankfully, while the odd fantastical video or quirky AI 'personality' goes viral, what I'm seeing on my feeds is that people still value reality. From brands' behind-the-scenes videos to glimpses into a person you admire's everyday routines, we're curious about the real people behind the accounts we follow.

That's because on social media, authenticity is still the most valuable currency. Authentic content builds trust with your followers. They don't want to see the same content churned out over and over by AI accounts; they want to hear your unique voice and see your individual story.

What does that look like in practice?

You could try:

Offering a candid response to personal experience or a big news story relevant to your industry.

Giving a peek at the more unglamorous parts of your workday. Faced with stacks of boxed up new products? Pop a camera up and suddenly you have an unboxing video.

Introducing the members of your team by letting their own personalities and interests shine through rather than sticking to a rigid formula.

Using mundane moments of b-roll footage as the backdrop for your big message.

Above all, don't be afraid to have a laugh. Look around and you'll see successful social media accounts often edit these 'outtake' moments into the hook of their video. And if it's just you with a phone, don't worry too much about not having professional equipment. More often than not, an overly produced, perfectly filtered video will only cause your followers to wonder whether it was made by AI. A realistic look behind the curtain of your business, on the other hand, will be the one to stop them mid-scroll.



Your followers want to hear your unique voice and see your individual story

TRIED & TESTED



True Dates
Apple

Finding this properly mouthwatering tastes-like-pick and-mix-but-isn't treat at Farm Shop & Deli Show was a gamechanger. No longer do I need to satisfy my taste for sour through sugar- and additive-filled confections; instead, I can tick the box with some health-giving dates. These offer just the right level of chew and a strong apple flavour, so they really do feel like you're indulging in something you probably shouldn't.

cotswold-fayre.co.uk

The Curious Curds Co
Key Lime Pie



Similarly satisfying my appetite for sour is The Cherry Tree's Curious Curds – most notably its Key Lime Pie variant. The team has worked wonders here, somehow managing to balance the taste buttery pastry and tangy cream cheese with strong flavours of lime for a thoroughly addictive curd that is wonderfully versatile.

cherrytreepreserves.co.uk



Fleur de Lan
Croissant Crisps

I clearly have a sweet tooth this month, as I cannot let this opportunity go by without mentioning Fleur de Lan's Croissant Crisps, distributed in the UK by Mahalo. Hand-rolled croissant crisps made even richer with the addition of caramel created using Irish dairy, these are addictively crispy-crunchy and beautifully buttery.

mahalosupplies.com

The Wasabi Company
Yuzu Mustard



Traditional mustard is an excellent thing, but it would be remiss of food lovers not to branch out into the more inventive versions of the failsafe condiment every now and then... And I recommend this as their first stop. Tart and citrussy, it's delicious with anything Asian-inspired, fish and in salad dressings.

thewasabicompany.co.uk

COMING UP NEXT...



Get ready for our **PANTRY SPECIAL** – a one-stop-shop guide to everything you need to get your customers' pantries stocked in style. We're exploring the worlds of **PASTA, RICE & GOURMET SAUCES** and tucking into **SWEET AND SAVOURY BISCUITS**, **CAKES AND BAKES**. We delve into the fine food world's **MUST-STOCK PRESERVES** for deliciously versatile staples, and showcase our pick of the ultimate **STORE CUPBOARD STAPLES**. All this and more to get you primed for your best-ever selling season.

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STORE SPOTLIGHT





Norfolk Deli

OWNERS: MARK KACARY
LOCATION: HUNSTANTON, NORFOLK

What's the philosophy behind the business?
Our philosophy has evolved over the years, but fundamentally it remains the same: and that is to provide an outlet for small local producers, to deliver a genuine foodie experience, to focus on quality and to carry forward our producers story with the same love and passion they have for their products. We aim to deliver this experience online to a much wider audience in the same way they do for those visiting us in person as evidenced by all the work we have done to build an online Norfolk producer hub and guides that educate and hopefully entertain.



What inspires the team?
The common answer would be customers, but it's near impossible to offer anything close to what we offer our customers without the people behind the food—those who obsess over their craft, who care about flavour, provenance, and doing things properly. Spending time with them, hearing their stories, and sharing that with our customers is what keeps us moving forward.

Who shops with you?
People who care about what they eat and where it comes from. Locals who want something better than the norm, visitors looking to take a taste of Norfolk home, and customers across the UK who trust us to curate something worth buying—especially when it comes to cheese and gifting.

What exciting plans do you have in the pipeline?
We're always looking at how we can strengthen our position as an authority on Norfolk. Over the past nine years, we've built the Norfolk Online Farmers' Market, and this year we've expanded that further with the introduction of the Norfolk Producer Hub—offering deeper insight into the people behind the products, along with guidance on how to use and enjoy them. Alongside this, we've focused heavily on creating genuinely useful content. Our blogs cover everything from the realities of running a small business to practical advice like what to do with mould on cheese, while our new guides are designed to answer the questions customers often struggle with.

Ultimately, it's about making the shopping experience—whether in-store or online—far better than elsewhere. That continues with the expansion of our hamper range and a growing focus on guided discovery, helping customers find something brilliant, not just something familiar.

What do you love most about what you do?
The moment someone tries something new and gets it. When somebody tells us they don't like Blue cheese and yet when we've asked a few questions and guide them to one and they go away having bought some. Or when we get one of those genuine reactions that shows that we are not just selling food; we're creating experiences people remember.

What's trending for you right now?
Curated choice over endless choice. Customers don't want to scroll through hundreds of options; they want someone to guide them. Our Cheesemonger's Selection, alongside our beer and chutney selections, is a direct response to that—tailored, thoughtful, and built on trust.

Ultimately it's about making the shopping experience far better than elsewhere

Talking Italian

Sponsored by Garofalo



CATERING FOR PICKY EATERS

THE APPETITE FOR PICKY BITS IS EVER-GROWING – AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO AS TEMPERATURES RISE. THANKFULLY, ITALIAN CUISINE HAS PLENTY OF WAYS TO TAP INTO THE DELICIOUS TREND

By 'picky eaters', of course, we're not referring to the consumers who stick to a short list of approved foods and rarely if ever stray, but the numerous shoppers who are looking for 'a bit of this, a bit of that' to satisfy their appetite for a 'picky tea'. A little bit of what you fancy does no end of good, and the Italian food world has plenty of gems for your customers to group together however they so wish to create their ultimate, personalised, spread.

'Picky tea' is a term that's gaining momentum in 2026 but the reality is that it's far from an innovative trend – indeed, Mediterranean cultures have been enjoying this style of eating for a long time, which means that from snacks to sweet treats they can offer a raft of menu options.

Our take on an Italian-inspired 'picky tea' is effortless – so long as you opt for high quality options. One or two excellent cheeses (the number can rise as the guest list does) such as broken off chunks of Parmigiano Reggiano and scooping Gorgonzola alongside crostini and grissini are a strong start; position alongside beautifully ripe fruit – figs would be optimum – for an attractive platter.

Add artfully draped charcuterie – Prosciutto di Parma and bresaola are almost universally loved – and jammy aged balsamic alongside a grassy extra virgin olive oil for drizzling as well as some punchy pickles and antipasti and you have a picky eating masterpiece.

Amaretti and dark chocolate, served with a smooth Italian red wine, finish off proceedings beautifully.

Surprisingly often, catering for a trend is not a case of reinventing the wheel – it's simply positioning it at a slightly different angle to bring it into the spotlight – and an Italian-inspired 'picky tea' is an easy win for fine food retailers.



Garofalo

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Réalisation Audrey Paradisi

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