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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the October issue of *Speciality Food*. The sparkle of Christmas is well and truly waiting in the wings, and while consumers' minds may yet be a way off planning their own celebrations, those in the fine food world are ready and raring to go. We've brought the festive spirit to this issue, exploring the 10 food and drink trends to know this festive season, the party food to stock up on, and how to merchandise your store effectively for optimum seasonal sales.

We also dive into the delicious world of British cheese (p.33), share pro tips on avoiding cheese waste (p.29) – particularly following the upcoming season of excess – and find out what home bakers are looking for in 2024 and beyond (p.36). Plus, find out why edible insects could well be the taste of the future (p.32).

Charcuterie is a firm favourite throughout the year, and no foodie party is complete without a board piled high with delicious cured meats. Discover why French charcuterie should be on your radar on page 16.

Plus, we preview Plant Based World Europe (p.18): a valuable event shedding light on this vibrant sector.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR





Are you aware of the new food waste legislation?

The rules will come into force in spring 2025, and experts are heralding it as a 'big win'

Environmental campaigners say the news that revised food waste legislation will come into force in England next year is a 'big win'.

Forming part of Defra's plan to make recycling easier, improve recycling rates, and simplify waste management, the new law will require most businesses to separate all food waste from other waste streams. It will have to be stored in separate bins, and collected by licensed food waste carriers.

It's hoped the legislation will prevent excess food waste making its way to landfill sites, with the latest figures showing food currently accounts for 9.5 million tonnes of all waste, and that UK retailers spend around £51,000 each year disposing of food waste to landfill.

The preference, says the government, is for these byproducts of cooking and food production, alongside unused food, to go to anaerobic digestion treatment plants, where they can be transformed into biofuel and digestate to spread over land, recycling nutrients, and contributing to a more sustainable, circular economy.

The new food waste law should come into effect on 31st March, 2025. It will impact public and third-sector organisations such as schools and hospitals, as well as food manufacturers, food retailers and hospitality, with businesses producing more than 5kg of food waste each week expected to arrange separate collections. This will include any biodegradable material waste produced while processing or preparing food, such as bones, eggshells, fruit and vegetable skins, tea bags and coffee grounds.

Those businesses with fewer than 10 full-time employees will have a period of grace, being brought into the scope of the law from the end of March, 2027.

Currently the government has an ambition to eliminate food waste from landfill entirely by 2030, with hopes the new rules, alongside measures such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) will drive that target forward. Changes to food waste collections domestically are also predicted to come into play soon in England, with Wales and Scotland already operating their own food waste policies.

"It's a big win for the environment, and it aligns well with the government's sustainability goals," says Mark Hall, co-founder of Business Waste. "We are geared up to help businesses comply with these regulations, ensuring a smoother transition to greener waste management practices."

"It's great news that the government will require businesses with over 5kg food waste per week to separate it out," adds Martin Bowman, senior policy and campaigns manager at Feedback. "Sending food waste to landfill results in significant methane emissions, contributing to climate change, and incineration is a highly sub-optimal use of food waste which should, at the very least, be sent for anaerobic digestion or composting."

Food waste prevention though, Martin continues, should always be the priority, with businesses tackling causes at the root, and building food waste reduction into their ongoing environmental plans.

This could involve retailers assessing stock, and cutting back on products that don't perform well, or offering 'flash sales' on items with short dates, while foodservice operators could look at reduced menus, improving food storage to extend freshness of produce, and more.

"Our research has shown that preventing food waste arising in the first place saves around nine times more emissions than sending it to anaerobic digestion," Martin adds. "We urge the government to implement mandatory food waste reporting for large and medium businesses as a priority, as well as policies to prevent food waste, like protecting against unfair trading practices which lead to food waste."

Pullquote "Sending food waste to landfill results in significant methane emissions, contributing to climate change, and incineration is a highly sub-optimal use of food waste which should, at the very least, be sent for anaerobic digestion or composting"



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THE BIG REVEAL

The national Farm Retail Association has announced its biggest brand overhaul in 45 years, unveiling a fresh new look and vision.

