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November/December 2025

# SPECIALITY FOOD

CONNECTING THE FINE FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY

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MASTER CHEESEMAKERS

## CRAFTING THE FUTURE OF BRITISH ARTISAN CHEESE



**JARROLDS**

JOHN ADAMS: HOW TO LEVEL-UP FESTIVE BASKETS
P. 22



**MAHALO**

TARA MEI: MODERN STORE CUPBOARD STAPLES
P. 42



**SUCSEED**

HELEN JOHNSTON: THE WELLNESS OPPORTUNUTY
P. 44



# In this issue


8 **Oliver Lloyd**
consultant

32 **James Grant**
No6 Pound Street

REGULARS

12 **Product News**
24 **Centre Spread: Breakfast**
26 **Trend Watch: Mushrooms**
32 **Cheese Uncut**
34 **Counterpoint: New Cheesemonger 101**
46 **Last Words**

FEATURES

11 **A Unique Gastronomic Experience**
14 **Britain's Best Delis: Blackwell & Co**
17 **The Ultimate Guide to Sustainable Supply**
21 **Icertech: A Sustainable Future**
22 **'How We Celebrate Christmas'**
27 **For the Love of Italy**
35 **Savour the Flavour of Blue Cheese**
38 **Clawson Farms – Where Heritage Meets Innovation**
40 **Coming In Hot**
42 **Modern Storecupboard Staples**
44 **A Healthy Opportunity**











## EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the November/December issue of Speciality Food – the last edition of 2025, and we're excited to leave this year on a high.

There's plenty of exciting projects in the pipeline, which you'll hear more about soon, but in the meantime we're sharing a final raft of need-to-know retail hints and tips to make the festive season which is so nearly upon us go with a bang, the storied history and delicious future of the blue cheese sector, why mushrooms are the trend to watch, and a fresh take on the store cupboard staples of the future.

Plus, we explore Britons' love affair with Italian cuisine and how to maximise this opportunity, and find out why the bridge between fine food and wellness has never been stronger.

We're also proud to share our new report, produced in association with temperature controlled packaging specialists, Icertech: *The Ultimate Guide to Sustainable Supply*. Within this issue you'll find valuable insights from big names across the sector around supply, packaging and distribution – with plenty more to be found in the full report which is free to download on our website.

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






# Pride in Place programme invests billions in British high streets

Bira (British Independent Retailers Association) has welcomed the Government's announcement of a new programme that will offer the kind of support high street businesses need to thrive.

The organisation's CEO, Andrew Goodacre, said the multi-billion Pride in Place initiative would inject much-needed funds into the heart of communities.

"Our hardworking members want to be proud of their shops, and want to be proud of their high streets. We have been asking for more investment in local places based on the needs of local businesses and the wider community," he added.

"Based on this proposal, it looks like we have been heard, and high street businesses will receive the kind of support they need. It would be ideal if we could combine this news with lower business rates that would allow businesses to also invest in their local area."

Alex Schlagman, founding partner of SaveTheHighStreet.org, calls the move a "huge opportunity". "In addition to the £5 billion funding, it puts new powers in the hands of the people who often care and know most about their local areas. At SaveTheHighStreet.org, we're here to help make this programme a success, supporting local independents, community champions and anyone else making a stand for stronger high streets around the UK."

Under the plans 169 areas will be given £2 million every year for a decade, with a further 95 areas gaining an immediate £1.5 million to upgrade public spaces.

The Government says communities will be "given the power to revitalise their neglected high streets, create new spaces for young people, and take back control of derelict pubs".

"For far too long, communities have been dictated to rather than be in control of their own destiny. This marks a new way of governing. By choosing renewal over decline, this Government is delivering lasting change working people will feel," a spokesperson said.

Steve Reed, secretary of state for housing, communities and local government, added, "When people step out of their front doors, they know their communities are struggling. They see shuttered pubs, fading high streets and their local areas in decline. Yes, communities have been stretched – but they haven't given up. They're working hard to make things better, and we're backing them.

"The Government is putting power into their hands so local people decide how best to restore pride in their neighbourhoods, not us in Westminster. That's what real patriotism looks like: building up our communities and choosing renewal over division."

Key initiatives as part of the plans include:

• Community Right to Buy: Handing local people the power to buy local assets, helping to turn around derelict pubs, create new parks, and regenerate spaces.

• Compulsory purchase powers: Allowing communities in England to buy boarded up shops and abandoned businesses, allowing new start-ups to thrive.

• Power to block unwanted shops: Empowering councils to say no to stores such as new betting or vape shops.

• Giving power to residents: Local organisations and community groups will be included in decisions on how the money should be spent.

Pride in Place funding will be delivered in England, Scotland and Wales, with corresponding funding provided to Northern Ireland.

Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, said, "For too long, people have watched their towns and streets decline – powerless to stop boarded-up shops and neglected parks. That ends now. We're investing in the UK's future, by backing the true patriots that build our communities up in neighbourhoods across every corner of the country."

Retailers themselves have called the announcement encouraging. "Anything that shows the Government recognises the importance of the high street and, more importantly, the communities that depend on them, has to be welcomed," said Mark Kacary, owner of The Norfolk Deli. "The idea that local areas might finally have some say in how their high streets evolve is long overdue."

"When you run a business in a small town where charity shops and cafés dominate, the thought of a plan that could help encourage more diversity – more true independents – is refreshing. Independent businesses bring life, character, and individuality to an area. Without them, every town ends up looking like a carbon copy of the next. And while familiarity might be comforting, it's hardly inspiring."

Handled well, he thinks, the plan could be a turning point in town centres, where local pride and independent spirit genuinely shape shopping for the future. "But if the decision-making isn't transparent and inclusive, we risk missing yet another opportunity to rebuild high streets that truly reflect the communities they serve."

Thriving high streets and town centres benefit everyone, agrees Tina McKenzie, policy chair at the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). But to make this plan happen, there needs to be a clear vision for each individual area, offering a strong mix of shops, services and experiences. "Many small business owners say that a diverse offering of independent businesses is vital for the future of the area," she said. "More investment, along with giving communities, including small firms, the opportunity to have more input into the future of an area is a positive move."

It's vital that changes are underpinned by the right policy, says Tina, with the "punishing" business rates system having a huge impact on small firms. "At Budget, it's crucial that there are targeted reductions to business rates for small firms, with an increase to the Small Business Rate Relief threshold in England, from its current level of £12,000 to £25,000," she says. "This would take more SMEs out of the rates system, allowing them to grow and invest."





# Majority of consumers to rethink relationship with plastic

**Fraser McIntosh, head of external affairs and sustainability, Suntory Beverage & Food GB&I, said of the UK's Deposit Return Scheme, set to launch 1st October 2027.**

"Traditional recycling of plastic bottles and cans will be a thing of the past. Instead, shoppers will return their empty containers to a designated return point where they'll receive a small, refundable deposit on each can or bottle.

"Our research shows that in just seven weeks of living with a DRS, the majority of consumers rethink their relationship with plastic bottles and cans, leading to redemption rates of up to 88%. It will drive circularity, increase recycling rates and help the UK meet its net zero commitments.

"As the proud owners of Lucozade and Ribena, we are strong advocates of a fully integrated UK DRS. Together, we can create a scheme that reduces waste, fosters sustainable habits and sets a global standard for environmental leadership."



# 5,000 farmers to proceed with eco plans

**After months of campaigning, the NFU has secured the continuation of an agri-environment scheme which allows thousands of farmers to deliver environmental benefits**.

In a meeting between Tom Bradshaw, president of the NFU, and Emma Reynolds, Defra secretary of state, it was agreed that the Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier (CS MT) plans would roll over into 2026 despite initial plans for the scheme to come to conclude at the end of 2025.

This update will ensure that 5,000 farmers will be able to continue delivering environmental benefits for British land and communities.

David Exwood, deputy president at NFU, said, "We're really pleased that Defra has listened and given certainty to so many farmers about the future of their environmental work for the year ahead. It recognises the valuable environmental work they have been delivering for many years. This result is a culmination of months of campaigning by the NFU. In reality it means that agreement holders will be able to continue delivering everything from wildflower corridors and habitats for farmland birds to nurturing species-rich grassland.

"To ensure that farmers can continue to undertake these vital environmental projects as part of profitable, resilient businesses, transparency over budgets and timelines for the rollout of the new Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme is key. We will work with Defra on a long-term, strategic plan for all agri-environment schemes."

# Gen Z to shape future of Britain's high streets

**According to research from American Express, conducted with futures consultancy Trajectory, Gen Z consumers are likely to shape high streets into tech-powered social spaces by 2050.**

The research shows that this generation – born between 1997 and 2012 – will "transform traditional retail areas into vibrant social destinations powered by immersive technology and AI innovation."

Experience will also be a key factor of the high streets of the future, says the research, with "how [businesses] make people feel" becoming as important as the products they sell. Technology will play a key role, with 76% of Gen Z respondents saying that retailers should create immersive in-store experiences using AI, and 60% stating that if shops offered AI-generated styling advice or digital try-ons they would be more likely to visit them.

The trend for personalisation is set to be increasingly popular, with 83% of Gen Z respondents advising that they would appreciate personalised offers based on past purchases.

Gen Z sees retail experiences as much more than transactional, according to the research; 79% want retail destinations to offer dining and leisure as well as shopping, and 59% see them as a complete day out.

Sixty-five per cent of Gen Z respondents said that an in-person shopping experience should provide something they can't get from e-commerce. Dan Edelman, UK general manager, Merchant Services at American Express said, "Our research shows Gen Z have the potential to reshape British high streets into vibrant social hubs, where retail, hospitality and entertainment will combine, even more so than today. For businesses, that will mean offering differentiated experiences, embracing new formats, and leveraging technology to deliver convenience and personalised service at every step. This has significant implications for all in the retail ecosystem when it comes to capturing consumer spend and driving loyalty."

Paul Flatters, CEO at futures consultancy Trajectory, said, "We're on the cusp of the high street being reborn as a living stage for everyday life. Picture streets where shopping flows seamlessly into co-working studios, rooftop gardens, tasting kitchens and wellness hubs. Think neighbourhoods that feel more like year-round festivals than retail strips – alive with weekly markets, cultural pop-ups and experiences you simply can't get online. By 2050, the high street will be less about transactions and more about connection."





# A Better Breakfast




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# FDF seeks trade boost for UK food businesses

**New data from The Food & Drink Federation (FDF) has shown an uplift in food trade, with non-EU exports outpacing EU export growth.** According to FDF's Trade Snapshot, non-EU insights increased by 10.6% since 2024, while total export volumes were up 7.2% in the first half of 2025 compared with 2024. EU exports saw steady growth of 4.2%.

During this period, the UK exported 4.5bn kg and 590m litres of food and drink to over 200 countries.

Exports to the US increased by 18.9% despite the additional 10% tariff, and two years after the signing of the trade deal with Australia and New Zealand, exports to these countries increased by 19.7%.

However, with export levels still lagging behind 2023's figures by 13%, FDF is calling for an industry partnership with government to set ambitious targets to boost food and drink exports.

Balwinder Dhoot, director of growth and sustainability at The Food and Drink Federation, said, "It's positive to see an increase in export volumes compared with last year, and now we need to go further. Government and industry can work together to use this as a springboard to turbocharge export growth.

"We want to work with government to create a clear and ambitious target to boost the UK's overseas food and drink sales, with a long-term plan to help us hit it. This could include improving access to global markets like Turkey and Mexico, ensuring the smooth implementation of an EU SPS agreement, bringing down US tariffs where they're higher than those paid by the EU, and supporting businesses that want to trade with new markets. This would help give industry a much-needed boost, helping businesses to sell more world-class British food and drink around the globe."

## Groundbreaking study into value of challenger brands conducted

Creative and media agency, Trouble Maker, has produced a first-of-its-kind report into what consumers are looking for from challenger brands.

The report uses consumer data to provide insights into what different shopper age groups connect with, the role of brand personality, and what they consider to be meaningful category disruption.

The research found that 51% of consumers identify as 'rebel-minded', and that 67% of these are likely to buy from brands which stand apart from their conventional counterparts – this equates to a £4 billion+ opportunity every week for challenger brands. The report also discovered that two-thirds of UK consumers believe that brands play their marketing "too safe", with this figure jumping to 75% amongst 18 to 35-year-olds.

Pete Jackson, head of planning at Trouble Maker, said, "As an industry, we love discussing, analysing and anointing challenger brands, but it struck us that no one had ever asked real people what they think makes a great challenger brand. The ambition for the TM100 is to capture what resonates with people and turn those insights into a practical playbook for making trouble in your market."

"This first study is just the start of what we hope will be a multi-year journey, exploring trouble-making through the eyes of UK consumers and creating a bellwether for challenger brands in the UK."

Jonathan Fraser, chief creative officer at Trouble Maker, said, "Creativity without courage doesn't cut it anymore. The TM100 shows that trouble-making isn't just a nice-to-have attitude, but reinforces what we already know - that it's a real driver of business value.

"Few brands win solely through media scale and even fewer are market leaders. The rest can only win hearts (and wallets) by being brave enough to break category rules, take risks and stand for something. That's both the challenge and the opportunity for marketers today."



# At-home hosting seeing YOY growth

**According to the Faire Forecast, created by Faire in partnership with trend forecaster, selling the food and related homewares for at-home parties is set to be a bigger opportunity than ever for Christmas 2025.**

The House Party trend was highlighted by the report, and demonstrates that searches for fondues have increased by 277% year on year, martini glasses have seen a 150% search increase, mocktail searches are up 57%, and people are searching for cake trays 94% more than they were last year.

The research demonstrates that UK shoppers are planning ahead for an increased number of events at home this festive season.

Eloise Connolly from Uberstar, which sells barware, glassware and cocktail making kits on Faire, said, "The surge in home hosting, whether it's your average BBQ or a sophisticated cocktail party, has really increased over the past few years. Mostly due to financial factors but also consumers are finding more comfort indoors these days. Not to mention there's the TikTok and Instagram trends for the younger generations, such as cocktail themed nights-in or 'bring your own board', a trend popularised last year where house guests bring their own snacks, drinks or cocktails according to different themes. People want to show off that they've done it all themselves at home, and share this with the online world."

## More than half of Britons support worker-owned retail model

**In research carried out with YouGov, charity Foodrise has found that the majority of UK consumers would like to see more cooperative or employee-owned retailers rather than conventional supermarkets.**

Supermarkets account for over 90% of British grocery sales, but the UK's reliance on them will lead to the government failing to achieve its climate, cost-of-living and public health goals, according to the charity.

Fifty-four per cent of respondents stated that supermarkets should be run by cooperatives rather than private companies (16%) or the state (3%), and SMEs and community and cooperative-own businesses have been shown to create healthier and fairer food environments – but despite the potential for independent food retail to deliver systemic change, the sector remains under-supported by national and local policy, says Foodrise.

The charity is calling for investment in alternative food networks, including the establishment of regional food hubs to supply shops, fruit and vegetable prescriptions, and business rate relief for sustainable independent food businesses.

Carina Millstone, executive director at Foodrise, said, "Our food and farming is controlled by 10 profit-hungry supermarkets, with devastating consequence for public health, British farmers and for our planet. But our new data shows widespread public support for a different way forward courtesy of worker-owned food shops, which could help improve the nation's health, while protecting the environment and making sure farmers get a better deal.

Julia Kirby-Smith, executive director at Better Food Traders, said, "The intersecting nature of food is both a challenge and a huge opportunity for the government. Rebuilding an independent food retail sector can help tackle multiple issues, including boosting our high streets and local jobs, building pride in our local communities, fair pay for farmers, access to healthier food, and a more sustainable food system.

"Collaboration between different parts of the food system offers a powerful way to achieve change across social, health and environmental issues. Too often, government support focuses on just the production side or just the public health side. We need to put a new emphasis on supporting independent food retail, building stronger local supply chains and unlocking better access to healthy, locally-grown food for all."





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## *"The rise of drinking chocolate"*



**OLIVER LLOYD**
CONSULTANT

If you walk into almost any café in Britain today, you're met with an encyclopaedia of hot drinks — a reflection of how far our café culture has evolved. Coffee drinkers can choose between a flat white, cortado, macchiato or mocha, but the options don't end there. For the true aficionados, there's a whole world of brewing methods to navigate — from slow-pour drip and V60 filters to French press, AeroPress, and cold brew, even nitro coffee, which is infused with nitrogen gas to create a naturally creamy, almost Guinness-like texture. Tea drinkers enjoy an equally vast menu: matcha whisked to order, fragrant chai, lapsang souchong, delicate oolong, and an entire rainbow of herbal infusions and botanicals. In many of the UK's most ambitious cafés, hot drinks have become a form of self-expression and craftsmanship — each cup reflecting precision, provenance, and ritual.

And yet, drinking chocolate has been left behind. In most cafés, it remains an afterthought — a sugary, milky powder stirred into hot water, often topped with marshmallows and whipped cream. It's presented as a nostalgic treat for children rather than a serious drink for grown-ups. What should be rich, layered, and complex has instead been flattened into something sweet and kiddy.

This is odd because the world of chocolate itself has been thriving. Over the last decade, British bean-to-bar producers have built a reputation for craft and quality that rivals anywhere in the world. Willie's Cacao, founded by Willie Harcourt-Cooze, helped spark Britain's fascination with single-estate chocolate more than a decade ago. Pump Street Bakery in Suffolk has become a cult name among food lovers for its small-batch bars made from ethically sourced beans, many with a distinctive malty richness born from the bakery's breadmaking heritage. And Russell & Atwell have reimagined the humble truffle as a refrigerated, fresh chocolate experience — closer to patisserie than confectionery.

If chocolate has grown up, then surely it's time its liquid form followed suit. That's already starting to happen. Hotel Chocolat has done more than anyone to bring drinking chocolate into the mainstream, thanks to its Velvetiser — a countertop machine that makes real chocolate drinks at home. It has turned the ritual of hot chocolate into something both premium and everyday, much like Nespresso did for coffee.

Meanwhile, Knoops, founded in 2013 by Jens Knoop in the coastal town of Rye, East Sussex, has built a loyal following across the UK and beyond. Its concept of 'Knoopology' lets customers choose the percentage and origin of their chocolate — from a creamy 34% milk to an intense 100% dark — my preference is for the 68% dark. Knoops now has stores across the country, from Brighton to Manchester, as well as international outposts including one in Dubai, and it's proving that hot chocolate can be every bit as nuanced and sophisticated as coffee.

But perhaps the most exciting development is what's happening at the artisanal end of the market. A new generation of makers is treating cacao with the same reverence that roasters bring to coffee. Full Power Cacao, which raised investment after appearing on Dragons' Den, focuses on ceremonial-grade cacao designed for mindful drinking — rich, unsweetened, and full of natural complexity. Islands Chocolate, originally launched in 2018, cut its teeth crafting single-estate beans for Michelin-star kitchens such as those of Tom Kerridge and Heston Blumenthal, and is now scaling out into retail tin formats for cafés and homes alike.

Bullion Chocolate, based in Sheffield, was one of the UK's first true bean-to-bar producers. They source, roast, and craft their chocolate entirely in-house, working with single-origin cacao to reveal what they call the "hidden gold" of flavour — rich, layered notes that change with each harvest. Having built a reputation among chefs and chocolate purists, they're now extending that same meticulous approach into drinking chocolate, giving people the chance to experience their bars in liquid form. And Harry's Hot Chocolate, made in Cheshire, has built a following for its deeply flavoured blends like Tremendously Chocolatey and Outrageously Orangey. There are many more joining this space — small producers, often regional, who are embracing cacao as a premium, adult beverage.

For me, the appeal of drinking chocolate isn't just its taste — it's the ritual. During a sabbatical in Mexico, I was struck by how normal it was to be offered hot chocolate alongside coffee at breakfast. Sometimes it was spiced with cinnamon or chilli, sometimes whisked until frothy, but always taken seriously — an adult drink, part of everyday life rather than an occasional treat. It made me realise just how much we've underappreciated chocolate as a drink in the UK. We've spent decades perfecting our coffee culture and reinventing our tea habits, but chocolate has quietly waited its turn. Now, with craft producers, premium machines, and growing consumer curiosity, it finally feels like its moment has arrived. The only question is who will seize it — because the next revolution in hot drinks might just come from the bean we already know best.

# Why mid-strength matters

**A whole new category is being carved out in the drinks industry, propelled by customer demand**

At *Speciality Food*, we've already reported on the ever-expanding low and no alcohol sector, which is experiencing unprecedented high demand, further fuelling innovation.

More Brits than ever are either eschewing alcoholic drinks when they go out, 'zebra striping' (alternating with soft drinks) or 'bookending' (starting and finishing an evening with non-alcoholic drinks. The trend has filtered into retail, becoming more than just the odd bottle or can here and there in the drinks aisle, as brands continue to premiumise and expand their ranges.

What about mid-strength drinks though? If you haven't already heard the term, now's the time to familiarise yourself with it, because this new wave of products doesn't look like it's going anywhere, with launches into the burgeoning space including Quarter Strength, Maison Sassy, Shandy Shack and Decemb, spanning beer, spirits and wines.

Earlier this year low and no alcohol specialist retailer and bar operator, Club Soda, put its clout behind mid-strength drinks brands, launching The Mid-Strength Collective, recognising the ongoing importance of this trend, and commissioning research from KAM Insights to demonstrate its commercial appeal.

Data showed mid-strength drinks are being sought out more frequently as an alternative to full and alcohol-free options, with 50% of consumers saying they would prefer two mid-strength drinks over one full-strength when they're out. Of those surveyed, 13% said they choose to 'coast' their evenings, drinking only mid-strength products to reduce their overall alcohol consumption.

And 32% said they'd spend more time in venues offering these options, increasing to 40% amongst 25 to 34-year-olds.

Laura Willoughby MBE, founder of Club Soda, says, "Ultimately, moderation does not have to be a binary choice between drinking and not drinking. The goal is to encourage a more intentional drinking culture – one where we pay attention to what we drink, not just when we choose to abstain from alcohol, but also when we choose to enjoy it.

Blake Gladman, strategy and insight director at KAM said mid-strength isn't just another category, it's a movement. "Now is the time for businesses to adapt and lead the charge in shaping the future of mid-strength alcohol."

These are exciting times, agree mid-strength category leaders.

Brad Crompton launched Session Spirit as a way to help people enjoy the taste/experience of full-strength gin at a lower ABV, saying he was inspired by the Mediterranean attitude towards slower, lighter drinking. He works with one of the UK's oldest distilling families (who've crafted gin for more than 16 generations) to create a sessionable 25% ABV gin – so far the only mid-strength spirit to win awards in full-strength categories.

And James Gundy was hot on the mid-strength trend, founding Small Beer in South Bermondsey, London, back in 2017. "We saw a gap between 0% ABV beers, which often miss the depth and complexity of a great pint, and stronger beers over 5%. Our answer was to create a range that sits between 2% and 2.8% ABV – beers that are full of flavour, refreshing, and perfectly balanced for moderation." The brand's beers are brewed to full strength, rather than being diluted, and in 2019 Small Beer became London's first and only B Corp certified brewery, pioneering the world's first Dry Floor Policy, reducing water usage to just 1.5 pints for every pint of beer brewed, compared to the industry average at the time of eight to 10 pints.




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# What's driving consumer behaviour in 2025?

**Head of consumer products at 4C Associates, Katy Gallagher, explores key developments in consumer behaviour that are shifting the strategies of food and beverage companies**

Insights from 4C Associates' annual food and beverage (F&B) survey show that consumer behaviour has evolved in significant ways over the past four years. While consumers are still conscious of price, it's no longer the only lens through which a product's value is judged. Sustainability is now expected, premiums are becoming the norm, and consumers will say a lot about their preferences.

In 2023, we saw consumer purchase decisions being heavily driven by inflation, and in 2024 we saw signs of consumer mindset evolving. This year we see another shift in expectations.

