# SF SPECIALITY FOOD

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YOUR FESTIVE SEASON SORTED




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# EDITOR'S LETTER



CHRISTMAS CAN OFTEN BE A STRESS-FILLED TIME, BUT TAKE STOCK TO CREATE A MAGICAL EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS AND YOU'LL REAP THE REWARDS

It's pretty fair to say that life is pretty tight right now, for the vast majority of both people and businesses, but that doesn't mean that the spirit of the upcoming Christmas can't shine through to make people prioritise relaxation and a spot of indulgence, even if just for a few days.

Budgets and resources are slimmer, so it's easy to think that Christmas might well be a little more sedate this year, but I say this is an opportunity to create and spread even more magic this year. After all, the greatest things in life are free, right?

Obvious but all-too-often forgotten in the festive stress is the power of a smile as customers enter a shop. Yes, you and your team may well not have the time to give the full indie retailer welcome and experience you may like to, with (hopefully) additional customers to satisfy and shelves to be stacked and artfully presented, but a positive acknowledgement that they have entered your establishment could go far in presenting a warm and open attitude.

Personally, I'm quite sensitive to the 'vibe' of a place so even if a product range is good, if there is nobody around to say a friendly "hello" to, whether that's a literal lack of any staff or a sense that the team members present are studiously ignoring their customers, I leave (most likely without spending any cash).

This isn't unusual, and it isn't a case of me being a hardened diva. Of course I want to support independents as much as I possibly can, but a tiny moment of warmth can make the difference between a sale and a walk-out – and lest we forget, even the supermarkets make an effort to create a sparkling atmosphere during the festive season so indies really should have a magical experience nailed, from the foundations of strong customer service upwards.

Decorations are a matter of personal taste. I've spoken to some fine food retailers who love to go all out, and others who like to stick to a 'more is more' approach only when it comes to the generosity of what they stock. Some shoppers and sellers alike may have a passionate hatred of tinsel, while others can't imagine Christmas without it. Whatever side you fall on, just be sure that your decorations and the wider experience you offer stay true to why you work in fine food retail.

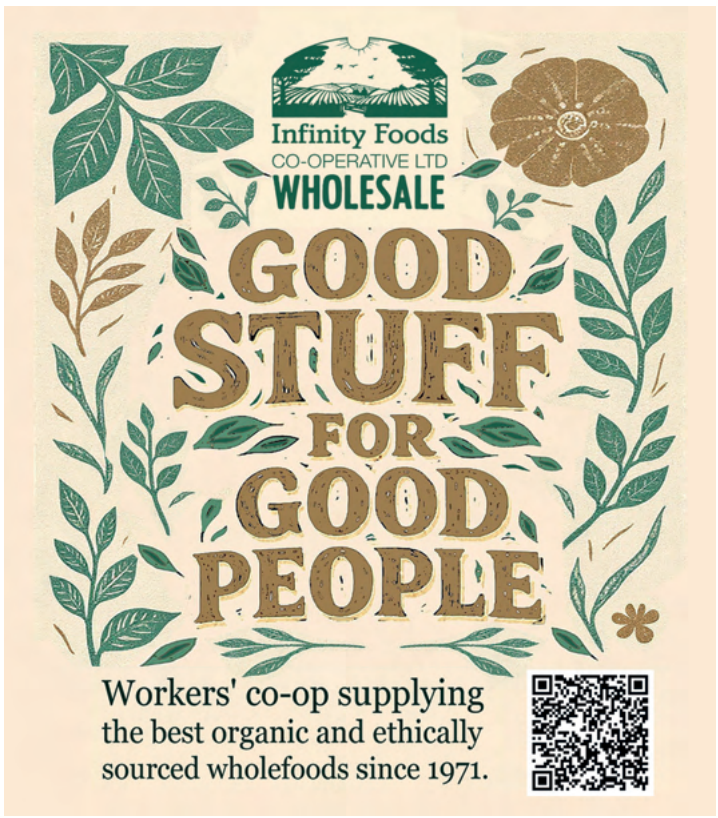
> *By sharing some of the passion and magic you have for your work with your customers, you could be building and retaining a community for life*

This may require a pause, to stop and remember what inspired you to do what you do and what powers you to keep going, but by sharing some of the passion and magic that you have for your work with your customers, you could be building and retaining a community for life.

Here's to creating magic that represents you this season.


**HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR**
holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com | specialityfood.net








# How secure is our food system?

**Britain's food and drink landscape has weathered sizeable storms in recent years, from extreme weather – more of which to come – to political unrest and financial restraints across businesses and consumers alike.**

**The silver lining of this dark cloud is that shorter supply chains and building local connections – a large part of *Speciality Food* readers' modus operandi – could play a valuable role in a secure food future. We spoke to three experts on the ground to share their take on the current state of our nation's food security and the challenges – and opportunities – to come.**




### TOM BRADSHAW
NFU PRESIDENT

"We simply cannot rely on the rest of the world to feed us. Over the past 30 years, the UK's self-sufficiency has fallen significantly in 10 of 11 key foods, while our reliance on imports has grown. Against a backdrop of increasing geopolitical uncertainty and the growing impacts of climate change, this paints a worrying picture.

"British farmers and growers are facing a cashflow and confidence crisis with inflation driven by the Iran war and after a summer of relentless dry weather and drought, which resulted in a brutal harvest for many. Despite these pressures, we continue to work hard every day to produce food for 29 million households, deliver jobs and support rural communities, and we're proud to do so. With the right support, we can do even more.

"That means establishing core production standards that apply equally to food produced here and imports and delivering a planning system that enables growth and innovation for farm businesses."

***"We need to see Government's words translated into meaningful action"***



### LUCY JONES
THE CORNISH FOOD BOX COMPANY

"The state of Britain's food security is now firmly on the agenda at every level from concerned local communities through to our government and security services. Apart from the COVID years it is the first time most of us in this country has had to consider where the food on our plates is coming from, and increasingly whether next time we go food shopping it will be available to buy – or what the price will be.

"Britain has a strong domestic food sector in many areas such as beef and dairy, but we have long been dependent on imports for other foods especially fruit and vegetables. We are increasingly exposed to climate change, extreme weather, global conflict, rising input costs and fragile international supply chains, which has led to the recent security assessment that we are at high risk from critical ecosystem collapse. Recent NFU analysis also suggests that self-sufficiency in many everyday foods has fallen over the past 30 years.

"For me, greater food security doesn't mean trying to produce everything ourselves. It means valuing, protecting and investing in our capacity to produce food here, while building a diverse and resilient supply chain. That creates both challenges and opportunities for SMEs. Smaller food businesses are being squeezed by rising employment, energy, and transport costs, without the buying power or margins of the major retailers. But our size can also be our strength. We can build direct relationships with farmers and producers, react quickly, shorten supply chains and connect customers much more closely with where their food comes from."

***"Food security ultimately starts with making British food production economically sustainable"***



### TODD REDWOOD
BSI

"Businesses have faced a relentless series of disruptions throughout 2026, and this latest threat could lead to higher costs, reduced product choice and goods shortages.

"Our research suggests many organisations are optimistic about their ability to withstand disruption over the coming year, but the foundations of resilience are often not yet in place. More than half describe their approach to risk management as reactive, while many lack formal, documented processes for managing supply chain risk.

"The research shows that many organisations expect disruption to drive higher costs, stockpiling and reduced product ranges. To avoid these impacts being felt by customers, organisations need to move beyond reactive crisis management and invest in proactive resilience.

"That means strengthening scenario planning, improving cross-functional coordination, increasing supply chain visibility, and ensuring leaders have the insight needed to make fast, informed decisions when disruption strikes."

***"Leaders need to have insight to make fast, informed decisions when disruption strikes"***




# The Feed.

Insider intel from the world of fine food

## Coffee offers growing opportunity for indies

**The British Coffee Association's latest figures have shown that coffee, already considered a sizeable opportunity for fine food independents and foodservice operators, is growing in popularity – especially with younger consumers, who are keen to explore innovative serves and unique menus at the establishments they frequent.**

The stats show that the number of cups of coffee consumed in the UK each day has grown by 5 million in 2018 to reach 103 million, partly driven by the nearly 50% rise in consumption amongst 18-34-year-olds since 2021.

These younger consumers report spending more than those aged 55+, with the average price they are willing to pay £4 compared with the older generation's £3.20.

The percentage of British adults consuming coffee every day – 67% – shows the scale of the opportunity for businesses, not least thanks to 29% of this figure consuming at least three cups daily.

Paul Rooks, executive director at UK Coffee Association, said, "These findings show just how firmly coffee is embedded in the social fabric and daily life across the UK, and it's particularly striking to see the growth among younger adults.



We are seeing a new generation embrace coffee, one of the UK's favourite beverages, with 18–34 year olds now reporting higher consumption than those aged 55 and over for the first time.

"How people enjoy coffee continues to evolve, whether that's a filter coffee, a flat white, cold brew, or iced coffee. That variety, and the ability to customise your drink to your mood and tastes, is one of the great strengths of coffee and helps explain its enduring popularity."

For premium operators, the opportunity lies in providing quality options with provenance and variety on menus. Catering for the growing cohort of health-conscious shoppers as well as those seeking out new experiences can make establishments increasingly attractive compared to mainstream options.

## Inflation: in numbers

**2.3%**
the current figure of grocery price inflation, up from **2.1%** in August

**2%**
the rise of grocery sales in the UK food and drink market

**1.5%**
sales growth at independents and symbols, following months of decline

**WORLDPANEL**



### The situation grows ever more grave

"Months into the #VATsTheProblem campaign, we are still waiting for meaningful dialogue from the government and to reduce UK hospitality VAT to 10%. We cannot make it any clearer how the entire hospitality industry in the UK is buckling under intense, and quite possibly irreversible, pressure. There are ongoing closures of restaurants, pubs, bars, hotels, food halls and many more are coming, linked to how we are effectively penalised by turning ingredients into meals through high VAT costs which is wildly out of line compared to our European neighbours. The situation grows ever more grave, on top of damaging NI contributions plus high energy rates, minimum wage rises and massive food inflation. There's also the issue of NICs causing mass unemployment for people aged under 24; we can help create employment opportunities for the 100,000s of NEETs across the UK, but it's also quite possible there won't be many hospitality businesses left for them to work in if this trajectory continues."

**Paul Askew, chef patron and owner of The Art School in Liverpool**, on the ongoing VAT challenges faced by foodservice operators

## Read the Label



**OLIVER LLOYD**
CONSULTANT

**Every ten days, I have a ritual where I stand at the kitchen counter with a mixing bowl, a bag of organic oats, and more nuts than is probably reasonable. Hazelnuts, Brazil nuts, pecans, pistachios, cashews, almonds. Chia seeds, goji berries, cacao nibs, desiccated coconut.**

Everything gets tossed in coconut oil and, if I have it, a generous drizzle of kithul treacle, a smoky, date-like syrup tapped from the flowers of the fishtail palm in Sri Lanka, with a notably low glycaemic index of 35, lower than both cane sugar and honey, and a depth of flavour that refined sugar cannot touch. It also reminds me of one of my favourite countries. Into the oven it goes, and twenty-five minutes later I have the best granola out there. I have been doing this for two years, and I am not alone. We are entering what I'd call the healthy gut generation, and more people are applying the same instinct to everything they eat.

The evidence is hard to ignore. Apps like Yuka, which scan product barcodes and rate their nutritional quality, now have tens of millions of users across Europe. The 30 plants a week movement, popularised in the UK by Tim Spector and rooted in the findings of the American Gut Project's 2018 study of over 10,000 people, has moved from niche nutritional advice into mainstream conversation. People are reading ingredient labels with a seriousness that would have seemed eccentric a decade ago, and what they are finding is giving them pause.

***For brands, the question is whether what's inside the packet is something they are genuinely proud to stand behind***

What's shifting isn't just awareness but behaviour, and a new generation of brands is responding. Peachie has built a seed and nut topping range specifically formulated for menopause support, fortified with 14 vitamins and minerals, including a full daily dose of Vitamin D, and now stocked in some supermarkets. It's a strong example of the category moving beyond generic gut-health messaging into highly targeted need states. Zoe, the personalised nutrition platform, has taken a similar approach, using microbiome testing to inform its seed and fibre blend and grounding the proposition in individual biology rather than general wellness.

Both brands understand that consumers are no longer satisfied with vague health credentials. They want to know what is in the product, why each ingredient is there, and what it's doing for them. The homemade granola instinct and the Peachie proposition express the same underlying shift: a desire for food that is transparent, intentional, genuinely functional and delicious.




# FROM GENEROUS GIFTING TO JOYFUL HOSTING

## VANILLA GOLD SPARKLE PAVLOVA

**Dusted with a shimmer of edible gold, this pavlova is packed with natural vanilla flavour and ready for cream, fruit, or whatever glorious mess you fancy piling on top.**

**Gluten free, vegetarian, and totally show-stopping – perfect for gifting, sharing, or sneaking the last slice before anyone notices.**







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# The Feed. Retail

## Social media and provenance to boost sales this Christmas

**A recent report from Mintel, *Predictive Consumer Gifting Behaviour & Seasonal Retail Trends,* has shown that there is an increased appetite for carefully curated and differentiated product ranges, with over half of UK shoppers stating that they would purchase items from local or small businesses if the products were clearly signposted.**

Mintel says that the findings demonstrate a shift in seasonal retail: 'Consumers aren't simply searching for trending Christmas gifts, but for gifts that feel meaningful and distinctive, and that are convenient to purchase.'

The report also highlighted the role that social media plays in the discovery of new products, with over one fifth of gift buyers saying that they seek out inspiration from social media.

Mintel names livestream shopping as a valuable format for independent retailers, allowing businesses to 'demonstrate products, answer questions, and build anticipation for festive ranges in real time'.

## Diversifying to survive and thrive on the high street



**RORY GILLIES**
CO-FOUNDER OF NOURISHED COMMUNITIES

**Every independent grocer I know is feeling the squeeze. Rents, wages, business rates and National Insurance are all moving in the wrong direction, while footfall is increasingly unpredictable. For shops operating on already tight margins, the traditional model is becoming harder to sustain.**

For a long time, our answer was to try to be a slightly better version of the same shop. It took a few uncomfortable years to realise that wasn't enough.

Looking around, the retailers I most admired were the ones treating their shop as a platform, a place with trust, footfall, and local relationships already built in, and asking what else that platform can support.

With that in mind we decided for Nourished Communities to survive and thrive, we needed to think beyond the shop floor; many other independents will be thinking the same, if not already taking action.

In addition to physical stores, it's important to consider what else you could produce. For example, we now make handmade empanadas under the London Empanada Co brand. What began as a best-selling product in our shops has developed into a separate business opportunity, with wholesale demand from independent cafés and retail businesses looking for something distinctive to offer their customers.

***When one channel has a slow month, another is usually doing fine, building more resilience into the business***

Hosting events is another promising new addition to supplement the income of a store, especially with growing rents. After six months of mixed success in managing our own events in our basement, we were really lucky to be approached by Calico, a new venture looking for a home for their fantastic programme of workshops in upholstery, lamp-making and embroidery. While good relationships are crucial in partnering so closely with another company, it has allowed us to diversify revenue streams at a time when resources are tight.

None of these individually would keep a shop afloat. But together, they significantly change the shape of the business. When one channel has a slow month, a rainy August on the high street, say, another is usually doing fine, building more resilience into the business.

Diversification isn't free, and it isn't as simple as adding another product to the list. Each new revenue stream adds complexity and needs time, systems and people behind it. We've had to learn how to build on our strengths and cut anything that is creating more complexity than value.

It won't look the same for every business, and it shouldn't. But if your shop is still trying to survive on one revenue stream in 2026, that's worth questioning before the next rent review does it for you.

## GET IN TOUCH

**In an era of multiples expanding their premium ranges, which they are often able to sell at lower price points than independents, we want to know how you make a basket feel better value than one from the supermarket. Let us know via holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com**



## Independent retailers want to play their part

"We welcome the Chancellor's focus on growth, and we share his ambition to deliver sustained growth for the UK economy. Independent retailers want to play their part in that growth, and growth that is spent with British based businesses is the kind that will benefit the high street most directly.The Chancellor himself accepts that he must draw a line under the rising cost of doing business. We now urge him to use the upcoming Budget to give independent retailers in every postcode real reason for hope, by acting on business rates and the cost of employment."

**Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira**, in response to Chancellor John Healey's commitment to reduce the burden of business regulation and create a roadmap to better business rates retention

## Shopping Christmas 2026: in numbers

**22%**
of Christmas budgets are expected to be accounted for by food and groceries
***IPA***

**78%**
of shoppers intend to plan ahead and stick to essentials this Christmas
***IGD***

**27%**
of UK consumers plan to spend more on food and drink during Christmas 2026
***PwC***




# SEGGIANO

## regional italian specialities make the season bright

Explore the festive treats Italians wait all year to gather around and share, from freshly baked holiday panettoni and honey-rich torroni to buttery biscuits and other seasonal specialties.

Crafted by small family producers across Italy for Christmas.