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What is EPR and how will it affect food and drink businesses?

Speciality Food breaks down the jargon around Extended Producer Responsibility, highlighting the key dates you need to know

There have been swells of confusion in the food and drink and packaging industries, as businesses try to keep up with new regulations and processes coming down the line, such as the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS).

Less discussed is Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) – set to impact numerous UK businesses, which will be expected to report more data around the waste they generate, and to pay fees for management of that waste.

While there is still much to learn, many in industry welcome the incoming changes for waste handling in Britain, including The Food and Drink Federation. Director of corporate affairs, Jim Bligh, said manufacturers on the whole support the government's zero waste goal, and are committed to a cleaner environment.

He said the newly issued base fees for the scheme will help them "take more responsibility for packaging", and plan accordingly for predicted 2025 costs.

"With EPR expected to cost at least £1.4 billion in 2025, it's crucial that funds are used to improve recycling infrastructure," he added. "Everyone must work together to ensure EPR drives value, boosts recycling rates, and fosters a circular economy. DEFRA should now empower producers to manage the scheme, encouraging investment, green jobs and innovation in packaging."

WHAT IS EPR?

EPR affects UK businesses importing or supplying packaging within the UK – including packaging which is filled at the point of sale, such as food containers and coffee cups.

These businesses will need to collect and report data on this packaging, including information about the type of packaging, whether it is primary, secondary, shipment or tertiary, its weight, and the material it is made from.

Businesses are also required to submit 'nation data' (detailing where packaging is being supplied and discarded in the UK) if they supply filled or empty packaging directly to consumers or small organisations in the UK, hire or loan reusable packaging, own an online business allowing non-UK businesses to sell empty packaging and packaged goods into Britain, or import packaged goods into the UK, and discard the packaging. They may need to pay a waste management fee, scheme administrative costs, charges to the environmental regulator, and get PRNS (packaging waste recycling notes) to meet their obligations.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY EPR?

Any business operating under its own brand and trademark will be impacted. Those providing a white label service for a third party within the UK, will not.

The rules apply if you are importing goods from outside the UK, with the intention to supply them here, even if you discard the packaging before selling.

You don't need to take any action if you are importing packaging or packaged products on behalf of another company which will later add its own branding.

Online businesses selling packaged products from outside the UK within Britain are impacted, but e-commerce sites acting as a third party for UK producers within the UK, are out of scope.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON LARGE ORGANISATIONS?

Businesses will be classed as a large organisation if they have a turnover of more than £2 million per annum, and are responsible for supplying or importing more than 50 tonnes of packaging in the UK.

Large organisations may need to act if they supply packaged goods to the UK market under their own brand, package goods for themselves or another organisation, import products in packaging, own an online marketplace, hire or loan out reusable packaging, or supply empty packaging.

They may need to take additional action if they pay or license another company to produce branded packaged goods to be sold under their name, to pack branded goods that will be sold under their brand name, place their branded goods on the market in the UK, or important branded packaged goods on their behalf.

When do businesses need to start collecting and submitting EPR data?

Those businesses impacted should have recorded data on packaging from 2023 onwards. Packaging data must be collected and reported by individual businesses and groups (not charities) with an annual turnover of £1 million or more based on most recent accounts, and those responsible for importing or supplying over 25 tonnes of packaging into the UK market during the previous year.

For 2023 data sets, businesses should base their annual turnover on figures up to 7th April, 2023, and packaging weight on the amount supplied or imported in the 2022 calendar year. Data sets for 2024 should be based on a business's turnover up to 7th April 2024, and packaging weight based on the weight supplied or imported in 2023.

All businesses should have their 2023 data prepared, though small organisations are not required to report it. Their 2024 data must be submitted by 1st April, 2025.