## 1 PRICE STILL MATTERS, BUT IT IS LOSING ITS IMPORTANCE

While price is still the top factor in purchasing decisions, its influence has declined steadily, from 72% in 2023 to 64% in 2024 and now 60% in 2025. This contrasts with the non-linear path of inflation, where in March 2023 inflation was 19% and fell sharply in 2024, but has risen to 4.5% in June 2025 remaining well above pre-COVID levels. While shoppers aren't necessarily returning to pre-inflation habits, they are looking beyond the immediate shock of inflation and redefining what "value" means. Rather than paying more, they expect more for the same price.

Today, value is not just about cost, but rather it's about the full package: taste (the second most important purchase driver), product range, health benefits, and even sustainability. For F&B companies, this change means price alone is no longer enough to win consumers. Brands that can clearly demonstrate these additional attributes without raising costs will be best positioned to retain loyalty.

## 2 PREMIUM IS THE NEW STANDARD

Unsurprisingly, with consumers now focused on total value, attributes once considered premium are now widely expected. Survey results show that an average of 53% of consumer are unwilling to pay more for these features. Organic produce is particularly under pressure: 51% of consumers say they won't pay extra, up 9.3 points from 2024, and only 24% are willing to pay even 5% more. Similarly, production factors like lowering carbon emissions and Fairtrade certification are increasingly seen as standard, offering little justification for higher prices that they may have once been able to command.

Consumers expect more for the same spend, which creates added cost pressure and businesses need to re-evaluate how they manage their product portfolio and prioritise investment, ensuring that resources are directed to either reduce the cost of these attributes, or to find and invest in features that do differentiate them in the market with consumers.

## 3 GETTING LOCKED INTO BRANDS

With consumers demanding more, they're now seemingly more willing to shift loyalties - 65% of respondents said their preferred brands remained unchanged, down from 73% in 2024, though that was a marked increase from 53% in 2023. This indicates that shoppers are willing to switch brands, for sharper deals or new product innovation suggesting that loyalty is stabilising, but brands still need to actively engage consumers to maintain it.

The data suggests variety is becoming a decisive factor with almost 20% of consumers naming product range as their top purchase driver, highlighting the importance of balancing variety with efficiency, and ensuring the right range is available without overextending. Tools like agile sales and operations planning (S&OP), capacity planning and SKU rationalisation reviews can help brands manage their range strategically while keeping operations lean.

Cost, special offers, and travel distance were more dominant in 2023, showing a clear shift toward choice and variety. As budgets ease, shoppers expect newness and choice, not just low prices. Price-sensitive consumers are rewarding brands that refresh or expand their offer, proving that innovation and relevance can help sustain loyalty under cost pressure.

## 4 VALUE AND SUSTAINABILITY: THE SAY-TO-PAY GAP

The say-to-pay gap (the difference between what consumers say they value and what they'll pay extra for), is continuing to widen across all categories. As highlighted, product traits once viewed as premium, such as organic, plant-based, or high-protein, are now considered standard, with little pricing power left. More than half of consumers (62%) will not pay more for high-protein foods, and an even larger share (69%) will not pay extra for low-calorie options.

The same applies to sustainability practices like recyclable packaging and Fairtrade certification. These are now hygiene factors that shoppers expect at no extra cost. But not all sustainability attributes carry the same weight. For example, 66% will not pay more for low-carbon products, and 73% will not pay extra for low-water-use items.

However, there are some production traits continue to carry more weight. Hard to replicate initiatives such as regenerative farming, renewable energy use, or other visible sustainability commitments remain credible differentiators. These may feel more tangible to shoppers and offer F&B companies a way to justify a premium in a market where baseline health and sustainability claims are now taken for granted.







# A UNIQUE **GASTRONOMIC** EXPERIENCE

## Ibérico Ham: an icon for all five senses in UK hospitality

To speak of Ibérico Ham is to speak of culture, landscape and time. Born in the Iberian Peninsula and shaped by centuries of craftsmanship, it is far more than a product: it is a sensory experience that awakens all five senses. From the whisper of holm oaks in the dehesa to the patient silence of the cellars where it matures for years, Ibérico brings to the table a uniquely European story that customers can see, touch, smell and taste.

### Why should Ibérico be on your menu?

**Differentiation.** Ibérico conveys quality and turns any establishment into a true gastronomic benchmark. Its deep, elegant and unmistakable flavour profile is naturally associated with celebrations and premium dining.

**Profitability.** With its high perceived value, Ibérico performs exceptionally well in tasting menus, premium sharing boards and exclusive experiences. The art of hand-carving adds theatre and enhances its commercial appeal.

**Versatility.** From a tasting board to brunch, seasonal dishes or cocktails, Ibérico Ham adapts to every moment of the day and every culinary occasion.

**Storytelling.** It allows chefs and teams to tell a story of breed, landscape and tradition—an emotional narrative that adds value and connects with guests.

### A market on the rise

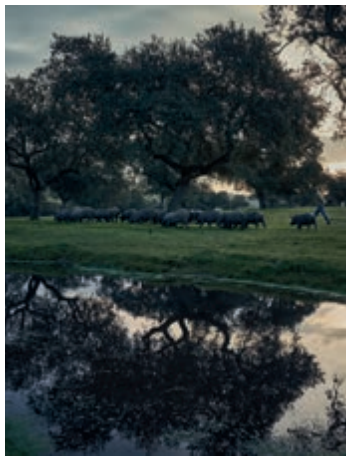
The UK mirrors the global growth of Ibérico Ham. In 2024, according to ICEX-Estacom, imports of European cured hams from Spain reached €29.16 million, 10.69% higher than in 2023 and 37.26% above 2020 levels. Globally, exports of these hams have grown by 56.5% since 2020—a clear sign of increasing demand and the sector's solid response capacity.

Adding to these figures is the confidence provided by high standards such as the European Production Model, the ÍTACA traceability system and the Ibérico Animal Welfare (IBAW) certification. For UK professionals, it means working with a product that is safe, transparent and aligned with sustainability.

### What makes Ibérico unique (and how to explain it to customers)?

• **Breed and origin.** Ibérico comes from a native breed known for its natural marbling, which gives the ham its tenderness and distinctive aroma. It is a product exclusive to the Iberian Peninsula—shaped by its land and its people.

• **Dehesa and sustainability.** The dehesa is a unique Mediterranean ecosystem rich in biodiversity.



Managed grazing preserves landscapes, supports rural economies and contributes to carbon capture—a sustainability story that truly appeals to today's consumers.

• **Time and craftsmanship.** By law, hams must cure for a minimum of 20 months, and many mature for 4 to 7 years—a slow, natural process in which climate and expertise perfect the flavour. Few premium products can claim such patience and authenticity.

• **Clarity at a glance.** Colour-coded seals make categories easy to explain: black (Bellota 100% Ibérico), red (Bellota Ibérico 50–75%), green (Cebo de Campo) and white (Cebo). A simple visual cue for menus and team training.

### How to integrate it effectively?

**Presentation.** Whenever possible, choose hand-carving: thin, even slices served at around 24 °C to release their full aroma and flavour.

**Tastings.** Offer boards that showcase different cuts—babilla, maza and punta—accompanied only by bread or breadsticks, so every nuance can be appreciated.

**Training.** Encourage your team to describe the product through the five senses: the vivid red colour with bright marbling, the delicate texture, the balanced aroma and the long umami finish.

**Formats.** Alongside whole legs that allow for carving theatre, high-quality pre-sliced packs offer speed and control—ideal for events or busy bars.

**Signature moments.** Iberian-themed menus, chef collaborations or guided tastings attract guests, build loyalty and generate added value.

### Standards you can trust

With Ibérico Ham, hospitality professionals can speak confidently about animal welfare, traceability, sustainability and Designations of Origin. It is a product that combines gastronomic excellence with certified guarantees—an essential argument for discerning consumers and a clear justification for its premium positioning.

### The campaign driving this momentum

"Awaken Your Ibérico Sense", promoted by the Interprofessional Association of Ibérico Pork (ASICI) in collaboration with the European Union, is a campaign designed to showcase Ibérico Ham through multisensory experiences and dedicated training. It helps UK professionals differentiate their business and allows consumers to discover a European icon that captivates all five senses.

### Ready to awaken your customers' Ibérico sense?

Ibérico Ham doesn't just elevate a dish—it elevates an entire experience. It differentiates your brand, strengthens margins and gives your team a powerful story to tell, slice by slice. With a steadily growing UK market, now is the time to make room on your menu for a European gastronomic icon.

Awaken your customers' Ibérico sense with a premium product that inspires emotion. Bring Ibérico onto your menu, train your team to speak (and carve) with confidence, and turn every service into an experience your customers will want to relive.



"IN **2024**, **IMPORTS** OF EUROPEAN **CURED HAMS** FROM SPAIN REACHED **€29.16 MILLION**, **10.69% HIGHER** THAN IN **2023** AND **37.26%** ABOVE **2020** LEVELS"

**ICEX-ESTACOM**



> "Awaken your customers' Ibérico sense with a premium product that inspires emotion"

Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

# Biona launches Italian-inspired duo




**New to the range are Italian Spelt Piadinas and Italian Spelt Pizza Bases.**

Piadinas are traditional flatbreads from Emilia-Romagna, and the new Biona offering is high in fibre and made with organic spelt flour and extra virgin olive oil. The pizza bases are thin and crispy, and made in Italy with ancient spelt grain and extra virgin olive oil, providing a high fibre option for pizza-making.

Carmen Ferguson, brand manager at Biona's parent company Windmill Organics, said, "We know many consumers are shifting from sliced bread and looking for more versatile bakery options which is why products like flatbreads and wraps are growing in popularity accordingly. When it comes to the pizza category, shoppers are trading up and looking for more authentic, high-quality options so our new pizza bases will meet that need."

**biona.co.uk**

# New protein pasta from Garofalo




**Premium Italian pasta brand Garofalo has been inspired by the growing interest in healthier pasta options to create a Protein Pasta.**

Made solely from wholewheat, no additional ingredients are added in order to increase the protein level of the final product thanks to a groundbreaking ingredient by one of Garofalo's partners via an advanced milling process.

Sally Assinder, UK marketing and account manager at Garofalo, said, "Garofalo's High Protein Pasta is made from 100% whole durum wheat semolina. The innovative milling process of the flour unlocks the full potential of the wheat, which is naturally rich in protein and fibre."

**pasta-garofalo.com**

# Organic Ancient Grain Spelt Flakes hit shelves

**Organic flour brand, Doves Farm, has announced a new addition to its award-winning range of breakfast cereals: Organic Ancient Grain Spelt Flakes.**

The Soil Association-approved flakes are light, crispy and wholegrain, made from sustainably-grown organic whole spelt and organic corn syrup. They are also free from artificial additives, high in fibre and wholegrains, and a source of protein.




Clare Marriage, co-founder of Doves Farm, said, "Spelt is one of our hero grains, loved by consumers for its nutty flavour and natural nutritional benefits. Our new Organic Spelt Flakes bring this ancient grain to the breakfast aisle in a simple, great-tasting format that fills a real gap in the market."

**dovesfarm.co.uk**

# New seasonal offering from Russell & Atwell




**Fresh chocolate makers Russell & Atwell have created limited edition Toffee Apple truffles.**

Hand-finished and made using Fino de Aroma Colombian cocoa, fresh organic British butter, organic double cream and golden syrup, they are designed to offer the perfect balance of sweetness, creaminess and sharpness.

Each chocolate offers the brand's signature 'double crack' textural experience, with a fine chocolate shell and bottom layer of chocolate encompassing the smooth filling.

Steve Russell, co-founder and chocolatier, said, "Toffee Apple is one of those flavours that's instantly recognisable and so perfect for autumn. We've taken that nostalgic profile and worked it into a fresh chocolate that feels both familiar and completely new. Store them in your fridge and enjoy their deep buttery notes and apple sharpness."

**russellandatwell.com**

# Walker's Shortbread announces festive range




**Shortbread makers Walker's Shortbread have shared news of their new festive range, which brings together all-butter pastry Mince Pies, Gingerbread Mince Pies, Festive Shortbread Shapes and Mini Shortbread Shapes.**

The Mince Pies combines crumbly all-butter pastry with a rich filling of spiced vine fruits and candied peel, while the Festive Shortbread Shapes come in shapes including Christmas trees, bells, stars and Santa.

The Mini Festive Shortbread Shapes are bite-sized and shaped like Christmas trees and stars, and are designed to be shared.







Bryony Walker, commercial director at Walker's Shortbread, said, "As a family business, we understand how special this time of year is, which is why our 2025 Festive Range offers a wide variety of delicious all-butter products to help loved ones connect and celebrate together."

**walkersshortbread.com**

SPECIALITY FOOD




THE GREEN ISSUE

THE GREEN ISSUE
Valuable intel into the sustainable future of food & drink

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# Premium octopus lands in UK market

**Spanish importer Mevalco has announced the launch of an MSC-certified octopus range.**

The range includes three-star Great Taste Award-winning MSC Cantabric Sea Octopus, which has been sourced exclusively through the importer's long-standing partner El Viejo Pescador before being cooked sous-vide at low temperatures for optimum quality.

The range has been designed to represent the best of sustainability, traceability and quality and brings the distinctive flavour of Cantabrian waters, delicate texture and a rich nutritional profile.




David Menéndez, managing director of Mevalco, said, "We are delighted to introduce this exceptional octopus to the UK retail market. Harvested with the utmost responsibility and expertise, it represents both a culinary delicacy and a centuries-old maritime tradition. Through our partnership with El Viejo Pescador, we are proud to bring the best of Asturias to discerning retailers and their customers."

**mevalco.com**

# Franklin & Sons releases Yuzu variant

**The premium brand of soft drinks, tonics, sodas and mixers has announced the launch of its new Yuzu Soda.**




Created using fresh yuzu juice, the soda is a carbonated combination of the sweet-sharp citrus fruit popular in Asian cuisine and fresh water from the Lake District.

The new soda can be enjoyed on its own over ice or mixed with a variety of spirits.

Pete Thornton, senior brand manager at Franklin & Sons, said, "Consumers are increasingly seeking unique and refreshing flavours that bring a sense of discovery to everyday drinks, and yuzu is a perfect example of that trend. Our new Yuzu Soda captures this trend perfectly, offering a bright, citrus-forward profile that works both on its own and as a versatile mixer."

**franklinandsons.co.uk**

# Bio&Me releases new Fibre + Protein bars




**Tapping into the growing demand for both protein and fibre-rich products, Bio&Me, founded by Dr Megan Rossi BSc PhD RD AKA The Gut Health Doctor, has announced the launch of its new Daily Boost Fibre & Protein bars.**

The bars are available in Blueberry and Cocoa variants and contains 9g of protein plus 10 diverse plant-based ingredients including wholegrain oats, dates, pumpkin seeds, carrots and extra virgin olive oil to help consumers to achieve their protein and fibre goals.

The bars are HFSS-compliant, with the Cocoa variant containing 5.2g of naturally-occurring sugars and the Blueberry variant containing 6.3g, plus they are gluten-free and vegan-friendly, and contain no artificial ingredients, sweeteners or palm fat.

Dr Megan Rossi, Bio&Me co-founder, said, "At Bio&Me, we're on a mission to make looking after your gut health deliciously easy. So many protein bars on the market are laden with added sugars or non-sugar sweeteners like sucralose and stevia which the World Health Organization now cautions against, along with emulsifiers, palm fat, and more – all of which are Ultra Processed Food red flags, and go against fundamental gut health principles. We wanted to do things differently. We've worked hard on development to elevate the health standard of protein bars. These new bars not only deliver on protein, but also the too often forgotten about, yet equally important nutrient, fibre, sourced from a diverse range of plant ingredients. We're bringing the protein:fibre index into the spotlight. This is something I studied in my PhD as being a key predictor of health outcomes as opposed to isolated nutrients."

**bioandme.co.uk**






# BRITAIN'S BEST DELIS: BLACKWELL & CO, LONG MELFORD

*Speciality Food* visits some of the UK's finest food and drink retailers to find out what sets them apart




While experts agree that the quality of British charcuterie has improved exponentially (in many cases even rivalling, like cheese, what's made on the Continent), a very real barrier to entry for lots of delis and farm shops is price.

But that's less of an issue if, like Blackwell & Co in the upmarket Suffolk village of Long Melford, you happen to produce your own.

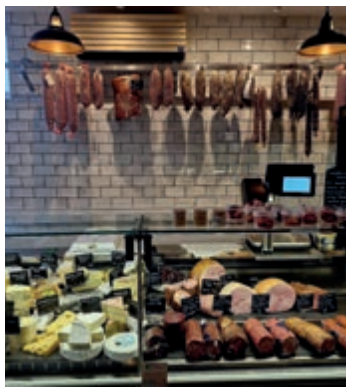
The deli, which opened at the end of 2024, is part of the Direct Meats family, which produces the celebrated Dingley Dell Cured range in partnership with Dingley Dell Farm on the Heritage Coast, using specially bred Red Duroc pigs.

Direct Meats owner, Martin Blackwell, and director Terri-Anne Lamb, had been searching for their own retail space for quite some time, Terri-Anne says. "We just felt we needed somewhere else to champion our products outside of wholesale."

Artisanal curing, using traditional methods, is something Direct Meats prides itself on at its base in Earls Colne, Essex. "We produce our own hams, all our own charcuterie, bacon, sausages, burgers and more, as well as doing a lot of outsourcing for other companies," Terri-Anne continues, adding that dry ageing is something else the business is known for.

## A vision for the future

What Martin and Terri-Anne set out to achieve was so much more than a deli. "We really wanted to create a destination store," she says. "We truly



feel our products are exceptional (I know we're biased) but a lot of what we produce you can only find in high level restaurants. We wanted it to become available to so many more people, so when they have guests around and they ask, 'where did you get that from, it's delicious?', they can tell them, 'oh, it's from Blackwell & Co'. Giving that message of farm to fork, and championing Dingley Dell, supporting their pork, is massive for us as well."

Having opened in a former butcher's shop, which was sorely missed by the community, the reception when Blackwell & Co's doors opened last November was "incredible", Terri-Anne recalls. "Everyone has been amazing. We've really fitted into the village and we're so grateful for the positivity."

## Uniqueness at its best

Inside, the deli is artfully presented, with baskets of fresh produce, displays crafted from wooden crates, chillers laden with Direct Meats' fresh and cured items (from ham to gourmet hot dogs), and a full deli counter, displaying around 16 different types of Dingley Dell charcuterie.

"It's the biggest selection of our charcuterie you'll find on any deli counter," Terri-Anne beams. "We have our saucisson sec with black truffle, salami with fennel going through, larger salamis and salami sticks. They are our takes on traditional products. We're always doing NPD, trying to make things that are a bit out there but with authentic methods."

The deli counter bursts with choice, each variety 'faced off' throughout the day, just like cheese, with slivers presented within the chiller so customers can see exactly what they're buying.

Charcuterie is accompanied by plenty of cheese (Baron Bigod, Wookey Hole Caved Aged Cheddar and Rosary Ash goats' cheese being the best-sellers), olives, pesto and more.

Having a dry ager on site, "Means the guys in the butchery are able to break down beef and pork steaks which are then packaged to grab and go – they've become so popular. And people are loving our bakery. Gareth, who runs it, is making some amazing products. We sell out of his sourdough, and there are bloomers like fennel and apricot, or olive and fennel. He makes Scotch eggs and pork pies, all from scratch. He's an important part of the deli – he was even in here with a paintbrush and building things before we opened!"

Italian products feature heavily at the deli, which is generously stocked with sauces, pastas and more from Tenuta – joined on the shelves by Stokes Sauces, Maynard Farm juices, relishes and chutneys from The Garlic Farm and Hawkshead Relish and more. "Our main ethos, when we were deciding what to stock, was we wanted excellent products that would complement our cheeses and charcuterie," Terri-Anne explains. "We wanted to keep it quite niche."

The 'cherry on the cake', of what the deli has to offer, she thinks, is the regularly changing display of heritage fruit and vegetables, which deliver a pop of vibrancy as customers enter. Their appearance, she adds, sets out their stall, demonstrating a commitment to quality.

"That aspect is really important to us in being able to offer something a bit different. Things people can't find everywhere. The 'wow' factor. We solely work with seasonal produce and that changes every week. So, we could have asparagus and wild garlic, or purple cauliflowers and heritage tomatoes. We just want to offer the best."

## Box clever

A way Blackwell & Co is attracting more customers, avoiding wastage at the deli counter, and differentiating itself, is by offering loaded sandwiches (made by Gareth using their own focaccia bread and charcuterie), as well as affordable charcuterie/grazing and picnic boxes. Laden with cheeses, meats, salad, homemade pickles and chutney, they help to turn over fresh stock, and have been drawing in daytrippers (the village is a tourist hot spot), who, in turn, inevitably top up their shopping baskets while in-store.

Locally, customers from nearby towns and villages have been driving into Long Melford, specifically to pick up lunch from the deli, boosting trade.

## What makes a great deli?

Although it's been operating for just a year, Terri-Anne says the whole team have learnt a lot about delivering a meaningful customer experience. "It's all about the passion and the products," she says. "We're proud to say we make 70% of our products ourselves, and we don't just get things in for the sake of it. Everything we stock is here because it's delicious, it's good quality, and we believe in it and can share that with our customer base."



### BLACKWELL & CO'S BEST-SELLERS

- "Sourdough is at the top. It does really well for us, followed by our charcuterie and cheeses."
- "Our tomahawk steaks from the dry ager are extremely popular, and we make a beef Wellington on-site that people love."
- "We really like the Tenuta range, especially the carbonara sauce and their pasta. I struggle with gluten, and their gluten-free pasta is unlike anything else."

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Source: *Soil Association Certification, Organic Market Report 2025, **The Grocer, May 2025

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MINISTRY OF ENERGY COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

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OF THE TRADITIONAL CHEESE OF CYPRUS
NAMED HALLOUMI

# THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY

## In this report, you'll discover just how vital forward-thinking is for the future of the food and drink sector

Sustainability is no longer a talking point; it's a turning point. As the fine food and drink sector navigates mounting environmental pressures, supply chain volatility and shifting consumer expectations, sustainable practice has become the foundation of long-term success. Businesses that act now are not only protecting the planet but also strengthening resilience, improving efficiency and building brand trust for the future. Created in partnership with Icertech, a leading innovator in temperature-controlled packaging, this report explores how the industry is responding to one of its biggest challenges and greatest opportunities. From regenerative farming and ethical sourcing to sustainable temperature-controlled packaging and responsible distribution, the insights gathered here reveal a sector in motion: one that's adapting fast and redefining what responsible growth looks like.

Sustainability isn't a box to tick or a one-size-fits-all solution. It's a continuous process of innovation, collaboration and accountability. Whether it's rethinking packaging materials, investing in circular systems or measuring impact through transparent reporting, the businesses leading the way are those viewing sustainability as a driver of commercial advantage, not a compliance exercise.

In this report, you'll hear from changemakers across the food industry, all united by a shared goal to future-proof the supply chain for generations to come.

**To explore the full findings, including practical tools to future-proof your business, expert resources and deeper insight into sustainable sourcing, packaging and logistics, download the complete report at specialityfoodmagazine.com/sustainablesupply.**

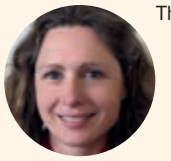
> "There is hope, and the public are asking for this. Those of us in the speciality sector know that customers will pay a premium if they see value, we have a duty to ensure that customers will actively pay for an environmental premium as much as they do for taste or tradition"
>
> SHANE HOLLAND, CHAIR OF BOROUGH MARKET

**68%** OF **CONSUMERS** VIEW **SUSTAINABLE** FOOD **POSITIVELY**, WITH **55%** VIEWING IT AS BEING **BETTER** FOR THE **ENVIRONMENT**

SODEXO

## THE VALUE OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

### Beth Mander, retail programme manager at Ellen Macarthur Foundation explains the concept



The Ellen Macarthur Foundation exists to accelerate a transition to a circular economy. By that we mean enabling people to live the lives they do now, enjoying products and services, but in a way that is decoupled from depleting finite resources and polluting the world.