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seggiano.com

great taste 2026

Great Taste 2026 1-Star Award
Pistachio & Chocolate Covered Torrone

# The Feed. Snacks

## Snacking isn't slowing down, but it is changing – and fast



**LOUISE FORSTER**
HOT PICKLE INNOVATION LAB

**Snacking has simplified. Since HFSS restrictions came into force, the distinction between a "better-for-you" snack and a next-level treat feels much clearer. Walk into any retailer and you'll find healthier options are increasingly front and centre; If you want something more indulgent, you can feel like you need to sneak around the back of the store to find it!**

It's no surprise then that innovation in 'healthier' snacking is booming. But healthier doesn't just mean taking things out. The new generation of snacks is being asked to do more.

Protein isn't going anywhere, but it is finding new formats. From ambient cheese bites and bars such as Eatlean Protein to snackable herby sausage slices from Club Salami, protein increasingly comes from the food itself rather than being added as a powder. Fibre is still having a moment, with Delve's roasted oat crisps showing how functional benefits can also be the star of the show.

Add GLP-1 into the mix and the opportunity becomes even more interesting. As meals and snacks continue to blur, there's growing potential for products that deliver more than a quick hit.

But healthier doesn't have to mean worthy.

At the recent lunch! Show at Excel, there was plenty of evidence that snacks are getting healthier without getting boring.

***It's no surprise that innovation in 'healthier' snacking in booming. But healthier doesn't have to mean worthy***

Take Vive's HFSS-compliant Jaffa Orange Delights. They have all the fun of a familiar sweet treat, with a playful, squishy middle that makes texture part of the experience. They taste good - there's a Great Taste star to prove it.

Soul Fruit turns Jack Fruit, Dragon Fruit and other exotic fruits into delicious, dried formats, while Zombie uses dates as the base for nostalgic sour-cola and doughnut-inspired kids' treats. Miss Kim's Lotus Root Bukgak adds a high-fibre, crispy Korean-inspired snack to the mix.

But indulgence certainly isn't disappearing. Spooners' Spoonable Cookie Dough* proves there's still plenty of appetite for snacks that go all-in on pleasure – it doesn't get much more indulgent than eating cookie dough straight from the tub.

Perhaps the most interesting space is where the two worlds meet. We've seen an explosion of frozen snackable treats, from Pukpip to Tru Fru to growing numbers of own-label versions. They combine the language of a treat with fruit and/or portionability, making them feel more considered: healthy treat and magical indulgence, all at once.

Perhaps that's the bigger story: the category is getting more creative, not less. New ingredients, unexpected flavours, playful textures and formats are giving shoppers more reasons to explore.

The snack aisle may be getting healthier – but it certainly isn't getting boring.



## Scotland HFSS legislation could risk "pulling customers away from local shops"

**Scotland's HFSS rules come into force this month and are set to cause issues for retailers who sell snacks and confectionery, who likely will be required to reshape their ranges and consider merchandising and promotion.**

The Scottish Grocers' Federation has launched a 'concise guide for retailers' affected by the plans, which now includes symbol and franchise retailers as opposed to the large supermarkets originally mentioned in the Scottish National Party's April manifesto.

The Federation has claimed that the new legislations risk "pulling customers away from local shops and encouraging them to travel further to out-of-town supermarkets for everyday essentials", as well as placing the responsibility with already stretched local authorities.

Affected parties can submit their views on the consultation until 24th November.

Is this news going to impact your business? Let us know via holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com.

### GET IN TOUCH

**We want to hear from you about children's snacks. Do you stock snacks that are formulated specifically for children, and if so, what do you look for – natural ingredients and low sugar, or fun treats as impulse purchases? Let us know via holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com**

### TOP PRODUCTS




**All Real Natural Protein Bar**
Made with 100% natural ingredients, high in protein, high in fibre and designed to support modern health needs.
**allrealnutrition.com**




**Lion's Brain Crisps**
Made with Savoursmiths, combining hand cooked British potato crisps with Lion's Mane extract and zinc.
**lionsbrain.co.uk**

For more **insight** into the **UK** snacking industry, including **product** recommendations and **expert** insight, download ***Snack Buyer*** from **specialityfood.net**







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# The Feed. Operations



## The tangible impacts of food and drink inflation

**With resources being stretched increasingly thinly across sectors, we spoke to two operators to find out how inflation is shaping businesses.**



**Stuart Masterson, supply chain specialist at Food Nutrition Partners**

"For food and drink manufacturers, inflation is not a single number. Ingredient, packaging, energy and labour costs move at different speeds, while customers and consumers remain highly sensitive to price. The result is pressure on margins, volumes and cash, even when input costs ease.

"Smaller operators have less room to manoeuvre. They often buy in lower volumes, have less negotiating power and cannot always pass on cost increases. Minimum order quantities and long lead times can force a choice between holding more stock and tying up cash, or running with less protection against disruption.

"For specialist products, switching ingredients is rarely a simple purchasing decision. Reformulation may involve trials, changes to specifications, shelf-life testing and customer approval. That limits the ability to react when a key input becomes more expensive or scarce.

"In my experience, the strongest response is to understand margin and supply risk by product, rather than relying on inflation figures. Which inputs have the greatest effect on cost? Where is stock absorbing cash? Which alternatives are technically viable? Procurement, technical, commercial and operations teams need to answer those questions together.

"Smaller manufacturers can be agile, but resilience depends on protecting working capital as carefully as supply."



**Mark Kacary, Norfolk Deli**

Now that we are operating as a smaller business from a single premises, business rates don't actually affect us particularly significantly. Of course, that would be very different if even the smallest businesses were required to pay the full amount.

Where I do have experience of their impact is when we expanded.

I'll be completely honest: part of the reason we closed our café when we did was that, as soon as we operated from a second premises, we became liable for full business rates on both. Suddenly the economics looked very different.

Add that to employment costs, National Insurance and all the other costs associated with growing a business and I don't think the public necessarily appreciates the financial burden placed on a small independent business that wants to expand. There can come a point where it almost feels as though you're being penalised for growing.

I completely accept that businesses need to contribute to the society and communities in which they operate, but I do sometimes question what a small business actually receives in return for its business rates. We still have to pay separately for our commercial waste collection, for example. Many of the services that a householder might naturally associate with paying council tax aren't necessarily services a business receives through paying business rates.

For me, therefore, the bigger issue isn't really our current rates bill. It's what can happen when a small business reaches the point where it wants to take the next step. Taking another premises, employing more people and expanding should feel like a positive progression. When we did it, the additional fixed costs associated with that growth ultimately became one of the factors in deciding to become smaller again.



### Offer a clear reason to visit

"The latest Operator Data Index shows that consumers are becoming increasingly selective about where they spend their money. Brands that offer a clear reason to visit, whether through quality, experience, flavour innovation or value, are continuing to outperform a market that remains challenging overall."

**Adrian Kowalski, insight manager at Lumina Intelligence,** on how brands can succeed in today's market

### Extreme weather impact




of surveyed food wholesalers experienced disruption during the extreme weather of summer 2026




reported stock shortages




increased buffer stocks and/or added vehicles, drivers or delivery shifts to maintain supplies

**Food Resilience Commission**




+ NATURALLY

# KALTBACH

CAVE AGED +

## TREASURE OF THE CAVE

### CRAFTED FOR SPECIAL MOMENTS

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# The Feed. Startups

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## 5 MINUTES WITH...



**HELEN SNOOK**
CO-FOUNDER OF INDI

**What would you be doing if you weren't in the food industry?**
I'd be a nutritionist, teaching children what it means to eat a healthy, balanced diet. Over the last 5 years I've learnt so much from the three nutritionists in our team, but why aren't we taught this stuff in school?

**What was your first job?**
I worked behind the bar in a busy London pub just after leaving school. I looked so young that customers loved asking if I was old enough to serve them. It was fun, but a crash course in how to handle difficult, rude and sometimes sexist behaviour.

**What inspires you?**
Talking to other founders. Building a start-up comes with plenty of highs, but also a fair share of stress and uncertainty. I think it's hard to fully relate unless you've been through it.

**What's the worst job you've done?**
Packing endless parcels for £5 a day (for months on end) in the hope of getting offered my dream job.

**What's your favourite part of your job?**
Working with my incredible colleagues who care about INDI, our mission, and our customers as much as I do. Reading customer reviews is a favourite pastime, too.

**And your least favourite?**
Managing production delays.

**How about the food industry?**
I love how dynamic and creative it is. There are so many interesting brands doing exciting things, whether that's formats, packaging or positioning. It's fascinating watching trends emerge and seeing how founders put their own spin on them, often at incredible speed.

**Tea or coffee?**
Tea – English Breakfast or mint.

**What would be your last supper?**
Homemade pasta.

**What's your motto?**
Be kind, it's free.

**What's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?**
Platefuls of veg momos (cabbage dumplings) in Nepal. They nearly poisoned me, but that's a story for another time.

**What's your favourite book?**
A tough one. I'm currently enjoying *If I Could Tell You Just One Thing...* with short, inspiring stories to end my day.

**Sweet or savoury?**
Sweet, every time (I just make sure I've had my INDI supplements first!)

## THE INNOVATORS

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




**Rites of Salt Natural Salt**
Natural sea salt with a fine grain, made for cooking, roasting, brining and finishing dishes.
**theritesofsalt.com**




**Herbal Quarters**
Small-batch functional herbal tea using full flowers, leaves, roots, peels and botanicals.
**herbalquarters.com**

## Why startups are the heartbeat of the fine food industry



**VHARI RUSSELL**
FOUNDER OF THE FOOD MARKETING EXPERTS

**Ask any fine food buyer what keeps them coming back to trade shows, and I guarantee the answer isn't the established brands. It's the startups.**

There is something genuinely electric about a founder standing behind a table at a farm shop or deli, passionately telling the story of the product they've poured everything into. That energy is infectious, and it matters far more than most people in this industry openly acknowledge.

Startups do something that no established brand, however brilliant, can replicate. They surprise us. They arrive with ingredients we haven't heard of, flavour combinations that make us stop mid-stride, and packaging that makes us pick something up purely because we've never seen anything like it before. In an industry where the UK's food and drink sector contributes over £139 billion to the national economy and continues to outpace many other manufacturing sectors, that ability to genuinely surprise and innovate is one of the most commercially valuable things imaginable [Jellybean Creative].

***Startups' ability to genuinely surprise and innovate is one of the most commercially valuable things imaginable***

And shoppers feel it. There is a very particular joy in discovering something new in a farm shop or deli. Something that feels like a secret. Something you want to tell people about. According to Mintel, consumers' love of food and drink content continues to represent a powerful touchpoint for brands to forge emotional connections with shoppers, and startups are the ones creating those moments of discovery every single day [USDA].

The social media dimension is significant too. An established brand might have a polished Instagram presence, but it rarely generates the kind of genuine, spontaneous word-of-mouth that a brilliant new product does. Social commerce is a growing force in food and drink, with 30% of social media users having bought food and drink products directly through social platforms, a figure that is only heading in one direction. Startups generate this organic advocacy naturally, because novelty and authenticity are the two things the algorithm rewards most [USDA].

But perhaps the most undervalued contribution startups make is cultural. They reflect who we are right now, our changing tastes, our growing curiosity about provenance, our desire for food that tells a story. According to Lumina Intelligence, over a third of consumers say they would be willing to pay more for provenance, particularly when it is linked to traceable supply chains and startups, almost by definition, have the most traceable and compelling stories of all.

The fastest-growing flavour profiles in UK food in 2026 according to Statista are matcha up 158%, hot honey up 120%, kimchi up 56% – almost all pioneered by challenger brands and independent producers before the mainstream caught up. Startups don't follow trends. They create them.

The fine food industry without startups would still be good. But it would be quieter, safer and considerably less interesting.

And nobody got into this industry because they wanted quiet and safe.

## Q&A How can I use startups to stand out from the multiples?



*"Supermarkets and multiple retail chains inevitably rely on massive volume, which means their shelves end up looking identical wherever you go. Independent retailers have a real advantage here – they have the total freedom to turn their shops into a truly experiential destination.*

*"I started raye the store with a goal of supporting small businesses and giving them a platform to grow. Backing emerging startups allows independent retailers to offer a level of curation, honest storytelling, and rapid innovation that the big players simply cannot match.*

*"Challenger brands are the ones driving the most exciting movements right now – whether that's through sustainable solutions, bold packaging design, or completely unique ingredient pairings.*

*"Bringing these founders onto physical shelves does not just differentiate an independent retailer's inventory – it creates a high-energy physical space where consumers can connect with the makers, find products of genuine substance and uncover tomorrow's trends long before they hit the mass market."*

**NICOLE COMPEN**, FOUNDER OF RAYE THE STORE

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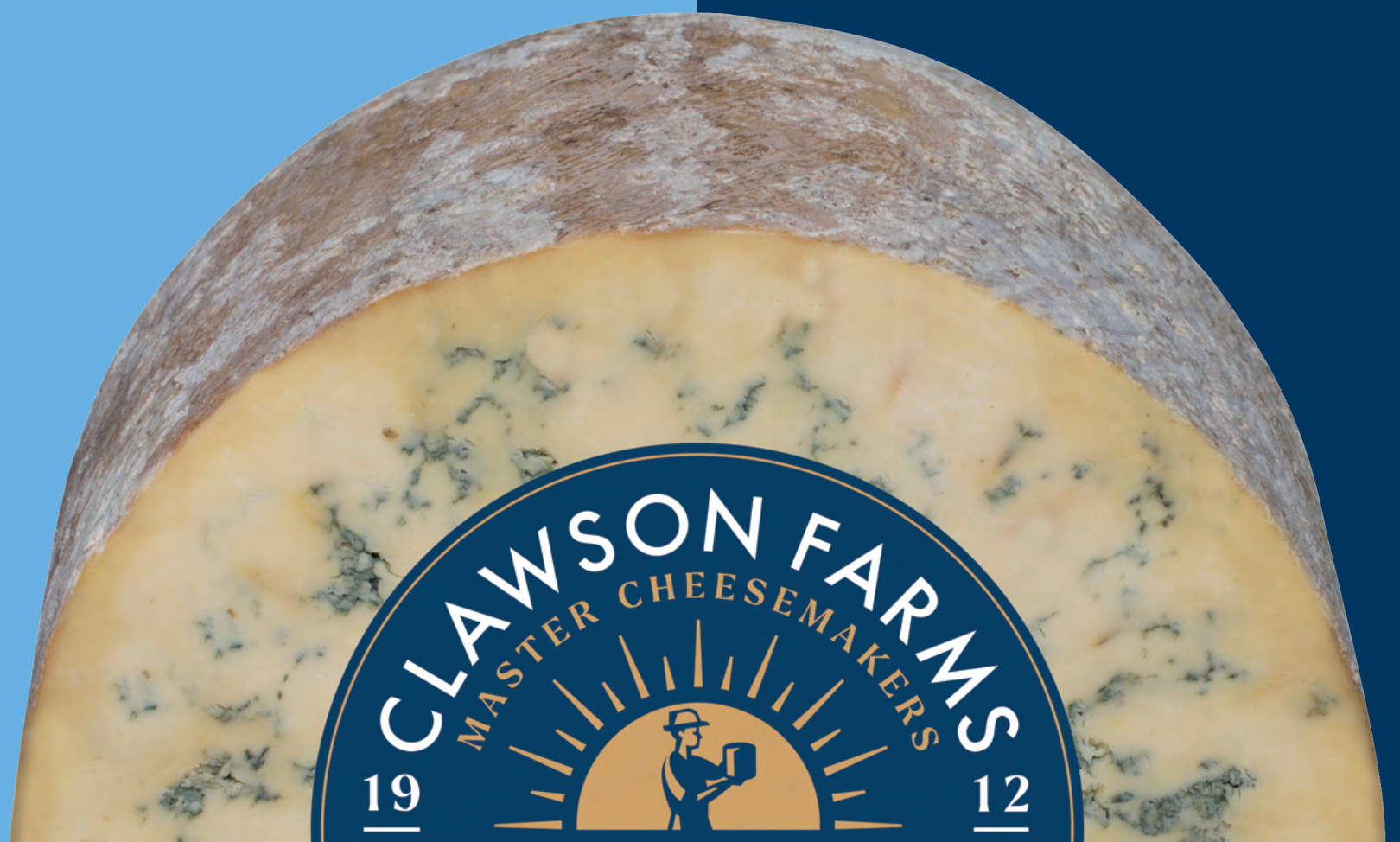
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**clawsonfarms.co.uk**



# The Feed. Tech

## Why now is your chance to get ahead



**THOMAS AKINTAN**
AVALON INSIGHTS

**There are very few two letter words that have had as much impact in recent years as the two-letter word 'AI' and as headlines, articles and stages continue to spread the word, underneath it all there is a massive opportunity.**

As an AI founder working across sectors and seeing first hand exactly how AI is truly changing people's lives and ways of doing business for the good, there is no better way to seize this moment.

I'm going to put myself in the shoes of a deli owner in Cambridge (visited there recently and loved it!) and start by asking myself the question: What can I do to ensure my business continues to thrive in this AI era?

First, I'd need to understand that AI is not something that is just for techies. On the contrary, I need to see AI as something that not only has a seat at the table for me but a full course meal to enjoy.