Under new rules this year, January to June data from this year should be reported by large organisations before 1st October 2024, and July to December data from January 2025, with a deadline of 1st April, 2025.

HOW MUCH IS EPR AND WHEN DO BUSINESSES HAVE TO PAY IT?

Currently payments are deferred for a year, due from 1st April, 2025, taking into account packaging supplied or filled in the preceding calendar year.

At the time of publishing fee rates won't be known for the 2025/26 period until 1st April, 2025. Illustrative fees range from £245 to £655 per tonne of aluminium, from £185 to £350 per tonne for paper or board, and £355 to £610 per tonne of plastic.



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"Is summer or winter best for speciality food shops?"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

Whenever people are asked to name a preference between summer or winter the answer is usually summer and for the obvious reasons. In a similar way I have always assumed that the most profitable and productive time to run a speciality food shop would also be summer.

The longer days, the better weather and the general feel good vibes of summer intuitively lend themselves to our sort of independent shops and our sort of independent prices. The very thought of the short wintery days of January and February are enough to send a shudder through the pickles and sauces department.

However on closer inspection, and of course specifically at the sales breakdown of Partridges, winter sales outperform summer sales every year and in some cases it is not even that close.

So what is going on?

Of course to start with it depends on the definition of winter. For ease of use I have determined the first and last quarters of the year should be counted as winter and the middle two quarters regarded as summer.

Christmas is naturally the big daddy of footfall in our sector and the December quarter alone still accounts for over 30% of Partridges' annual sales, and that's basically over a 12-week period as week 13 at the end of the year is our quietest. But I would still have thought that the first three cold months of the year – the eighth, ninth and twelfth busiest – would have balanced out the Christmas benefits. I am wrong.

Looking back over the last five years' sales records, winter (the first and fourth quarters) has always outperformed summer (the second and third quarters). By 3.8% in 2019, 9.6% in 2020, 6.8% in 2021, 3.8% in 2022 and 5.0% in 2023.

By the way this does not necessarily hold for convenience stores, where the result appears more of a photo finish. From individual research I know one store that records a one percent margin in favour of winter and another that scores summer as nearly 10% better. Different locations different trading patterns.

However, the real difference is not just about December. It is about November and its cultural resets after half term, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas lights switch-ons and Christmas markets. It often outperforms December and last year by 11%. Speciality food is in the air.

So looking out from the front of our shops on an overcast, cold, rainy and quiet September day like today, let's not worry too much and just remember things are about to get a whole lot better.

> "The very thought of the short wintery days of January and February are enough to send a shudder through the pickles and sauces department. However on closer inspection, and of course specifically at the sales breakdown of Partridges, winter sales outperform summer every year"



Farm Retail Association unveils fresh new look

The Farm Retail Association has rebranded with a bold vision for the future.

The national Farm Retail Association announced the biggest brand overhaul in its 45 year history at the recent Speciality & Fine Food Fair, with a fresh new look, and a vision to bring together the 1,000-plus farm shops and farmers operating in the UK.

The Farm Retail Association (formerly FARMA) is a not-for-profit association of the best real farm shops and real farmers' markets from across the UK.

Writer and broadcaster Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, who is also patron of the FRA, launched the rebrand with FRA chair Emma Mosey.

Fearnley-Whittingstall is a writer, campaigner and presenter best known for his *River Cottage* TV series as well as for fronting documentary series such as *Hugh's Fish Fight, Hugh's War on Waste, Britain's Fat Fight* and *War on Plastic with Hugh and Anita*.

He said, "I'm delighted to be joining the Farm Retail Association to celebrate the start of a new chapter for the association and to connect with the amazing farm retail community."

Emma said the launch "marks the start of a new chapter for the FRA which we are taking to the next level in bringing farm retailers and farmers markets together. It is vital to have one strong voice for the industry, to promote local food, low food miles and local producers to consumers and to ensure farm retailers and farmers markets continue to thrive."