The easy comparator is to think of today's systems as linear. We take stuff out the ground, we make stuff with it, and then we throw it away. So it's very wasteful. It is polluting, and it is depleting the natural environment, soil health and more.

Currently, we're working with an extractive supply chain. The people doing a lot of the work are the least compensated for it, and then that has risks compounding it because actually then there's no resilience at that level – this means that the supply chain more broadly is at risk.

As ever, it is a hugely complex system. There's no silver bullets. But we need to start to think about investing in more sustainable circular ideas such as co-products – byproducts of food manufacturing being resources, not waste.

## SUSTAINABILITY DRIVERS



### Ruth Galpine, programmes director at Soil Association clarifies the sustainable supply chain mission

**Sustainability in supply chains is being propelled by two main forces:**

1 Firstly, businesses are increasingly required to operate more sustainably and to evidence that through credible reporting.

2 Secondly, there is growing consumer awareness of what they're eating, where it came from, and its environmental impact.

In short, one driver is policy and legislation; the other is that customers and supply chain partners expect, and want, progress.

Clear, explicit communication of action on sustainability is now valued and increasingly expected by brand and business customers, and in some cases required by customers and supply chain partners. Whether requested in tender applications, procurement contracts, or embedded within a sustainability strategy, this is increasingly helpful positioning for businesses in competitive markets.



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# THE POWER OF SUSTAINABLE SOURCING

## Sourcing sustainably has never been more vital – here's why

Sourcing may be one of the most complicated parts of the supply chain process, but it is undeniably a valuable place to start. While you may collaborate with one packaging supplier – and so checking that their own supply chain is up to scratch would (hopefully) be a relatively simple process – when you drill down into the myriad of suppliers to your business, this can begin to seem a headache.

From the products that go onto your shelves to the ingredients in your own produce, and from the source of the energy that powers your business to the suppliers that keep your office supplies topped up, it's a heady mix of questions... that are undoubtedly vital to ask.

Here, we speak to experts who share just how important it is to source sustainably.



## 3 REASONS TO SOURCE SUSTAINABLY

Nahuel Tunon, head of sustainable sourcing at Fairtrade Foundation

**1 COLLABORATION IS KEY**
By promoting fair and equitable trade practices – ones which prioritise long term producer relationships, a sustainable price and promoting regenerative farming practices – we can help ensure a sustainable and more stable future for both farmers and the wider supply chain.

**2 ECOLOGICAL ISSUES**
Supply chain disruptions are becoming increasingly common: we have seen this with Covid-19, global conflicts and protectionist policies. As these drive greater uncertainty they are compounded by the impacts of climate change. No longer can buyers focus their sourcing efforts on securing the lowest price for a product: their main priority must now be ensuring their supply chains are resilient to these global shocks.

**3 FUTURE STRUGGLES**
Simply put, if businesses don't prioritise long term commitments with their producers then their positive impact will always be limited. What's more, producers will always struggle to farm sustainably, address critical risks, and deliver long term investments that go beyond their most basic day-to-day needs.

THE **FOOD** INDUSTRY IS **RESPONSIBLE** FOR ROUGHLY **26%** OF **GLOBAL** GREENHOUSE GAS **EMISSIONS**, AND **LIVESTOCK** CONTRIBUTES **14.5%**

**UNITED NATIONS**



## AGRI-FOOD INSIGHT



Rod Coogan, agri-food expert at PA Consulting, says that sustainable supply chains are an invaluable necessity

Climate volatility, geopolitical tensions, and shifting consumer expectations are exposing vulnerabilities in traditional supply chains. Companies that diversify sourcing, build supplier partnerships, and embed sustainability into procurement decisions are better positioned to weather disruptions. Real-time data, predictive analytics, and scenario planning are helping brands anticipate shocks and respond faster.

Brands don't just need to reduce emissions, they also need to build agility and trust. The most successful food companies will be those that treat sustainability as a driver of innovation and resilience and not just a compliance checkbox.

"As global environmental and social challenges intensify, sustainable procurement has evolved from a niche concern to a strategic imperatives"



## ROADBLOCKS TO SUSTAINABILITY

**52%**
OF UK RETAILERS DON'T FEEL PRESSURE FROM CONSUMERS TO MAKE CHANGE

**42%**
BELIEVE MAKING THEIR OPERATIONS MORE SUSTAINABLE IS TOO BIG A TASK FOR THEM TO MANAGE

**35%**
OF RESPONDENTS SAID THAT THEIR BUSINESS HAS SHIFTING OR COMPETITING PRIORITIES

***The State of Sourcing Report*, Source Events**



"SOME **CONSUMERS** SAY THEY ARE **WILLING** TO SPEND **9.7%** MORE, ON **AVERAGE**, FOR **SUSTAINABLY** PRODUCED OR **SOURCED** GOODS, AS ALMOST **NINE-IN-TEN (85%)** REPORT **EXPERIENCING** FIRST-HAND THE **DISRUPTIVE** EFFECTS OF **CLIMATE** CHANGE IN THEIR **DAILY** LIVES"

**PWC**

# PACKAGING FOR **PEOPLE & PLANET**

## So much more than a simple vessel for goods, smart packaging bridges the gap between supply chain and consumer experience – so is a valuable place to begin your sustainable evolution

Perhaps the aspect of sustainable supply that consumers understand best, packaging can be one of the most underrated elements of a forward-thinking supply chain. Often an afterthought rather than a carefully considered cog in the wheel, it's well worth investing time into curating your packaging portfolio to ensure that it benefits everyone in the chain – from the planet to the end consumer.

## *"Reuse cuts inefficiency and downtime"*

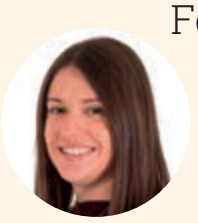


### Andy Maddock, regional managing director at IPP

The constant and perpetual use and reuse of supply chain assets in a cost-effective and efficient way reduces time and cost and boosts productivity to make sure the right products are in the right place at the right time and at the right price. At the same time, it cuts inefficiency and downtime – reducing millions of hours, miles and metric tonnes of carbon emissions by eliminating redundant journeys. This in itself optimises journeys and reduces further wear and tear on vehicles. Each link in the supply chain is a key top and bottom-line beneficiary of the circular economy.

Any industry where the raw materials are largely or wholly sustainable in terms of recyclability or re-use can engage with the circular economy.

## *"Packaging goes far beyond material choice"*



### For Alex Jackson, sales and marketing director at Icertech, packaging plays a key, vital role in sustainable supply chains system

Packaging is often one of the most visible indicators of a company's sustainability commitments. On the surface, we tend to focus on what packaging is made from – is it paper or plastic? In reality, packaging's role within a sustainable supply chain goes far beyond material choice. In a truly sustainable supply chain, packaging is designed not just to move products from A to B, but to minimise waste, reduce emissions, and prevent product damage, ultimately lowering the number of returns and the associated environmental impact. When done well, packaging becomes a key enabler of efficiency and circularity, supporting both environmental goals and commercial performance.

Both businesses and consumers recognise the value of sustainable packaging. In fact, consumers are often among the strongest drivers of change, challenging brands to improve their environmental performance.

For businesses, however, there are barriers that aren't always visible to the end user, from cost pressures and supply chain complexity to the difficulty of finding solutions that are both truly sustainable and capable of meeting performance and affordability requirements.

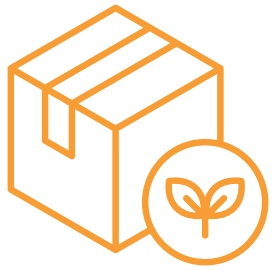


### Francisco Gaffney, CEO and chairman of Trinity SES, shares tips on how to integrate sustainable packaging into a business's day-to-day operations

**Three moves that pay off fast:**

1. Make packaging recipes part of resource management and flow them through orders
2. Publish live role-specific dashboards so teams see how their work serves strategy
3. Run a shadow-IT sweep, then consolidate into integrated tools to restore a single source of truth

Done this way, sustainability reporting stops being a tax on time and becomes proof of a better-run supply chain.

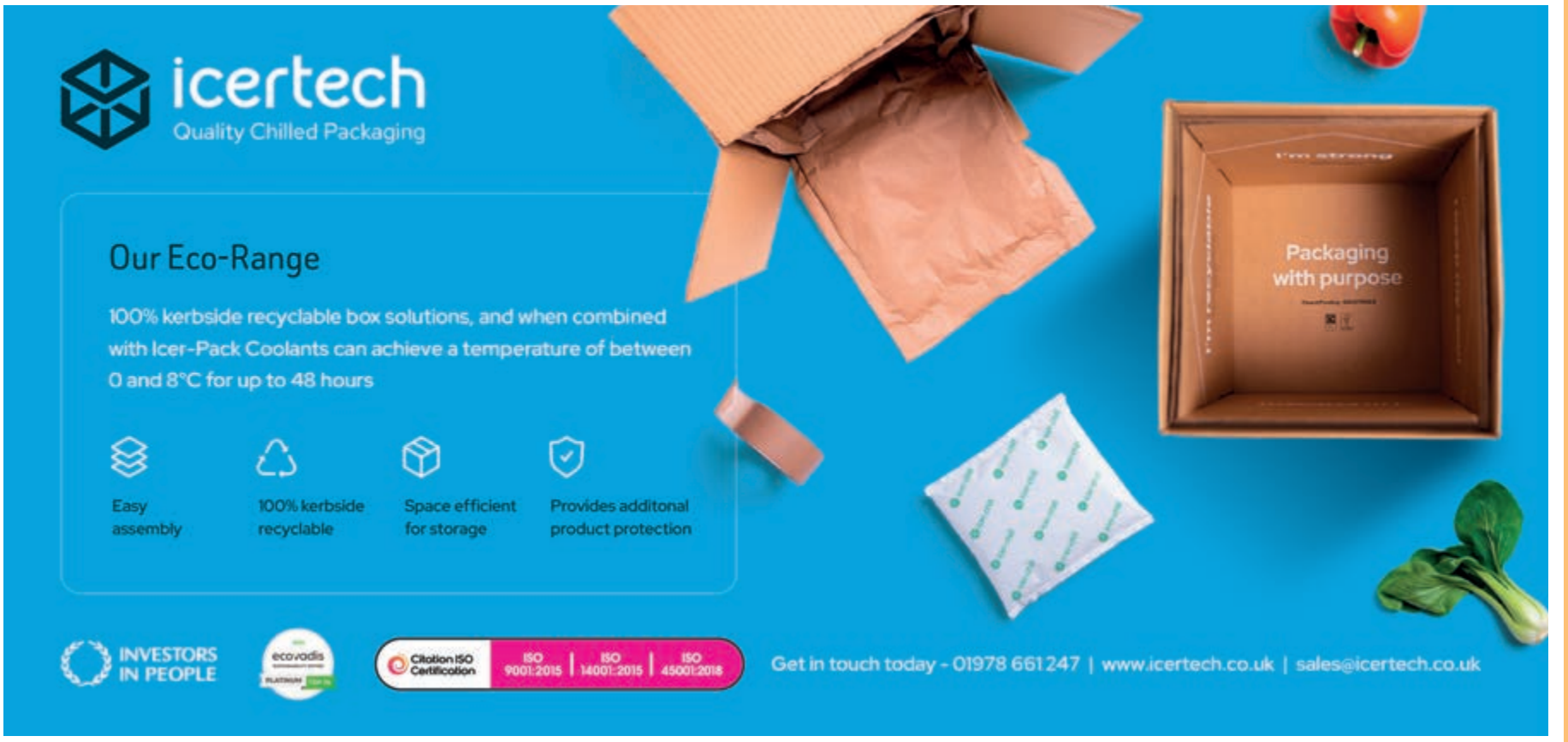


**PACKAGING ACCOUNTS FOR SOME 5.4 PER CENT OF EMISSIONS, WHICH IS MORE THAN TRANSPORTATION OR OTHER SUPPLY CHAIN FACTORS**

**United Nations**

"THE **UK** SUSTAINABLE **PACKAGING** MARKET **SIZE** REACHED **USD 9.71 BILLION** IN **2024.** LOOKING FORWARD, IMARC GROUP EXPECTS **THE MARKET** TO REACH **USD 18.70 BILLION** BY **2033**, EXHIBITING A GROWTH RATE **(CAGR)** OF **7.56%** DURING **2025-2033**"

**IMARC**



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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Quality Chilled Packaging

# FUTURE-PROOF DISTRIBUTION

## Transporting your goods with the planet in mind is a vital part of boosting your sustainability credentials...

When it comes to working within a sustainable supply chain, distribution is much more than a question of getting an item from A to B. There are a number of questions to be asked – some might even be a little uncomfortable at first – but once you're viewing your business through the lens of sustainability, you'll see why it is so important to make meaningful change.

Renewable energy is a good place to start – implementing renewable sources and opting for electric vehicles (or a distributor who utilises them) can form an important part of the chain. Perhaps, too, you could look into the possibility of your business generating its own power through solar panels. Download the full report for more insight and actionable advice.

## DISTRIBUTOR INSIGHT: COTSWOLD FAYRE



Paul Hargreaves, CEO, shares his experience of running a sustainable operation

**WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES IN MAKING YOUR OPERATIONS MORE SUSTAINABLE, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THESE?**

The challenges are always knowing what the most effective actions are to do and how to prioritise them and of course, financial ability to do them. Not everything we have put in place to become more sustainable costs money, but some of it does and we need to ensure that what we do is the most effective use of cash.

**WHAT ARE THE MARKERS OF A SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN?**

The best marker would be an auditable net zero measure, and this is where we are aiming for by 2030, but this is just for our own business activities.

We won't be truly net zero until all the 5,000 products within our range are also net zero, so the task head is enormous and, as a wholesale, relies hugely on our suppliers.



## GROWER INSIGHT



Patrick Holden, founder of the Sustainable Food Trust, has experienced first-hand the evolution of the food supply chain

I've been farming for over 50 years, and I've seen it all. When I started there were local abbatoirs, everything was packed, processed and distributed locally – but since that time it's become increasingly difficult to supply the local market.

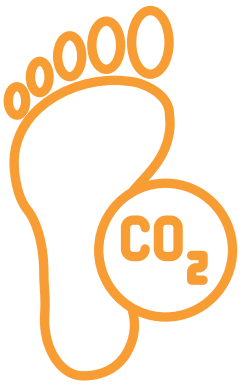
We used to grow carrots which went through packhouses throughout the UK, but then the supermarkets realised that if they only had one pack house per commodity product they'd make more money. We live in an era of commodity slavery – once a product has left the farm gate the farmer doesn't know where it's going, as supermarkets realised that if they only had one packhouse per commodity product they would make more money.

The supermarkets are keeping that secret, as it's a pretty unattractive story, but the great news is that more consumers want to know where their food is coming from – and it's up to us to be telling that story. All of the links in the chain have gone, and we have to put them back in again.

It's not simple, and there's a lot of cost involved, but that's how we can re-establish a supply chain that can be sustained – and sustainable – for years to come. Everything, from public health to nature, will benefit.

> "It's not simple, and there's a lot of cost involved, but that's how we can re-establish a supply chain that can be sustained – and sustainable – for years to come"





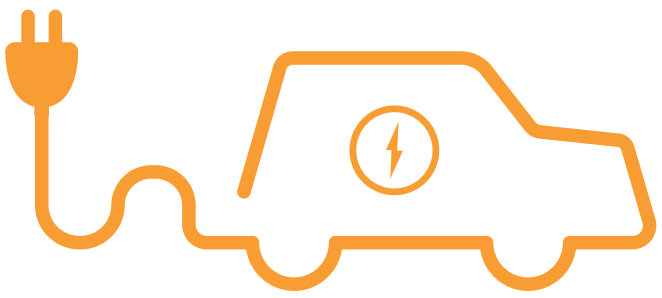

**IN THE MID-2010S, TRANSPORTATION REPLACED ELECTRICITY SUPPLY AS THE UK'S SINGLE LARGEST CLIMATE POLLUTER, WITH MOBILITY ON LAND, SEA, AND IN THE AIR NOW ACCOUNTING FOR ROUGHLY 30 PERCENT OF TOTAL EMISSIONS**

**Statista**



**DISTRIBUTION CONTRIBUTES 29 PER CENT TO FOOD SYSTEM EMISSIONS, WHICH IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE GROWING**

**United Nations**



> "Subject to continued innovation and policy support, all new HGVs for the food system could be zero-carbon from the mid-2030s. This shift is dependent on continued technological innovation and robust policy support to overcome the challenges associated with electrifying heavy-duty transport. [The industry must] proactively engage with programmes to decarbonise HGVs, trialling new technologies in the 2020s and planning to roll these out in the 2030s, subject to continued innovation and policy support"

**INSTITUTE OF GROCERY DISTRIBUTION**

# A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



Alex Jackson, sales and marketing director at pioneering temperature-controlled packaging business, Icertech, explains why taking a holistic approach to sustainability is vital

Making sustainable choices in temperature-controlled packaging (TCP) delivers benefits that go far beyond environmental impact. By reducing carbon emissions, minimising waste to landfill, and improving resource efficiency, businesses can significantly lower their overall footprint while maintaining product integrity.

Sustainability also builds commercial strength. Consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that act responsibly, rewarding transparency with trust and loyalty. In a competitive market, demonstrating genuine environmental commitment can set a business apart, offering both reputational and operational advantages. With evolving regulations placing greater emphasis on packaging accountability, taking a sustainable approach today helps ensure compliance.

At Icertech, we believe in making temperature-controlled packaging as simple and as straightforward as possible for our customers. However, there's no one-size-fits-all solution and it's not just a matter of choosing "this material" or "that ice pack." Every customer's application is unique, and our goal is to ensure packaging is truly fit for purpose: protecting product integrity without being excessive.




## A holistic approach

True sustainability extends beyond environmental factors. While reducing waste, lowering carbon emissions, and choosing recyclable materials are all vital steps, they form just one part of a much bigger picture. A genuinely sustainable business model takes a holistic approach – one that considers the triple bottom line: people, planet, and profit.

This means looking at how decisions impact not only the environment, but also the people involved- from employees and suppliers to customers and the wider community.

A business can't be truly sustainable if its practices harm the wellbeing of its workforce or undermine the communities it operates in.

Equally, sustainability must be economically viable. Profit isn't in contradiction to sustainable values, as profit is ultimately what allows businesses to invest in better processes, innovate, and make lasting improvements.

Taking a holistic approach ensures that progress in one area doesn't come at the expense of another. It can be a lot to consider on top of the other challenges that comes with running a business and growing a brand. A manageable approach is to focus on doing one thing better that you are currently.




## Moving forward with TCP

For those reviewing their existing packaging, or for those new to the sector it's helpful to consider the following questions:

- **Time frame:** How long does the packaging need to maintain the required temperature? When discussing your needs with your supplier, provide as much detail as possible.
- **Temperature range:** What are the specific temperature requirements for your product throughout the journey?
- **Other factors:** Consider storage space, sustainability goals, and the level of impact protection required.

The future of packaging is changing quickly, driven by customer demand and legislation. In 2027 Simpler Recycling legislation will be introduced, requiring packaging to be clearly labelled and allowing soft plastics to be recycled with curbside collections. Through schemes like EPR, the cost of non-recyclable materials will increase overtime to account for their disposal. All of these changes on the horizon mean that companies will be constantly innovating, so keep a look out for new, sustainable packaging products to be released soon, the future is exciting!

Discover more at:
**icertech.co.uk**

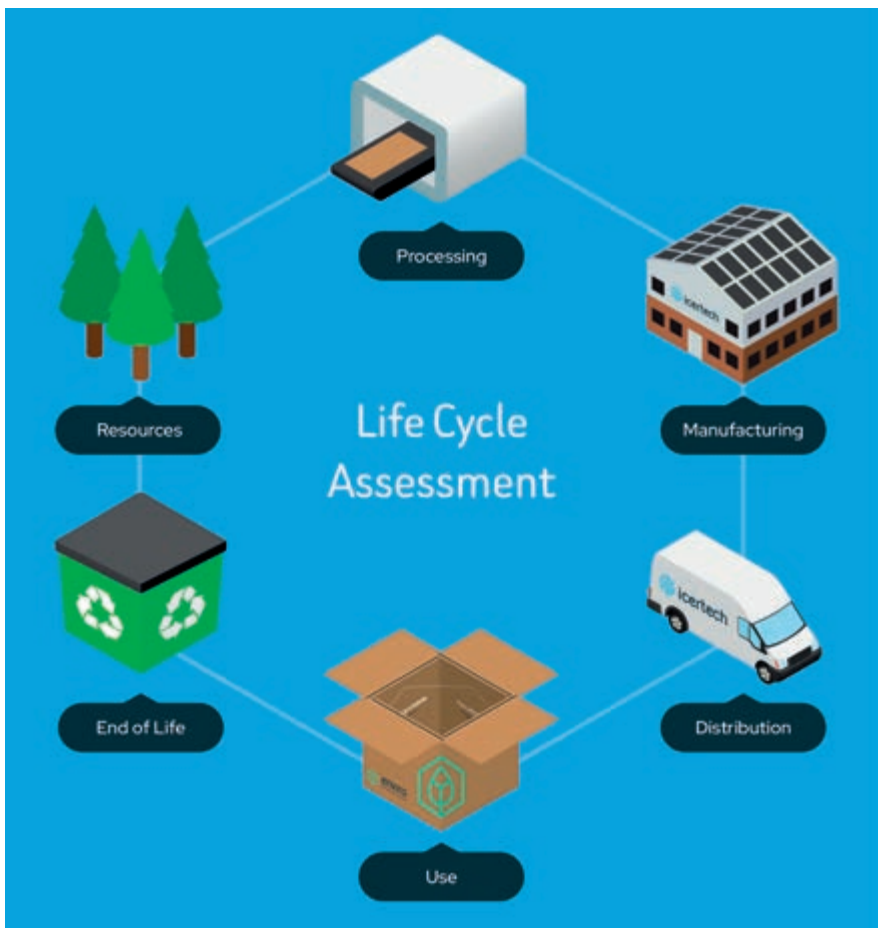
## HOW TO COMMUNICATE RESPONSIBLY

1. Share the "why" behind material choices, explain the points you have considered.
2. Keep disposal instructions clear and simple.
3. Back claims with credible testing, certifications, or lifecycle data.
4. Use well recognised marks, such as OPRL.
5. Ask questions to their suppliers to ensure they are as informed as possible.
6. Be transparent. We welcome questions from our customers, and it puts them in a good position to answer any queries from their customer in turn. Our suggestion is that you're as transparent as possible with this information.

## INDEPENDENT VERIFICATION – WHY, WHAT AND HOW

You're looking for an external body, neutral to the business and its objectives/agenda, to verify environmental claims. Independent verification ensures that claims are credible, accurate, and trustworthy, helping customers make informed decisions and preventing misleading or greenwashed messaging. Marks/logos to look for are, but not limited to:

- EcoVadis • B-Corp • Investors in People
- FSC • ISO 14 001 • Fairtrade
- Rainforest Alliance • UN SDG's




## THE REALITY BEHIND SUSTAINABILITY MYTHS

**MYTH:** SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING IS MORE EXPENSIVE

While it's true that sustainable packaging can come with a higher upfront cost, focusing solely on price overlooks the bigger picture. The introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation means that the financial burden of using non-recyclable materials is set to increase, reducing the gap between traditional and sustainable options. Choosing sustainable packaging is not just about meeting environmental targets; it's about future-proofing your business, strengthening consumer trust, and aligning with the values of a market that increasingly expects brands to take responsibility for their impact. In this sense, sustainability is less a premium and more a long-term investment in brand integrity and resilience

**MYTH:** RECYCLABLE MEANS SUSTAINABLE

True sustainability considers the entire lifecycle, from raw material sourcing to the impact of manufacturing, and end-of-life options. Some materials whilst technically recyclable are rarely recycled due to lack of infrastructure.