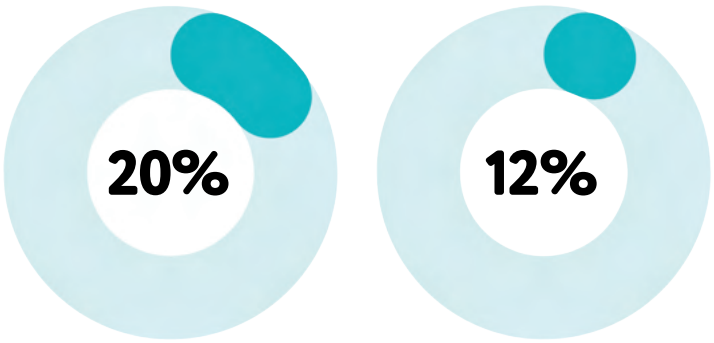
Next, I don't need massive overhead costs to realise these benefits either. Starting small and in simple ways can pay massive dividends. A lot of the tools are free to use and if I am a one-person band then with the power of AI, I'm finally able to orchestrate a full choir and play certain roles or instruments (sticking to the analogy) that I previously couldn't play using the power of AI Agents. Quick terminology tip – think of AI Agents like hands, they can think, make decisions and take actions.

***If you were to ask me a year ago were businesses ready for AI agents I'd say no, but now it's a yes***

Perhaps I have a small or medium sized team, well I'd make sure they are upskilled on AI and fast. If my 15-person team can each learn how to use the power of AI in their own way to create simple AI workflows to optimise a process, then it saves me time, money and most importantly generates value for customers by allowing me to focus on the human stuff of my deli. A practical example could be getting an AI tool (Perplexity or Claude) to find what people are saying online, translate it in simple terms then help come up with some ideas to create content, products and services around it.

Finally, I'd keep the heart of what I do for my deli as mine and never outsource it. No AI can replicate the uniqueness and individuality of what makes you… you. So I'd start early and keep my value close.

## Retail cybercrime: in numbers




of UK businesses have experienced at least one cybercrime

of retail and wholesale businesses have experienced cybercrime

**The UK Government's Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2025**

## GET IN TOUCH

**If you had £10k to spend on revamping your establishment/business with the likes of new EPOS tools, electronic shelf labels, a new and improved digital portfolio including ecommerce and website, stock management and loyalty systems etc, how would you utilise it? Let us know via holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com**

# How to beat AI at gifting inspiration

**Mintel's recent *Predictive Consumer Gifting Behaviour & Seasonal Retail Trends* report has found that the influence of AI on consumer gifting behaviour is set to grow.**

At present, under 10% of UK shoppers use AI to generate gift ideas, and this number is predominantly made up of younger generations who are familiar with AI tools, but the net is set to widen to other segments of society.

This offers an opportunity for independent fine food retailers, says Mintel, who can use AI tools themselves to curate gifting ranges which are unique and distinctive, and support smaller brands, independent makers and limited-run products by combining consumer search queries with personalisation features.

"This could elevate AI from a basic recommendation tool into a more sophisticated gifting discovery engine," says the report.




***Working with AI could elevate it from a basic tool into a sophisticated discovery engine***






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easyveggieideas.com/awards

JENNY O'NEILL Head of Awards - jenny.oneill@artichokehq.com





# Sustainability



## Rethinking the lifecycles of packaging to minimise waste and save money

Sustainability is quietly woven into the fabric of everything we do at Infinity Foods. One unique example of this is our box collection scheme. Customers fold flat boxes after they've unpacked their delivery. These boxes are then collected by the Infinity delivery team and brought back to our warehouse. Here, they are relabelled and put back into circulation, carrying our products onto the next customer. We do this until the boxes reach their natural end of life and are recycled. We send out thousands of boxes every week and have been doing this for decades. Most importantly, this scheme reduces waste. But it also saves us money too and is a simple process to maintain.

**Mark Bruce, Infinity Foods Wholesale**, on the value of a circular approach

## Shoppers' sustainability demands become more targeted



**According to research conducted by 4C Associates, the British consumer's attitude towards sustainability has evolved significantly throughout the five-year period during which the study was conducted.**

Following the Covid-19 pandemic environmental concerns became a more mainstream consideration during purchasing decisions, but took a hit as cost-of-living pressures intensified between 2024 and 2025 – meaning that consumers were prioritising affordability over paying a premium for sustainability initiatives.

In 2025 the research highlighted that the 'say-to-pay gap' – the difference between what consumers said they valued and what they were willing to pay for – grew, but in 2026 shoppers are becoming clearer about the initiatives they are willing to pay more for.

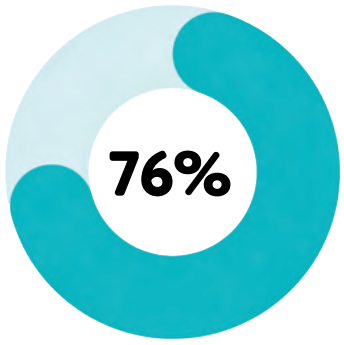
Low water usage has seen the strongest movement, increasing from 27% in 2025 to 41% in 2026. Recyclable packaging has also grown from 35% to 45%, while regenerative farming and low-carbon production saw a small increase. Renewable energy has retained its position as the highest-ranked sustainability factor for the third consecutive year.

"For F&B businesses, sustainability investments must increasingly be linked to both environmental outcomes and commercial value – demonstrating why their sustainability initiatives matter to consumers as well as to the business," the report advised.

## Food packaging: in numbers




of UK consumers believe all food packaging should be plastic-free




believe festivals should only use plastic-free food packaging

**Xampla**




## Beyond Organic September



LEE HOLDSTOCK
SOIL ASSOCIATION CERTIFICATION

**2026 has been a stand-out year in terms of retailer involvement in Organic September, both major and independent. M&S's decision to reduce the price of key organic products as part of their "Remarksable Value" proposition grabbed both consumer and media attention. With 4 out of 5 British households buying organic, and with middle- and lower-income shoppers among the most frequent buyers, this was a strategic move by M&S to grab more everyday shopping baskets. There is a clear demand for organic products, with sales of organic in major retail growing faster than non-organic in both value and volume terms.**

Price reductions and loyalty discounts are a good way to capture new shoppers, with many then remaining loyal organic purchasers after the promotion is over when they have experienced the higher quality of the food. However, it is only one way retailers can encourage more basket spend on organic. 3 out of 4 shoppers are concerned about exposure to artificial pesticides and PFAS ("forever chemicals") in their food. Making the benefits of organic clear in-store – for example, no use of artificial pesticides, and the higher animal welfare regulations – can therefore capture more shoppers. Independent retailers have a unique opportunity to do this with more in-store space and an opportunity for a more personalised shopping experience through their staff.

***Championing organically produced products gives consumers the healthier and more sustainable items they are looking for***

Online retail is a channel where organic overperforms due to the opportunity to share more on its benefits. We have previously run ecommerce testing that has shown a 15% increase in conversions when the Soil Association Organic logo is present – a logo that in a recent survey of 2000 UK adults, just over half agreed makes them trust a product more. This is one reason we see Ocado over-perform the most on sales of organic in major retail – they now stock over 3000 organic brands and they increased their offering of organic products by 130% this Organic September.

Championing seasonal, British and organically produced products all year round gives consumers the healthier and more sustainable items they are looking for while simultaneously supporting our domestic organic farmers. An Organic Action Plan for England, which will aim to increase the percentage of farmland that is organic is imminent, following on from the success we have seen with the Scottish Organic Action Plan. If we get the decisive government action we need to boost organic production to match demand, retailers will have more opportunity to stock organic products than ever before.

# 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

### FUNCTIONAL CRISPS LAND ON UK SHELVES

A Kind Mind has launched Lion's Brain crisps to cater for the growing demand for food with health functionality. The hand-cooked crisps contain Lion's Mane extract and added zinc to improve cognitive function. Three flavours are available: Wild Mushroom & Black Garlic, which is vegan and gluten-free, Shiitake Mushroom & Truffle Salt, which is vegan and gluten-free, and Raclette Cheese & Shallot, which is vegetarian and gluten-free.

**lionsbrain.co.uk**







### NEW 100% COCOA POWDER FROM ISLANDS

Islands is launching pure cocoa produced from its farm in St Vincent on 19th October. "Over the past few years, demand for specialty drinking chocolate has surged — driven by a desire for exceptional flavour, ethical sourcing and sustainable farming credentials. Our conscious consumers are also prioritising functionality and sugar-free options, and we're delighted that our new 100% cocoa powder delivers on both, deliciously," said Wilf Marriott, founder.

**islandschocolate.com**

### TRANSPARENCY-LED SALT BRAND ENTERS UK MARKET

The Rites of Salt has designed a range to bring verifiable provenance to the staple seasoning category.The edible salts available are Pink Himalayan Fine Salt and Natural Sea Salt Fine Grain. "We built The Rites of Salt because we felt a category as familiar as salt deserved more transparency," says founder Hashir Hussain. "There is no shortage of provenance and purity language in the category, but often very little for the customer to actually verify."

**theritesofsalt.com**










## Refreshed look for PureOaty

Glebe Farm Foods has refreshed the branding of its PureOaty range in order to deliver greater shelf impact while making it easier for consumers to choose between its products for different usage occasions. Every item in the range is produced using 100% British oats which are certified gluten-free by Coeliac UK. The new strapline 'Delicious oats. Made simply.' promotes the brand's dedication to taste, trust, transparency and British provenance.

**glebefarmfoods.co.uk**

## Booja-Booja reveals new launches

The dairy-free chocolate brand has added to its roster of indulgent chocolate products with the launch of new 8 Truffle Boxes in Fruit & Pecan Praline Crunch and Salted Caramel Mocha options, 16 Truffle Selection Box including two new truffle flavours, two recently created Chocolate Wonders packs – Coconut Chocolate Wonders and Deeply Chocolate Wonders, and three new hot chocolates in Orange, Vanilla Chai Spice and Hazelnut variants.

**boojabooja.com**







## Festive favourite returns for 2026

Fairfields Farm Crisps' much-loved limited edition Honey Roasted Chestnut & Sage flavour has made a return for the upcoming season, available in 150g sharing packs. Robert Strathern, co-founder, said, "Bringing back Honey Roasted Chestnut and Sage flavour for 2026 was an easy decision for us. It quickly became a customer favourite, offering the perfect balance of sweet and savoury flavours. There's something magical about creating a flavour like this and seeing how much people love it, so we're delighted to be bringing it back for another Christmas season".

**fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk**

## Botivo unveils winter special edition

The small-batch botanical aperitivo brand has released a limited edition variant for winter incorporating date molasses with clove, allspice and vanilla. "We wanted to create a totally unique limited edition that captured the magic of this time – ingredients that when brought together taste how the festive season feels! That's how this limited edition was born," says Imme Ermgassen, co-founder.

**botivodrinks.com**




## Honest Toil releases mini cans

The brand's 100ml tin has been designed for hampers and Christmas stockings, and contains the same fresh extra virgin olive oil with bright, grassy and peppery notes as the original larger version. The oil is made by pressing early harvest Koroneiki olives grown around Kyparissia in the western Peloponnese hours after picking.

**honest-toil.co.uk**




## Innovative new panettones

Supplier of quality Italian foods, Tenuta Marmorelle, have announced the launch of two new panettone variants set to join its range: 'Nduja & Chocolate Panettone and Red Velvet Panettone. The 'nduja option is a combination of slow-risen artisan panettone, authentic Calabrian 'nduja and dark chocolate, while the Red Velvet Panettone brings together the light texture of traditional panettone with the rich indulgence of red velvet cake for modern takes on the Italian classic bake.

**tenutamarmorelle.com**




## New festive fudge from Fudge Kitchen

Gourmet confectionery brand Fudge Kitchen has brought out a festive take on traditional crumbly fudge. Handmade in small batches, it brings nostalgic gingerbread and warming spice flavours into an attractive format perfect for gifting.

**fudgekitchen.co.uk**



# Functional drinks from Biona

Windmill Organics has launched a trio of functional drinks into its Biona range: Immune Shot, a 95ml blend of organic fruit and vegetable juices with functional botanical extracts, Fibre Shot which contains naturally sweet fruit juices, functional fibres and botanicals in a 95ml bottle, and 100% Sri Lankan Coconut Water which contains no additives of extra sugar in 1l recyclable packaging. Gemma Williams, head of marketing at Windmill Organics, said, "The UK functional beverage market is growing fast, as many people are now choosing drinks offering health benefits over the traditional sugary soft drinks which have historically dominated the category.

**biona.co.uk**




# Potts Partnership's new tubes travel the world




The brand has released a new range of squeezable, resealable and recyclable tubes of versatile cooking pastes, offering high flavour intensity and layering. The globally inspired paste range incudes Japanese – Miso, Tamari & Ginger Teriyaki Flavour, S. Indian – Chilli, Kerala Masalal Tandoori Flavour, Mexican – Honey & Chipotle Flavour, Lebanese – Zaatar Spice Flavour, and Korean – Gochujang & Rice Wine Flavour pastes presented in 100% recyclable aluminium tubes.

**pottspartnership.co.uk**

# Christmas gift collections from Charlie & Ivy's

The family business has launched three themed collections in time for the Christmas gifting season: Pizza Pairings Collection, which brings together Chipotle Chilli Mayonnaise, Smoked Garlic Mayonnaise, Smoked Chilli Dressing and Smoky Harissa Drizzle Oil; Feast & Barbecue Collection which contains Garlic & Thyme Plant Based Mayonnaise, Mustard & Ale Mayonnaise, Chilli, Balsamic, Oregano & Thyme Bread Dipper and Peri-Peri Marinade; and Chilli Lovers Collection of Chilli & Lime Mayonnaise, Chipotle Chilli Mayonnaise, Mango & Chilli Dressing and Chilli, Garlic & Ginger Bread Dipper.

**charlieandivys.co.uk**




# Fill your shelves with award-winning products



**CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS**
GREAT BRITISH FOOD AWARDS

**The Gold, Silver and Bronze producers in the Great British Food Awards have finally been announced, with the Regional Champions and Grand Champion unveiled at a fun and food-filled ceremony in London on 6th October.**

Once again, there were more entries than ever this year, first judged by dozens of expert panellists, and then by celebrity category judges. Coming out on top as the highest scoring product was Fen Farm Dairy's incredible Baron Bigod cheese. Congratulations to their entire team, and to everyone else who took home a prize in 2026.

Great British Food Magazine will be out in late October, with the winners' guide available to view at greatbritishfoodawards.com.

Additionally, we're giving point of sale support to independent retailers in January and February, helping to highlight winning products, as chosen by judges such as Raymond Blanc, Helen Browning, Jack Stein, and a host of other high profile industry names. We're confident this will attract existing and new customers while supporting some of the best makers, big and small, at the same time.

***Once again, there were more entries than ever this year, first judged by dozens of panellists, and then by celebrity category judges***

**If you'd like to learn more, email charlotte.smith-jarvis@artichokehq.com**

Great British FOOD AWARDS 2026


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# Trendwatch.

SPONSORED BY Tracklements



# Southern Style

Flavours of the American South and Mexico are boldly sweeping onto British plates...

**What are my customers hungry for right now?**
Things are looking up for flavours from Down South and Mexico, with more shoppers than ever seeking out its moreish combination of spice, smoke and zesty citrus. "Food has long given us the opportunity and travel the world via our plates and when it comes to South American flavours, it's a beautiful mix," says Tracklements' Becca Chapman.

With almost half of British consumers tempted by South American flavours while out and about, it's only natural that they would want to tap into these flavours at home, too... "and for those replicating at home, condiments can do a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to bringing depth of flavour without spending hours over the stove," Becca continues.

**What should I be stocking?**
The store cupboard is your friend when stocking up on Southern American and Mexican flavours. Condiments and seasonings with smoky and spicy notes abound in fine food right now...

"Whilst Chipotle is not traditionally found in South American food, for a fusion twist on classic dishes like Feijoada or Empanadas, our Smokin' Chipotle Sauce brings heat, depth and smokiness," says Becca.

We love Lumberjaxe's range too; their Louisiana Cajun, Cowboy Butter and Moonshine Mango seasonings taste straight out of an American barbecue joint, and are incredibly easy to use – as well as gratifyingly versatile.

Meanwhile Waitrose has reported a surge in sales of tabasco (+27%), Worcestershire sauce (+25%), and lime juice (+28%) as a result of shoppers looking to bring Southern American flavours to their kitchens... and drinks trolleys.

*"Food has long given us the opportunity and travel the world via our plates and when it comes to South American flavours, it's a beautiful mix"*

**Did I hear that Mexican drinks are trending too?**
Absolutely. Cocktails with salted rims seasoned with spice and herbs are hot right now, says Waitrose, with the trend for savoury serves being fed by social media posts as well as the bar culture of our capital – drinkers are opting for spicy cocktails such as micheladas, spicy margaritas, picklebacks and spicy palomas.

"Mexican cocktails are a great option for those looking to embrace the savoury drinks trend," says Jourdan Gabbini, beer, cider and spirits buyer at Waitrose. "So many are led by those bold, salty and spicy flavours that our customers are loving at the moment. The spicy margarita is a classic example, using lime juice for an acidic freshness, and Mexican seasoning and salt on the rim for that signature kick. These flavours can easily be added to other cocktails for a savoury twist – for example a spicy paloma has become increasingly popular, because the salt and tajin cuts perfectly through that tart grapefruit.