She added, "We really want to encourage all farm retailers and farmers markets to join the FRA to really put our industry at the forefront."

The Farm Retail Association is also thrilled to announce the launch of its highly anticipated annual conference in March 2025, themed 'Profit With Purpose: Let's Grow With Integrity'.

The event will feature an impressive line-up of renowned speakers, including Guy Singh-Watson, visionary founder of Riverford Organics; George Eustice, former secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs; and Nigel Barden, renowned food journalist and broadcaster. These industry leaders will share their insights on building successful and sustainable farm retail businesses while upholding strong ethical principles. Attendees can expect thought-provoking discussions, valuable networking opportunities, and practical takeaways to help them thrive in today's competitive landscape.

On the evening of the conference, the FRA's annual awards will also be held to spotlight and celebrate innovative businesses in the industry.

Entries close on Monday, 23rd September, and the awards will be announced on Tuesday, 12th March at a glittering dinner at the Eastside Rooms in Birmingham.

Categories include the Rising Star Award, celebrating business development and newcomers to the industry, Farm Shop Butchery of the Year, Large Farm Shop of the Year, Small Farm Shop of the Year, Farmers' Market of the Year, Farm Cafe/Restaurant of the Year, PYO of the Year, and Associate Member of the Year.

The category of Pick Your Own Farm (PYO) of the Year, was shortlisted in July as judging took place in the height of the PYO season. The finalists are Craigie's Farm, Manor Farm Fruits, and Garson Farm PYO.

All members of the Farm Retail Association are eligible to enter the awards free of charge.

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Research shows calories have been slashed in British shopping baskets

Food and drink manufacturers have reduced salt by a third, and sugar and calories by a quarter

New data, recently unveiled by Kantar Worldpanel, has revealed that products from Food and Drink Federation (FDF) members are now contributing a third less salt (33%), and a quarter less sugar (25%) and calories (24%) into British retail compared to 2015.

HFSS regulations and changing attitudes to diet, health and wellbeing are being seen as major contributors to the figures, with significant investment ongoing in the food and drink sectors to promote innovation.

In 2023 alone, more than £160 million was spent on the research and development of healthier products, including reformulating existing recipes and changing portion sizes.

Creating delicious and nutritious food and drink, said Kate Halliwell, chief scientific officer at the FDF, is no easy task, requiring vast resources, time and technical expertise. Kate said she is proud to see continued advances being made within the industry, which is committed to bringing healthier options to British shopping baskets, but thinks additional support is needed to take initiatives further.

"The industry, and in particular smaller companies, could do even more with better government support, which is currently only a fraction of what's available to, for example, investments in the aerospace or automotive manufacturing sectors," Kate said. "To take critical investment in healthier product innovation to the next level, we're calling on government to support the UK's largest manufacturing industry in boosting further investment in reformulation."

The FDF would like the UK government to provide a £4 million fund to support SMEs who want to "do the right thing", Kate added, replicating the successful Scottish government-funded Reformulation for Health programme across the rest of Britain. "This scheme has proven itself to be a cost-effective way of supporting innovative projects that have removed millions of calories from Scottish food products in line with public health goals."

In addition to reducing calories, sugar and salt, FDF members are leading efforts to promote positive nutrition, Kantar's report states. The federation's Action on Fibre initiative (launched in 2021) helps make high fibre choices more readily available to consumers across a range of products, from breakfast cereals to pizza. In 2023 members introduced 150 new and reformulated products which contributed 190 million additional servings of fibre to the UK population. Alongside new product launches, the food and drink industry is also helping shoppers to lead healthier lives by investing in workplace wellbeing programmes, and providing clearer nutritional labelling, Kantar's research found.

With diet-related disease being linked to high levels of ill health in Britain, there is a responsibility for this kind of joined up thinking across manufacturing, government and retail, said Alan Black, director of food systems transformation at The British Nutrition Foundation.