**MYTH:** NATURAL MATERIALS ARE ALWAYS BETTER

Paper, cardboard, or plant-based materials are seen as inherently eco-friendly. Whilst they are natural materials, it is important to still ensure that they are sourced responsibly, and that you take into consideration additonal factors such as supply chain.

> "All of these changes on the horizon mean that companies will be constantly innovating, so keep a look out for new, sustainable packaging products to be released soon, the future is exciting!"

# HOW WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

## Retailers across the UK share what makes the festive season magical for them – and their insider tips to help 2026 be the best yet

**Christmas bells usually equal ringing tills. In Britain, we spend an average of almost £50 billion on food, drink and gifts in the weeks leading up to 25th December, meaning it's still the most critical transaction period in retail.**

**Get your marketing, merchandising, stock and staffing right, and you've got yourself a great formula for success. Read on to discover what your peers will be doing during 'turkey and tinsel time' this year.**



### JARROLDS' FOOD HALL
NORFOLK

The food hall truly comes alive at Christmas, says John Adams, managing director for retail. "The vibrant buzz and festive atmosphere provide the perfect backdrop to carefully curated ranges for foodies, gorgeous foods, gifts, drinks and hampers – many sourced from Norfolk, but complimented with handpicked gastronomic highlights from around the world."

In order to captivate as many customers as possible, John says the business keeps its shopping and dining options open later – until 8pm – from Thursdays to Saturdays at the end of the year, "so our guests can take their time and linger a little longer".

"We work hard to create a space that combines shopping with hospitality, and it feels more like a full Christmas experience than just a food hall," he adds.

Christmas shopping opportunities in Norfolk are even greater this year, with the opening of Jarrolds Letheringsett – the brand's second food hall and farm shop, located near Holt, with its own butchery (featuring locally reared meat from the Astley Estate), fresh local and organic produce, and hand-picked hampers, which continue to be very important to Jarrolds' Christmas offering.

"This year, our carefully considered collection of hampers includes a ready-to-order selection, presented in Jarrold's signature boxes and traditional wicker baskets," says Jim. "Each one is brimming with exceptional food and drink, featuring artisan products from our home county and beyond.

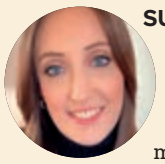
"There's also the option to create a more one-off gift too, through our bespoke hamper service, allowing customers to meander through the food hall, hand-selecting every item with that person in mind. It's a service we offer to help customers create a thoughtful, meaningful gift for a client or foodie friend."

Regular tastings and food experiences are ramped up during late November and December, continues John. Evening wreath-making workshops with a local florist are being introduced at both Letheringsett and Norwich, while the retailers' restaurants reflect the seasonal spirit - The Bay offering bubbles and oysters with a city view, and Benji's Cafe serving mince pies and hot chocolate to warm customers' cockles.

Jarrolds aims to be a full-day festive destination, John adds. "You might arrive to choose or pick up a gift, then stay for tastings, live demos, or book a return visit for your children to see Santa in the toy department.

"And our window displays are always full of seasonal promise, such





### SUFFOLK FOOD HALL
SUFFOLK

Rebecca Neale, marketing manager at Suffolk Food Hall, says it's "so lovely" to share the Christmas season with customers. "It's a key time for our butchery, with meat orders coming in, as well as for our greengrocers, which provides locally grown produce to make Christmas dinner extra tasty. Our bakery and deli also have the opportunity to make different products using festive flavours and seasonal ingredients, meaning customers have new products to try. It's a time to be creative and offer customers a unique experience."

Once Halloween is out of the way, the food hall's merchandisers flourish every corner with seasonal cheer, stocking it to the brim with speciality products, from biscuit tins and chocolates to mulled wine, home decorations and gifting ideas.

"We ensure Christmas flavours are available throughout the site," Rebecca adds. "Including festive toasties and Biscoff hot chocolates in the cafe, as well as a dedicated festive menu in the restaurant. We also offer colouring competitions for children, and breakfast with Santa events."

This year the food hall will boost its Christmas presence with themed quiz nights and shopping evenings, as well as two new Christmas murder mystery nights, which have already attracted high levels of sales. "Our Festive Saturday on 29th November will also see new plans, including photo opportunities, live music and face painting."

Rebecca's top tip: "Customer service always goes such a long way. At Suffolk Food Hall we are dedicated to providing customers with the highest level of service, and always aim to help, whether it be showing them where the hamper department is, advising them on meats for their Christmas dinner, or simply offering a bakery treat recommendation. All our staff are always approachable and knowledgeable. This can have a real impact on the experience customers leave your site with."



### THE LAMBING SHED
CHESHIRE

"Everything here turns into a Christmas wonderland," says Helen Brackley, marketing manager at The Lambing Shed in Knutsford, talking about their Yuletide plans.

What draws customers in is the fact the shop truly celebrates local produce – particularly home-reared and locally-sourced meat, which form a focal point of most people's Christmas celebration tables. "We want to really get customers excited about our butchery. We go to local farms for our turkeys and geese, and the beef and lamb is our own."

The 'homemade' messaging gets even stronger at Christmas, Helen continues. "Customers really love that they can buy our own mince pies and sausage rolls – lots of things are made here."

This has been a marked year of change for the farm shop, which upped its ante in events to huge success this summer – growing its family market exponentially. "We did a massive sand pit in a converted barn, and it really took off! We got lots more followers, and more parents came in with their children." This has informed 2026's Christmas plans. "Off the back of that, we knew we wanted to do something that wasn't just Father Christmas



and that wasn't too expensive – something everyone could come to."

As a result, in addition to themed afternoon teas this year, The Lambing Shed will have a Christmas trail for children through the shop – "they'll have to follow the footprints" – leading to Santa, and there'll be donkeys, reindeers and elves telling stories. Catering to families has never been so important, Helen thinks.

Helen's top tip: "The key message is that we're all trying to compete against supermarkets, so we have to support local and shout about homemade where we can. Customers need to know when they shop with us, they're buying from local people and supporting the local economy."



as last year's giant red bow, which was wrapped around the entire building, adding to the sense of excitement even before you step inside."

John's top tip: "Working in retail, food, drink and hospitality at this time of year is both joyful and intense. But it makes it all worthwhile when you see and hear people talking about Jarrolds being part of their Christmas memories and family traditions. By adding personal touches, from carefully considered menus, to attentive customer service, and rewarding customer loyalty, we're always aiming to create truly memorable experiences. The key is to make each season feel full of anticipation, excitement and newness."






**DELILAH FINE FOODS**
NOTTINGHAM

The food hall comes into its own during Christmas, says owner Sangita Tryner – the Grade II listed building beautifully suited to adorning with all the trimmings. It's transformed, she says, by an abundance of extra special food and drink, and their annual centrepiece – a huge decorated tree in the main window, which brings a real sense of joy and magic.

"Nottingham city centre is at its most vibrant this time of year, drawing in more visitors than any other season. It's a perfect opportunity for us to reconnect with familiar faces who might not pop in as often, and to welcome newcomers who are discovering the Delilah experience for the first time," she continues.

"The atmosphere among the team is electric. We bring in a few extra hands to help, and it's heartwarming to see our experienced staff guiding the new ones – sometimes for their own sanity, but mostly because the fast pace brings everyone closer. The result is a stronger, more connected team – and a store full of festive spirit."

As someone who is endlessly enthused by all good food and drink, Sangita says buying for Christmas is tricky because space is finite, and she often finds herself getting overwhelmed. "Every year I now have to take one of our staff with me to stop me running wild! We are always big on Italian treats at Christmas. I use three or four suppliers just for my panettones, making sure I cover all the flavours, sizes and styles and, of course, the quality has to be the best. Ollie, our brilliant deli queen, is responsible for the fresh buying, and always comes up with some winning new cheeses."

This year the team have embraced the rise of Dubai-style chocolate too, introducing four bars from chocolatier, Danny's Delights. "Dubai-style Turkish delight, biscuits and even panettones all feature."

Delilah Fine Foods hosts a big Christmas event on the last Friday of November every year, which has become a calendar must for regular customers, says Sangita. The team create a market-esque vibe on the mezzanine, inviting a selection of suppliers to show their wares and present on stage for 10 to 15-minute stints, imparting their expertise, and sharing knowledge of how to use their products, which is invaluable.

Rick, (Sangita's husband and wine buyer) will be there, alongside a wine supplier of his choosing, with tastings of the must-buy bottles for the holidays. And canapes will flood out of the Delilah kitchen, with chefs given free rein to raid the shelves for inspiration. "It's a great foodie, boozy start to the festive season," Sangita beams.

Beyond this, the true key to getting Christmas right is tastings, she adds. "Delilah is awash with sampling at this time of year. A lot of the products we source are not commonly available, and we love introducing people to the unknown taste sensations that the true magicians have created... our producers!"

Sangita's top tips: "Keep things fresh and new. Always have something that your customers haven't seen before – they come to you to be inspired. And try to understand individual needs. Show an interest and, most importantly, fit the budgets. Everybody is trying to sell to these people. You need to stand out from the supermarkets and chains, and that is by providing the personal service we all came into this industry to provide."









## Start your customers' days right with the perfect breakfast spread

**1 TAYLORS OF HARROGATE**
**YORKSHIRE TEA ICED**
A brand-new iced tea from the UK's number one tea brand. Made using only natural flavourings, and low in calories – it's tea, but not as you know it. This cool twist on the classic brew is available in two flavours, Lemon and Peach & Raspberry, crafted in Yorkshire with a bespoke Yorkshire Gold loose leaf tea extract. A sophisticated way to chill out!
**taylorsoutofhome.co.uk**

**2 BIO&ME**
**OVERNIGHT OATS**
Say hello to Bio&Me's new speedy Overnight Oats – a gut-loving breakfast that's ready in just three minutes. Created by Dr Megan Rossi, aka The Gut Health Doctor, each bowl delivers up to 14 diverse plant-based foods – including almonds, chia, carrots and gluten-free wholegrain oats – to help support a healthy gut. Available in two delicious variants: Raspberry & Coconut and Cocoa.
**bioandme.co.uk**

**3 TAYLORS OF HARROGATE**
**YORKSHIRE TEA & YORKSHIRE GOLD**
A proper brew with exceptional taste, trusted by consumers for over 130 years. Yorkshire Tea carefully blends responsibly sourced aromatic leaves, and their expert tea tasters ensure every cup will be as deliciously refreshing as the last. Yorkshire Gold is their finest blend, a carefully curated selection of teas from three of their favourite origins – Assam, Kenya, and Rwanda. They source exclusively from the top ten tea gardens in the world to create a brew that's rich, smooth, and incredibly satisfying.
**taylorsoutofhome.co.uk**




**4 RORA DAIRIES**
**ORGANIC GREEK STYLE YOGURT**

Made simply with organic whole milk and live culture. The milk comes straight from the farm and after the yogurt has incubated, it is strained gently over time to create a thick and creamy live 'Greek style yogurt'. This product is made with love and time and contains absolutely no unnecessary ingredients!

**roradairy.co.uk**

**5 CASTLE DAIRIES**
**BUTTER**

Castle Dairies have been crafting award winning butters since 1966 in Caerphilly, South Wales. An independent, family run business, they use only 100% British and natural ingredients to make their deliciously creamy butters and spreadable butters – possibly the best butter in the land! Now stocked throughout the UK, they are the perfect topping on your morning toast, crumpet or bagel.

**castledairies.co.uk**

**6 JUST LIVE A LITTLE**
**GLUTEN-FREE GRANOLAS**

Wholesome gluten-free oats, baked with nature's rich and juicy nuts, fruits and seeds for a taste to be enjoyed by the spoonful, bowlful, or even by the handful. The range has four flavours – each available in 360g resealable, recyclable packaging. They include Maple & Toasted Pecan Granola, Raspberry, Coconut & Cashew Granola, Cocoa & Hazelnut Granola, and Peanut Butter & Apple Granola.

**justlivealittle.com**

**7 DARKWOODS**
**SNOW STONE WINTER BLEND**

Darkwoods' Snow Stone 'winter blend' evokes all the flavours of the season. The fuller roast style adds dark chocolate overtones and a full body. The coffee takes its name from one of the Stanza Stones, a series of poems carved into the rocks in the Pennine Hills. To be enjoyed in front of the fire as the nights draw in and the leaves begin to fall.

**darkwoodscoffee.co.uk**

# TREND WATCH

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# MUSHROOM MANIA

## Rich in flavour as well as nutrients, mushrooms are having their moment

**WHY ARE MUSHROOMS HOT RIGHT NOW?**

Traditionally often overlooked, mushrooms are ticking a lot of boxes – healthy, delicious, hugely versatile and with a natural affinity for wellness-led products.

**WHAT'S ON THE MARKET?**

Unless your head has been firmly stuck in the sand throughout 2025, you will have seen a plethora of mushroom-led products across bricks and mortar and online shelves – with flavour-packed dried mushrooms from the likes of Foresta sharing space with functional lion's mane-infused drinks such as MUUSH, and coffee/cacao and mushroom blends purported to give you a long-term spring in your step.

Bianca Boxley of Norfolk Mushroomery explains, "Mushrooms offer a unique intersection of culinary luxury and functional nutrition. They are flavour packed, nutrient rich, potentially therapeutic and incredibly versatile. They're one of the few foods that satisfy both gourmet tastebuds and health-conscious minds."

Fan Yang, who launched Other Foods as a result of her unending love of mushrooms, has found that while her crunchy seasoned mushroom snacks were created for fun and flavour, the majority of her customers are seeing them as satisfying – and nutrient-packed – alternatives to conventional potato crisps.

**THERE DO SEEM TO BE MORE MUSHROOM VARIETIES IN VEG DISPLAYS NOW, TOO...**

Yes indeed – we're far from the days of a simple choice between button or chestnut mushrooms. Shiitake, chanterelle and portobello mushrooms are all over menus and easily accessible for culinary experimentation at home, while enoki, oyster and morels are adding a touch of natural luxury to the proceedings.

"People are taking a lot more interest in the growing of mushrooms here in the UK and some of them are looking to cultivate mushrooms from wild varieties," explains Will Thorogood, director of Mushroom Man, based in New Covent Garden Market. "The equipment and knowledge have certainly made growing on a smaller scale much easier and this has led to growers beginning to trial many new and interesting varieties of mushrooms."

**WHAT DO THEY BRING TO THE TABLE?**

"Mushrooms have an umami richness as they are naturally high in glutamates which give that savoury flavour that adds depth to any dish; certain varieties like shiitake, porcini and morels are among the prized for their intense flavour," says Bianca. Hugely versatile, they can be cooked in a myriad of ways to bring out their prized flavour and nutrients.

"I believe [their increased popularity] has a lot to do with a move to people moving to a more vegetarian or vegan diet, either full or part time," says Will. "Mushrooms are great alternative in a dish to replace some of the flavour, umami and the 'meaty' texture that you can lose without meat or fish."

**TELL ME MORE ABOUT THEIR NUTRIENT PROFILE...**

"They are virtually fat free and low in calories," explains Bianca. "They are rich in vitamins and minerals and are an excellent source of B vitamins, selenium (a powerful antioxidant), copper (which supports heart and nervous system health), and potassium (which helps regulate blood pressure)." So far, so virtuous. "They also contain compounds known as beta-glucans that help the immune system. Gut and digestive health is another benefit as they are a great source of prebiotic fibre which feeds beneficial gut bacteria while helping digestion and maintaining a balanced microbiome. Mushrooms exposed to UV light produce vitamin D2 making them one of the few plant-based sources of vitamin D – crucial for bone health."

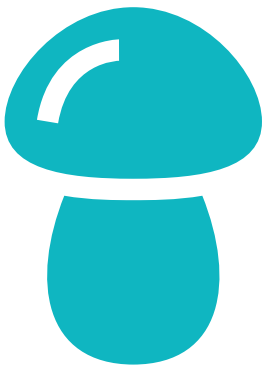
**WHY SO POPULAR IN WELLNESS CIRCLES?**

"Adaptogenic mushrooms such as reishi, cordyceps and lions Mane are increasingly used in wellness circles to support stress management, endurance and mood," says Bianca. "Lions mane is becoming a popular mushroom and is being studied for its potential neuroprotective effects in supporting cognitive function and memory."

While stocking mushroom-packed supplements might be a little out of your comfort zone, do check out blends from the likes of Sixways which provide superfood-packed alternatives to your usual cup of coffee or hot chocolate.

**HOW CAN READERS CATER TO THIS DEMAND?**

"Look at expanding your range of fresh mushrooms to include more of the exotic types of mushrooms such as king oyster, shimeji, enoki, lions mane and cordyceps, and also wild when in season," advises Will. "We are fortunate in the UK with such great wild mushrooms growing here, especially in Scotland through late summer and into autumn. The advantage of wild mushrooms is the European season for many types runs from late summer through to the spring. It's a great seasonal product that is available at a time of the year when there isn't an abundance of exciting UK produce to get excited about!"



"THE UK MUSHROOMS MARKET IS PROJECTED TO WITNESS MIXED GROWTH RATE PATTERNS DURING 2025 TO 2029. THE GROWTH RATE BEGINS AT 2.55% IN 2025, CLIMBS TO A HIGH OF 3.45% IN 2028, AND MODERATES TO 2.74% BY 2029"

> "They're one of the few foods that satisfy both gourmet tastebuds and health-conscious minds"





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**COMMENTATORS**



**SOPHIE ZIEGLER-JONES**
SUMA



**SALLY ASSINDER**
GAROFALO



**ANTONIETTA KELLY**
ITALIAN TRADE AGENCY



**BECKY GILL**
EMILIA'S PASTA

# FOR THE LOVE OF ITALY

## Italian cuisine is adored by Brits – here's why, and how to make the most of this valuable opportunity

For generations, the British public have loved Italian food almost as much as their own... If not more so, some would argue. Pasta with a flavour-filled sauce is without doubt one of the most popular weeknight meals in the UK, but our love affair extends far beyond that. Panettone at Christmas, Italian coffee, Aperol... even the approach that Italians have to food and drink – think family get togethers, warmth and generosity – is appealing to us. All of this adds up to form a particularly valuable opportunity for fine food and drink retailers.

"Italian food remains a cornerstone of UK eating habits. It's comforting, familiar, and rooted in quality ingredients and simple preparation," explains Sophie Ziegler-Jones, comms and PR lead at Suma. "For speciality retailers, it's a category that consistently performs, offering customers trusted flavours with room for premium and ethical differentiation."

Sally Assinder, UK marketing and account manager at Garofalo, agrees. "Italian food represents familiarity and inspiration for UK consumers. It is the cuisine people turn to for something quick, comforting, and universally loved, yet it also provides endless opportunities to elevate everyday cooking. A bowl of pasta can be as simple as supper in 10 minutes or as creative as a restaurant-quality dish at home. At Garofalo, we see pasta as the perfect balance between accessibility and aspiration. It allows consumers to cook confidently while exploring new recipes, regional shapes, and flavour pairings that take their cooking to the next level."

According to Antonietta Kelly, senior trade analyst at the Italian Trade Agency, Italian cuisine represents an attractive lifestyle to British consumers. "For UK shoppers, Italian food represents authenticity, simplicity, and a lifestyle. It is strongly associated with high-quality, fresh ingredients and it is widely regarded as a healthier, more wholesome choice, thanks to its roots in the Mediterranean diet. Italian cuisine has become a staple in British households, not only for its comforting flavours but also for the ease with which its dishes can be prepared at home."

The visibility of Italian chefs in British society plays a key role in the growing awareness and appreciation of Italian food, she continues. "A significant role in the growing popularity of Italian food in the UK has been played by an ever-increasing number of Italian chefs. From well-established names such as Giorgio Locatelli, Francesco Mazzei, and Aldo Zilli, to a new generation of up-and-coming young talents, these chefs have helped bring authentic Italian cuisine to a wider audience through their restaurants, media appearances, cookbooks and culinary events."









## A WHOLESALER'S PERSPECTIVE



Bruno Zoccola, owner of Valentina's Foods, shares his expertise from the front line of Italian food and drink

**WHAT DOES ITALIAN FOOD REPRESENT TO UK CONSUMERS?**

Italian food has always stood for comfort and connection. My parents came to the UK from Italy in the 1950s and built their lives around sharing good food – it was how they stayed connected to home and brought people together. I think that sense of warmth, generosity and authenticity is what still draws people in today.

**HOW IS THIS EVOLVING?**

When we first opened our shop, people knew the basics - spaghetti, Parmesan etc. Now customers are incredibly knowledgeable. They ask for things they know and like, such as Parmigiano Reggiano, or specific regional olive oils. There's a real curiosity about where food comes from and how it's made. It reminds me of Italy itself – where provenance and quality are everything.

**WHAT ARE YOUR BEST-SELLING ITALIAN PRODUCTS YEAR-ROUND?**

Fresh pasta is always top of the list, then there are the classics: we have over 100 cheeses, 70 salumi, 150 wines, and countless pantry staples, all hand-picked by me and my team from small producers across Italy and beyond. Delicious options like Prosciutto Crudo, Gorgonzola and Mortadella are sliced to order, so nothing goes to waste and everything tastes its best. Our olive oils are staples too. My parents always said that if you start with great ingredients, you don't need to do much more: and that's something we've kept true to at Valentina.

**HOW ABOUT SEASONALLY?**

Christmas is always special for us – panettone and pandoro have been part of our shelves since the beginning and we're pretty sure we have the largest collection of panettone in London, ensuring we cater for every taste and dietary requirement- we even have a new Dubai Chocolate flavour this year! In summer, it's all about antipasti – Burrata, marinated artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes, focaccia, and a bottle of wine. Easter brings Colomba cakes and handmade tiramisu. We try to keep those Italian traditions alive at Valentina.

**ARE THERE ANY UNSUNG HEROES THAT DESERVE SOME TIME IN THE SPOTLIGHT?**

I'd say Buffalo Mozzarella. Everyone thinks they know what Mozzarella tastes like from the packs they buy in the supermarket, but true Buffalo Mozzarella is another thing entirely. The flavour is rich and slightly tangy, the texture is creamy and delicate: it's a completely different experience. Once people try the real thing, they never go back!

**HOW SHOULD BRITISH RETAILERS TELL THE STORY OF GREAT ITALIAN PRODUCE?**

Tell the human stories. Every product has a family behind it – just like ours. Retailers can do the same: focus on provenance, simplicity and the brilliant work that the producers do. Let the quality speak for itself.

**WHAT'S IN THE FUTURE FOR THE ITALIAN FOOD SECTOR IN THE UK?**

I think it's heading back to its roots – smaller producers, true regional specialities, and transparency about where things come from. There's huge appreciation for authenticity and for the traditional kind of Italian family values. At Valentina, we'll keep honouring that tradition while showing how Italian food can still evolve and excite new generations.

> "Focus on provenance, simplicity and the brilliant work that the producers do. Let the quality speak for itself"

### Food with heart

Of course, taste has to be the most important factor when it comes to stocking – and enjoying – great Italian food, but story also plays a key role. Consumers are becoming increasingly interested in the regionality of Italy – what produce comes from where, and the stories behind those items – and are willing to pay a premium for food with proven provenance and a story they can connect with.

Another important cornerstone of any high quality product these days is sustainability, with consumers becoming increasingly of its markers. "More than ever, shoppers want to align with brands that reflect environmental and ethical values" says Becky Gill, national account manager at Emilia's Pasta. That includes responsibly sourced wheat, minimal packaging, and shorter supply chains – all of which reduce the product's environmental footprint."

Suma also invests heavily in sustainability to not only support the farmers supplying them, but also cater to the growing demand for genuinely sustainably-produced food. "Suma's Italian range reflects our belief that good food should be done fairly," explains Sophie. "We work with Italian farming co-operatives and small producers who share our values of sustainability and fair pay."