"Alternatively, the malty, beer-based Michelada is a really unique savoury cocktail that lends itself really well to the other savoury flavours, which include tabasco and Worcestershire sauce. It's a really delicious option for those looking for an alternative to spirit-based cocktails."

**How important is provenance?**
According to Garden of Eva founder, Eva Thorne, while the appreciation and recognition British shoppers have of the varying flavours of Southern American states isn't close to the understanding they have of, say, Italian regional cuisines, this is changing – but it's a complex matter.

"Every region has its own unique taste which is fed by its landscape and culture," she explains. "For example, Nashville hot chicken is becoming increasingly popular here, as is barbecue, but when you start to look into it there's a lot to explore... Memphis barbecue sauce with its brown sugar and tomato is very different to the mustard-based Carolina sauce. Texas barbecue is more about the beef and dry rubs than sauces.

"Those distinctions are not expressed here to the degree that people like me would like to see, but you need a shorthand and this means that distinctions start to get flattened."

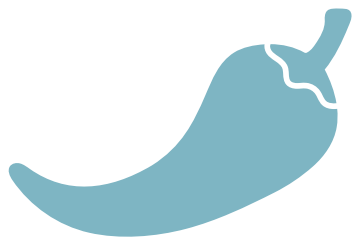


*Nearly half of shoppers are interested in trying South American cuisine when dining out*

Bidfood



*Waitrose has reported a surge in sales of tabasco (+27%), Worcestershire sauce (+25%), and lime juice (+28%)*



*Sales of Cooks' Ingredients Mexican Style Seasoning at Waitrose is up 40% compared to last year*





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# The Spirit of Christmas

Being considerate of customers' budgets, tastes and thirst for innovation is key to stronger drinks sales this season



**CONTRIBUTORS**



**DAWN DAVIES**
THE WHISKY EXCHANGE



**ASH SINFIELD**
TEALS



**SUSAN VAUGHAN**
CELTIC MARCHES

For *Speciality Food* readers, Christmas drinks offer an opportunity to do more than simply fill shelves with familiar festive favourites. In 2026, consumers are looking for drinks with personality, provenance and a sense of occasion – whether that means an unusual liqueur, a richly flavoured whisky, a distinctive mulled drink or a beautifully packaged bottle that feels worthy of giving.

The key, according to Dawn Davies of The Whisky Exchange, is to look beyond predictable seasonal products and give shoppers something they cannot easily find elsewhere. "I think liqueurs are one to watch this year, particularly quirky liqueurs," she says. "There's quite a lot of really fun options out there."

Dawn believes the trend reflects a wider desire for drinks that feel elevated but remain playful. "People just don't want a Bailey's anymore. They want something different," she says, pointing towards products with genuine provenance and quality rather than simply unusual flavouring.

For independent retailers, this creates an opportunity to use the drinks fixture as a point of discovery. Unusual liqueurs, distinctive world whiskies and characterful spirits can provide the theatre that encourages customers to browse, ask questions and ultimately spend more.

> *The mulled wine market has expanded exponentially in recent years, with a new openness to enjoying mulled wine outside of only red varieties*




## Christmas is a licence to indulge

The festive period also changes consumers' attitudes towards price. A bottle of something special that might feel like an unnecessary purchase during the rest of the year can become much easier to justify when it is connected to entertaining, gifting or a few weeks of seasonal indulgence.



"Christmas is that moment," says Dawn. "It's about bringing people together. It's about that time by yourself when you're wrapping presents. It's about the colder nights, when you want comfort and something that you just wouldn't buy normally." That willingness to trade up is particularly relevant for fine food independents. Davies says that "at Christmas we think, £70 to £80 sounds fine", compared with a lower everyday price point.

For retailers, the message is not simply to stock more expensive bottles, but to give shoppers a reason to spend more. Provenance, craftsmanship, flavour, packaging and the story behind a product can all help communicate value. "We're really happy to spend as long as we know that there's quality and we're getting value for money," Dawn says. "When you open that bottle you really want it to deliver for you."

## Richer flavours for winter drinking

Classic, full-bodied styles have an important role to play in festive drinking. Dawn reports strong interest in heavily sherried whiskies, richer styles and smoky spirits as consumers look for drinks capable of standing up to the flavours of the festive table. "We're definitely seeing an uptick in those richer styles and big smoky beasts coming in because people are eating richer foods," she says. "Consumers feel like they need that kind of envelopment of flavour at this time of the year."

This is an opportunity for retailers to make food-and-drink recommendations rather than treating alcohol as a standalone category. Whisky with Christmas pudding, a rich spirit alongside chocolate or a warming drink alongside a cheeseboard can turn a product recommendation into a festive occasion.

Teals is also looking to strengthen this approach, with Ash Sinfield, founder, highlighting plans to improve cross-selling alcohol with cheese. "It's an area where Somerset excels," she says, suggesting bitter-sweet Somerset Cider Brandy Company Ice Cider as "a great alternative to Port" alongside a Christmas cheeseboard. That kind of pairing plays directly into the strengths of the independent retailer: expertise, curation and the ability to connect products across the shop.

## Mulled drinks move beyond the traditional

Mulled wine remains a festive staple, but the category is evolving. Susan Vaughan of Celtic Marches says consumers are increasingly open to alternatives to traditional red mulled wine, with rosé, white wine and mulled cider helping to refresh the category. "The mulled wine market has expanded exponentially in recent years, with a new openness to enjoying mulled wine outside of only red varieties," says Susan. She adds that mulled wine has "lost its slightly kitsch status" and become "a fixture of the festive drinks aisle", appealing to a new generation of drinkers.

Celtic Marches has responded with Mulled Rosé and Mulled White alongside its established Jacob Marley's Mulled Red and flavoured mulled ciders. Interest in mulled products is continuing to grow, inspiring retailers to offer the category more space and variety rather than relying on a single traditional option.

### £ HOW TO SELL

- ***Make the bottle part of the experience***
  *Packaging is increasingly important, particularly when drinks are being bought as gifts. Giftable bottles should be easy to identify and, where possible, displayed in a way that allows their packaging and provenance to do some of the selling.*
- ***Avoid novelty***
  *There has been a shift away from products that are overtly Christmassy towards those which promote 'winter' with subtle, seasonal cues. Avoid wastage in the new year by minimising stock which is heavily and exclusively geared towards Christmas.*
- ***Give customers confidence***
  *By grouping products by price point, providing tasting notes and samples, and training staff to make recommendations, retailers can give their customers confidence when it comes to purchasing drinks at Christmas – which can often be higher ticket items.*

# The Spread.

Level-up your customers' Christmas gifting game with these luxe recommendations

## Ballancourt

1 Ballancourt introduces premium authentic pâté and terrine gift boxes in three varieties: Game, Farmhouse and Fish. Each contains three 180g jars of bestselling products. Beautifully presented, available with Ballancourt or own-label branding, ideal for Christmas displays, with long-life ambient storage.
**ballancourt.co.uk**

## Snowdonia Cheese Company

2 Make an impact this Christmas with Snowdonia Cheese Company's Celebration Cheese Cake. The four-tier centrepiece combines Red Storm, Black Bomber, Green Thunder and Rock Star cheeses, creating an impressive 2.8kg gift for cheese lovers and a ready-made centrepiece for festive entertaining.
**snowdoniacheese.co.uk**

## Forest Feast

3 Crunchy roasted almonds wrapped in rich Belgian dark chocolate, finished with a generous layer of creamy white chocolate and crushed peppermint candy cane. Share the festive joy in every bite!
**forestfeast.com**

## Sharpham Cheese

4 Sharpham Cheese's range of flavour-filled and expertly crafted cheeses and chutneys is worthy of any feast. Guests can choose from handmade Brie, Ticklemore and award-winning Rustic cheeses, and get creative with Caramelised Fig Chutney, Ploughman's Chutney and Red Onion, Rosemary & Thyme Marmalade.
**sharphamcheese.co.uk**

## Walker's Nonsuch

5 Unwrap festive nostalgia with four classic flavours: Original Creamy, Liquorice, Roasted Hazelnut, and Brazil Nut. Made with whole milk, butter, and 130 years of family tradition, it includes a novelty hammer to whack, THEN unwrap, and enjoy this Christmas!
**walkers-nonsuch.co.uk**

## The Cotswold Cardillo

6 The Cotswold Cardillo panettone range blends Italian tradition with Cotswold craft, offering Tradizionale, Chocolate and Pistachio varieties – including an award-winning Tradizionale. Each handmade panettone highlights a signature ingredient, delivering authentic Italian flavour and a perfect festive treat with a glass of fizz.
**thecotswoldcardillo.co.uk**

## Mermaid Gin

7 A little taste of Mermaid, made for gifting. This gift set pairs a choice of 5cl bottle of the brand's signature Mermaid spirit with a gold-crested Mermaid glass tumbler. The perfect stocking filler or thoughtful introduction to the business's award-winning collection.
**isleofwightdistillery.com**

## Hawkshead Relish

8 Make Christmas gifting deliciously special with Hawkshead Relish. Our festive Christmas Triple Pack and Petite Couture Christmas Gift Box bring together a selection of beautifully crafted preserves, perfect for food lovers. Thoughtful, delicious and proudly handmade in the Lake District.
**hawksheadrelish.com**



2

SNOWDONIA CHEESE Co

3

FOREST FEAST Original Snack Explorers SHARE ME CANDY CANE MINT CHOCOLATE ALMONDS

5

Whack THEN unwrap and ENJOY! Luxury Toffee Selection Net Weight 14 oz (400g)

6

THE COTSWOLD CARDILLO Pistachio and White Chocolate PANETTONE ARTISAN CREATIONS from our ITALIAN family KITCHEN with textures of PISTACHIO CREMA and PISTACHIO CRUMB 750g

THE COTSWOLD CARDILLO Traditional PANETTONE ARTISAN CREATIONS from our ITALIAN family KITCHEN with our own HOME CANDIED ORANGE FRUIT 750g

7

MERMAID

8

HAWKSHEAD Relish COMPANY Boxing Day chutney Christmas chutney New Year relish Fruity Cranberry Sauce

# Behind the Sale: Christmas 2026's Food and Drink Trends

From a wine merchant's vineyard story to a Christmas cookie cheesecake, this year's festive favourites strike a chord with shoppers. But what's really driving sales, asks Charlotte Grainger?



## CONTRIBUTORS



**MICHELLE MURPHY NIEDZIELA**
NEUROSCIENTIST



**JEFF BOSS**
STARMORE BOSS



**ELIZABETH KINGHAM**
MOOKIES



**JON BROADHURST**
CHEESE & FRIENDS

The unmistakable smell of cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon fills the air the moment the festive season arrives. Mulled wine warms gently on the stove, the mince pies are in the oven, and there's a lavish cheeseboard already laid out for guests. Food and drink has always been the setting at Christmas time. And this year, it's making for the perfect gift, too.

Food and drink gift buying has climbed 81% since 2022, as shoppers look for something meaningful without stretching their budget. The cost-of-living squeeze hasn't dulled the appetite to spend at Christmas, either. Mintel reports the average spend rose from £357 to £374 between 2024 and 2025.

For independent retailers, the trend brings a genuine opportunity. Shoppers are looking for something that, once unwrapped, creates a moment of connection. Understanding that psychology, and stocking-up accordingly, is the secret to selling out this season.

### Trend 1: Gifting as an occasion

Michelle Murphy Niedziela, a behavioural neuroscientist and founder of Nerdoscientist, has spent years studying why people choose the gifts they do. She explains that food gifts do something other products may struggle to achieve. They create an occasion for everyone.

"A shareable food gift can be both an object and an experience," she explains. "You're giving someone the product, but you're also giving them an opportunity for a social moment. Opening the bottle, putting out the grazing board, tasting something together, and talking about it."

Breaking bread can literally create stronger social bonds. Research published in the Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology suggests that those who eat together socially tend to feel happier, more satisfied with their life, and more engaged with others than people who don't. With that in mind, a delicious gift that can be shared has the power to connect groups.

Of course, there's a difference between a product intended for solo consumption, and a shareable treat. The first shows the giver knows the recipient well. It may be personalised, or chosen because it speaks to their taste specifically. The second is about creating closeness, whether that's through opening a bottle after dinner or passing around a box of chocolates.

Niedziela says it's the retailers who understand this that do well. "Don't just market the product, market the occasion that the product enables," she advises. Buying a gift, in her experience, brings its own decision fatigue. People wonder whether a present is appropriate, whether it looks generous enough, and if the recipient already has it. "Food gifts can then reduce some of that uncertainty better than a more durable product because they are consumable and can be a trigger to an occasion," she adds, saying retailers should keep that in mind when stocking up.

That logic should follow through in the way staff interact with customers, too. Rather than focusing on how much a customer wants to spend, Niedziela suggests asking whether the gift is for the recipient to enjoy alone or share. Questions like that mean you can pinpoint what she calls the 'behavioural job' of the gift, helping staff point the customer towards the right fit.

### Trend 2: Selling the story behind the product

Research from Mintel predicts that by 2026 retailers who lean into storytelling, personalised experiences and inspiration-led store layouts will be best placed to win over festive shoppers. At Starmore Boss, the Sheffield wine and spirits merchant, owner Jeff Boss understands this intrinsically, and has seen it play out in store.

"Most of the bottles we stock have a history behind them, and customers want to invest in that when they buy a gift," he explains. "We can talk about the winemaker, tell them we've visited the vineyard, or explain what the producer has overcome."

Every member of staff at Starmore Boss has a hand in buying stock, which Boss says changes the kind of recommendation a customer actually gets. "It's never just 'here's a bottle of whiskey.' It's 'here's a bottle from an exclusive distillery that does its own malting, or grows its own barley on the farm.'" That detail, he says, gives the gift a rather exceptional quality. The shopper can share the product's story with the recipient when handing it over.

Boss has also noticed an intriguing change in customers' buying habits in recent years. Five or six years ago, a 20cl bottle was the standard gifting size. However, he's seen a rise in people opting for mini bottles and sampler packs rather than a single full-size spirit. He puts this down to shoppers looking to "get more value or more options for the same price".

**71%**
of Brits bake occasionally, open to new global cuisines
***Food Ingredients 1st***

### Trend 3: Nostalgia with a new twist

Christmas nostalgia has a certain taste. For most people, it's the same handful of flavours coming back year after year. However, shoppers are increasingly happy to see it reworked. Recent flavour trend research found that while 46% of consumers favour familiar tastes, 71% say they're open to trying new global cuisines. At Mookies micro-bakery in London, co-owner Elizabeth Kingham is no stranger to combining the nostalgic with a twist.

"I'm really drawn to the idea of nostalgia," she explains. "Some of us remember the dessert cafes from the 90s, where you'd go for strawberry milkshakes and I love taking those memories and making them feel a bit more grown-up. For example, a milkshake with date molasses and espresso."

Location plays a part in Mookies' approach, too. Nestled on Brick

## EXPERT VIEW

### Creating excitement

*Ben Yates, co-MD of Bon Bon's*

"Confectionery adds a real sense of fun to seasonal food offerings. Many items are associated with Christmas traditions and can evoke memories of childhood and family celebrations. Seasonal packaging, festive shapes and limited-edition flavours help create excitement and make confectionery feel extra special compared with everyday treats. Overall, confectionery contributes to the enjoyment, generosity and tradition of Christmas food. Its combination of indulgence, sharing and nostalgia makes it a key aspect people's festive celebrations.



*"For many households, confectionery forms part of the wider Christmas food experience"*

## Stock Check 26




**Hawshead Cheeseboard Chutney**
Featuring figs, cranberries and apples, this fruity chutney is a seasonal favourite.
**hawksheadrelish.com**




**Cherry Tree Smoked Cheddar**
Mature cheddar infused with natural smoke, for a cheeseboard with real depth.
**cherrytreepreserves.co.uk**




**Verduijns Parmesan Wafers**
Crisp Dutch wafers baked with real parmesan, perfect as an accompaniment.
**verduijns.com**




**Pump Street Chocolate Craft Chocolate Tasting Box**
Six single-origin mini bars in a book-style box, made for sharing.
**pumpstreetchocolate.com**



Lane amid one of London's most food-diverse neighbourhoods, Kingham says it's common for someone on the team to bring back an unfamiliar ingredient from a nearby shop and ask whether it might work. Cheerful customer conversations over the counter also impacts the ever-evolving menu.

Last Christmas, Mookies turned the classic combination of dark chocolate, orange zest and ginger into a cookie cheesecake with whipped mascarpone. As the festive season approaches, Kingham plans on trading orange for yuzu and grapefruit, and testing ginger and pecan cookies. She's also working with brown butter for a deeper, nuttier caramel in the bakery's signature cookies, a change she credits directly to customer feedback.

### Trend 4: Affordable luxury for uncertain times

Festive spending patterns are split by income, but not always in the way you might imagine. Research shows higher earners still spend the most at Christmas, but their spending fell 1.7% year on year. Those earning under £15,500 increased their spending by almost 5% year on year, despite spending less overall.

Moreover, those looking for a little luxury aren't only weighing up the price tag. Niedziela points to research suggesting emotional, symbolic and functional value play a role in buying habits just as much. That means a smaller spend can still carry the same sense of occasion as a bigger one, so long as the story and presentation are there.