"We know that reformulation can help reduce population intakes of nutrients of concern such as free sugars and salt, which could benefit public health outcomes. Increasing positive components in products such as fibre and fruit and vegetables and targeting portion size are also promising strategies for improving public health."

Alan said food manufacturers are well positioned to deliver change at scale, and that the British Nutrition Foundation is working with companies across the sector to support them in making healthier choices easier for consumers.

"This report provides a helpful snapshot of how companies are improving the health profile of a wide variety of food and drink," added Jacinta George, managing director of Reading Scientific Services Ltd (RSSL), which is also working alongside businesses, helping them to navigate routes to more healthful products.

"We know that successful reformulation is multifaceted – it requires time and investment to change recipes and launch new healthier products," she said, "It's not as simple as removing ingredients or replacing them with alternatives - a deep technical understanding of the function of different ingredients is needed. This is because reformulation can influence every characteristic of a product, from processing and cost, through to taste, texture and shelf-life. The significance of these changes cannot be overstated or underestimated because the quality of the product is key to consumer acceptance. We hope this report will help inspire companies with what can be done, as well as help policy makers understand the depth of industry commitment."

Read the report, *Innovation for Healthier Diets*, on the FDF website.

Ways for food retailers to reduce waste

Independent retailers can lead the charge on reducing the amount of food waste being sent to landfill – here's how

Growing numbers of sustainability initiatives have taken off in the food and drink industry in recent years, but waste continues to be a problem that many businesses struggle to deal with.

Food waste from all sectors is still a shocking 10.7 million tonnes in the UK, according to WRAP, 70% of which was intended to be consumed by people (while 30% accounts for 'inedible' food). This food could have gone on to make the equivale of over 15 billion meals, or enough to feed the entire UK population three meals a day for 11 weeks – instead, it wound up in landfill.

Elsewhere, food packaging producers are making strides to move away from single-use plastics – but change isn't happening overnight. Plastic packaging in the UK accounts for nearly 70% of our plastic waste, WRAP says, and we throw away around 290,000 tonnes of plastic bags and wrapping every year in this country.

While national schemes are being introduced to address this, there are still actions that individual shop owners can take. Read on to discover the ways that independent retailers can cut back on waste.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FOOD WASTE PROBLEM

Across grocery retail, it's estimated that the equivalent of 190 million meals worth of waste is thrown away every year, amounting to more than 100,000 tonnes in total, says Philip Simpson, managing director of ReFood, a food waste recycler in the UK.

"Despite being seen as a 'necessary evil' to operating within the supply chain, food waste remains a major issue for speciality stores," he says. "From bruised products and damaged packaging to out-of-date produce (which alone is said to be responsible for 87% of all retail food waste), the cause of this waste varies from store to store. However, it's important to note that food waste costs you twice – firstly in lost revenue, but secondly in waste disposal costs."

According to Philip, landfill tax has risen to £126.15 per tonne, so the sector is paying more than £12.5 million every year to discard wasted stock.

The first step to addressing this waste, he says, is to adopt best practice measures across your shop. "From tightening up stock rotation processes and inspecting deliveries at the point of receipt, to improving labelling, increasing cold chain efficiencies, optimising forecasting and applying discounts in good time, amending processes can deliver immediate benefits," Philip says.

Any remaining food waste should then be recycled or composted rather than sent to landfill.

Farm shops have an excellent opportunity to instal their own compost systems, like Teals plans to do, to keep their food waste inside a closed loop system on their farm. However, if that's not possible for your shop, food waste recycling facilities can turn food that's no longer edible into renewable energy. Through anaerobic digestion systems, the methane that is naturally released when food breaks down is captured and used to generate power.

Other by-products can also be created. For example, ReFood makes a sustainable bio-fertiliser from the residue left after the anaerobic digestion process, which is used by local farmers as an alternative to chemical fertilisers. "The benefits of embracing food waste recycling are numerous – reducing reliance on landfill, preventing the release of greenhouse gases, generating renewable energy and providing a sustainable fertiliser for farmers. However, with zero landfill tax charges to pay, it can also prove a simple way to quickly and effectively reduce overheads," Philip says.