Suma's best-selling Italian products? "Our best-sellers include organic pasta (including gluten-free options), a huge range of tomato products, and conventional and organic olive oil. All everyday staples that deliver consistently on taste and provenance," she says.

### The power of pasta

Pasta is undoubtedly the king of Italian foods in the UK, and the British shopper is becoming increasingly discerning. "The retail pasta sector is undergoing a noticeable shift – from a commoditised pantry staple to a premium, values-driven category. Today's shoppers are far more informed and intentional about what they buy, and pasta is no exception," says Becky.

"It turns everyday meals into something memorable by bringing restaurant-quality into the home. It's affordable luxury – for just a few extra pounds, you get a product made with real craft and heritage. It's a simple way to treat yourself and your family without overspending. Pasta is about more than just food. It's about sharing meals, slowing down, and enjoying the process. We offer a small upgrade that delivers on both quality and experience, without asking consumers to compromise."

"Fine food shoppers are as discerning as ever," agrees Sally. "They still want pasta that delivers exceptional taste and texture, distinctive shapes, and clear provenance. Alongside this, there is a strong trend towards high-fibre and high-protein options. At Garofalo, we see shoppers choosing pasta as the hero of the meal. They are looking for distinct shapes, bronze-drawn texture, and the assured quality of premium durum wheat."

### The value of provenance

"Discerning shoppers are increasingly looking for pasta that offers authenticity, provenance and premium quality – not just a basic



## THE FUTURE OF PASTA

"Consumers continue to move beyond the basics of spaghetti and penne to explore regional specialities such as Mafalda Corta, Paccheri, and Orecchiette, and are actively seeking authentic DOP ingredients," explains Sally. "At the same time, there is growing interest in healthier pasta options such as wholewheat and now high-protein varieties. That balance of health and indulgence is driving real innovation in the category. Garofalo's forthcoming High Protein Pasta, launching in November 2025, reflects this evolution perfectly. It is a truly innovative high-protein pasta made solely from wholewheat, with no additional ingredients added to increase the protein level of the final product. This is made possible through a groundbreaking ingredient developed by one of Garofalo's partners via a specific and advanced milling process."





pantry staple, but a product with real craft and story behind it," Becky explains. "Shoppers are prioritising origin and traceability; they want to know where their food comes from."

"Emilia's retail pasta has been developed specifically with the discerning shopper in mind - someone who values authentic flavour, traditional methods, and sustainable values. Our pasta is produced in the birthplace of dried pasta, by a small facility that honours centuries-old methods. With PGI status, this region guarantees a level of quality and tradition that today's shoppers are actively seeking."

Fine food shoppers are familiar with checking out the backs of packs in the hunt for a short, clean list, and Emilia's Pasta delivers on this front. "Our pasta is made with just two simple, traceable ingredients – 100% Italian durum wheat semolina and water. Both sourced from the Gragnano region, which forms part of our commitment to working with producers who prioritise sustainable farming practises and local supply chains. Our thought-provoking artistic packaging is made from 100% paper, so it is fully recyclable, helping reduce environmental impact without compromising on shelf appeal.

"Even in a cost-conscious climate, consumers are still willing to invest in products that offer genuine quality and a rewarding experience"

## New selling tools

There's an increasing understanding, too, for the artisanal techniques that go into a lot of traditional Italian food and drink. "There's also a growing appreciation for artisanal techniques

*"We're proud to offer a slice of Italy in the Suffolk countryside"*



**Jack Wolff-Evans of Reuben's in Melton, Suffolk, brings his team's foodie excitement and hunger for Italian discoveries to a loyal audience**

The team at Reuben's has always been hugely inspired by Italian delis and larger destinations like Eataly, and we wanted to bring the products that had previously only been available in London to Suffolk. We work directly with a lot of suppliers who we meet at trade shows, and their excitement and passion rubs off on us; we're proud to be offering a little slice of Italy tucked away in the Suffolk countryside, in some cases selling products that haven't even reached London yet. We even sell an olive oil made by a local family who have an olive farm in Italy.

We don't have a lot of space to play with, but our Italian section is the largest we have because there's such a demand for it – people get excited about spending a little more on an artisanal pasta and sauce; it doesn't cost a lot, but it's a meal they look forward to preparing and eating.

Alongside incredible pastas and sauces, we sell jarred vegetables like slow-cooked aubergines and peppers, and really lovely sun dried tomatoes – plus indulgences like cannolis and Italian chocolates.

We're a team of food lovers, so we make sure to quality test each of the products we sell – if something on our shelves is four or five times the cost of what someone can get in the supermarket, we have to be able to justify that. It would be awful for a customer to spend that money then be disappointed by the experience when they get home.

> "We're a team of food lovers, so everything is quality-tested"



## STOCK CHECK




**FALCONE ITALIAN SOFT AMARETTI**

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

**holleysfinefoods.com**




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**rosolioitalicus.com**




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**cottagedelight.co.uk**



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Bring the flavour of Italy to a huge number of dishes, from grilled meat and fish to pasta and sauces. Fully adjustable, this blend includes rosemary, sage, bay, basil, marjoram and thyme.

**drogheria.com**




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**eatrealsnacks.com**




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**familigiacrispino.shop**




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**COOKS & CO GRILLED ZUCCHINI ROLLS**

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**cooksandco.co.uk**



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**dalter.co.uk**

like bronze-die extrusion and slow drying, which are known to improve both texture and flavour," says Becky. "Taste and performance are something serious home cooks are looking for; they want pasta that cooks beautifully al dente and holds sauce well."

"We use bronze dies to shape the pasta, giving it that signature rough texture that helps sauces cling beautifully. The pasta is then slow-dried at low temperatures, preserving the wheat's flavour and nutritional integrity – a process rarely used in mass-market pasta."

Health also plays a role. "Clean, high-quality ingredients are also high on the list of priorities," says Becky. "People are reading labels more carefully now and are drawn to short ingredient lists – no additives or shortcuts."

### A bright future

"The future for Italian food in the UK is bright and diverse," says Sally. "Italian food continues to be one of the UK's most trusted and loved cuisines, but shoppers are increasingly seeking greater depth of experience, regionality, and modern convenience. At Garofalo, we believe the next chapter will be about authenticity combined with innovation, staying true to centuries-old Italian milling and pasta-making methods while adapting formats, packaging, and communication for today's consumer."

"Independent retailers play a crucial role in promoting authentic Italian food," says Antonietta. "They should offer their customers a more immersive experience through product tastings, insightful stories about origin and tradition, and personalised preparation tips. This hands-on, educational approach helps preserve the true essence of Italian culinary culture and builds a deeper connection between consumers and the products they buy."

"The future of Italian Food and drink in the UK is very promising as the interest towards our country is not abating with millions of British tourists visiting Italy every year and discovering new regions and their food specialities."

## IN NUMBERS

### Data from the Italian Trade Agency

The United Kingdom remains a key market for Italian food and soft drinks export.

In 2024, the total export value reached nearly £4 billion, marking a +2.39% increase compared to the previous year. In terms of volume, Italy exported approximately 1.8 million tonnes of goods to the UK, remaining stable with no significant change from 2023.

The positive trend has continued into the first half of 2025. From January to June, exports reached almost £2 billion, up +3.19% year-on-year. Export volumes also grew slightly to 918 million tonnes, representing a +1.41% increase over the same period in 2024.

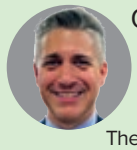
Top Italian products exported to the UK:

- Pasta
- Olive Oil
- Tomato products
- Charcuterie
- Cheeses
- Vinegars

"IN **2024**, THE TOTAL **EXPORT** VALUE REACHED NEARLY **£4 BILLION**, MARKING A **+2.39%** INCREASE **COMPARED** TO THE PREVIOUS **YEAR**"



## DISTRIBUTOR INSIGHT



Gianfranco Perri, founder of CEO of Just Gourmet Foods, shares his take on the role of Italian food in the UK market

These days, there's a lot of eating at home because restaurants have become so expensive – even casual dining. This means that people are looking for treats at home, a restaurant quality meal which offers the key components people see as being authentically Italian: natural and fresh, with a focus on family.

I set up Just Gourmet Foods because I saw a gap in the market for high end, authentic retail products for the UK market. Italy simply has the fundamentals of great food, including a great climate which is optimum for producing high quality ingredients, so I focused on family-run enterprises which produce authentic food from their regions.

With just a few ingredients you can have a really good meal that's not overly expensive, and you don't need to be hugely skilled in the kitchen to get a good result. This is where quality comes in – a beautiful passata doesn't need much added to it to make a delicious sauce, just some olive oil, herbs and seasoning, and that's because the tomatoes used to make it were grown in natural sunlight and not in greenhouses so they're perfectly ripe and sweet, and have been cooked down to the perfect consistency and flavour.

The tomatoes in that passata will have been cared for like babies, and that's why authentic Italian food is so great – there's passion and mastery built in. Bakers, butchers, baristas... they're all experts in what they do and can turn their hand to anything in their craft, because they make it their life – not like the mainstream food scene in the UK. The value of food is held higher in Italy across the board.

Appearance is also hugely important, and a vital aspect of the products I work with. The magic of Italian food and drink is that its packaging can tell a story and evoke happy memories – of time with family, of holidays – and this is an invaluable selling tool. People buy with their eyes, and this means a beautiful product is less likely to sit in the cupboard.

Plus, the fact that you need less of a quality ingredient for it to stand out in a dish means that customers shouldn't be shy about spending a little more money on a good quality product. We're happy to support retailers with tastings, as we recognise that there can be a jump in price between the Italian staples customers might be used to buying from the supermarket and the premium items we're selling.

"People are looking for treats at home, a restaurant quality meal which offers the key components people see as being authentically Italian: natural and fresh, with a focus on family"

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*"Sustainable cheese choices for a truly real Christmas"*



**JAMES GRANT**
NO2 POUND STREET

As the festive season approaches, our tables fill with familiar comforts, the sparkle of lights, the pop of corks, and, of course, the glorious sight of a well-built cheese board. But as we gather around the table this year, there's a growing awareness that how we fill that board matters more than ever. The way our food is produced, the land it comes from, the animals behind it, and the people who craft it all have a lasting impact far beyond Christmas Day.

Across the country, more people are rethinking what they eat and where it comes from. The rise of sustainable, ethical, and agroecological food production has shown that flavour and responsibility can go hand in hand. For too long, the industrial food system has promised cheapness at the expense of quality and care. Synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and monocropping have stripped life from farmland, damaged wildlife, and compromised soil health. The result is a food culture detached from nature and the people who nurture it.

Thankfully, a quiet revolution is underway. A new generation of cheesemakers and farmers is proving that better ways are possible, approaches that nourish the soil, respect animals, and sustain communities. This Christmas, your cheese board can be part of that movement, and this month's topic is on sustainable cheese choices for a truly real Christmas.

Take Stonebeck Dairy in Nidderdale, Yorkshire. They produce a truly seasonal raw milk Wensleydale, using milk only from their own small herd that grazes the land as nature intended. Every decision on their farm, from herd size to pasture management, is guided by harmony with the landscape. There's no push for expansion, only care and respect for the land that gives their cheese its distinct, authentic flavour. Each bite is a reminder that the best cheese comes from balance, patience, and love of place.

In the South Downs, Brett Sacks at Slow Grown Farm follows a similarly thoughtful path. He uses only raw milk and even creates his own starter culture, an increasingly rare craft in modern cheesemaking. Brett farms entirely without chemical fertilizers or pesticides, allowing natural cycles to support his land and animals. His herd is small, around 20 cattle, but his impact is immense. The byproducts from his cheesemaking feed his heritage pigs, creating a closed loop system where nothing is wasted. It's cheesemaking in complete harmony with nature.

At a recent Stiff Milk event, a platform I cofounded with comedian Marcus Brigstocke to celebrate real cheese and its makers, the respected cheesemaker Roger Longman of White Lake Cheese described Brett's cheese as "the best I've ever eaten." That kind of praise speaks volumes about the craftsmanship and integrity behind these small-scale producers.

This spirit of authenticity is what inspired me to found The Real Cheese Project just over a year ago. Its purpose is simple: to champion real cheese and help educate people about why their choices matter. Every cheese we buy is a vote for the kind of farming we want to see in the world. The Real Cheese Project celebrates those who make cheese from the ground up, from soil to animal to plate, and invites everyone to reconnect with the true value of what they eat.

Supporting small producers isn't just a gesture of goodwill; it's a stand for quality, community, and sustainability. Independent cheesemongers across the country champion these makers because they believe in real food. When you buy from a local shop, you're helping to sustain an entire network, from farmers and affineurs to local delivery drivers and small-batch condiment makers.

And it's at these shops that Christmas really comes alive. At No2 Pound Street, our queue for cheese stretches down the street in the weeks before Christmas, but no one complains. There's warmth, conversation, and laughter. People share recommendations, taste samples, and enjoy the anticipation of taking home something genuinely brilliant, cheese chosen for its story, integrity, and flavour.

So this Christmas, think about where your cheese comes from. Choose flavour born from healthy soil, raw milk, and good farming. Ask your cheesemonger about the farms behind the counter. Support those who are farming gently, regeneratively, and with care for the land. Every cheese you serve, every board you build, tells a story of good farming, good people, and good food. In a season built around giving and loving and reflection, what better gift could there be than that?

# 'The UK needs to back raw milk cheese'

**Is your counter looking a little different this autumn? Cheesemongers and deli counter managers across the UK are feeling the squeeze as many of the Continental cheeses (from France and Italy) they once relied on have been banned from import by rules around Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD).**



Not only has this reduced choice and the availability of staunch customer favourites, but it puts pressure on Britain's own cheesemakers, who may be left to pick up the pieces as retailers look to local producers to fill the gaps.

Someone who's been very vocal about the impact of LSD import bans and the implications going forward for raw milk cheeses made both here and overseas, is La Fromagerie founder, Patricia Michaelson, who is concerned the future of these varieties is at real risk.

Restrictions, such as those imposed by the Government in the wake of LSD, are forcing cheesemakers to rethink whether they should use raw milk at all. And some makers who were entirely raw, have abandoned this ethos as they've grown – especially if they're seeking to export into other markets where raw milk cheese is banned.

"There's definitely been a change in attitude," Patricia told *Speciality Food*. "And this whole LSD problem has brought it to the fore. If Defra or the agricultural department of the Government feel that they can implement a system where they say, for no reason at all (because this is a skin problem, nothing to do with the milk), certain cheeses cannot be sold, despite the WOAH website and French Government saying otherwise, I think that's wrong!

"Canada has also banned raw milk cheese for no other reason than to say, 'we don't think raw milk not treated above 40°C is safe'. Why? They say thermised milk around 50°C is safe, but that still has bacteria in it. I think our Government will go after everything made with raw milk now. In 10 years' time, I don't think we'll see raw milk cheese coming into the UK."

Patricia has written to the Port Authority and APHA's issue resolution team, looking for answers about raw milk imports, to no success. "How can they allow thermised milk that's not fully pasteurised to be OK, and not raw milk?"

At La Fromagerie, raw milk has been an important part of the offering for 35 years. "I think it's the healthiest cheese possible," Patricia explained. "Like Parmesan. It's a long, slow ageing process with raw milk. As it ages the lactose goes out, and the bacteria that are left are good, because they've been fighting the bad bacteria. It's a superfood of proteins, calcium, vitamins and minerals, but also the bacteria your gut needs."

Should raw milk cheeses be written off by our Government in the future, Patricia says it will dramatically change the cheesemongering landscape. "We're starting to see it now with the lack of cheese people are able to get. They're trying similar ones to follow the criteria, but they don't taste the same. I usually have a lovely Dongé Brie. The people I get it from have a pasteurised version because they sell to the States. It's a very nice cheese, but for me, personally, it's nothing like the complexity of the raw milk cheese. It's the equivalent of buying sourdough from the supermarket or going to E5 Bakery – the difference is in the taste!"

Patricia is hoping for the best, and says when French and Italian raw milk cheeses become available again, she'll have a huge celebration. In the meantime, she won't stop talking about them, and hopes other cheesemongers who share her passion will be emboldened to lobby and push as hard as she is for their return.

"It's important for us to rally together. Nobody's being as blunt as me, which is a shame. I will keep writing in and making a fuss. After all, raw milk is tested much more rigorously because of the fact it's raw. If a cheese goes through a process and nothing has shown up in its profiles, what's the problem?"

Discussions should be ongoing around the future of raw cheesemaking in this country too. "Cheesemakers, if they want to carry on having raw milk cheese, need to speak up," Patricia added. "They need to question the regulations all the time. The more people talk, the more the Government should take notice!"

# Ruby Mist relaunches




**Fruity, savoury, creamy and mature – Ruby Mist is back. Snowdonia Cheese Co has revived and relaunched its waxed cheese in a new collaboration with renowned Port producer, Graham's – independently owned by the Symington family since 1970.**

The handcrafted artisan Cheddar is now infused with Graham's Late Bottled Vintage Port, produced using grapes harvested in the heart of Portugal's Douro Valley, and aged for five years in seasoned wooden casks.

Unfolding slowly, the rich fruitiness of the spirit enhances the flavour of the cheese, while an added dash of French brandy brings a gentle, lingering warmth.

It's available to speciality retailers now.

# Cheesemaker wins 50 awards in two years

**The team at Golden Hooves are celebrating the regenerative cheesemaker's Vintage Cheddar being named UK Supreme Champion at the Global Cheese Awards for the second time.**

One of the biggest prizes in the industry, the trophy takes Golden Hooves' tally up to 50 individual awards, with accolades having been bestowed by Great Taste, the British & Irish Cheese Awards, International Cheese & Dairy Awards, Virtual Cheese Awards and others.

Golden Hooves' co-op has also been honoured with the King's Award for Enterprise for Sustainable Development – testament to the hard work that's gone on behind the scenes since the brand launched two years ago.

Director, Leona McDonald, said of the most recent win, "It's been an incredible couple of years for Golden Hooves, but this award really stops us in our tracks – we're thrilled! More and more people want food that's better for the planet without giving up the joy of proper cheese, and that's exactly what we're all about." She continued, "This trophy is a lovely reminder that you don't have to choose between flavour and farming that restores the land. We've got the cheese – and the butter, crackers and other treats – to prove it."




# Britain's Best New Cheese announced

**Four new British cheeses were pitted against one another last month in The Real Cheese Project's People's Cheese competition.**

Cheeses lovers purchased boxes containing the finalist cheeses (as chosen in previous rounds), sampling them at home alongside a livestream, hosted by The Real Cheese Project co-founder James Grant, and self-professed cheese addict, comedian Marcus Brigstoke.

Of those tasted – including Yr Afr from Wacky Wedge, Nanny Gwynn from Cornish Cheese Co, and Ooh La La from Highland Fine Cheeses – it was Stone Tree Dairy's Redlap that came out victorious, being named Britain's Best New Cheese.

Helen Boyd, co-founder of the dairy in Dartmouth, South Devon, told Speciality Food she and her husband Martin were thrilled by the announcement.

"My husband always wanted to make cheese," Helen said. "He finished his job with a tech company, so the timing felt perfect. At the time we lived in Wiltshire, where the countryside is fantastic, but we couldn't find the kind of farm we were looking for. Then this one came up."

The couple moved in 2020 and invested heavily in building a dairy from scratch, milking for the first time late last spring, and launching their first cheeses at Dartmouth Food Festival in October 2024 – all made with raw milk from the farm's own grass-fed goats.

Of their range of four (which includes soft cheeses and a feta-style) it's Redlap that won the hearts of the public this autumn.

Crafted in an Alpine style, it's turned and washed twice a week and aged for a minimum of five months up to around 10 months.

"We're really pleased with it, because it's exactly what we set out to make," added Helen. "Everyone told us we couldn't make a goats' milk Alpine cheese because the milk can't be heated to the same extent as cow's milk. But as soon as we heard that, we wanted to try it. It works well. It's so nice to be able to show you can make things other than soft white cheese with goats' milk. Those varieties are great, and will always have a really important place on the cheeseboard, but I think, at the moment, there's a perception you can do lots of things with cow's milk and not with goats' and that's not necessarily the case."



Of the award, Helen continued, "It's been remarkable. We've got a great team we've built up over the year, and we're incredibly proud of them. It's really fantastic for us. What's been so gratifying has been the amount of support we've had both from consumers and local cheesemongers and delis who've championed our cheeses."



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PETER'S YARD



# NEW CHEESEMONGER 101

Are you new to the art of serving cheese, or just learning the ropes? Here, specialist cheese retailers tell us what they wish they'd have known at the beginning of their careers

Standing behind the cheese counter for the first time can be overwhelming. So many products to understand and learn. Customers asking questions (many of which you may not initially know how to answer). Processes and procedures to go through.

All that expertise will come with time and training. But alongside that training, there are other things you can be thinking about and discovering along the way to bolster your new career in cheese.

Cheesemongers (some stalwarts and others new to the industry) tell us what they wish they'd thought about when they were learning the ropes.

### VICTORIA DUNTHORNE
VICTORIA'S CHEESE

"For newbies, I'd say it's never too early to prep for Christmas. Make sure your consumables are well stocked up, and don't be afraid to pre-order with suppliers before they necessarily ask you!

"Also, think about slightly reducing your range to make space for increases in volume. Rather than five different Cheddars, just have three for Christmas.

"And, if someone has already mentioned Christmas, the first year is your 'school year', when you get to know your customer base and what sells well in your community. I swore I wouldn't sell waxed cheeses, but I now have Snowdonia Rock Star in the fridge every week as it sells well and people love it. Remember, you are running a business, not an ego trip."

### STEPHEN FLEMING
GEORGE & JOSEPH

"One thing that springs to mind is less about cheese, and more about the shop. Put everything on wheels so you can rearrange the shop, which makes it easier for cleaning and reconfiguring when you might want to lay things out differently throughout the year.

"Also, get out and meet cheesemakers. I discovered my first range this way. I'd speak to one cheesemaker, and they'd say, 'go and speak to this person', then they'd recommend someone else. I came across cheeses I wouldn't have found otherwise."

### CHARLIE TURNBULL
CHEESE EXPERT

"Purely on the cheese front, I would have liked to have learned more about the condition of cheese earlier on. I accepted too quickly the often very positive assurance from wholesalers they could get any cheese to me within two days. But I needed to figure out how I wanted MY Caerphilly or Montgomery. To narrow down what my customI wish I'd done my WSET at the same time as studying cheese for two reasons. Firstly, it is a very good way to learn and understand what goes together. And then, there's the opportunity of selling wine and cheese together, which can push your turnover up 20-30%. You'd need to be good in both, and have the same patter, confidence and joie de vivre.
ers wanted and my 'house cheeses'. If you go to Paxton & Whitfield and La Fromagerie and taste a Monty, they each have their own version. They've invested in those relationships, and customers get attached to their variant of the cheese. Knowing what you're choosing, and being deliberate, makes you a better cheesemonger."

### PETER DAVIS
CHEESE AND BEES

"You need to learn the stories behind the cheese. Customers love hearing about the maker, the farm or the animals. It also builds your confidence. And don't be afraid to say, 'I don't know'. Honesty builds trust, and you can always go and find out. Learning never stops. Taste constantly. You can't recommend confidently if you don't know the cheese personally.

"I'd also say, find mentors and friends in the industry. There's a wealth of knowledge among makers and mongers, and most love to share. It's such a friendly industry, and everyone wants the best for everyone else."

### JESSICA SUMMER
MOUSE & GRAPE

"If you can, get hands on experience working in a cheesemonger for six months to a year, ideally through a Christmas season. It's the busiest time of year, and you'll learn so much – from stock management to handling customers under pressure.

"Also, invest in your learning. The Academy of Cheese is a brilliant foundation. I'd recommend going up to Level 2, pairing that with HACCP training.

"Visit as many cheesemongers and producers as you can. Seeing different ways of working and tasting a wide range of cheeses is invaluable. And visit a dairy and cheesemaker before you start too. It will help you to talk about and describe the cheeses."