Jon Broadhurst, co-owner of Cheese & Friends in Sheffield, has witnessed that happen firsthand in the festive season. "We've grown every year, and the biggest time of year for us as a cheese shop is Christmas, and Christmas is just going stronger and stronger," he says. "I would say quite 20% of our business is buying the cheese or an accompaniment for cheese for somebody else as a gift, because it's delicious, it's nice, and it's something that's wholesome."

Vouchers and tasting events do particularly well as gifts, Broadhurst says. The shop has run 14 tasting events so far this year, with seven more scheduled, and at least a third of guests at each one have had their place bought for them.

And it doesn't end there. Cheese boxes, already packaged as luxury gifts, carry a written narrative about the cheese and its maker. It's an approach Broadhurst and his team built themselves, and it changes the way customers perceive the products.

"We've got a poster in our shop called The Role of the Cheesemonger," explains Broadhurst. "And we think the role of the cheesemonger is to promote farmhouse cheeses and to tell the story, as far as we know it, of who made it. There's a story behind it as a family, a real place involved." When a customer is searching for a gift, that matters. "They're buying products that tell a story," he says of the shop's bestselling Great Up North box.

> *It's never just 'here's a bottle of whiskey.' It's 'here's a bottle from an exclusive distillery that does its own malting, or grows its own barley on the farm*







PARTNER CONTENT



# A Sweetener Full of Surprises

Made solely from the sugary sap found in maple trees, pure Canadian maple syrup is a completely natural, vegan-suitable alternative to processed sugar with a rich and unique flavour

## The natural choice

Unrefined and unprocessed, pure Canadian maple syrup comes from a unique natural process which occurs every spring, deep in the forests of Québec.

After the cold winter, frozen maple sap thaws and moves back down towards the base of the tree, where it is then 'tapped' and harvested. The harvested sap is taken to a sugar shack and boiled down to make maple syrup. It takes about 40 litres of sap to make just one litre of syrup.

Tapping season lasts for about four to six weeks, between March and April and involves thousands of producers, many from family farms where tapping skills have been passed down the generations.

## A sweetener for today's consumers

More than CAN$22.6 million worth – almost five million lbs – of maple syrup and associated products such as maple sugar and spread were imported into the UK during the period January-June 2026 – that's up more than 20% on the same period in 2025.

DID YOU KNOW?

**Almost 5 million pounds of maple products were imported into the UK between January and June 2026**

And according to the Québec Maple Syrup Producers (QMSP), UK consumers' love of natural ingredients has helped the value of imports of pure Canadian Maple Syrup to jump to their highest ever.

"The natural authenticity and provenance of pure Canadian maple syrup is particularly important to consumers in the fine food and deli sector," explains Vincent Grondin from Maple from Canada, the marketing organisation behind Québec Maple Syrup Producers (QMSP). "Bottling at source too means deli shoppers have the reassurance that they are buying a pure, unblended maple syrup with authentic origins, direct from the producer."



Vincent also attributes the popularity of Canadian maple syrup to the present interest in natural alternatives to processed sugar and the versatility of the ingredient across both sweet and savoury recipes. "Working with food influencers and recipe developers for social media content helps us to tell the story of Canadian maple syrup, its natural origins as well as its usage in exciting, healthy dishes", he explains.



"We are keen to showcase the other variants in the maple syrup family too such as maple spread, maple vinegar and maple sugar, which are gaining traction in the fine food sector among consumers who are keen to try the taste of maple syrup in other formats."

GET IN TOUCH

**To find out more about pure Canadian Maple Syrup visit maplefromcanada.co.uk**

# Catering for Party Season

## A blend of discovery, curation and convenience is set to bring excitement to your counters this Christmas



**CONTRIBUTORS**



**MATT HOPKINS**
IND!E



**LEWIS SLAYDON**
OLIVES ET AL



**SEAN MASON**
TWO FARMERS

Christmas party food offers an opportunity to do much more than fill the freezer or create a convenient buffet selection. Done well, it can become a high-value category built around discovery, premiumisation, provenance and, crucially, the complete entertaining occasion.

For Christmas 2026, shoppers still want the familiar favourites, but they increasingly expect more from them than before. They want better ingredients, more distinctive flavours, interesting provenance and products that deliver an element of theatre without requiring hours in the kitchen.

"I think we're seeing a move away from the traditional idea of Christmas party food being lots of beige, fairly predictable buffet food," begins Matt Hopkins of IND!E. "People still want indulgence at Christmas, but they're becoming much more adventurous about where those flavours come from."

That does not mean abandoning the classics. Instead, the opportunity for independents is to curate a party food range where familiar formats sit alongside products that offer something new.

### Familiarity with a twist

Booths' festive sales data demonstrates the continuing strength of recognisable Christmas flavours. Its strongest party food performers across 2024 and 2025 included Duck Selection with Hoisin Dip, Brie & Cranberry Parcels, Lancashire Cheese & Plum Parcels, Vegetable Indian Selection, Chicken Bites with BBQ Dip, King Prawn Selection and Mini Beef & Horseradish Yorkshire Puddings.

"Our best performing party food is still very much built around familiar Christmas favourites," says Martin Wolstenholme, product developer at Booths. Interestingly, there is no single party food style dominating. Customers are buying British classics alongside seafood, meat and globally inspired products. Indeed, he says, "Customers are becoming more adventurous, but without moving too far away from the traditional favourites."

For independent retailers, that suggests a balanced approach to ranging. The core should provide reassurance, while a carefully chosen selection of more unusual products provides discovery. For example, in 2025 Booths saw particularly strong growth in Bang Bang Cauliflower, up 21%, Chicken Kebabs with Mango Dip, up 15%, and Mini Yorkshire Puddings, up 12% between 2024 and 2025. "We wouldn't necessarily say customers are moving away from meat or traditional products, as these are still some of our strongest sellers. It's more that customers are looking for a bit more variety alongside the traditional favourites," Martin explains.

That is an important distinction for retailers planning Christmas 2026. The opportunity is not necessarily to replace pigs in blankets, sausage rolls, cheese-based bites or other established favourites, but to surround them with products that provide extra culinary excitement.

### The rise of grazing and global flavours

The way consumers entertain is helping to shape the party-food opportunity. Rather than serving one large meal, Christmas gatherings increasingly lend themselves to grazing, sharing and pick-and-mix occasions. "Sharing and grazing gives people the opportunity to put lots of different things on the table and let everyone pick and mix," says Martin. "There also seems to be more willingness to bring different cuisines and flavours into the festive occasion."

That creates space for retailers to build more eclectic ranges. For independents, this provides a useful merchandising principle: think in terms of a party table rather than a single category. For example, a customer buying mini pies might also need chutney, mustard, dipping sauce or crisps. Someone buying prawns may be interested in an aioli or chilli sauce. A cheeseboard can lead naturally into crackers, chutneys, nuts and drinks.

**EXPERT VIEW**



*More than ever, people want easy ways to entertain, and the right accessory helps them picture the occasion. The Olive Bowl makes a ritual of serving our olives, catching their extra virgin olive oil marinade for bread dipping or to use for cooking. A touch of theatre, a talking point*

**LEWIS SLAYDON**
OLIVES ET AL

### Make convenience feel premium

One of the biggest opportunities lies in products that deliver a premium experience without creating extra work. "The sweet spot is food that feels special but doesn't require hours in the kitchen," says Matt. "A really good product that can be served, shared or finished with one or two ingredients is incredibly appealing."

This is particularly relevant to independent retailers because premium party food does not necessarily have to mean elaborate food. A product can command a premium because of its ingredients, provenance, production method, flavour profile, packaging or the story behind the producer. Two Farmers, for example, positions its crisps around farm-grown potatoes, hand-cooking and locally sourced ingredients.

"The perfect crisp starts life as part of a batch of superior potatoes, all grown on our farm. We then hand-cook on the premises and season the crisps using top-quality ingredients from local producers," says co-owner Sean Mason.

For Christmas, the producer is also offering festive tins in 100g and 500g sizes. Sean says these "make brilliant gifts" while also working as serving pieces on the Christmas table. "While the crisps are available in environmentally friendly, fully






compostable bags, these distinctive recyclable tins can be used for serving the crisps in too. They make great, showstopping centrepieces on any Christmas or Boxing Day table!"

That kind of multifunctionality is valuable to retailers because it gives shoppers another reason to trade up.

## Flavour is becoming a bigger selling point

Condiments and sauces are another area where independents can add value to party-food purchases. Sauce Shop founders Pam and James Digva argue that condiments can transform familiar food while allowing guests to personalise what they eat. "You can put relatively familiar food at the centre of the table and let people dial the flavour up, down or in a completely different direction themselves," they explain.

Their research suggests consumers increasingly regard condiments as "ready-made flavour builds", with the balance of heat, sweetness, acidity and seasoning already developed. That makes them particularly useful for entertaining.

Honey Mustard BBQ can be paired with pigs in blankets or sausage rolls; Honey Sriracha can glaze salmon or be used with crispy popcorn chicken; Chipotle & Lime Aioli can put a smoky, citrusy twist on prawn cocktail; and Pineapple Habanero can complement pork. There are opportunities beyond food, too. "Original Hot Sauce adds a kick to a Bloody Mary," say the Digvas, while their sauces can be folded through hummus, drizzled over whipped Feta or served alongside cheese and crackers – making sauces an ideal cross-selling category rather than a standalone fixture.

## Expectation is building around Christmas 2026

What distinguishes the fine food shopper right now is not necessarily a desire for ever-more complicated food, but greater expectations around what they buy. "Shoppers have become much more flavour literate," say Pam and James. Exposure to restaurants, travel and social media has increased consumers' familiarity with different cuisines, ingredients and techniques.

That means chilli sauces, for example, are no longer simply about how hot they are. "There's still an appetite for heat, but increasingly it's about the flavour of the chilli itself and what sits around it – fruitiness, acidity, sweetness, smoke and fermentation.

"Real ingredients and quality matter," Pam and James add, alongside the expectation that products deliver something shoppers may not have the ingredients, time or know-how to recreate themselves.

## Vegetarian does not mean compromise

Vegetarian party food also has an opportunity to move beyond being a box-ticking exercise. Martin says that Booths is developing "vegetarian options that are indulgent and flavour-led", rather than simply treating them as alternatives for people who do not eat meat.

For independent retailers, this means vegetarian products can be merchandised as exciting party choices in their own right, alongside meat, seafood and cheese rather than in a separate 'special diets' corner.

## How to increase basket spend

Perhaps the biggest commercial opportunity is to stop thinking about party food as individual SKUs and start selling complete occasions. "Curation is probably the biggest opportunity," says Matt. "Rather than selling individual products in isolation, help the customer build the occasion.

"If someone buys a great cheese, show them the unusual chutney, cracker or condiment that goes with it. If they're buying party snacks, introduce a premium dip or sauce. Build sharing selections, gifting combinations and easy 'party table' solutions."

A customer might come in looking for crisps and leave with a selection of premium snacks, a dip, a sauce, cheese and crackers. Someone buying a few party bites could be shown a complementary condiment. A customer looking for a Christmas gift could be directed towards a festive tin of premium crisps alongside other entertaining treats.

## Build discovery into the Christmas fixture

The other major opportunity is differentiation. "Anything that feels generic" is becoming less compelling, says Matt. "I don't think consumers necessarily want to abandon the classics, but they increasingly want a better or more interesting version of them.

"The standard party-food selection with very little differentiation feels dated," he says. "The opportunity is to take something recognisable and give people a reason to talk about it... whether that's an unexpected flavour, a brilliant independent producer, interesting provenance or simply exceptional quality."

According to Martin, "The opportunity is to evolve rather than reinvent Christmas by keeping the familiar favourites, but giving customers more choice, flavour and discovery." For fine food retailers, that is also a useful blueprint for growing the basket. Make the classics better, introduce shoppers to something they have not tried before, and show them how individual products can work together to create a complete Christmas occasion.

> *Anything that feels generic is becoming less compelling. I don't think consumers necessari;y want to abandon the classics, but they increasingly want a better or more interesting version of them*

### HOW TO SELL

**Offer a taste of discovery**
*While in previous years shoppers have stuck to the classics as their budgets tighten, this year they're hungry to experiment despite financial concerns still being present – so offer twists on classics and world flavours alongside traditional options.*

**Make it easy**
*Shoppers are often time-pushed at Christmas time, and it's easy for party fare to fall down the priority list below the big events of Christmas dinner and Boxing Day lunch. Group products together in ways that are celebratory and easy to understand with POS and social media marketing, and consider offering set priced bundles to tick convenient and budget-friendly boxes.*

**Master the upsell**
*With samples and staff discounts, your team can become more familiar with the products you stock and excited to share their findings with customers. Use this as an upselling tool alongside your usual marketing materials for an invaluable personal touch.*






SPECIALITY FOOD Stock Check 26



**Sauce Shop Buffalo Hot Sauce**
Hot and tangy, and crafted from fermented jalapenos.
**sauceshop.co**



**Olives Et Al The Olive Bowl**
Designed to separate the fruit from the oil, allowing each to be enjoyed as it should be.
**olivesetal.co.uk**



**Booja-Booja Chocolate Wonders – Salted Caramel**
Each bite-sized chocolate comprises a vegan, gluten-free ganache with pieces of chewy salted caramel, rolled in chocolate flakes.
**boojabooja.com**



**Cedar Baklawa Baklawa**
A crisp selection of handmade Mediterranean-style Baklawa, rich with nuts and sweet syrup.
**cedarbaklawa.co.uk**

# Traditional Bakes Get a Festive Twist

Cakes and puddings are at the heart of Christmas... Here's how to celebrate them at their best

## CONTRIBUTORS



**LEANNE CROWTHER**
A GLORIOUS MESS



**SIMON ATKINS**
RED BARN CONSULTING



**DAVID COLCOMBE**
MAPLE FROM CANADA UK



**SAMIR CHOUMAN**
CEDAR BAKLAWA

## HOW TO SELL

- ***Smart displays***

*The visual nature of festive cakes and desserts lends them to strong merchandising. A display could combine premium panettone and stollen with gifting biscuits, maple syrup, nuts and dried fruit, while a separate dessert-led display could bring together pavlovas, cream, berries and chocolate accompaniments.*

- ***Simplify and excite***

*The objective is to make Christmas shopping easier while inspiring shoppers to trade up. "The products should feel like a discovery – something shoppers see and think, 'That would be brilliant for Christmas'," says Leanne.*

- ***Create festive magic***

*The strongest festive cake and dessert ranges do not simply provide shoppers with a pudding; they give them a reason to celebrate, gift, entertain or create something memorable. "Christmas shouldn't be about being overly serious or hours tied to the kitchen," says Leanne. It's about bringing people together, creating memories and having a bit of fun with food.*

For fine food independent retailers, the Christmas cakes and desserts fixture offers an opportunity to combine some of the season's most familiar flavours with premium ingredients, provenance, visual appeal and a sense of discovery. This year, however, the focus appears to be less about endlessly reinventing festive favourites and more about refining them.

That means retailers can look to traditional recipes, high-quality ingredients and recognisable flavours, while still offering shoppers something distinctive enough to feel special. For Leanne Crowther of A Glorious Mess, one of the defining trends is what she describes as 'modern nostalgia'. "Consumers still want the flavours and desserts that remind them of Christmas, but they are looking for them to feel more exciting, inspirational and special," she says.

Opportunities for familiar desserts to be presented in new ways are reaping rewards for brands and retailers. "We're seeing that in the resurgence of familiar desserts with a twist," she says "from tiramisu and pavlova to trifle and traditional festive flavours presented in more modern formats."

### Experience matters

Visual appeal is becoming increasingly important within festive desserts, particularly as Christmas entertaining encourages shoppers to think about how food will look as well as taste. "I think the dessert has also become much more of an experience," says Leanne. "Consumers want something that looks fantastic when it arrives at the table and gives them a reason to say, 'Wow'."

For retailers, that makes presentation a selling tool. Products that can provide an immediate visual impact can work particularly well in displays designed to inspire shoppers rather than simply list products. This is also relevant to the growing role of desserts as entertaining solutions. A product that looks impressive while requiring minimal preparation can offer a compelling proposition to busy Christmas hosts.

### Premium ingredients justify higher price points

The importance of quality ingredients is also emerging strongly in European festive bakes. Simon Atkins of Red Barn Consulting says the market is moving back towards traditional products made with premium ingredients rather than an ever-expanding number of novelty flavours. "It seems as though the general trend is that people want to go back to traditional options," he says, describing a move towards traditional panettone with selected flavour variations rather than the huge range seen previously. He highlights the importance of "very good basic ingredients such as eggs and butter".

The objective, he suggests, is for products to reach a point where shoppers can understand why they cost more. This is particularly relevant in categories such as panettone and stollen, where shoppers may be prepared to spend more but still want reassurance that the product will deliver on quality.

### Simplifying a classic

Panettone has experienced a proliferation of flavours in recent years, but Simon believes the category is now pulling back. A few years ago, he recalls, "just about every flavour under the sun [was available]. Last year, brands drew it back a little bit, and even more so this year."

Traditional panettone can provide the core proposition, supported by a smaller number of more distinctive variations, he suggests. Pistachio remains relevant, while toffee apple is identified as a flavour to watch. Simon believes that producers are now recognising the commercial consequences of excessive range proliferation: "I think it diluted sales too much, to be honest," he says. "It was too much."