Small, independent retailers can also join a 'Target, Measure, Act' approach to tackling food waste that's used by both WRAP's Food Waste Reduction Roadmap and the Courtauld Commitment 2030, a voluntary agreement in the food and drink industry that was created to deliver farm-to-fork reductions in food waste.





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OLLIE LLOYD
ADVISOR

When I ran Great British Chefs, there was always a sense of Deja Vu during the holiday season as, once again, our "Roast Turkey Crown" recipe delivered us increasing daily traffic. We always challenged ourselves to create new and exciting content to inspire people to break the habit of lifetime on Christmas day. It is clear that food preferences continue to evolve, and every year the pantheon of classic festive dishes gets another chip as more consumers try something new. But we should all remember that there are a lot of Brits who have a repertoire of six recipes that they cook on repeat and innovation in food is not something to embrace.

The reality is that we all crave familiarity with a sprinkling of newness. The challenge for food brands is to deliver on this paradox. The dishes that people cook are stubbornly stable, with YouGov claiming that chips, fish and chips, and English breakfast still top the charts, even amongst millennials. But what is often forgotten is that there is often innovation around the edges in terms of sauces or drinks. In addition, there is a constant stream of innovation and new trends that get crazy buzz in mainstream media and on TikTok. If you visited any of the recent food trade shows, you would think that innovation is the lifeblood of most brands. For brands and retailers to deliver during the festive period, they need to balance a desire to do something different and meet consumers daily more traditional needs.

The world of advent calendars is a good example of where this is playing out. My two kids definitely want one every year and they remember what they had the year before and what they liked and disliked about it. But they would be disappointed if we got the same one two years in a row. They might want the same brand and maybe even the same type of chocolate but they want something new and exciting. If you look at the ever growing number of brands offering advent calendars you see how this shapes up in the market. There are now dog advent calendar's (Denzel's being my dog's favourite), gin, coffee and even pork scratching ones.This creates a tightrope for brands and retailers to walk. They have to deliver on the category requirements but offering up something new. Yet, there are different rules for different categories, as some are less tied to traditions. In the world of Christmas puddings, many opt for the classic and the best available at their price point rather than chasing down something new that many might just see as novelty and risky for the big moment. But other very closely related items like minced pies, where are more consumption moments opens up possibilities for more innovation. I for one start eating mince pies from the moment I see them in-store and they are like the harbingers of Christmas indulgence! The same could be said for other categories like snacks, chocolate and even smoked salmon which have higher consumption rates and are less tied to the core family set pieces.

When we think about foodie gifts, I think there is much more opportunity for play. Retailers and food brands have a real opportunity to develop new and different things that intrigue and tell a new story. The arena of foodie gift boxes is a good example of this, and businesses like Fortnums, The Deli Society and Sous Chef do a great job in this area. They are always creating new sets around different themes, be it emerging cuisines like Korean, new hot cook books or specific geographical groups of producers. The key in these spaces is to deliver products that consumers actually want and will use.

So when brands think about the festive season what is the best approach? From what I have seen, the key is to acknowledge changing habits and try to capitalise on them, without neglecting the core and often quite traditional needs of consumers and the particular sub category dynamics. As we all know, there is a trend towards moderation and more mindful eating as people think about gut health and are concerned about UPFs. There are more people who follow specific diets either for health reasons or due to dietary requirements. There is an ever growing awareness of the importance of sustainability and the impact that our food system places on the planet. But above all food is about joy, particularly when you are celebrating with friends and family. This Christmas the winners will be the brands that are able to surprise and delight consumers without costing the earth and as the saying goes not being weird.