### SVETLANA KUKHARCHUK
THE CHEESE LADY

"Listen closely to your customers and engage with them in the way they want to engage. If they'd like to browse quietly, let them; if they're chatty, have a conversation. Pay close attention to their likes and dislikes rather than focusing on the cheeses you personally love. The goal is to make the experience all about them, not about you.

"You should also be hyperaware of soft cheese dates. Don't assume everyone else is keeping track as carefully as you might. Create systems that help ensure soft cheeses are sold as they reach their peak ripeness, so nothing goes to waste and customers enjoy them at their best."

### NICOLA AND DARREN KELLAR
ALL IN A PICKLE

"When we started, we asked our cheese supplier for help, striking up a good relationship from day dot. They came to the shop and showed us how to display the cheeses in the counter. We also visited suppliers, and were shown how to cut the cheeses properly. So, basically cement a good lasting relationship with all your suppliers is important.

"The other most important tip? Steer away from anything a supermarket stocks. Make it unique."

### CHRISTOPHE BONNEAU
THE CHEESE SHOP, BRADFORD UPON AVON

"Make sure that you know what you are selling. Product knowledge is key to your success. Always present a good display, as your customers will buy with their eyes first, and offer plenty of choice and samples. I think you should give advice on pairing cheese with other food or drinks too. This will help you upselling other products.

"And remember, different cheese will sell better than others at certain times of the year, so make sure that you are prepared for the demand."

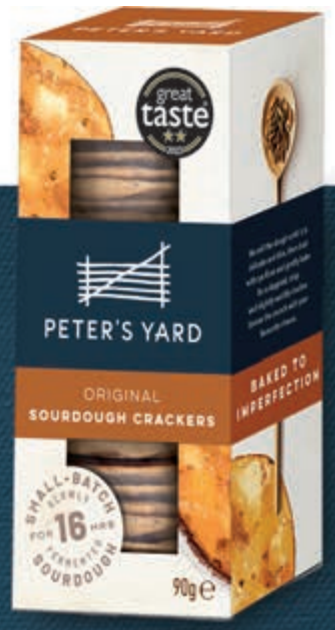
> "It's such a friendly industry, and everyone wants the best for everyone else"



PETER'S YARD

IT ALL RESTS ON A GREAT CRACKER

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



# SAVOUR THE FLAVOUR OF BLUE CHEESE

It's a cheeseboard must-have and a hero cooking ingredient. *Speciality Food* discovers how to select and store blue cheese, and what consumers are looking for

**COMMENTATORS**



**DYLAN FOURIE**
MACKNADE



**CHARLIE TURNBULL**
CHEESE EXPERT



**STEPHEN FLEMING**
GEORGE & JOSEPH



**DOMINIQUE DELACOUR**
TOM WALKER & SONS



**BILL MATHIESON**
CLAWSON FARMS



**CAROLINE BELL**
SHEPHERDS PURSE



**EMILY DAVIES**
DORSET BLUE VINNY



**BEN STANSFIELD**
THE CORNISH CHEESE CO



**MARTIN TKALEZ**
PEVENSEY CHEESE



**NED PALMER**
AUTHOR AND CHEESE EXPERT



Blue cheese is a marvel. A miracle even. Its existence is thought to be entirely down to happenstance – legend of yore telling that it was discovered when a piece of cheese was unwittingly left in a damp cave, developing mottled blue veining, and taking on entirely new characteristics.

Our cheeseboards would be far less exciting without this discovery. Devoid of the piquancy, umami-ness and spice blue delivers. And of the creamy nature of these varieties, created over time as the penicillium roqueforti breaks down and softens the paste.

As Caroline Bell, co-owner of Yorkshire's Shepherds Purse, says, it's a cornerstone of the cheese landscape, representing both tradition and innovation. Especially here in the UK. "Britain has some of the world's most iconic blue cheeses, from Stilton with its PDO status to the wave of artisan blues, like ours."

Unlike Cheddar or even Cheshire, what people forget, says cheese expert Charlie Turnbull, is that blue cheese is a relatively new thing. "Up until around 100 years ago, outside of Roquefort and Bleu d'Auvergne in France, Dorset in the UK and Italy's Gorgonzola, blue cheese really was unusual. They were a rare phenomenon. Go back 150 years ago and you wouldn't encounter them outside where they were made. Up until the 1920s to 1950s we didn't see the introduction of moulds to blue cheeses at all. They were from the natural cracking of the cheese and active encouragement. If you look back at Dorset Blue Vinny, they would run horse harnesses in the vat, which sounds disgusting now, but this is why blue cheeses were such difficult animals," Charlie explains. "It really is very recent that it's been mastered by cheesemakers."

There are three styles of blue cheese, Charlie says, and wise cheesemongers should aim to offer at least one of each, enabling them to appeal to a wider range of shoppers.

"You have the Gorgonzola style, the Stilton style and the Roquefort style. Roquefort is soft in nature and the mould presents in little pockets, like mini caves. Then in softer varieties, like Gorgonzola, the mould runs in vertical veins, sometimes breaking out. And in Stilton the blue is much more widespread, like webs. It crawls between the cracks of the curds. All lovely."

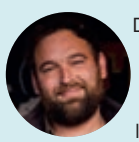
## An ode to Europe

While Britain is rightly proud of its stalwart blues, the traditional blue cheeses of continental Europe bring added pizzaz and intrigue to the counter, says author, cheese expert, and ambassador to the EU's *More Than Only Food & Drink* campaign, Ned Palmer.

"Spicy, fondant-textured sheep's milk Roquefort leads them all, and has a venerable history. It received the first ever product protection in the form of a royal charter from King Charles VI of France in 1407, and was the first cheese to

## TAKE CARE

### Look after blue cheese with these expert tips:



Dylan Fourie, deli manager at Macknade says you should leave as little of the cheese exposed as possible to prevent it drying out. "And keep blue cheeses in their own section as they can permeate the flavour of other cheeses."



"If your fridge is getting full at Christmas, the salad chiller is the best place for it," says Stephen Fleming, owner of George & Joseph.




## SOMETHING OLD, **SOMETHING NEW**

**Blue cheese is undoubtedly going through a revolution, as existing fans ask their cheesemongers, 'what's new?', and younger and newer blue cheese consumers dip their toes into the category for the first time – many using it in cooking to soften its edges a little**

Across the UK, there's a strong heritage of blue cheesemaking, and in turn that's inspired today's modern makers.

While Stilton is rightly heralded as one of Britain's epicurean gems, did you know that our oldest blue cheese has a history stretching back around 300 years?

Dorset Blue Vinny was revived by Michael Davies 50 years ago. His daughter, Emily Davies, who runs the business today, says, "It was a cheese made in nearly every farmhouse in Dorset, and it was rumoured to be Thomas Hardy's favourite. With the onset of the Milk Marketing Board, when farmers could make a better price for their milk, they didn't leave any milk for their wives, who were the ones traditionally making cheese – consequently Dorset Blue Vinny died out."

Later, as milk buying changed, Emily jokes that her dad was annoyed by getting up every day to milk his cows for products nobody wanted. "He had originally trained as a cheesemaker, and decided maybe he ought to think about making cheese. We are right on the cusp of big Cheddar making, so he knew he didn't want to make Cheddar, so thought, 'how about Dorset Blue Vinny'?"

Off he went to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food where the recipe was held. "He got his sticky mitts on it, bought a second-hand vat, and started making it in the garage at the end of the farmhouse."

Emily's mother, naturally, didn't approve of her husband maturing the cheese in their home. "The walls were turning blue. My mum said, 'Michael, this isn't happening in my pantry, let's be off with you!' He got addicted and converted one of the old cow barns, where we still make it today."

The team use milk from the farm's own herd of 280 Holstein-Friesian cows to produce the cheese – the liquid travelling only 80 yards from the milking parlour to the cheesemaking vat. It's matured for 15 to 20 weeks, with the PGI cheese being, "a brilliant introduction to blue", says Emily. "It's got such a delicate veining pattern and is lovely and creamy."

A newer range of cheeses to come about from the milk price crash of the late 90s is the variety from The Cornish Cheese Co, founded by Philip and Carol Stansfield.

Philip realised there wasn't a blue cheese in Cornwall at the time, and wanted to steer away from Stilton styles, says his son Ben, today the business's head of sales and marketing. After a two-day cheesemaking course in 2000, and a day with an instructor, Philip set out to create a smooth, creamy, European-style blue. A year later, Cornish Blue was born.

Crafted in open vats, and hand-cut, moulded, salted, pierced and packed, the cheese is matured between 10 to 12 weeks and designed to be eaten young, so it isn't dominated by a blue punch. "I tell customers it's a fantastic option for people that swear they don't like blue cheese," Ben says. "We really enjoy in-person tasting and being able to win people around. For them to admit they've been converted!"

As a modern dairy, The Cornish Cheese Co isn't defined by many generations of heritage, which, says Ben, makes it more agile and adaptive to consumer demand. As a result, many of the maker's cheeses, including its blue, have been designed with contemporary tastes in mind.

During lockdown, Ben says they became more conscious that consumers were being drawn to softer, creamy cheeses, but also towards locally-made versions of their Continental favourites. "We have seen a shift of customers wanting these types of cheeses made with local produce, supporting small

> "Younger customers, who once might have taught blue was 'too much', are becoming far more open to it – especially when shown quick, tasty ways to use it in everyday meals"
>
> **CAROLINE BELL, SHEPHERDS PURSE**

get a modern AOC in 1925 – now recognised internationally as the PDO designation."

Italy is justifiably famous for its cow's milk Gorgonzola, Ned adds, while Spain, "has the rustic, farmy, mouth-tingling Cabrales, traditionally wrapped in maple leaves and aged in caves in the Picos de Europa mountains. All of these cheeses, with their long and rich traditions, have PDO status."

These countries, Ned continues, have not let tradition get in the way of innovation, with modern, new-wave blue cheeses found in all of them.

Experimentation is on the rise in the EU, Ned says, picking out Italy, where flavoured blues are bang on trend at the moment. "One example is Tatie, from Veneto in Northeastern Italy – a cow's milk cheese softened and sweetened with mascarpone, with bitterness and zing from the addition of a local Vermouth. Innovation paid off: Tatie won a Super Gold in the 2023 and 2024 World Cheese Awards."

Northern Europe is less known for its traditional blues, but cheesemakers here are catching up fast, Ned explains. "Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany is home to Friesisch, or Friesland Blue – a cow's milk cheese with a blushing pink washed-rind which adds a gentle note of funk to the rich spicy paste. Norway won best cheese in the world at the 2016 World Cheese Awards for its Kraftkar – a cow's milk whose spicy intensity is mellowed with its creamy texture and sweet flavour. And Sweden has a number of charmingly named blues, including Vera, a sweet-tasting sheep's milk with a soft texture and a gentle herbaceous note."




### How to choose blue cheese

Pay attention and listen to cheese when you're buying, says Charlie. As a rule, look for cheeses where the mould is blue to blue-green, not pale aquamarine. "People often forget to look at the curd. If it's very white it will be too acidic and young. Blue moulds have the job of breaking down the cheese into something creamier. Take them too young and you could encounter a lack of flavour, sourness and, in some cases, bitterness."

Besides checking the 'blueness' of blue cheeses, Stephen Fleming, founder of George & Joseph, says you need to inspect their condition. "You can tell a lot about blue cheeses, like Stilton, by the rind," he explains. "We've had instances in the past where the rind is falling away from the cheese. That's a clear sign something's not right. And when I cut into the cheese, I expect the paste to be bright, with a good distribution of blue veining or marbling. Sometimes we've opened a cheese and there's not been any blue." On these occasions, don't be afraid to go back to your supplier, he urges. "It's OK to flag it up!"

### What do today's consumers want?

Blue cheese, it has to be said, is undergoing a bit of a revival at the moment. Alongside soft goats' and sheep's milk cheeses, we're seeing a number of new blues coming onto the market as consumers seek out more interesting flavour profiles.

Without a doubt, the most runaway success within speciality cheese at the moment is being seen in softer, creamier blues, made in a Continental style.

"We've found, no matter which feature blue cheese we recommend the most, consistent sales are from our Gorgonzola Dolce," says Dylan Fourie, deli manager at Macknade, adding that Stilton comes in at a close second, "as it still offers a slightly crumbly and creamy texture and isn't too overpowering."

Blue cheese is "inspiring confidence" with consumers, agrees Caroline, who is seeing consumer trends shifting. "Younger customers, who once might have taught blue was 'too much', are becoming far more open to it – especially when shown quick, tasty ways to use it in everyday meals. A little crumble on a salad, stirred through pasta, or melted on a burger. It's these small wins for flavour that help people fall in love with blue."

Shepherds Purse's biggest seller, she says, is Yorkshire Blue, first developed by her mum, Judy, in the 90s. "Creamy, mellow and beautifully balanced, it's the perfect introduction to blue cheese, while also being loved by those who enjoy a softer style."

Dominique Delacour, head of UK marketing at Tom Walker & Sons, says the business is experiencing high demand for blue cheeses that combine flavour and convenience. "Smaller formats that help preserve quality are performing well," she adds, "particularly when tied to provenance and heritage – factors that remain key for today's more discerning customer."

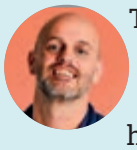
Dominique agrees that softer blues, such as Cambozola and Montagnolo, are leading the charge, driving much of the category's momentum. Tom Walker & Sons saw its sales in these products uplift by 18% between June and August this year, compared to 2024. "Their creamier texture makes them approachable and versatile, appealing to consumers who may be hesitant about stronger styles, but still want depth of flavour."

Montagnolo is a strong performer for both Dylan (who calls it a 'gateway blue') and Stephen, who adds that it's one of George & Joseph's biggest sellers, apart from at Christmas when scooping Gorgonzola ramps up in demand. "We scoop it into pots, so you get this fantastic bit of theatre at the counter. As soon as one person does it, everyone else wants it as well!"

Latching on to the concept of softer blues are Gen Z, who are tentatively stepping into the blue cheese world. Clawson Farms, as part of its five-point business strategy, is heavily putting focus on building brand loyalty with these younger cheese consumers, says CEO Bill Mathieson.

In addition to working with influencers such as Aidy Smith (who created a Stilton cocktail that went viral on socials), Bill says the maker is launching new 50g packs to encourage experimentation. "We are also looking at how we evolve our recipe. We've done quite a bit of work in the last year or so to make it a little bit creamier and to dull the strength back a bit without doing

## A WHOLESALER'S PERSPECTIVE



**Tim Collings, national sales manager at Rowcliffe, agrees with our other experts that the modern palate is craving a creamier, milder blue, and the wholesaler has seen an increase in sales of this style in the last 12 months**

Three big hitters for the business, he says, are:

- **Isle of Wight Blue** - Covered in blue, green, grey and white mould this soft blue cheese starts out with a relatively mild blue flavour which develops a spiky blue flavour profile as it matures. This blue will stand out on any cheeseboard.
- **Grand Noir** – A luscious and creamy premium blue cheese aged in black wax. Grand Noir has a punchy blue flavour with an incomparably smooth consistency and extraordinary mouthfeel. A truly versatile cheese that works just as well on a salad of pears and walnuts.
- **Cashel Blue** – They recently received their second 3 Star Great Taste Award. This Irish blue classic cheese is not to be missed. It's creamy yet crumbly and so versatile it works well sprinkled over a salad or melted into soup.

businesses, and lowering their carbon footprint as a consumer, which is great news for British cheesemakers. Now more than ever, it's important to protect our local economies, and if we can do more for the planet at the same time, that's even better."

One of Britain's newest cheeses, Pevensey Blue, is fast becoming a cheesemonger favourite, raved about by the likes of award-winning affineur and head of cheese at Rennet & Rind, Perry Wakeman.

Pevensey Cheese was founded in 2020 by Martin and Hazel Tkalez, who wanted to get out of London to raise a family. Hazel comes from farming stock (in beef and lamb), and her parents just happened to live next to an organic dairy farm.

There was an opportunity, Martin says, to transform two bays of an old barn at Hazel's parents' farm into cheesemaking facilities. And it wasn't long before Martin and Hazel struck up a business plan with their neighbours, David and Marion.

The couple had the ideal background to get started – Hazel in food sales and Martin having worked in retail at Neal's Yard Dairy for 15 years. "We both love cheese," he smiles.

They settled on blue cheese because, "we love Stilton, it's our favourite thing to eat," says Martin, "and other people told us it's really hard ot make a soft blue cheese. As they say, fools rush in where angels dare to tread. Lots of people told us not to make a soft blue!"

Martin says they weren't put off, trying to create, from the start, something with a buttery texture that looks beautiful and is complex. After five years they believe they've got the make right, crafting it daily in small batches using organic milk (delivered from only five minutes away) from British pedigree Friesians, with 4-5% added Ayrshire milk which brings extra fat and creaminess to the make. Around 95% of the animals' feed is from their farm, supplemented by organic rations. In warmer weather, the cows graze on the Pevensey Levels – something that's encouraged by the Sussex Wildlife Trust, helping them to prevent the marshes becoming overgrown and improving the habitat for migratory birds, spiders and other insects.

Crafting the cheese is a morning's work (a process almost halved in time thanks to expert consultation), and the profile is perfectly suited, Martin says, to current tastes. "It's soft, open textured, buttery and spreadable at 11 to 12 weeks. And it should be quite sweet. Even though we pasteurise, a lot of flavour comes from the milk. I think it tastes a bit like having a Dairy Milk or Fruit & Nut chocolate – that's the profile. That malty chocolate taste."

anything too radical on our own brand."

Development of Clawson Farms' 1912 label is ongoing too. "We're balancing what Clawson Farms is renowned for – world champion cheese – testing the Gen Z market with a creamier Stilton to see what happens," Bill explains. "We think if we can get the younger generation on that and Shropshire Blue, then they will, over time, migrate through the blue cheese category. We're really excited about that."



## STOCK CHECK 2025 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE




**CLAWSON FARMS**
**1912 ARTISAN STILTON**
PDO Blue Stilton, crafted with sustainable British milk from Clawson Farms' member farmers. This blue delivers layers of flavour, an intense tanginess, and a gentle crumble.
**1912.co.uk**



**DORSET BLUE VINNY**
Made to a more than 300-year-old recipe using milk from the farm's own cows, milked just 80 yards from the dairy. Creamy, savoury and rich.
**dorsetblue.com**




**OXFORD CHEESE**
**OXFORD BLUE**
A semi-hard, smooth cow's milk blue with a mellow depth of flavour.
**oxfordcheese.co.uk**




**THE CORNISH CHEESE CO**
**CORNISH BLUE**
A mild, creamy, dense and buttery blue cheese with a gentle sweetness. Designed to be eaten young.
**cornishcheese.co.uk**









# CLAWSON FARMS

## WHERE HERITAGE MEETS INNOVATION

From its century-old co-operative roots, to its award-winning blue cheeses and a new generation of products designed for modern consumers, Clawson Farms is redefining what it means to be British artisan cheesemaker

The first thing you'll notice as you tumble into the Leicestershire village of Long Clawson, is the quietness. A sense of peace pervades in this small part of Britain, where farmhouses and cottages nudge alongside lush, verdant fields occupied by tractors, ponies, sheep and cows.

Trundling along tiny byways and lanes, or venturing onto the village's clearly marked countryside footpaths, you'd never suspect this very spot is the hub of one of Britain's national culinary treasures – Stilton.

Since 1912, it's been home to Clawson Farms – the largest Blue Stilton PDO producer in the world – where 30 local farms within a 30-mile radius of the dairy, and a team of craft, artisan cheesemakers, transform the finest quality milk into award-winning masterpieces.

Clawson Farms is proud to be one of the oldest farmer-owned co-operatives in the UK.

As custodian of the art of fine cheese, from field to fork, the business is firmly rooted in its heritage, traditions and community, while investing in the future – of its people, products and customers.

### Best in class blues

Clawson Farms' head cheesemaker, Richard Mayfield, can be considered the 'gatekeeper of greatness'. Leaving school in 1988 with the intention of being a farmer, Richard joined the business as a teen, and nearly 40 years later hasn't looked back. The industry, he reflects, must be ingrained deep in his bones; both his grandmother and uncle were cheesemakers.

Richard says he's been honoured to be witness of the evolution of Clawson Farms, and enjoys not only eating the cheeses they conjure together, but watching the smile creep over consumers' faces as they try a Blue Stilton, Shropshire Blue or Rutland Red for the first time. It's an "unbeatable feeling".

A large part of Richard's role is ensuring every cheese made at Clawson Farms' dairy is produced according to a strict set of 'golden rules' (different for each variety). More than 100 years of expertise inform these rules and criteria, designed to deliver consistent excellence, and meet PDO requirements every single time.

The jewel in the crown at Clawson Farms is its Blue Stilton PDO, with around 3,000 rounds produced daily.

The process is of crafting Stilton is deliberately long and slow – the goal being to make a cheese that's low in acidity, creamy, buttery, and tantalisingly savoury and umami.

Eleven vats, each holding 20lts of milk from the Clawson Farms co-operative, are brought to life every day – the maker's secret blend of cultures and rennet blended in carefully using state-of-the-art stirring technology, which has truly refined the end product, says Richard. "The stirrers are very gentle in the way they react with the milk – much more gentle than stirring manually." It's just one investment by the company that he says has had a marked and beneficial impact. "When I first started, this was all by hand. Now it's automated, it makes a better job of it than we could. The cutting part is also quite critical. When I was cheesemaking back in the 80s, there were seven of us cutting by hand, and we all did something different. With automation, we can get that consistency."

Stilton curds are cut to a precise size which, says Richard is crucial for its mouthfeel and the moulding process to follow. "If we cut it too small we lose moisture. Too big and it retains too much moisture. That's one of our 'golden rules'."

A day later , fledgling Stilton (devoid of most of its whey, which is processed into whey proteins to be sold), is cut into strips, salted, tumbled lightly in a mill, and filled into the awaiting hoops.

The level of care and attention to detail bestowed upon every Stilton from this point on is quite remarkable. They're turned by a specialist machine in the 'hastener room' four times a day in strictly temperature-controlled conditions – not too cool, not too warm – to encourage their cylindrical shape and ensure the curds settle evenly.

In the 'White Room', the Stiltons are cooled and firmed up, ready to be wrapped and smoothed.

The cheeses are then nestled for 10 days in one of the oldest parts of the factory – the original, reconditioned vat room - where cheesemaking began in 1912. "We've got a brand-new air handling unit and state-of-the-art humidity control and temperature control so we can mature the cheeses at optimum humidity," Richard explains. "The cheeses spend two weeks in this room, and we turn them every day, by hand for four days to keep the shape, and create even moisture distribution throughout."

On day six they're turned once more (more than 15,000 cheeses are hand turned daily), and their coverings are removed on day 10, at which point the Stiltons will go to live in the historic maturing rooms, where their individually distinct coats of mould burst forth onto the rinds. No two cheeses are the same,

## PDO EXPLAINED

### Clawson Farms' farm liaison and sustainability manager, Ruth Grice, is proud to be part of the very special farm co-operative at the heart of the business

In 2026, Stilton celebrates 30 years of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status — a mark safeguarding its authenticity and heritage. Only cheeses made in Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, using traditional hand-crafted methods, can be called Stilton. For Clawson Farms, one of just four licensed dairies, the PDO is a symbol of responsibility and pride, ensuring each wheel reflects the quality and provenance of local milk. As custodian of PDO Blue Stilton®, Clawson continues to honour tradition while innovating, from its award-winning artisan range to a new, milder 1912 Stilton recipe — celebrating both heritage and modern British cheesemaking.









each having their own pattern or 'fingerprint' - almost watercolour-like sweeps of teal, slate grey and Prussian blue.

After four weeks in the maturation rooms, the Stiltons are pierced over the course of a fortnight, before being graded at six weeks.