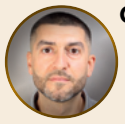
The same return to tradition can be seen in stollen. Simon points towards Dresden Stollen PGI, highlighting its protected status and traditional heritage. Not only a very traditional product, it is presented in distinctive packaging which





## ARTISAN BAKING CRAFTSMANSHIP AT ITS BEST

*Samir Chouman of Cedar Baklawa*



**Cedar Baklawa brings you artisan baking craftsmanship at its best Using recipes passed down through generations of our family, the renowned Cedar Baklawa range celebrates authentic Lebanese-style artisan baking, using only the finest ingredients.**

Our premium, handmade Cedar Baklawa is light in texture, delicately crisp and subtly sweet, and a refined twist on more traditional varieties. We lovingly handcraft layers of light filo pastry and clarified butter, with every piece packed with premium nuts and drizzled with our signature syrup.

The Cedar Baklawa collection features a selection of flavours varities including pistachio, walnut, cashew and chocolate. Enjoy our delicious treats in timeless classics, as well as adventurous shapes like our delightful nests, all baked to perfection.

With the increasing popularity of Middle Eastern-inspired flavours, Cedar Baklawa is the perfect choice for Christmas, special celebrations, or an-all-year-round-treat to enjoy with tea or coffee, or as a dessert.

Discover deliciousness in every bite with Cedar Baklawa, handcrafted in the UK and perfect for creating a real sense of occasion.

We're passionate about embracing exciting new ideas at our bakery. Coming soon: our Cedar Mamoul Mini Bites in some truly irresistible flavours.

heightens the positive experience – especially at Christmas: "it looks the part," he says.

## Cakes across borders

Alongside panettone and stollen, European Christmas specialities can give fine food retailers a way of adding discovery without abandoning familiarity. Gingerbread remains "very much a Christmas staple", according to Simon, while presentation tins create a strong gifting proposition. He describes the appeal of the biscuit category as "lovely presentation tins offering gifting opportunities", with products suited to the gifting areas found across retail.

Traditional French specialities also have a role to play. Simon highlights French spice bread as "one of those very traditional French products that is coming increasingly onto the market".

Citrus is another flavour direction appearing across the European cake category, with a focus on larger pieces of candied orange and lemon peel rather than small fragments, says Simon. The combination provides both visual impact and flavour, making citrus-led products another option for retailers looking to broaden their festive offer without moving into excessively experimental territory.

## The return of the familiar

Perhaps the most significant message is that Christmas 2026 is seeing a step away from novelty for novelty's sake. "Heritage recipes and regional products are appealing to today's consumers, rather than anything overly wacky," says Simon. He describes the market as being "pulled back into the mainstream styles that people are used to".

That does not mean consumers have lost their appetite for discovery. Instead, the opportunity may lie in finding products that combine an established format with a carefully considered twist. That approach is reflected in A Glorious Mess's "modern nostalgia" proposition. The aim is not to replace traditional Christmas desserts but to make them feel more relevant.

"The Glorious Mess gives shoppers something that feels familiar enough to be comforting, but different enough to make the occasion feel special," explains Leanne. For independent retailers, that balance can form the basis of a strong Christmas fixture: traditional enough to reassure, distinctive enough to inspire and premium enough to feel worthy of the season.

## An appetite for bake at home

The Christmas cake and dessert opportunity does not stop with finished products – retailers can also use the fixture to inspire shoppers to create their own festive treats. David Colcombe, chef ambassador from Maple from Canada UK, says Canadian maple syrup is increasingly being used beyond traditional applications.

> *Christmas shouldn't be about being overly serious or hours tied to the kitchen. It's about bringing people together, creating memories and having a bit of fun with food*

"Christmas is the time of the year when consumers experiment with new recipes for bakes and desserts," he says, adding that maple syrup is becoming "a staple ingredient for use across a range of sweet festive recipes." Its flavour profile works with familiar Christmas ingredients including "pecans, walnuts, orange, apple, ginger, cinnamon and chocolate", he says, advising that retailers signpost maple syrup alongside Christmas baking ingredients and show shoppers what they can create with it.

"Shoppers are more willing to trade up for distinctive flavours at Christmas," he continues. "Maple syrup can give familiar cakes and desserts a special, indulgent feel." Recipe cards can reinforce the proposition, with examples including Christmas Maple Cake and Maple Cherry Tiramisu Cheesecake.

SEARCHES FOR **'PANETTONE'** ROSE **30%** ON THE **WAITROSE** WEBSITE BETWEEN **2025** AND **2026**






SPECIALITY FOOD **Stock Check 26**



**Just Desserts**
**Black Forest Cheesecake**
Made with a dark chocolate biscuit crumb, filled with a tart, dark cherry filling, and velvety dark chocolate shavings.
**just-desserts.co.uk**




**Simply Ice Cream**
**Stem Ginger & Marmalade**
Creamy ice cream blended with Seville orange marmalade and pieces of stem ginger.
**simplyicecream.co.uk**




**The Cotswold Cardillo**
**Chocolate Panettone**
Light and fluffy dough enriched with indulgent chunks of rich chocolate.
**thecotswoldcardillo.co.uk**




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The classic Buckingham recipe, gently laced with Scotch whisky for a deliciously rich whisky fruit cake.
**buckingham-cakes.com**




**Billington's Gingerbread**
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**billingtonsgingerbread.co.uk**




**Marabissi**
**Chocolate Panforte Cake**
A dense, generously fruited traditional Italian cake, packed with almonds, spices, fruit and cacao.
**justgourmetfoods.co.uk**




**Figgy's**
**Luxury Handmade**
**Christmas Pudding**
A multi-award-winning Christmas pudding handmade in the West Country with Somerset Cider Brandy and Hanlons Port Stout.
**figgys.co.uk**




**Forest Feast**
**Candy Cane Mint**
**Chocolate Almonds**
Designed for sharing in a resealable bag, crunchy almonds are coated in dark and minty rippled white chocolate.
**forestfeast.com**




**Walker's Shortbread**
**Festive Shortbread Assortment**
All-butter shortbread fashioned into bells, stars, Christmas trees and Santas. Sold in a reusable, covetable festive tin.
**walkersshortbread.com**




**Falcone**
**Italian Soft Amaretti**
Classic Italian confectionery, made with almonds and with a chewy, fudgy bite.
**holleysfinefoods.com**

# A Festive Bite

Chutneys and pickles are mainstay of deli shelves, but the festive period brings ample opportunity for them to shine





**CONTRIBUTORS**



**BECCA CHAPMAN**
TRACKLEMENTS



**ASH SINFIELD**
TEALS



**MATT HARRIS**
PICKLE PROJECT



**RICHARD HEDDINGTON**
THE BAY TREE

Chutneys and pickles may traditionally sit alongside the cheeseboard, but for independent fine food retailers they represent a much broader opportunity – from increasing festive basket spend and creating compelling pairings to introducing shoppers to new flavours and building attractive gifting options.

As Christmas approaches, the category has the potential to become much more than an accompaniment. With shoppers investing time and money in creating memorable festive meals, retailers can use chutneys and pickles to add value to everything from Christmas lunch and cheeseboards to Boxing Day leftovers, drinks and gifts.

"Chutneys and pickles give shoppers simple ways to elevate almost every festive eating occasion across the festive period, without having to spend hours behind the stove," says Becca Chapman of Tracklements.

"Whether it's adding a final flourish to Christmas lunch with Cranberry, Port & Orange Sauce, enhancing a cheeseboard with best-tasting chutney pairings, or bringing Boxing Day cold cuts to life with Particularly British Piccalilli, chutneys and pickles transform eats with less effort leaving more time to spend with loved ones!"

That convenience is particularly relevant at Christmas, when consumers are often prepared to pay more for products that help them create an impressive occasion without adding extra preparation. "Shoppers are typically more considered at this time of year," she adds. "They've spent time curating the perfect components for the big day; they don't want to let it down at the last minute with less than the very best condiments."

For independent retailers, this makes premium chutneys and pickles an opportunity to reinforce the quality message running through the rest of the festive shop.

## Build the basket around the occasion

One of the biggest opportunities is to stop treating chutney as an isolated product and instead merchandise it alongside the foods with which it will be eaten. "For retailers, this variety of usage occasions creates upsell opportunities with complementary purchases of meats, cheeses, crackers, upping basket spend throughout the festive season," says Becca.

The category also benefits from being relatively easy to add to an existing purchase. According to the *Waitrose Food and Drink Report*, the majority of shoppers have more than six condiments in their fridge at any one time, which Becca describes as making chutneys and pickles a "no-risk 'additional purchase' for browsing shoppers".

For indies, the implication is clear: visibility matters. A jar placed next to the cheese counter, festive crackers or charcuterie can become an easy add-on, particularly when the retailer explains exactly why the two products work together. The cheeseboard is an obvious starting point. "Curating pairings from your counter is a surefire way to drive seasonal sales," Becca says.

Tracklements supports retailers with pairing guides and point-of-sale materials, including recommendations from cheesemakers such as Jamie Montgomery, Sarah Appleby and Dulcie Crickmore. The commercial potential can be considerable: Becca reports that one customer achieved a 62% year-on-year uplift in sales after featuring Fresh Chilli Jam alongside its cheese counter for one month.

## Inspire shoppers to experiment

While a traditional cheeseboard chutney remains an important staple, retailers should not assume that shoppers only want familiar flavours.

At Teals, founder Ash Sinfield says the traditional all-round cheeseboard chutney remains "a safe bet" – particularly when the product is being bought as a gift. However, she is also seeing customers move towards more adventurous flavour profiles. "Personal tastes seem to be gravitating more towards the exotic, and we've seen growth in fermented and sweet and spicy," she says.

Teal's is bringing in a local producer making an Indian-style chutney "absolutely packed full of vegetables and spices". Its appeal, she says, is its versatility. "They are equally good with cheese, cold meats or curries so they add versatility and colour to the shelf." That versatility is valuable because it allows retailers to communicate several different uses for the same product rather than relying solely on cheeseboard sales.

Flavour-wise, there is plenty of scope for experimentation. "Chilli jams are doing well but so are Tomato & Onion or Cider & Apple," she says. For cheeseboards, she particularly favours fruit-led flavours. "I love the contrast that a sweet preserve brings to a salty cheese so I tend to go for fig, damson, quince or honey for a cheeseboard – it's hard to beat something sweet and sticky with a piece of Bath Blue."

## Pickles are having a moment

Perhaps the most significant opportunity beyond the traditional chutney category is the renewed interest in pickles. Pickle Project argues that the category is experiencing a resurgence, particularly among younger and more adventurous shoppers. "Pickles are really having a moment right now," says co-founder Matt. "The hype is absolutely there for pickles, but the products on offer generally don't match that."

Its proposition is designed to inject new energy into a category he describes as "quite lacklustre and old-fashioned. New, modern and exciting brands like ours do, and can help, attract younger, more adventurous shoppers." The fresh interest is being driven in part by social media, where pickle-related content has generated huge audiences.

"Pickles are all over social media – racking up billions of views, celebrity endorsement and big brand collabs," he continues. Crucially, pickles are no longer restricted to their traditional role alongside burgers or sandwiches. "They're in sauces, cocktails, the list goes on." That wider usage provides another opportunity for independents to educate customers. Pickles can be positioned as ingredients, cooking components and cocktail accompaniments as well as cheeseboard products. Matt has seen particularly strong demand for Pickle Project's Deli Dill, its take on a classic American garlic and dill pickle, made with no added sugar.

## Don't overlook Christmas gifting

The festive season also gives the category a valuable second role: gifting. According to Mintel, eight in 10 consumers buy food as gifts at Christmas, while Tracklements

**£ HOW TO SELL**

- ***Branch out***
  *Traditional cheeseboard favourites remain important, particularly for gifting, but adventurous flavours, fermented products, sweet-and-spicy combinations and modern pickles provide opportunities to attract shoppers looking for something different.*
- ***Get creative***
  *The category can also work across multiple departments: cheese, charcuterie, crackers, hampers, festive meals and gifting. Pairing suggestions, sampling, prominent POS and thoughtful merchandising can all help customers understand why they should add another jar to their basket.*
- ***Tell the story***
  *Chutneys and pickles are so much more than something to dollop on the side of the plate; the opportunities truly are endless and that makes this traditional category ripe for reinvention. The opportunity is not simply to stock more jars, but to give each one a purpose, a pairing and a story.*



says its gift packs have delivered strong seasonal sales for retailers as both impulse purchases and stocking fillers.

For independents, chutneys and pickles can work particularly well as affordable gifts that still feel premium and considered. Hampers are another important format for retailers to have in mind. Chutneys and pickles can form part of a larger basket of complementary products, whether the retailer offers ready-made hampers or allows shoppers to build their own.

"Hampers are also a simple way to elevate your gift offering," says Becca. "Whether you create ready-to-buy hampers, or allow shoppers to personalise them, it's a great opportunity to introduce shoppers to a wider range of your produce, and often generates repeat purchases after Christmas."

Matt also highlights the stocking-filler potential of his brand's products, noting that its pickles proved popular as stocking fillers and Secret Santa gifts last year because they retail for under £10.

That gives retailers another way to merchandise the category: not simply as an essential accompaniment to Christmas food, but as an accessible gift with personality.

**62%**

One customer achieved a 62% year-on-year uplift in sales after featuring Fresh Chilli Jam alongside its cheese counter for one month

***Tracklements***

## Use the counter as a selling tool

For independent retailers, one of the strongest advantages of the category is the ability to sell it through recommendation rather than relying entirely on packaging.

Ash says small-batch chutneys can offer a marked difference from mass-market products. "Everything from texture to spice level and vibrancy can be better," she says. The challenge is that smaller producers do not always have the same packaging resources as larger brands. "The flip side of this is that for small producers, packaging usually comes second," she continues. Her solution is straightforward: "A way to combat this is good POS and in-store tastings."

The Bay Tree's Richard Heddington agrees that tasting can be particularly effective. "Printed pairing suggestions can be useful when placed near the cheese counter. This may pique interest, but a tasting can bring greater results," he says. "There's no substitute for getting the customer to taste the product."

That approach also helps retailers communicate the idea that chutney is not simply something to 'dollop' onto a plate. "Chutney is not just a chuck-on-a-dollop product," he continues. "The aim is to show its versatility as a condiment on (and as an ingredient in) dishes."

## Sell the leftovers, too

Christmas does not end with the main meal, and retailers can use this to extend the relevance of chutneys and pickles beyond 25th December. "There's more to Christmas food than cranberry sauce, booze, and mince pies," says Richard. "Chutneys and condiments are very much the understated heroes waiting to play their part." Leftover cold meats, cheeses and other festive foods provide multiple opportunities. "At The Bay Tree, we create flavour partnerships because we believe a chutney should have a purpose."

The company recommends products such as Real Ale Chutney and Gooseberry & Coriander Chutney with leftovers, while Boxing Day Chutney, Fireside Chutney and Spiced Plum Chutney are designed to complement seasonal cold meats and cheeses.

These recommendations give retailers an easy post-Christmas sales message: help customers make the most of what they have already bought. Each will greatly enhance the picky-bits fest of the Christmas season.

> ***"There's more to Christmas food than cranberry sauce, booze, and mince pies. Chutneys and condiments are very much the understated heroes waiting to play their part"***

SPECIALITY FOOD **Stock Check 26**




**Goat Rodeo Goods Disco Cucumber Pickles**
Cucumber pickles balancing dill and pink peppercorns. Salty, sweet and a touch sour, with coriander, nigella and mustard seeds.
**goatrodeogoods.com**




**Cultjar Giardiniera Verde**
Each jar brims with fennel, courgettes, asparagus, spring onions, sugar snap peas and more.
**cultjar.co.uk**




**The Garlic Farm Red Onion Relish With Jalapeno & Garlic**
Bring extra pizazz to cheese and grazing boards, sausage sandwiches and grilled meats with this fiery, allium-forward relish.
**thegarlicfarm.co.uk**




**Mrs Darlington's A Cracking Christmas Chutney**
A flavoursome chutney laden with apples, cranberries and Christmas spice.
**mrsdarlingtons.com**







# King of the Festive Cheeseboard

Loved by all ages, Le Gruyère AOP is all set to be a centrepiece of this year's Christmas celebrations

For generations, food lovers have insisted on Le Gruyère AOP being part of their festive feasting – and no wonder; with its unique taste of stunning Swiss landscapes and trusted reputation for quality, it has long earned its reputation as a must-have for celebrations around the world.

Le Gruyère AOP has been made in the Gruyère region of Switzerland as well as the Swiss cantons of Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Jura, Vaud and the Bern area since the twelfth century, which has allowed plenty of time for the cheese to reach its present – some would say perfect – state. Since 1115AD, cheesemakers have transformed the milk of local cattle herds into cheese, and the knowledge and techniques established by its original makers have been upheld for the following 900 years to the delight of cheese lovers across the world.

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

## A finely crafted cheese, renowned internationally

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

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

## A cheese for everyone

Award-winning Le Gruyère AOP is suitable for all cheese lovers to enjoy, thanks to being naturally gluten and lactose-free so nobody – including lactose-intolerant or coeliac customers – need miss out on this one-of-a-kind cheese.