> "The reality is that we all crave familiarity with a sprinkling of newness"

'New thinking' is needed on plastic waste

The introduction of bans on plastic carrier bags and takeaway containers has undoubtedly had an impact on the amount of plastic waste ending up in landfill – but single-use plastics remain a significant problem in the UK, with food and drink being a leading contributor of plastic waste

The Big Plastic Count, conducted by Greenpeace UK and Everyday Plastic with the University of Portsmouth, found that UK households discard an estimated 90 billion plastic pieces annually, with only 17% being recycled domestically. This year, the survey of nearly 225,000 people found snack packaging and fruit and veg packaging emerged as the most commonly counted plastic items. In fact, 81% of plastic counted consisting of food and drink packaging.

"It's clear from these results that the plastic waste problem is not getting any better, and that recycling is not going to solve it," Dr Cressida Bowyer, deputy director of the Revolution Plastics Institute, said upon the publication of the results in April.

"New thinking around packaging choices, backed up by legislation, is urgently needed," she said, calling for more reuse and refill systems to "transform the plastics economy from a linear to a more circular model".

Refills are an area where independent retailers have long led the charge, and many retailers who have introduced refill set-ups still report strong success, with customers keen to reduce their packaging footprint and often save money.

According to WRAP's research, shoppers are open to trying different refill and reuse options, and around half of those who haven't yet are receptive to trying. However, only a few have adopted refill as a habit. Read more about selling refill products here.



Where refills aren't possible, consumers widely agree that packaging should be more sustainable.

"The direction of travel on packaging is increasingly embedded, driven by awareness and customers starting to demand or expect good practice," Ash says. "With supply chains becoming more cost effective and brilliant and creative solutions emerging across the world every day, retailers have a responsibility in both directions to help drive change."

At Teals, fruit and veg sold in the food market is never wrapped in plastic; instead paper bags can be used to purchase them. The trays used in the butchery to hold the meat products can also be recycled via household collections in Somerset.

But far from putting the onus entirely on customers, shops like Teals are doing important work on waste management. For example, Teals works with seven different waste providers to collect different waste streams that the business produces, so each can be recycled or repurposed in the most effective way for the planet.

By taking action on waste, fine food retailers can not only showcase their values to customers, but also lead the way on a more sustainable food sector.



Shoppers are still valuing organic

Consumers have a lot of sustainable messaging to digest right now, but research shows they are putting organic first

Time and time again, research is showing that, across the board (and despite financial strains on households) British consumers aren't giving up on their mission to be more sustainable – especially when it comes to food and drink.

While terms like 'regenerative farming' are booming (given a boost most recently when Wildfarmed appeared on Jeremy Clarkson's runaway Amazon Prime hit, *Clarkson's Farm*), those in the organic sphere are doubling down their efforts to ensure the conversation around this method of production remains in the public consciousness.

This year, for example, Penny Nagle of Feltham's Farm (maker of Renegade Monk and Rebel Nun) founded the Organic Cheesemaker's Network, with a view to unite Britain's organic dairy industry, tackle the challenges these producers face, and protect organic cheese as a category for the long term.

'Regenerative' could well be having its day, but according to statistics, organic food and drink sales aren't slowing down. Analyst, Statista, says the UK organic market has experienced growth of 5.2% in 2024, with 36% of those asked in a survey this year saying they valued and would buy more sustainable and eco-friendly foods if they were available.

This sentiment especially rings true amongst younger shoppers such as Gen Z, who are thinking more frequently not only about their diets and the impact of what they eat on their health, but also the impact that diet also has on the world around them.

"Shoppers are increasingly getting on board," Niamh Noone of the Soil Association said of the organic market, adding that last year "independent retailers did particularly well, growing 10%, and more than two-thirds of them expect to grow this year. We know there's a market for making ethical choices when you shop. Organic certification means shoppers are investing in high standards, protected by law."

WHY ORGANIC MATTERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

"Businesses and nature benefit when we prioritise organic," Niamh continued. "It's still the most evidence-based way to support food and farming that's better for the planet. Working with nature, organic farms have an average of 30% more biodiversity, nurture soils so they store more carbon, and uphold the highest animal welfare standards in the UK."