Clawson Farms' master graders know what they're looking for, and only the best cheeses which have met all their 'golden rules' are selected for sale. "We're looking at the shape, and the amount of blueing," explains Richard. "We want a nice open texture and a good, even blueing all the way down the iron." At this stage the cheeses will be selected as Blue Stilton PDO and sold at around eight to 10 weeks, enhanced with affinage



to be sold as Mature Blue Stilton PDO at approximately 12 weeks, or triple graded as a Reserve Blue Stilton PDO – tasting for superiority at the point of packing.

Clearly they're doing something right. "We've won a lot of awards for our blue cheeses. In the last three years our Blue Stilton PDO and Shropshire Blue have both been Supreme Champions at the ICDAs. That's not something that happens very often, and I think goes to show the quality of our cheesemaking year-round, and that if we follow our 'golden rules' we will make excellent cheese. I've been doing this for 37 years, and we're in the best place we've ever been. The investment this company has made and the technology we use have really been advantageous in maintaining quality."

On the subject of Shropshire Blue, this is a cheese that's causing excitement at counters across the UK, as a striking addition to the cheeseboard, or cooking, and is being discovered by a whole new audience who can't get enough of its rich orange colour (from natural annatto extract), deep flavour and creamy nature.

It's made and matured much in the same way as Stilton, "but it's a bit more creamy and mellow," says Richard. "We use slightly different cultures and have slightly different fat and protein ratios. The cultures break the cheese down a bit faster which makes it milder."

## The red that's turning heads

Part of Clawson Farms' job, as one of Britain's leading artisan cheesemakers, is engagement with consumers, and turning perceptions on their axis. An area where they've achieved great success in this department (other than in blues) is with Red Leicester.

This category of cheese has endured years of scrutiny, largely because what's available most widely is mass-produced and considered bland and rubbery. Clawson Farms' Rutland Red has shone a bright spotlight on the variety, helping to set the industry standard, impressing experts and judges along the way.

In 2024, Aged Rutland Red was named Best Territorial Cheese in the British Cheese Awards, and took Gold in the Global Cheese Awards.

Less than 500 wheels are produced at Clawson Farms every week, crafted in a very traditional, hands-on method using two vessels, including a beautiful 80-year-old vintage vat, which takes only 4,500lts of milk at a time.

It's a short make (taking less than four hours). After cultures and annatto are added, the curds are cheddared, hand salted, and decanted into cloth-lined moulds, before being pressed in a tower, and brushed with clarified butter. "Some people say they can taste the butter on the rind, but its main job is to stop the cheese drying out too quickly," Richard says.

A further difference between Rutland Red and run-of-the-mill reds is the maturing process. "We're air drying which allows the cheese to mature properly. Cheaper cheeses are matured in plastic, so the flavours don't concentrate." Air drying has a profound effect on the finished cheese. "It's got a sweeter, nuttier taste. We mature for around six months on this product and in that process the natural flora in the air start to interact with the cheese, giving it its characteristics. It's more flaky and rustic, with a nice snap to it."

## Excellence meets modern tastes

Sales of speciality and artisan cheeses are on the up as consumers continue to invest cheese across multiple dining occasions – from 'picky teas', to grazing boards.

Social media trends (such as the viral 'cheese pull') are putting products in front of an ever-younger audience, drawn to not only the Instagram appeal of what they eat, but also by brands they consider to be authentic and story-led.

"We're witnessing an exciting resurgence in traditional British cheeses and artisanal blues," says Clawson Farms MD, Bill Mathieson, adding that the business is being incredibly agile in responding to potential new customers – customers who are prioritising ingredients that are natural, fermented, and UPF free.

The team have been out and about sampling everything from blue cheese cocktails to blue cheeseburgers with this burgeoning audience, working with influencers such as Ady Smith to capture their imagination.

And in the cheesemaking rooms, innovation has been ongoing within the 1912 range. "We always talk about this as being 'the perfect introduction to Blue Cheese for new consumers'," says Bill, adding that 1912 is "utterly moreish".

It's a great testament to the skill of Clawson Farms' cheesemakers, and a major development, he continues, that they've been able to adapt the 1912 recipe, making it milder and creamier in order to recruit a younger blue cheese audience – notably Gen-Z, while retaining the superior quality this brand is renowned for.

Clawson Farms has further demonstrated that it has its finger on the pulse by adopting new formats. Data from Mintel's UK Cheese Market Report 2024, showed 49% of adult cheese consumers would find smaller formats of high-quality cheese appealing beyond special occasions.

In response, new 150g wedges and 50g snack packs of Blue Stilton PDO have been added to the range. The snack pack, already trialled in M&S stores, is proving a hit, encouraging discovery at a price point those new to blue cheese are willing to try.

"We want to existing customers to reach for Stilton more regularly, and to enable those dipping their toes into blue cheese for the first time to be adventurous without laying out a great cost," Bill continues.

"The Stilton renaissance isn't about nostalgia – it's about relevance!"

**Find out more about Clawson Farms at clawsonfarms.co.uk**

## FARMER **FOCUS**



**Clawson Farms' farm liaison and sustainability manager, Ruth Grice, is proud to be part of the very special farm co-operative at the heart of the business**

Four days of the week, Ruth Grice is either at Clawson Farms HQ or out on farms, working with partners in the co-operative.

The rest of the time, she can be found out in the fields at Yard Farm (itself part of Clawson Farms' co-operative) only four miles from the dairy, which she runs with her parents.

"We've been on this particular farm since 1952," she says, "but we've farmed here for over 100 years, and in the last 300 years have moved between two villages, so we're very local!"

Yard Farm is typical of Clawson Farms' collective, being small, family-run and keenly attuned to the health and welfare of its animals, the land and more widely the environment and wildlife in and around its own fields.

A herd of just 200 pedigree Holsteins, bred in a closed herd system, all with their own names and individual personalities, feed outside on the grasses of the Leicestershire countryside from April to October, looked after by a team who, Ruth adds, are "so fantastic".

For Ruth, with her sustainability hat on, there is so much good going on within the co-operative, and this is something she speaks about with a great deal of pride.

At Yard Farm, they've been working hard to reduce their carbon emissions as much as possible. "Part of that is being as efficient as we can. Without pointing out the obvious, that starts with making sure our cows are happy and as healthy as they can be, living long lives, which is better for our carbon footprint, and better for our bottom line."

This diligence extends to feed, with the farm switching from added soya to alternatives like rapeseed and rape meal (which has seen a reduction in carbon), increasing biodiversity by planting more trees and hedgerows, and managing water courses as efficiently as possible.

Sustainability, within Clawson Farms, isn't only environmental – it's about nurturing people too. Yard Farm directly and indirectly employs local people, hosts local farming groups, and offers work experience placements for young vets.

"Our Clawson community has been around since 1912," adds Ruth. "Some of our families have been in the co-operative since that date, and we all share a similar ethos for sustainability. Everyone comes at it slightly differently. Each farm is different. The land we're working on is different. The cows and staff teams are different. But everyone's on board, and I think a huge advantage is that we have a brilliantly short supply chain. We can share information so easily."

In many ways, Clawson Farms is part and parcel of local life, she continues.

"We've supplied Clawson Farms for the past 30 years, and like all the other farmers, we're super proud to be in dairy. While this part of the world we do grow some good grass, we're mostly surrounded by beef, sheep and arable farming," says Ruth. "It's Stilton cheese that keeps dairy farms in this area alive, and we're so, so happy to be part of that story."

# COMING IN HOT

Exciting changes are afoot in the hot drinks category – and indies are set to benefit



> Understanding what shoppers are drinking, and why, reveals valuable opportunities for both retailers and producers

**COMMENTATORS**



**ANDREW NIVEN**
THE KNOWLEDGE BANK



**STUART WILSON**
LOST SHEEP COFFEE



**KATHERINE WILLIS**
CUPS FULL



**DAMIAN BLACKBURN**
DARKWOODS COFFEE



**LOUISE COLLINS**
BOOJA-BOOJA



**PHIL KIRBY**
BREW TEA CO.

The vast majority of us stop for a cuppa at some point – or multiple points – during the day, but despite its popularity, the hot drinks category could be described as being somewhat staid – indeed, a third of shoppers say that they feel uninspired by the hot drinks aisles so are looking for something different, according to The Knowledge Bank – but not any more. Innovations are rife, with convenience playing a sizeable role and communications around quality being more important than ever before.

We may be known around the world as a nation of builder's tea drinkers, but The Knowledge Bank research has found that the tide is turning – 44% of tea drinkers say that standard black tea is rarely the best choice for their tea needs, and 43% say that the difference in taste between expensive and cheaper teas is noticeable. What's more, 48% sometimes drink tea as an alternative to alcoholic drinks.

"In terms of preferred flavours," says Andrew Niven, strategic market intelligence manager at The Knowledge Bank, "chai has seen significant growth (+22% in value) year-on-year, and camomile has doubled. On the other hand, fruit flavours, mint and Earl Grey have all dropped in sales over the past year."

"The rising interest in chai reflects a growing interest in health-forward options; the tea is reputed to aid digestion, reduce blood sugar and boost heart health – all trends outlined by New Nutrition Business's 2025 Mega Trends. Stocking a wider range of functional teas - those claiming benefits like improved relaxation or digestion – can also help reach the 50% of shoppers who trust herbal teas deliver on their promises."

## Convenience rules

In shoppers' busy lives, convenience is often king, so it's important to cater for those short on time as well as those who have the time to luxuriate in hot drinks as a mindful moment. According to The Knowledge Bank, 57% of coffee drinkers drink instant coffee at least once a day, while 81% have RTD coffee at least once a week.

Stuart Wilson, founder of Lost Sheep Coffee, advises that right now, premiumisation and convenience are driving growth in coffee.

"A few years ago, people wouldn't have dreamt of putting the highest quality coffee into everyday products like RTD coffee cans or coffee concentrates. At Lost Sheep Coffee, we're redefining expectations. The concept of taking speciality-grade coffee and putting it into products usually reserved for commercial coffee is exciting, and as a brand, we're leading the way."

Indeed, according to Stuart, RTD coffee cans are now the fastest growing soft drinks sector, fuelled in large part by Gen Zs with a thirst for premium convenience and innovation. Lost Sheep's signature Get To The Hopper coffee, which is 100% traceable, levels up their coffee cans – "ours are smooth, with no bitterness," he says. "It's about making speciality coffee more accessible. RTD's are a great way to do that as you can just chill, shake and enjoy. You're essentially getting a full barista experience, just like you would in a coffee shop, all with the shake of a can."

Lost Sheep has also innovated in the concentrate category, offering a blend of speciality grade espresso coffee and full coffee traceability – currently unique in the market, which some mainstream brands have started to dip their toe into. "What concentrate offers is the opportunity to create café-style coffee in the comfort of your own home, with no barista skills or expensive equipment required," he says.

Cups Full has pioneered another opportunity in the convenience corner of the coffee market: premium bio-web coffee bags which deliver perfectly infused high quality coffee, with the sweetness and smoothness often associated with cold brew, in every cup. There are three variants in the range: Power, which delivers a nutty and chocolatey power punch of caffeine; Pace, a full-bodied blend which provides dark chocolate, roasted almond and brown sugar notes with a balanced hit of caffeine; and Peace, a low-caffeine option that tastes of caramel and milk chocolate.

"My theory is that coffee bags need to contain good quality coffee, because otherwise consumers won't trust the coffee bag format – they think good coffee has to come with equipment, but actually it all comes down to the quality and grind of the coffee, and the format of the bag," explains Katherine Willis, founder. "Once that's been demonstrated to customers, they understand and are hooked."

A key part of the quality story is sourcing, and Katherine has ensured that every bag contains top notch coffee by sourcing from ethically-minded producers.

Sourcing is also of key importance to the team at Darkwoods Coffee, which builds relationships with sustainable growers to build its core range, giving the freedom to experiment with heritage varietals. "We buy high volumes of coffee from our growers for our core blends, and when they have a speciality variety on offer we pay a premium for these and put them in our producer series or reserve range," explains Damian Blackburn, director. "This showcases the best of what they're doing each year and adds value for everyone."

Creating fantastic coffee goes far beyond the varieties grown, and coffee obsessives are increasingly interested in finding out more about the science that goes on behind the scenes of their favourite cups. "Our producers love to experiment with what they grow and the processes they use to create the coffee; things like fermentation, drying, and how yeast and bacteria can be manipulated all feed into how coffee tastes," says Damian.

That's not to say that it's a case of the more experimental, the better, advises Damian. "Truthfully, I think some of the options in the world of coffee that are a bit polarizing are very intense and almost umami-like – they're bringing soy or meatier flavours which come about through experimentation with fermentation." These can be a bit much even for coffee heads, says Damian, but especially for consumers who prefer a smoother, nuttier cup with low acidity.

## Rethinking tea

At Brew Tea, co-founder Phil Kirby is passionate about educating consumers about the potential of black tea. "As much as herbal and functional teas are a rapidly growing market, we're finding that when you ask most people what comes to mind when they think of tea, they're most likely to describe a black tea, likely served with milk and maybe sugar," he says.

Innovation is rife in the health-driven tea market, but that doesn't mean that it's the key to success across the board. Instead, Phil and the team at Brew Tea Co are finding that by opening their customers' eyes to the variety of black teas available – that they can personalise what they drink according to what they fancy at the moment.For example a deeper Assam in the winter months, or a refreshing Ceylon in the summer – they are extending the potential and demand for quality black teas.

Speaking of quality, as in so many things appearances matter. "We look for a whole leaf as this infuses its oils and flavours into hot water best," says Phil. Once tea leaves are broken, they lose this ability to display their taste



## STOCK UP ON **DECAF**

Decaf might seem like a low-level contender, but demand is rising – so smart retailers are stocking up. Research from The Knowledge Bank states that 40% of coffee drinkers are trying to reduce caffeine intake, and 49% would like to see a greater range of decaf coffee options. Meanwhile, the stats show that 32% of tea drinkers consume decaf, and 37% limit the number of cups they drink because of concerns over caffeine content.

we've created a range of scoops, mugs and teapots so that they can create a moment." This investment of time brewing the tea – which isn't long, although Brew Tea Co suggest a minimum brew time of three minutes – reaps rewards for the consumer, to whom stopping to make a cup or pot of tea represents a chance to pause and take some time away from their daily stresses. "This kind of ritual is a commonly recognised element of the coffee industry, but we're working to translate this into the tea sector, too."

### The hot chocolate opportunity

The world of hot chocolate is evolving, too. No longer content with the sugar-filled, chocolate-poor instant mixes that have dominated the market for years, shoppers are seeking the genuine article: hot chocolates that are rich, indulgent, and offer all the comfort you want from a cup of hot chocolate with none of the nonsense stuffed into low quality imitations... And this offers up a fine opportunity for indies.

"As in other food and drink sectors over the last decade or so, more and more discerning consumers are looking for hot chocolate that's not just great tasting but 'cleaner', ie made with ingredients they can understand and trust," explains Louise Collins, marketing communications manager at Booja-Booja. "Hot chocolate is no longer just an occasional drink for cold winter nights, it is now, as any glance at social media shows, an everyday, Instagrammable treat beloved by young and old alike."

"For us, it's always about being as inclusive as possible, appealing to 'free from' and 'conventional' consumers alike. And as a multi award-winning chocolate maker, with a diverse, discerning and passionate customer base, it was essential that any hot chocolate we launched lived up to our reputation. If it didn't taste indulgently creamy and like 'a truffle in cup', it just wouldn't do. Early taste tests showed we were on to something special and so we tweaked and tasted, tasted and tweaked until, finally, we were delighted with the results (as happy just isn't enough!)"

'Truffle in a cup' is exactly right – for too long, hot chocolates have been bland, devoid of any real chocolate richness and full of the bad stuff. Thankfully, there are plenty of options to choose from within the fine food market which tick boxes all over the board – from taste and texture to quality and story.

THE **HOT BEVERAGE** MARKET WENT UP **3.9%** IN VALUE AND **2.1%** IN VOLUME YOY (**TOTAL OF £2.46BN**)

**THE KNOWLEDGE BANK**

## STOCK CHECK




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Slow-roasted, Fairtrade, organic, Ethical Consumer accredited coffee made from 100% high-altitude Arabica beans from small-scale co-operatives, with a smooth, velvety flavour.

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**PENNINGTONS COFFEE FELL BLEND**

Smooth and moreish, this blend of South and Central American beans is bold and rich, and has picked up awards for its irresistible taste.

**penningtonscoffee.co.uk**




**BIRD & WILD RSPB COFFEE**

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**birdandwild.co.uk**




**MOICHA CEREMONIAL MATCHA**

An award-winning premium Japanese matcha, sourced from Uji. Foams up brilliantly, and delivers a clean, balanced umami flavour.

**moicha.com**




**OWL & MONKEY PINK TEA WITH ROSE AND VANILLA**

Naturally pink tea, infused with natural rose oil, English rose petals and pure vanilla extract. Subtly sweet with a delicate aroma.

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**DRAGONFLY TEA SWIRLING MIST**

Plastic-free, individually sealed string and tag sachets, filled with authentic Bai Mudan white tea from the Fujian province. Mellow and lightly nutty.

**dragonflytea.com**






# MODERN STORE CUPBOARD STAPLES

## The way Brits eat is changing – and ambient foods are at the forefront of the evolution

**COMMENTATORS**



**KELLY PEAK**
PEAK & THE PANTRY



**DAVID COLES**
THE BAY TREE



**BARNES EDWARDS**
THE GARLIC FARM



**LIZ CUFF**
TRACKLEMENTS



**CARMEN FERGUSON**
WINDMILL ORGANICS



**TARA MEI**
MAHALO

A decade or so ago, the word 'store cupboard' would conjure up images of tins of baked beans or spaghetti hoops, maybe with a dusty jar of spice and tub of stock in for good measure, but the opportunity is now much tastier for everyone as we say goodbye to 2025 and enter a new year.

"The store cupboard has shifted from 'back-up basics' to the heart of how we cook today," believes Kelly Peak, founder of Peak & The Pantry. "People want premier convenience -flavour-packed products that help them make something delicious in minutes, but with the integrity of small-batch craft. They want convenience and comfort, with values baked in."

"'Making the Ordinary ExtraOrdinary' is our company strapline, and so we are firm believers that store cupboard products are absolutely essential for fine food retailers, as it provides the consumer value for money for a high-quality basic ingredient," begins David Coles, head of sales at The Bay Tree. "This gives them an opportunity to offer something different, be that something that's sustainable, or more health conscious."

> "Today, consumers are eager for newness"

Far from being bland, many store cupboard ingredients offer up a delicious blend of versatility and culinary excitement. Barnes Edwards, director of The Garlic Farm, explains, "Our new collection of organic cooking pastes responds to customers' needs for versatile, easy-to-use store cupboard ingredients and the growing demand for organic food. We've created multipurpose cooking pastes that transform dishes with punchy flavour and work brilliantly as bases for stir-fries, curries, casseroles and soups, without compromise on quality or flavour."

### Versatile staples

According to research carried out by Tracklements, store cupboard ingredients such as table sauces are as useful as ingredients as they are as condiments. "We found out that two thirds of shoppers are looking for easier ways to make staple meals tastier and more varied, and that while 70% of them use table sauces to go with everyday meals at home, almost a third of them are also using them as an ingredient," explains Liz Cuff, marketing director.

This is a smart move on shoppers' parts, meaning that they can save time amplifying the flavour of their dishes as the hard work would have already been put in by producers. Think caramelised onion chutney in a gravy to save time softening and sweetening the foundational onions, or good quality ketchup – containing lots of tomatoes – combined with butter beans and hot sauce for a stew, as per a Tracklements recipe recommendation.

Inspiring your customers to be a little more creative when it comes to the uses of store cupboard staples will reap rewards, says Liz. "Everyone knows that fig relish is great with goats' cheese, but we know that people are putting ours on top of porridge in place of jam, too. It's also amazing on ice cream with a spoonful of brandy over the top!"

### Key selling points

Health is as key a consideration for British households at the moment as value for money, so lean into the great blend of these two factors that storecupboard products often showcase. "Be that with no ultra-high processed ingredients, organic, reduced sugar, fat or salt," says David. "Environmental is another talking point, something that's sustainable or even eco-friendly ingredients. However, let's not glaze over the big one... if something tastes great, it's very likely customers will pick up that brand of product again."

Carmen Ferguson, brand manager at Windmill Organics, agrees on the value of health to today's shoppers – and the role this plays for retailers, too. ""Stocking a strong store cupboard range can significantly increase average basket spend by offering a wide variety of products that meet diverse customer needs, including organic and better-for-you items," she says. "In a post-pandemic world, we know many UK consumers are looking to eat healthily, and this is also one of their top reasons for cooking meals completely or partly from scratch. Moving forwards, interest in healthy eating will only gain further momentum, highlighting the relevance of a comprehensive organic range that would attract these health-conscious shoppers who are willing to spend more on quality organic products."

Supermarkets are known for their extensive range of store cupboard items – row upon row, shelf upon shelf – so how can retailers offer a compelling alternative? "I think the obvious answer is for independent retailers to sell organic versions of the usual kind of staples which can be found in the multiples. It's hard to beat them on price, but you can beat them by selling healthier, organic versions of regular products consumers are looking for," says Carmen. "Having said that, you of course need to consider if it's likely to become a regular seller. As a minimum, I'd recommend stocking a diverse range of core organic food and drink products, including staples like grains, pasta and canned goods, as up to 67% of UK consumers state that they have purchased organic in the last 12 months. Introducing a healthier alternative to a core product range can be a way to test consumer appetite for new lines."

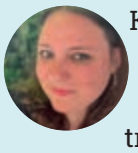
"Perhaps the more niche lines that are unlikely to make it onto a supermarket shelf but may well find a receptive audience in a fine food outlet? Two recent Biona examples which spring to mind would be our recently launched Matcha Tagliatelle nests and Black Cumin Seed oil which are both perfectly suited to specialist, fine food or health food retailers, but unlikely to reach the major multiple grocers."

### What's to come for the store cupboard?

"I think the future is very positive," says Carmen. "In these difficult financial times that the country is going through, traditional store cupboard essentials like canned foods have become even more appealing to consumers as they are cost efficient, have longer shelf lives and limit wastage. In particular, our sales of canned beans and pulses have increased by 27.8% since 2022. We attribute this not only to their accessible price point but also to the movement towards plant-based foods that has shifted from ultra processed meat alternatives to more natural options. Consumers also now increasingly understand that they can buy healthier food that meets their needs in canned formats too. It's also recognised that canned food is not limiting and actually provides a variety of exciting flavour options."

"More than anything, people crave community. They want to feel part of a story, not just a transaction. Store cupboard staples are becoming a way to connect – to traditions, to culture, to values they care about. And they want to connect with brands that also make them feel seen, aligned, and included," says Kelly. "It's about that sense of belonging - knowing the food you reach for reflects who you are and what you believe in. The modern pantry is no longer just about convenience; it's a place of identity, story, and shared experience."

## STORE CUPBOARD **TRENDS**

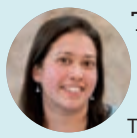


Kelly Peak of Peak & The Pantry shares the trends to look out for in 2026

- **Hybrid comfort cooking:** nostalgic dishes layered with bold global flavours.
- **Regenerative and responsible sourcing:** olive oils, grains, and fish caught or grown in ways that restore ecosystems.
- **Female-led innovation:** a wave of women founders bringing new energy, ethics, and storytelling to the pantry.
- **Natural, short-ingredient lists:** fewer additives, more integrity.
- **Fridge-raid solutions:** pastes, dressings, and condiments that rescue leftovers and reduce waste.
- **Affordable indulgence:** small luxuries like artisanal oils, nduja, or craft chutneys that make everyday meals special.
- **Counterintuitive flavour play:** soy sauce in cocktails, fish sauce in vinaigrettes - staples crossing boundaries.
- **Pantry as identity:** shoppers see their cupboards as reflecting their values - sustainability, supporting small producers, and belonging to a food movement.