## How to be confident you're stocking genuine Le Gruyère AOP

*Speciality Food* readers can rest assured in the knowledge that there are details on genuine wheels of Le Gruyère AOP that confirm their authenticity: a casein mark which appears on every wheel, alongside the date of production; also the words 'Le Gruyère AOP' alongside a number which specifies the dairy at which the cheese was produced. This can be easily identified at gruyere.com.

### TASTING NOTES

LE GRUYÈRE AOP CATERS FOR ALL TASTES AND PREFERENCES

- Le Gruyère AOP Classic – aged six-nine months: nutty, floral and sweet, this option is ideal for those who prefer milder cheese
- Le Gruyère AOP Réserve – aged 10 months and above: aromatic and flavourful, this variation boasts a unique complexity and slight crystalline crunch
- Le Gruyère AOP can also be purchased aged 18 and 24 months – both provide a strong yet expertly balanced flavour

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






## HOW TO CUT: LE GRUYÉRE AOP

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

DID YOU KNOW?

**The small but interesting variations in the flavours of Le Gruyère AOP are the result of cows being fed on rich grass in the summer and hay in the winter. No silage is used and nor are any preservatives or additives.**

**18hrs**

the maximum timescale after milking the milk must be poured into the cheesemaker's copper vat

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**CONTRIBUTORS**



**JESSICA SUMMER**
MOUSE & GRAPE



**AMANDA BURNINGHAM**
EMMI UK



**DYLAN FOURIE**
MACKNADE



**HEATHER LEWIS**
CLAWSON FARMS





# Become a Cheese Destination This Christmas

Smart stocking, creating a special experience and offering creative solutions all play a role in 2026's festive season

Christmas remains one of the most important occasions for cheese, but for independent fine food retailers the opportunity extends well beyond simply stocking the traditional Stilton and hoping shoppers add a few crackers to their basket. From curated cheeseboards and limited-edition cheeses to grazing occasions, gifting and premium accompaniments, cheese can become a significant part of the festive shopping mission – and a way for independents to demonstrate exactly what makes speciality retail different.

For Jessica Summer, founder and owner of Mouse & Grape, the independent retailer's greatest strength is the ability to turn what can be an intimidating category into a personal experience. "For independent retailers, our biggest advantage is the personal guidance we can offer," she says. "A Christmas cheeseboard can feel quite daunting for customers when they are faced with lots of unfamiliar cheeses, so being able to ask how many people they are serving, when they plan to enjoy it and what flavours they like makes the experience feel much more approachable."

That sense of guidance is particularly valuable at Christmas, when shoppers may be buying more cheese than usual, entertaining larger groups or looking for something special to take to family and friends. Rather than attempting to compete with supermarkets on sheer breadth, independents can use their expertise to curate a more considered range.

"A carefully curated range is more valuable than simply offering endless choice," says Jessica. "I'd make sure there is a good mix of milks, textures and flavour profiles, with a balance of familiar favourites and a few more unusual cheeses that customers may not discover in a supermarket."

For retailers, that means thinking carefully about the role each cheese plays. A board might include a soft cheese, a hard cheese

> *A carefully curated range is more valuable than simply offering endless choice. I'd make sure there is a good mix of milks, textures and flavour profiles, with a balance of familiar favourites and a few more unusual cheeses*






and a blue as its foundation, with a goat's cheese or washed-rind option providing something more unexpected. The aim is not to overwhelm shoppers but to make the selection feel varied, exciting and easy to understand.

The opportunity for *Speciality Food* readers lies in making the cheeseboard feel like an occasion rather than a collection of products. "Tasting, sharing the stories behind the cheesemakers and giving confident pairing advice all help to make buying cheese feel like an experience in itself," she continues.

For Amanda Burningham, cheese brand lead at Emmi UK, storytelling can be one of the category's most effective assets. "I think storytelling is one of the most powerful tools the cheese category has because every cheese has a story – where it comes from, who makes it, how it is produced, how long it has been matured and what makes it taste the way it does."

For the retailer, however, the message does not need to become overly technical. "The challenge is to make those stories accessible," she explains. "You don't need a paragraph of technical information; sometimes one compelling detail about the maker, origin or maturation process is enough to make a cheese feel much more interesting."

A concise shelf card explaining where a cheese comes from, how it is matured or what makes its flavour distinctive can give customers a reason to trade up without requiring staff to deliver a lengthy explanation to every shopper.

## Sell cheese to build occasions

The traditional cheeseboard is also evolving. "I think the modern cheeseboard is becoming much less about a classic combination of cheeses and much more about how we want to eat and share food today," says Amanda. "The traditional board of three or four cheeses is evolving into something more like a cheese grazing board – a collection of hot and cold cheeses, dips, breads and accompaniments that people can pick at, dip into and share."

> *Cheese has an incredible ability to adapt to the way people want to eat and entertain today. It can be premium and considered, relaxed and informal, indulgent and theatrical, or simply something delicious to share*

That has important implications for Christmas stocking. Cheese does not necessarily have to be positioned as the final course after the Christmas meal. It can be used as part of drinks occasions, informal gatherings, Boxing Day grazing, New Year's Eve entertaining and relaxed evenings over the festive period.

"Ultimately, it's about creating more variety and interaction around cheese, with different textures, flavours and formats giving everyone something to enjoy," she continues. For retailers, this opens the door to selling cheese alongside a much wider range of products. Charcuterie, pickles, chutneys, crackers, breads, nuts, fruit, honey and wine can all become part of the same shopping mission.

Jessica recommends that retailers think about the cheeseboard in terms of generosity and balance rather than sheer size. "For me, an occasion-worthy cheeseboard is generous and beautifully considered, rather than simply enormous. Four or five excellent cheeses will usually give you plenty of variety without overwhelming people."

## Master the art of quantity

Christmas cheese can also present a practical challenge: how much should customers buy to ensure that guests feel satisfied, but leftovers are minimal? Jessica suggests around 80–100g of cheese per person if it is being served as a course, with a little less required after a large Christmas meal.

Pre-ordering can also help both the customer and retailer. "Retailers could offer a small selection of ready-curated cheeseboards at different sizes or price points, alongside a more bespoke option," she advises. "It makes life easier for the customer while allowing the retailer to plan stock and manage demand during the busiest part of the year."

This could work particularly well as a Christmas pre-order campaign, with boards designed around different occasions or budgets. A family board, an indulgent board, a British artisan selection or a wine-and-cheese package could give shoppers a simple starting point while still allowing staff to personalise the final selection.

## Create urgency with limited availability

Dylan Fourie, deli manager at Macknade, highlights another way independents can make their Christmas range distinctive: limited availability. "The way we keep our range exciting is by including unique well curated cheeses that have 'wow factors' and are only limited to Christmas," he says. "We source cheeses from our network of suppliers and producers alike so we can obtain exclusivity for our customers which is something that keeps our range exciting."

For an independent retailer, exclusivity can be particularly powerful because it creates differentiation that cannot easily be replicated by a supermarket. A Christmas-only cheese, limited batch or special supplier collaboration can become a talking point and give customers a reason

### £ HOW TO SELL

**● *Use presentation to increase value***

*Jessica recommends combining cheese with high-quality crackers or sourdough, then adding fruit, nuts, honey and a carefully chosen chutney or chilli jam. "At Christmas, dried figs, dates or a few chocolates can make the board feel particularly special," she says, while cautioning against adding so many strongly flavoured accompaniments that they overpower the cheese.*

**● *Cross-sell a solution***

*"The most effective upselling should feel like useful advice rather than a sales pitch," says Jessica. "Once you understand the cheeses a customer has chosen, you can recommend one or two accompaniments that genuinely complement them, whether that's a particular cracker, truffle honey, chutney or something sweet for a blue cheese."*

**● *Don't forget drinks***

*The same approach can extend into drinks. "There isn't one wine that will pair perfectly with every cheese, but sparkling wine is a brilliant all-rounder because its acidity and bubbles cut through richer flavours. Sherry is often overlooked, while Sauternes, Tokaji or a sweet Moscato can be wonderful with blue cheese."*




SPECIALITY FOOD
## Stock Check 26




**Clawson Farms**
**Truffle Seeker**
Part of the dairy's premium, characterful waxed truckle range. Mature, rugged Cheddar meets the taste of real truffle.
**clawsonfarms.co.uk**



**Mrs Kirkham's**
**Mrs Kirkham's Tasty Lancashire**
Unlike any other Lancashire cheese. This is bold and punchy with bite and a slightly crumbly texture.
**mrskirkhamscheese.co.uk**




**Snowdonia Cheese Co**
**Ginger Spice**
Creamy, flavoursome Cheddar is paired with fine crystallised ginger for a spicy bite.
**snowdoniacheese.co.uk**




**Ballylisk**
**The Triple Rose**
Made in Armagh, this triple cream cheese is soft, deliciously creamy and full of flavour.
**ballyliskcheese.com**




**Cheshire Cheese Company**
**Amaretto**
This truckle blends the cheesemaker's traditionally made tasty Cheshire with a generous hit of Amaretto flavour.
**cheshirecheesecompany.co.uk**



**Cropwell Bishop Creamery**
**Mini Blue Stilton**
The dairy's unmistakeable, award-winning Stilton, wrapped in branded wax paper, ready for festive gifting.
**cropwellbishopcreamery.co.uk**



**Trewothan Dairy**
**Pitchfork Cheddar**
Clothbound and aged for 12-14 months, each wheel of this Cheddar is subtly different.
**trethowanbrothers.com**




**Croome Cuisine**
**The Festive**
A mature Cheddar blended with cherries, mixed fruit, apricots, brandy and cinnamon.
**croomecuisine.com**



**Mrs Temple's Cheese**
**Binham Blue**
A creamy blue cheese that melts in the mouth. Made in Norfolk.
**mrstempleschees.co.uk**



**Hofkaserei Kraus**
**Shadow Blossom**
An Alpine-style cheese coated in an aromatic blend of five peppers and spices.
**hofkaserei-kraus.de**

to visit the store specifically.

There is, however, a stock-planning concern. "The biggest challenge for us is procurement," says Dylan, explaining that some orders need to be placed as early as January because certain cheesemakers produce only limited quantities for the year. Traditional favourites cannot simply be assumed to perform in exactly the same way every year, he says, meaning buying teams need to be prepared to react to emerging demand while retaining core lines.

### Make cheese part of your gifting range

Cheese also has considerable potential as a Christmas gift, particularly when packaging, presentation and storytelling turn an individual product into something that feels special. Heather Lewis of Clawson Farms says Christmas shoppers are looking for products that create a sense of occasion. "At Christmas people are really looking for something a bit special," she says. "They're prepared, even in tough economic times, to push the boat out a little bit to create a moment of family and sharing. They want to give lovely gifts and enjoy all the sentiment and warmth that comes with that."

Premium cheese is an appealing gifting proposition because it can combine food, presentation and discovery. Clawson's truckles are designed to meet that need through unusual flavour combinations, distinctive characters and packaging, says Heather. "Every cheese in our range has been designed to use premium ingredients and create flavour combinations which are familiar, but a bit special."

The idea of giving shoppers something familiar but elevated is particularly relevant at Christmas. Customers may know they want Cheddar, for example, but a more unusual flavour, format or presentation can make it feel like a gift rather than an everyday purchase.

### Don't overlook alternative occasions

Perhaps the biggest opportunity is to get creative around the uses of cheese at Christmas. "I think the biggest shift is that we should stop thinking about the cheeseboard and start thinking about the cheese occasion," says Amanda. She cites NIQ data to 8th August 2026 showing the overall cheese category up 3.5%, with Snacking Cheese up 10.5%, Spreads & Dips up 10.4% and Speciality Cheese Ingredients up 6.3%.

"These trends point to the growing number of ways consumers are choosing to enjoy cheese, from grazing and 'picky bits' to cooking, snacking and entertaining," she continues. Raclette, fondue and baked cheese can create interactive entertaining occasions, while goat's cheese can move into canapés, salads, small plates and even dessert-style grazing.

"Cheese has an incredible ability to adapt to the way people want to eat and entertain today," Amanda explains. "It can be premium and considered, relaxed and informal, indulgent and theatrical, or simply something delicious to share."

By creating a counter with a unique character, that caters for varied dining occasions, indies can stand out from the crowd.

**EXPERT** VIEW

## Create an occasion

*Heather Lewis, Clawson Farms*

Our truckles provide the sense of occasion that fine food shoppers are looking for at Christmas. Yes, you can have them all-year-round, they're designed for that too, but they are special – their flavours have been designed to be a little bit out of the ordinary. Take a classic Christmas flavour such as Wensleydale with Cranberry – we've added marmalade and elderflower to it to give it greater sense of specialness and occasion, which you really feel when you taste it. It's an elevated experience in terms of the full experience, from presentation to taste."



*"We've added marmalade and elderflower to the classic Wensleydale & Cranberry to give it greater sense of specialness and occasion"*



# Counterpoint.

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# Beyond Expectations

## Curating a selection that goes beyond the obvious to excite customers and cheesemongers alike is a joy... Here's how to do it

For independent fine food retailers, cheese is an opportunity to offer customers something they cannot find everywhere else. But an exciting range does not necessarily mean filling the counter with obscure cheeses. It is about curiosity, discovery and giving familiar products an unexpected twist.

"Customers are always looking for something new in the world of cheese," says Nick Birchall of The Cheese Shop, Nantwich. "If it's a Cheddar, say, then look for an option that is matured in hay or herbage... just that little different touch really attracts customer attention and tantalises their taste buds."

Svetlana Kukharchuk, The Cheese Lady, agrees that the familiar can provide an effective route into discovery. "Customers often respond well to cheeses that sit within familiar styles, such as Cheddar, Alpine or Gouda, but offer an unexpected twist."

For Svetlana, unusual cheeses are central to the independent cheesemonger's role. "Customers can find standard cheeses almost anywhere, so our role is to introduce them to something genuinely distinctive."

### Make discovery approachable

The key is not to make customers feel that they need specialist knowledge before they can explore. Sampling, staff recommendations and simple explanations can turn an unfamiliar cheese into an appealing proposition. "Discovering a new cheese should feel exciting, not intimidating," says Svetlana. "Our job is to make exceptional cheese approachable and help people find something they will genuinely love."

Emmanuelle Metz of Metz Cheesemonger takes a similar approach. She argues that specialist retailers have a role in expanding customers' horizons rather than simply selling what they already know. "It's just a matter of enlarging people's knowledge," she says. Even the customer who insists they are 'boring' because they only like Cheddar can be encouraged to explore: "It's not boring – you can go further than your usual choice..."

That sense of discovery can also be a reason for customers to return. "It's a question of how to make yourself different from the others," Emmanuelle says. "It's not a matter of competition, but a matter of keeping your customers excited or even attracting new customers."

> *"Customers can find standard cheeses almost anywhere, so our role is to introduce them to something genuinely distinctive: a small-batch cheese, an extra-mature version of a well-known cheese, a different milk, or simply a flavour they have never experienced before"*

### Give the counter a personality

An exciting range should feel curated rather than random. Emmanuel believes that a counter should reflect the personality of the person behind it, as well as the season, location and wider offer. "If you bring something new into the shop or counter, it needs to make sense with the rest of the shop. Otherwise, you're just one more shop, and anonymous."

That might mean highlighting a particular cheese for the season, creating an unusual pairing or working with a producer on something distinctive. "It's just bringing magic to people."

Nick also takes a proactive approach, with his business contacting cheesemakers "around the country and in fact the world" to discover new products and even suggesting alternative ways of maturing cheese.

### Evolve your list of relationships

Sourcing genuinely different products can be difficult. Wholesalers may require larger volumes than a small retailer wants to commit to, while imported cheeses can face delays and availability problems.

That makes producer relationships increasingly valuable. Emmanuelle looks for cheesemakers who are prepared to experiment and collaborate, while Svetlana stresses the importance of relationships, research and tasting, while acknowledging the commercial realities. "It is easy to fall in love with a very niche cheese, but we also have to consider its price, shelf life and potential demand," she says.

### Keep evolving

For Emmanuelle, a willingness to keep changing is essential. "We've got to keep listening to people. We have to keep bringing them joy, and don't forget that one customer's unusual may be the usual for others." What matters is finding the cheeses, stories and experiences that make your own counter worth exploring.

## Modern Cheese Curation

**For a truly unique experience, follow your passions as a cheesemonger**

- For Svetlana, unusual cheeses are at the heart of what makes an independent cheesemonger special. "Customers can find standard cheeses almost anywhere, so our role is to introduce them to something genuinely distinctive: a small-batch cheese, an extra-mature version of a well-known cheese, a different milk, or simply a flavour they have never experienced before."

- Providing customers with 'unusual' products boils down to asking them to change their habits, says Emmanuelle. "Sticking to our personal habits is part of human nature, but I'm not here to please people so I prefer to avoid the obvious choices." If a customer makes a request for a cheese that doesn't excite Emmanuelle, she doesn't bring it into her range to "please them." This maintains the authentic personality of her counter.

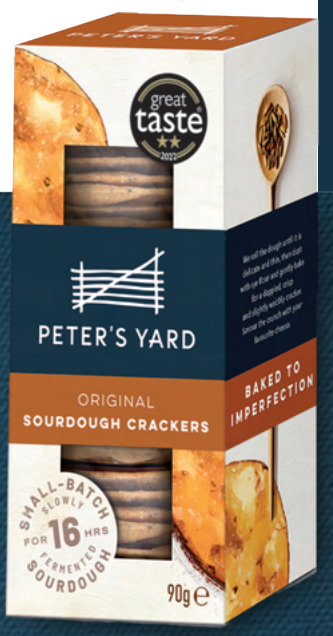
- Importing some cheeses is easier said than done in 2026, so Nick looks to the domestic sector to feed excitement into his shop. "The challenges of course are ever present," says Nick, "especially at the moment when importation from some European countries is so hard, but here in the United Kingdom we have some excellent cheesemakers producing some world class cheeses and I'm always keen to promote British cheese and perhaps options with a new twist or identity."




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# The Cut.

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

## Beyond the cheese pull; bringing storytelling back to the counter



**VICKIE ROGERSON**
NORTH PR

**The cheese industry has a storytelling problem. We are slowly eroding the art of storytelling in how we promote and celebrate cheese, in exchange for dopamine-driven social posts and AI generated content.**

Now, I love a TikTok video as much as the next person and there are some brilliant creators who do a wonderful job of celebrating cheese – Emma aka The Cheese Explorer and Morgan McGlynn are two of my faves. But beyond these knowledgeable voices, cheese content is increasingly being reduced to glossy food-porn aesthetics and the dreaded cheese pull.

What is often missing is the authentic story behind the cheese: the people who make it, the landscape and pasture that shape it, the cows, goats or sheep that provide the milk, the production process and the family or farming story that brought it into being.

There is so much to talk about yet these deeper stories of provenance, skill and place can easily become secondary to the aesthetics.

***There is so much to talk about yet these deeper stories can easily become secondary to the aesthetics***

Human beings naturally connect with other human beings, and we are inquisitive, or nosy, depending on how you look at it. We engage with food more deeply if we understand who made it, why they made it and what makes it different.

Of course, taste is everything. For producers and retailers, that will always be the guiding principle, but the story creates emotional connection. It can help shoppers understand the value of a cheese, justify its price and remember it long after the tasting sample has disappeared.

We need less AI generated content and more heart. Shine a light on the people, history, landscape, and craft behind every cheese. Retailers should invite cheesemakers into their shops to sample their cheese and talk directly to customers. Visit dairies, film the making process and give producers more space to tell their stories – instore, online, and across social media.

Cheesemakers should never underestimate the power of their own stories and expertise. Bring that knowledge to life.

The more vividly we tell the stories behind our cheese culture, the more shoppers we can welcome into the cathedral of cheese we all know and love.

## Golden Hooves releases results of latest Impact Report

**The cheesemaker has shared the impact of the regenerative efforts taking place on the nearly 100,000 hectares of its First Milk co-op's member farms via its latest Impact Report.**

The data shows year-on-year improvements, including a 3.8% decrease in net greenhouse gas emissions and an 8.2% reduction in farm carbon intensity.

It found that 96% of member land was farmed in a way that minimised soil disturbance and 95% supported the maintenance of living roots, while 88% was used to incorporate livestock into the system.

Regenerative actions across First Milk farms are estimated to have locked away more than 264,000 tonnes of carbon in soils and vegetation, up 14.57% since 2025. Plus, Golden Hooves farmers are now mapping water risk across every farm to help protect waterways.

Improvements have also been made regarding the preservation of hedgerows as natural habitats, with 6,593km of hedgerows now falling within the co-op's regenerative programme.

Leona McDonald, director of Golden Hooves, said, "We all want to feel good about our choices at Christmas, and these days, good intentions and flowery words just aren't enough.

"At Golden Hooves, we're leading the way in regenerative dairy, publishing powerful evidence across carbon, soil health, water and biodiversity, so we're really excited to have sustainability claims that are as mature as our cheese.

"Our hard cheese is award-winning. Our hard data speaks for itself. We have great products, real stories, and proof that fantastic flavour and fantastic farming go hand in hand.

"You can now choose a cheeseboard that helps farmers encourage and measure the return of nature, not just reduce carbon – so for those out there who have yet to discover us, join the regen revolution this Christmas!"


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# Two new cheeses from Treur Kaas




**The family cheesemaker has announced the launch of two new cheeses: Villa Pickles and Chevretta Lavender.**

Villa Pickles is a creamy cheese with the flavour of piccalilly, cucumber, and dill. Aged for eight weeks, this cheese has a creamy and soft texture. Willem-Jan Oudehinken, international account manager at Treur Kaas, said. "Its aroma and taste are fresh and vibrant, with the flavours of piccalilly and dill taking centre stage. The cheese has a brighter yellow colour than most cheeses, thanks to the blend of herbs and spices. A surprising addition to any cheese board!"

The new Chevretta Lavender is a young, creamy goat's cheese with a delicate flavour. "The addition of lavender not only gives the cheese its distinctive purple colour but also adds subtle floral notes," explains Willem-Jan. "The cheese starts off wonderfully mild and creamy, followed by the light, aromatic notes of lavender. The result is a truly distinctive cheese that stands out for both its flavour and its appearance."

The overall cheese category up **3.5%**, with Snacking Cheese up **10.5%**, Spreads & Dips up **10.4%** and Speciality Cheese Ingredients up **6.3%**

**NIQ data to 8th August 2026**

# Sales of Continental soft cheeses surge



**According to recent data from Worldpanel, soft cheeses from Mainland Europe are expanding in popularity in the UK market, and seeing a 5% value and 4.4% volume gains.**

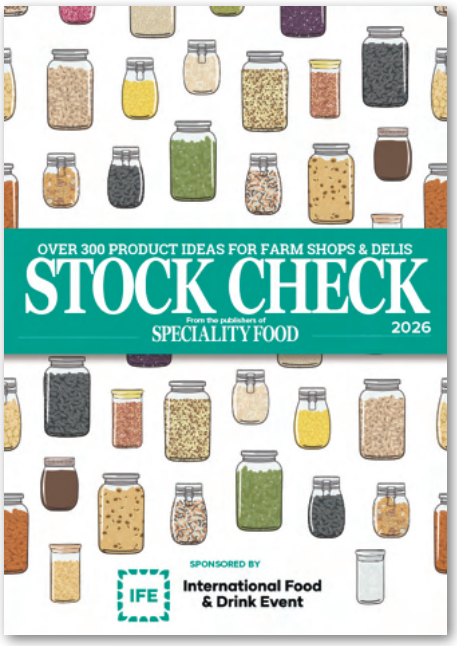
Mozzarella and Halloumi are the current front-runners, with value of Halloumi up 19.7% to £88.7m according to Worldpanel data.

However, hard Continental varieties are comparatively struggling, with volumes down 1.7% according to AHDB.

The rising popularity of at-home entertaining and hot serves of soft cheese such as Raclette are considered to be behind the growth of this category, as household budgets tighten and shoppers choose to indulge at home rather than in restaurants.

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CHEESES THAT I LOVE

## ROB COLLIER
SOUTH WEST CHEESE SHOP



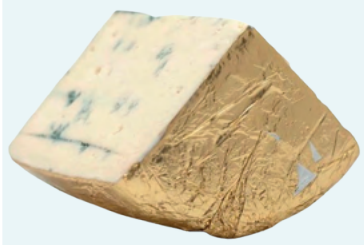
### HOFKÄSEREI KRAUS, ALP BLOSSOM
A showstopper of a cheese that will elevate anyone's cheeseboard. Not only does it look incredible with its vibrant coating of flowers, it has the aroma and flavour profile to match. Nutty, sweet and beautifully aromatic, it is everything I want in an Alpine cheese and more.



### STONE TREE DAIRY, GOAT CURD
I will never forget the first time I tried Stone Tree Dairy's raw milk goat curd, it was a real seminal moment for me in what has now become a love for all things goat! It's fresh, lemony, mousse like and so versatile. On pizza, in pasta, salads, dips, or for me simply on a cracker with a drizzle of honey.




### TICKLEMORE DAIRY, BEENLEIGH BLUE
I love blue cheese and Beenleigh Blue from Ticklemore Dairy in Totnes is a particular favourite. Strong enough to let you know it's there, but never too strong to overpower your palate. It's smooth, creamy with a gentle sharpness and not over salty. Some crusty bread, a full bodied red and some Beenleigh Blue = heaven.



### LYNHER DAIRY, STITHIANS
The latest offering from Lynher Dairy has fast become my new go-to cheese and one that delivers every time. Packed full of flavour it's buttery, rich and savoury with a hint of sweetness and a delightful crumbly texture, it's a cheese I could eat every day and never tire of, simply delicious.



### SHARPHAM CHEESE, CREMET
This mixed milk triple cream from Sharpham is about as good as it gets. It has all the characteristics of a good triple cream, elevated by the tang of the goat's cheese. Delicate and mousse like when young, it ripens into this rich clotted cream like spreadable sensation. I am mildly addicted to this cheese and proudly so.



### CLAWSON FARMS, RUTLAND RED
Who doesn't love a Red Leicester? It's a real pleasure every time I get to remove the cloth from a new wheel of Rutland Red. The aroma of the butter combined with the cloth, the beautiful golden orange colour once it's cut open, topped off with the sweet caramel notes when you taste. It's award winning for a reason, lots to love about this cheese.



*"The latest offering from Lynher Dairy has fast become my new go-to cheese and one that delivers every time"*

# Last Words.

The final word in independent fine food retail

## The Social Punch



**Courtney Goldsmith shares need-to-know insight into the world of social media**

Are you using all the social media tools available in your arsenal? We're as guilty as the next person of going into autopilot mode with tasks like social media, especially when they make up a small part of our busy jobs. It's all too easy to lose the creative spark that makes them fun (and, we should say, successful) and instead stick to the same tried and tested templates and formats. Use some time this month to take a look at your accounts with fresh eyes and see what you could be doing differently.

Let's start with Instagram. The app is known for frequently changing up features, so there may be some new options available that could make your life easier – and your posts draw in more engagement. Did you know you can now reorder your grid by dragging and dropping, rather than just pinning posts? You can also join in with a collaboration post but hide it from your grid if the original post doesn't quite suit your brand's aesthetic. You can also make more edits to a carousel post after publishing, like editing and reordering photos and videos. But we're still waiting for the day when you can replace or add an image to a carousel! You can also make carousels work harder by adding individual captions for each photo.

Now let's turn to a social media site that you may be under-utilising: LinkedIn. It's not everyone's cup of tea, but those who use it well reap the rewards. Whether you're an indie retailer founder, a cheesemaker, a brand spokesperson or a shop manager, building a visible LinkedIn profile could boost your promotional reach. As with any social media, it's all about sharing your genuine personality, as well as something that's useful to others – be it your business insights, behind-the-scenes of a rebrand or an article that you contributed to. What's more, recent research has shown that LinkedIn is quickly becoming a top-cited source for AI chatbot answers, with posts from personal profiles performing the best for references. You might be surprised how valuable posting consistently and sharing genuine insights could be for your business.




*Recent research has shown that LinkedIn is quickly becoming a top-cited source for AI chatbot answers. You might be surprised how valuable posting consistently and sharing genuine insights could be for your business*

## TRIED & TESTED




**Rizz**
*Smoky Chipotle Hot Honey*
We all know that hot honey is a must-have on pepperoni pizza, but this chipotle take is a new go-to in my kitchen. I love the complexity it lends to cheese (and when the temperatures dip, cheese on toast)...
**hot-honey.nl**




**Agua de Madre**
*Night Time Cherry Remedio*
I'm hoping to keep this year's colds at bay with this – a warming and convenient way to nip them in the bud. This Night Time Cherry variant is one of my favourite recent discoveries.
**aguademadre.co.uk**

**Freja Bone Broth**
*Classic Chicken & Vegetable Soup*
I for one have been (not so) patiently waiting for October's nip in the air, precisely so I can hunker down with the likes of this soup. Full of flavoured and brilliantly textured, it's a must-have – particularly as we enter cold and flu season.
**frejabonebroth.com**







**Everyday Superfood**
*Dried Ginger Pieces*
Anyone who knows me is well aware I love a versatile food product, and this is my current favourite. Delicious in baking and fabulous as a healthy snack on its own, I now wouldn't be without it.
**everydaysuperfood.co.uk**

## Coming Up Next...

Jingle bells are well and truly ringing in our November/December issue, so we're sharing some **LAST-MINUTE FESTIVE TIPS** to help you maximise this annual golden opportunity. We also explore the joys of **MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE** and **BLUE CHEESE**, find out how you can master the **STORE CUPBOARD** for this season and beyond, and cosy up with trending and traditional **HOT DRINKS**. Plus, we uncover the ultimate **BRUNCH** for food lovers.



**CONTENT**
**Editor**
Holly Shackleton, 01206 505110
holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com
**Art Director**
Lee Whiteford
lee.whiteford@artichokehq.com

**COMMERCIAL**
**Head of Commercial (Food & Drink)**
Jessica Brett 01206 505901
jessica.brett@artichokehq.com
**Senior Account Manager**
Louise Barnes 01206 508629
louise.barnes@artichokehq.com

**Accounts**
artichokemedialtd@integral2.com

**Publisher**
Sam Reubin 01206 505936
sam.reubin@artichokehq.com

**Published by**
Artichoke Media Ltd,
Global House, Global Park,
Moorside, Colchester
Essex, CO1 2TJ

**specialityfood.net** @SpecialityFood specialityfood_ speciality-food

# Store Spotlight






## Stocks Kitchen

**OWNERS:** AMY & JACK ELLES
**LOCATION:** FIFE



**What's the philosophy behind the business?**
At Stocks, it really comes down to good food, good ingredients and bringing people together. We love seasonal, local produce and knowing where our food comes from. The shop, cook school and events side of the business all grew from that same idea.

We like simple things cooked well, using great ingredients. Being based at Bowhouse, surrounded by farmers, growers and makers, makes that philosophy feel very natural. We work closely with local producers including Balcaskie Estate, East Neuk Market Garden and fish landed nearby on the Fife coast, and we try to let the seasons dictate what we do.

**What inspires the team?**
A huge amount of our inspiration comes from the people and produce around us. We are so lucky to be in the East Neuk - it's a microclimate with brilliant farmers, growers, fishermen and food producers literally on our doorstep.

We are also inspired by cookbooks, restaurants, old recipes and the people behind them. That's one of the reasons we started our Cook the Books events, bringing chefs and food writers to Stocks to cook from their books and share the stories behind them.

**Who shops with you?**
It's a real mix, which is one of the things we love about the shop. We have lots of local customers who come in regularly for bread, cheese, wine recommendations, vegetables and something for dinner, alongside people visiting Bowhouse for the first time.

We also get plenty of visitors to the area who are looking for something local to take home or ingredients for a holiday meal.

We have noticed that our customers are increasingly interested in where things come from and in buying fewer, better products. They want to know the story behind what they're buying.

**What exciting plans do you have in the pipeline?**
The cook school is the big new chapter for us. We are now building a programme of hands-on cooking classes, demonstrations, supper clubs and special events.

We're also developing more food experiences, as well as expanding our range of Stocks-made products and seasonal food to take home.



Ultimately, we want Stocks to become somewhere people come to for food, but also for ideas, experiences and a sense of community.

**What do you love most about what you do?**
We get to meet so many interesting people through the shop, events and cook school, and food gives you such a natural way of bringing people together.

And every day is different. One day we're cooking for an event, the next we're developing a class, choosing cheese for the shop or talking to a local grower about what's coming into season.

**What's trending for you right now?**
For us, it's really about seasonal produce and cooking from scratch rather than chasing trends.

Wine, cheese, cookbooks and really good pantry ingredients continue to be strong. There's also a real appetite for simple, generous food that people can recreate at home.

> *We're developing more food experiences, as well as expanding our take-home options*

## Talking Italian

Sponsored by Garofalo



# Cosy up, Italian style

**'Tis the season for flavour-rich soups and stews, and to inspire your customers to think cosy and classy with Italian-inspired favourites**

Cockle-warming, nutrient-rich with vegetables, and a great source of protein if you add in some beans and/or meat, soups and broths are a staple of many cuisines – from Britain to Japan – but Italian options offer a particularly special blend of comfort and vitality that ticks an awful lot of health-conscious shoppers' boxes as the cold weather starts to bite.

Soups with beans at their heart, elegant clear broths bolstered with filled pasta and cosy options made extra unctuous with the addition of salty pancetta at their base, Italian-inspired bowls of goodness provide a budget-friendly way for your customers to boost their health and wellness as well as their 5-a-day count – but don't be fooled by their simplicity; there are plenty of ways to make them exciting for adventure and taste-loving foodies. We all know minestrone, that hearty vegetable soup which is a fabulous way to use up leftover vegetables we all find in the fridge from time to time... Much in the same way as you might add a spoonful of crispy chilli oil over the top of an Asian-tinted broth, you can suggest your customers loosen some pre-made pesto with excellent extra virgin olive oil to add a burst of fresh flavour to this classic Italian fare.

And inspire your customers to celebrate pre-prepared fresh pasta in a totally new way by serving them in a classy but flavour-packed broth enriched with Parmigiano Reggiano. This dish looks expensive and time-consuming, but if you're stocking the basics your customers can be wowing their cold-weather guests in under 10 minutes.





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