## **DISTRIBUTOR** INSIGHT



Tara Mei, founder of Mahalo, says that adventure is a key selling point for store cupboard products right now

The UK store cupboard is evolving into more daring flavours than ever with a renewed focus on authenticity over fusion. Flavour is at the forefront and people are keen to recreate restaurant quality meals conveniently at home.

Consumers are expecting vibrancy in 2025. Branding and packaging are more important than ever as emerging brands compete to be distinct. Consumers are keen to find their 'crack' sauce – the one powerfully flavoured item they pair with everything over variety.

Consumers are feeling bold and adventurous – previously there has been a huge emphasis on adapting terminology and flavours to allow consumers to understand what products are and what they taste like. Today, consumers are eager for newness and terms like 'gochujang', 'furikake' and 'jollof' no longer need further explanation.

In the next 12 months, expect to see a shift away from Asian flavours. Korean, Indonesian and Filipino products have skyrocketed but the appetite for newness has not slowed. Expect more West African and South American flavours and branding that aligns to the cultural heritage of these areas.



> People want premier convenience - flavour-packed products that help them make something delicious in minutes, but with the integrity of small-batch craft. They want convenience and comfort, with values baked in

## STOCK CHECK 2025 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE




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**COMMENTATORS**



**NICOLE COMPEN**
RAYE THE STORE



**MARCUS CARMO**
ACAI BERRY



**ANISH PATEL**
NUTRATEA



**RUMBLE ROMAGNOLI**
CHILLI NO.5



**HELEN JOHNSTON**
SUCSEED



# A HEALTHY OPPORTUNITY

## No longer the preserve of specialist stores, products that promote better health are a valuable option for fine food indies

For decades, food and drink that offered health benefits – think nutrient-dense wholefoods, or items which made grand claims and hailed from far flung destinations – were solely available from specialist health food stores. Ones which sold supplements and tinctures alongside their superfood offering, and which were tricky to navigate for shoppers who weren't totally fluent with the language of 'wellness'. These establishments often came with a supportive, knowledgeable staff member on-hand to answer questions, but still seemed a little out of the comfort zone for many UK shoppers.

Fast forward to now, and food and drink products are making health claims left, right and centre – so much so that it can be difficult to uncover the truth behind these fabulous-sounding stories. The good news is that *Speciality Food* readers don't need to travel far from their knowledge base to make the most of the wellness opportunity – in fact, it could just be a question of relearning (with a new lens for health credentials) about some of the products you already stock. If you're looking to explore this modern opportunity further, though, there are plenty of products to whet your appetite. Wellness has gone mainstream, says Nicole Compen, founder of raye the store. "Consumers today are far more conscious about what they put in their bodies and on their skin, and they're looking for products that align with their lifestyle values: natural, functional, sustainable, and beautifully designed. These are no longer niche concerns – they're everyday priorities."

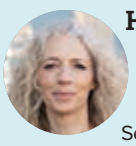
While the consumers who shop in delis may not be hardcore wellness fanatics, they follow enough principles espoused by the health and wellness sphere for its products to be a natural fit. "Fine food retailers are perfectly positioned to lean into this because their customers already expect discovery, quality and a story behind what they buy," explains Nicole. "By stocking wellness products, retailers can extend that same experience beyond the plate - into supplements, adaptogenic drinks, clean beauty, and functional snacks. It's about curating a holistic lifestyle offering that feels seamless, not fragmented."

### Serving up health

One thing's for certain: the case for stocking health-boosting foods is a strong one, with the market seeing considerable growth – largely thanks to the glowing advocates on social media. One such sensation is Acai Berry, a business with stores in London and a freshly-launched e-commerce option which sources acai – a berry rich in antioxidants amongst many other nutrients – directly from the Amazon.

"The growth of the açaí market in the UK over the past five years has been extraordinary and reflects a much bigger movement in the wellness food sector," begins Marcus Carmo, CEO. "Consumers are actively seeking out nutrient-dense options that deliver both taste and functional benefits, and açaí fits perfectly into that space."

## SPOTLIGHT ON: **SEEDS**



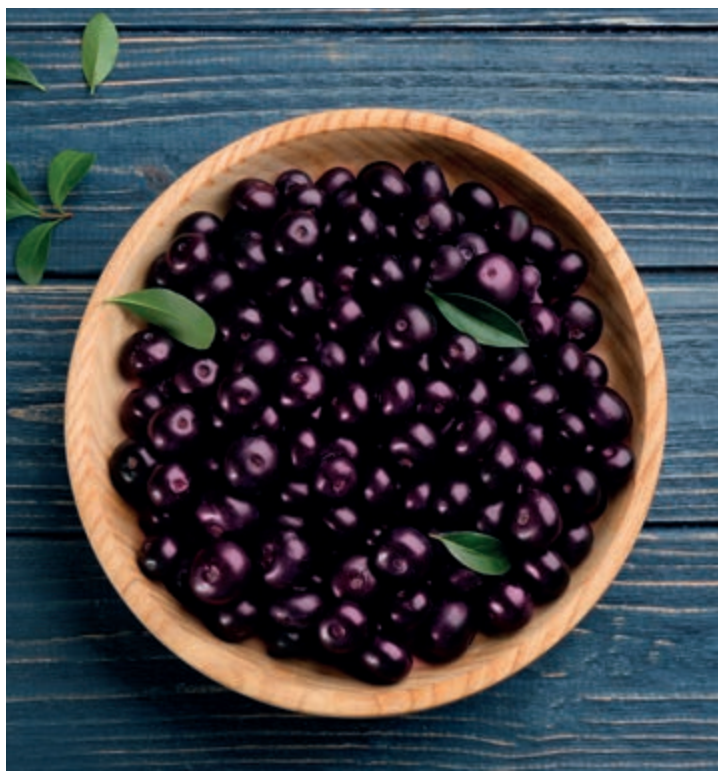
**Helen Johnston, nutritionist and founder of Sucseed, explains why it's worth investing in a good stock of seeds**

Seeds are nature's forgotten superfoods – nutrient-dense, rich in fibre, healthy fats, and plant protein. Seeds such as flax, chia, sunflower, pumpkin and hemp support gut health, hormone balance, energy and so much more, making them a powerful yet simple addition to modern diets. In the UK we eat far fewer nuts and seeds than countries such as Spain and Italy. Seeds are still seen as the poor relation to nuts, yet a spoonful (15-20g) a day provides a natural wholefood boost for digestion, focus, and sustained energy. For example, flax seeds are rich in lignans, powerful plant compounds that combine antioxidant, hormone-balancing, and gut-supporting effects. Hemp seeds provide complete plant protein, omega-3 and omega-6 fats, supporting energy, brain function and healthy skin.

Format is everything. Seeds can be enjoyed whole, milled, toasted, or flaked, each offering different textures and nutrient availability. The key is making them easy to use daily. By blending seeds with carefully chosen herbs, Sucseed has created a versatile format that suits sweet and savoury dishes alike - sprinkled on porridge, stirred into smoothies, or scattered over salads. Without this convenience, even the most powerful and tasty foods risk being left in the cupboard. The right format turns beneficial ingredients into a simple, sustainable habit that makes nutrition both practical and pleasurable.

Consumers often don't realise how transformative seeds and herbs can be - or how simple they are to use. Education should link tradition with science, showing how seeds provide fibre, protein, and essential fats, while herbs offer targeted support for energy, gut health, or immunity. Retailers can help by offering tastings, recipe inspiration, and clear storytelling at point of sale. When shoppers see how easily blends work in everyday dishes, seeds and herbs stop being niche and become recognised as everyday staples for wellbeing.

> "Seeds support gut health, hormone balance, energy and so much more, making them a powerful yet simple addition to modern diet"







Acai itself is a great starting point, as its frozen format makes it convenient for shoppers to have on standby and likely to be habit-forming – not to mention its supreme health credentials. "Naturally rich in antioxidants – significantly higher than blueberries – as well as being rich in fibre, iron, calcium, Vitamin A and healthy fats, açai provides natural energy in a way that is both versatile and enjoyable. At Acaí Berry, we've seen this first-hand: in 2025 alone, our sales have almost doubled, and we're now serving more than 16,000 açaí bowls every week in London alone. It's clear that açaí is not just part of a passing trend, but a cornerstone of the wellness food revolution happening across the UK."

## Health goes foodie

It's not only products which, let's be honest, might be tricky to pronounce until you've been schooled by a wellness pro, that offer a powerful way for fine food indies to tap into the wellness trend. There's a great number of products which are naturally high in goodness, not least simple locally-grown and ideally organic produce. Bonus points for 'offering the rainbow' to promote the consumption of a range of nutrients (and create an eye-catching display) and pushing trendy mushrooms (find out why in this issue's edition of Trend Watch).

> "Investing in wellness today isn't about chasing fads, it's about future-proofing your offering, staying relevant to the next generation of shoppers, and creating a retail experience that feels alive, modern, and forward-looking"

Herbal tea is a great starting point if you want to dip your toe into the wellness realm. "A carefully blended herbal infusion can be just as thoughtful and premium as a fine bottle of wine or olive oil on a deli shelf, yet it carries an added dimension of purpose. This dual identity of both indulgence and function means tea is no longer just a daily ritual; it's a product that aligns with the broader cultural shift towards mindful consumption," says Anish Patel, co-founder of Nutra Tea. "The timing feels right. In an era where wellness is becoming as much about pleasure as it is about function and ritual, tea stands out as the perfect connector."

Rumble Romagnoli, co-founder of Chilli No.5 has found that fine quality food products containing health-promoting ingredients is the way to go – tempting adventurous foodies' tastebuds at the same time as boosting their health from the inside. "Over the past decade, health food has shifted from being purely functional and restrictive to becoming exciting, indulgent and chef-led," he begins. "Consumers no longer want to compromise on flavour for nutrition; they want both. We are seeing the rise of gourmet products made with natural, high-quality ingredients that deliver on taste as well as health benefits. The sector has become more creative, drawing inspiration from global cuisines and foodie culture while still putting wellness at the forefront," he says. "For consumers, it means they can eat for both pleasure and wellbeing without feeling like they are missing out. Health food is no longer confined to plain packaging and niche health stores; it is proudly sitting on shelves in premium retailers, food halls and online platforms." For retailers, Rumble continues, this means expanding their offering to include products that bridge the gap between health and indulgence, with innovation, strong provenance stories and nutritional benefits all playing a role.

"At Chilli No. 5 we are passionate about combining gourmet flavour with functional health benefits. All our sauces are made with natural, plant-based ingredients and enriched with superfoods and supplements such as inulin, guarana and maca."

Who will these products attract? "Core wellness consumers: those who already shop at health food stores and will be thrilled to see these options in a fine food setting; curious foodies: people who are open to discovery - if they're buying artisanal cheese or natural wine, they'll likely be drawn to a new-wave kombucha or adaptogenic chocolate; and lifestyle shoppers: younger audiences in particular, who see food, drink, skincare, and wellness as part of one lifestyle ecosystem rather than separate categories," says Nicole.

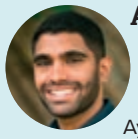
## Not a passing fad

She argues that wellness isn't a trend, it's a cultural shift. "Consumers are more informed than ever, and they're asking harder questions about ingredients, sourcing, sustainability, and function. That doesn't go backwards. Yes, certain 'buzz' ingredients come and go - one year it's CBD, the next it's mushrooms – but the underlying demand for products that make people feel good, perform better, or live more consciously is only going to grow."

"Consumers are looking for functional products that feel indulgent, beautiful and exciting to eat," Rumble says. "Fine food will increasingly incorporate health-enhancing ingredients, whether that is adaptogens, superfoods or innovative formulations, but with the flavour, packaging and storytelling you would expect from luxury brands. We will also see more transparency, with consumers wanting to know exactly how their food supports both their health and the planet."

"Investing in wellness today isn't about chasing fads," agrees Nicole, "it's about future-proofing your offering, staying relevant to the next generation of shoppers, and creating a retail experience that feels alive, modern, and forward-looking."

## AYURVEDA: ANCIENT WISDOM, MODERN RELEVANCE



**Anish Patel, co-founder of NutraTea, explains the role Ayurveda can play in bridging the gap between food and wellness**

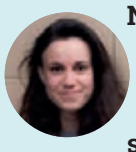
Ayurveda offers more than a philosophy of health; it provides a time-tested framework for understanding how herbs can bring balance to the mind and body. While it isn't about replicating traditional medicine in its entirety, Ayurveda's principles are increasingly being transferred into modern life, giving consumers a deeper story behind the ingredients they're already curious about.

Herbs such as ashwagandha, turmeric, and shatavari have been valued for centuries, and now they are enjoying a renaissance as people seek out adaptogens, nootropics, and natural ways to support wellbeing. What makes Ayurveda particularly resonant today is its emphasis on natural ingredients and the power of botanicals - concepts that align perfectly with the contemporary demand for food and drink that offer both pleasure and purpose.

When these herbs are crafted into products that not only deliver health benefits but also delight the palate, they move seamlessly from the wellness aisle into the fine food space. In this way, Ayurveda acts as a cultural bridge, connecting ancient heritage, natural remedies, and today's appetite for food and drink that does more than simply satisfy hunger or thirst.

> "Ayurveda acts as a cultural bridge, connecting ancient heritage, natural remedies, and today's appetite for food and drink that does more than simply satisfy hunger or thirst"

## WHERE TO START



**Nicole Compen, founder of raye the store, suggests products that could kick-start your wellness range**

If you're dipping a toe into wellness, I would suggest to start with products that are easy to understand, enjoyable, and make sense alongside fine food.

- Functional beverages: non-alcoholic aperitifs, kombuchas, or adaptogenic sparkling drinks - something people can try in place of wine or soda. e.g. Moody, Jamu, Living Things, Agua de Madre, Brink, Adapt
- Premium snacking: protein-rich nut butters, functional chocolate, plant-based jerky – indulgence with a health edge. e.g. Cosmic Dealer, Jungle Butter, Little Victories, Beam, Ooji
- Everyday supplements made beautiful: collagen sachets, mushroom powders, or natural sleep aids packaged in a way that feels modern and gift-worthy. Such as Indi, Mushiii, Moodeys, DIRTEA, Dome Vitamins

The key is to avoid overwhelming your shelves with too much at once I would say – a small, thoughtful selection works better. Test, learn and adapt to what your customers show interest in.

> "The key is to avoid overwhelming your shelves with too much at once"



# FINAL CALL

We can hardly believe we're at our November/December edition already. It seems like just yesterday we were sipping iced matcha lattes on sunny afternoons, and spreading our garden tables with 'picky bits' to share over a glass of wine on 2025's balmy evenings.

All attentions now, naturally, are turned towards the final hurdle of the year – Christmas.

The opportunities for selling (and upselling) during this time are vast, and make up a large chunk of the year's revenue. In essence, you've got to squeeze as much juice out of the season as you possibly can.

Here are just a few ways to up your game this year:

• **If you operate a farm shop, it is crucial to tap into the family market -** Families are consistently being drawn into farm retail, but even more so when there's an experience on offer – something that will surprise, delight and entertain children during the weekly shop. If you have an onsite cafe, now's the time to ramp up your festive offering with Christmas-themed fare, from chocolate orange or mint white hot chocolates, to mince pies, gingerbread men, and cupcakes festooned with jolly decorations. Consider setting up Father Christmas or elf visits. Organise Christmas trails. Even the simplest of arrangements (such as creating a simple post box for children to write and post letters to Santa) can be incredibly effective. And make sure you shout about your endeavours on social media – especially local Facebook groups.

• **Aim for abundance** – But don't go too Christmassy with your stock. A full, brimming, cornucopia of food and drink will get you noticed during the key shopping period. If customers feel they can tick off lots of boxes (from loading up the treat cupboard, to buying gifts) in one fell swoop, they're more likely to visit. Fill every nook and cranny with goodies, seasoned retailers say, but don't fall into the trap of buying lots of themed Christmas or festive products. After all, who will want to purchase them when 1st January rolls around? Keep ordering tight on these items. You can always buy more if demand is high.

• **Lean into your individuality -** We'll soon be seeing the multiples' Christmas adverts, and their enticing annual offerings, which always turn heads. Your niche, and superpower, is bringing something different to customers' tables. Ramp up your own merchandising, campaigning and social presence over the next few weeks, showcasing every little delicious detail and point of difference.

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

# 5 MINUTES WITH
## DAN D'SOUZA OF MUUSH



**WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?**
So many things I'd love to do, but I really enjoy coaching for performance as my part of management, so this is something I would explore.

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?**
My first ever job was working at Wimbledon tennis as a pot washer. My first 'proper' job was interning in marketing at Virgin Holidays.

**WHAT INSPIRES YOU?**
Hearing from other people who are living out their purpose. I was listening to the Matthew McConaughey's Diary of a CEO episode – his journey is amazing. Twists and turns and lots of resistance, but he made hard decisions and changed paths and over time honed the formula.

**WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?**
Charity telephone fundraising. Don't get me wrong, it's essential work, and for important causes. I was given a charity helping abused children and had to call people up and reel off a harrowing story about child abuse. If they allowed me to get to the end of the story, I had to ask them for money three times, regardless of what they told me (e.g. they had no money for heating, etc). Unless I got cut off, I had to do all of the above, and if I didn't, I'd risk losing my job. I left after two months. But a useful experience nonetheless.

**HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?**
It's a fascinating place. It's interesting how theoretically low the barriers to entry are, but how tough it is to last for the long term. When you look at drinks brands you know 80% have been around for 50+ years or iterations of them, very few new brands survive the long term.

**WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?**
Currently Sticks & Sushi or chicken Basque (a dish similar to paella my mum makes).

**WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?**
It is what it is. Or maybe the MUUSH tagline for something a bit more positive: one small step. The concept that big changes should be broken down into bit-size small incremental changes.

**WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?**
I've had all the creepy crawlies in South East Asia, but I'd probably say sea snails. To this day, the most disgusting thing I've ever tried. I thought they'd be similar to French snails. Ice cold slime.

**WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?**
At the moment, *Start With Why* by Simon Sinek. I think finding your purpose is so fundamental to achieving contentment in life.




## BE CONNECTED




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**CONTENT**

**Editor**
Holly Shackleton, 01206 505110
holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com

**Content Creator**
Charlotte Smith-Jarvis, 01206 505981
charlotte.smith-jarvis@artichokehq.com

**Art Director**
Lee Whiteford
lee.whiteford@artichokehq.com

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

**COMMERCIAL**

**Senior Account Manager**
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

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Just what you want at this time of year, this special edition launch from Tracklements is an instant store cupboard essential. Deeply rich in umami, it offers an ideal sweet/savoury balance that makes it as versatile as you could wish for. We love it with meat or cheese, but it's just as delicious stirred into soups and stews for instantaneous slow cooked depth.
**tracklements.co.uk**

**OTHER FOODS**
CRUNCHY SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS




Crunchy mushrooms may be a concept that it takes a while to get your head around, but actually once you've tried this innovative product you're bound to be as hooked as we are. Surprisingly flavourful with rich umami, and moreishly crunchy, they tick the experiential boxes of conventional savoury snacks with added fun (and fibre).
**otherfoodsuk.com**

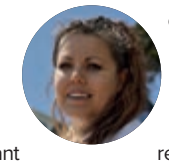
**DARKWOODS COFFEE**
KENYA EEGADS (WASHED)




Coffee is just one of those products where quality – or a lack thereof – is instantly noticeable. In this one, part of Darkwoods' speciality range, it shines through in its fruity tang which makes for a supremely satisfying cup. This coffee is made using traditional Kenyan methods on a small scale, and this attention to detail really makes it stand out.
**darkwoodscoffee.co.uk**

# THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Charlotte Vincent, head chef at Burgh Island Hotel



At Burgh Island, our philosophy is simple: exceptional food begins with exceptional sourcing. Everything we serve has a story, and as a chef, I want to know every step of that story. That means knowing exactly where our ingredients come from, how they are produced and ensuring they meet the highest possible standards. It also means keeping that food local, not just for flavour but for sustainability. Our carbon footprint is a key part of our approach. Why would I buy green beans from Kenya when I can get the freshest from just down the road?

Take Rexdown Fisheries in Kingsbridge, for example, just 30 minutes away. They supply us with everything from scallops to smoked fish. The Southcom Smokies are caught and smoked locally, and the mackerel we serve for breakfast is caught off Bigbury, smoked in Salcombe, and delivered straight to our kitchen. It is not just about freshness; it is about traceability and supporting our local fishing community. Front of house staff are encouraged to share these stories with guests, so every plate comes with context, care and a connection to our region. Some fish will have been out of the water for only four hours before it reaches the table, and that is the standard we hold ourselves to.

Sustainability continues further in the way we our source seafood. Outside of Rexdown Fisheries, we also source scallops from a free-diving supplier who hand-selects only the largest, leaving smaller ones to reproduce and help protect the local beds. Lobsters with eggs go back into the sea. We are incredibly particular about this because it is important to us that we protect the environment and ensure the longevity of local species. Everything that enters our kitchen has passed this ethical standard, and that responsibility is something I take personally.

Vegetables follow the same principle. We source from West Country, who operate a strict field-to-fork concept. All our vegetables come from within 50 miles of Burgh Island, from farms stretching from the Cornish border to Exeter, and into Devon and Somerset. The short journey means a lower carbon footprint and incredible flavour, thanks to Devon's rich soil. From farm to depot to kitchen, everything stays local. It also allows our team to explain to guests exactly where their food is coming from, which we believe enhances the dining experience.

Foraged ingredients like mushrooms and sea herbs also come from the immediate area. Seaweed and seabed produce are harvested from clean waters just a few hundred feet from our front door. It is about knowing exactly what we are serving, being intimately connected to the land and sea, and ensuring nothing comes in that we would not be proud of ourselves. If I cannot see it, we do not use it.

Building strong partnerships with local suppliers is essential. It is more than just getting the best produce; it is about understanding each other's values, maintaining ethical standards, and building trust. A good supplier relationship also resonates with our customers. When people see that care and integrity reflected on the plate, they talk about it, share it. At the end of the day, supporting local businesses, protecting the environment and serving food we can truly stand behind is exactly what Burgh Island is about.

# TALKING ITALIAN

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## CREATE A SPECTACLE

Make magic with Italian food's innate style and story

Italians are renowned across the world for their style, and this skill is not reserved just for what they put on their bodies. We've all appreciated the sight of a beautifully designed and presented food or drink item, but how many readers have proactively turned it into a selling tool?

Yes, some Italian packaging is so beautiful that it doesn't require any additional bells and whistles, but that's not to say that these products couldn't also benefit from a little extra magic. This doesn't need to be expensive, or time consuming.

If you have a shelf or section filled with stunning Italian produce, why not highlight the beauty of the products themselves by corralling them into 'stories'? Gorgeously designed, bronze-dyed pasta with some POS explaining its story artfully placed alongside some fresh on-the-vine tomatoes and a basil plant, plus a sign advising shoppers to pop to the cheese counter for a deliciously aged Parmesan if they don't already have some, creates a scene that many shoppers would find hard to resist – particularly if they are time-poor and fancy levelling-up their weekday supper.

Similarly, fabulous Italian coffee presented with a stylish Moka pot, biscotti and maybe some classy espresso cups could inspire some gifting, especially as Christmas looms.

It's simply a question of getting creative. It might well be that time is especially tight for you right now as the fine food world's busy season enters its final flurries, but a little extra thought around how to create 'moments' could make a real difference to the experience of your customers.

If you really are short on resources, though, there's certainly no harm in piling beautifully-packaged Italian food and drink high in the spirit of festive generosity. Panettone lends itself particularly well to this style, as well as being strung up from the rafters where room format allows.

Of course, this isn't just an opportunity at Christmas – each season, and product, brings with it an opportunity to make the most of the stunning produce hailing from across Italy.

Telling the story, both visually and literally, will only add to the romance that will get customers reaching a little deeper into their pockets.



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