"Intensive food systems are wreaking havoc on human and planetary health," added Roger Kerr, chief executive of Organic Farmers & Growers. "New approaches to food and farming, such as regenerative, seek to mirror some of organic's principles – a huge milestone, but not without challenges for consumers navigating the shelves. Sustainable, nature-friendly food brands are on the rise, and it's becoming an increasingly competitive environment. Therefore, it's important to promote organic's distinct points of difference."

One of the most hotly debated topics at this year's National Organic Conference, Roger said, was how the sector can support sustained growth, from the percentage of land being farmed organically, to the market value of the products being bought by consumers.

"For too long voices of reason that champion positive action have been ignored," Roger added. "With a new government in office, and the spectre of ever-increasing 'greenwash', it is critical we support production systems that not only make a difference, but are built on the solid foundations of integrity, longevity and principles. The industry needs a genuine, concerted effort to support cleaner, more nature-friendly food."

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIC TO CONSUMERS

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons for the enduring appeal of organic food and drink, particularly with the modern shopper, is its health benefits. "The nation's poor diet costs the NHS £11billion annually," said Roger, "with a growing body of evidence on the effects of pesticides on the incidence of cancer and on the gut microbiome." In contrast, he said, "Organic's holistic approach delivers both positive environmental outcomes, and nutritious, healthier food, without harmful synthetic inputs and antibiotics."

An organisation that is seeing first-hand the upward interest in organic produce from consumers conscientious of their health and diets, is Growing Communities, founded in Hackney more than 25 years ago by current director Julie Brown as a community-led initiative.

As well as operating the Better Food Shed, a not-for-profit wholesaler distributing more than 20 tonnes of fresh organic produce to farm shops, food shops, education services and food programmes, Growing Communities founded the UK's only fully organic market in 2003.

When it started, said Growing Communities' Kerry Rankine, the idea was to help improve the food system... to make it more sustainable. "Which sounds like grand plans, but we were really thinking about how we could change the food system to provide better food, and to reward people who are growing more sustainably. It was true then, and it's even more true today. We know more about climate change and the climate emergency we face, and food is a key part of that." Kerry continued, "We can give up a lot of things, but we can't stop eating. For us, being organic, and having organic certification for the market and farmers that supply us is really important."

Kerry said the team love hearing people talking more openly about farming and agriculture today, and how it can be better, and believes organic (as it's regulated) is the "cornerstone" of healthy, environmentally beneficial food and drink. "There are checks to ensure people are doing what they say they are doing. That baseline of organic farming is important!"

Interest in organic produce, Kerry said, increased dramatically during Covid, and hasn't stopped. "We found, looking back to the pandemic, there was a huge, sudden interest in where food came from because people were panicking. All sorts of small veg schemes and farms thrived at that time." After that peak she said there was a small drop off "but we've recently seen continued interest from people supporting the market. Sales are up 17% this year!"

Her experience, that organic is resonating with a younger profile of shopper, tallies with anecdotes from other organic makers and retailers. For Growing Communities that "partly reflects the demographic of where we are, but it's also really positive in terms of the future. We also run farm trips once a year. On one of the visits to a farm in Kent, I was amazed talking to young people about why they'd come along." They told Kerry they wanted to connect with nature, find out more about where their food comes from, and to understand the reality of farming.

"They found it enjoyable and stimulating, hearing the birdsong, talking directly to the farmer...finding out how much hard work it was. I was really encouraged by that."

Topping the list of what shoppers want from the organic sector is fruit and veg, said Kerry, revealing that the four or so stalls the market has dedicated to fresh produce have lengthy queues every week. Also soaring in popularity are organic raw milk, and meat – with customers appreciating knowing the provenance of what they're eating, and that animal welfare is being prioritised.

WHY RETAILERS SHOULD BE VALUING ORGANIC

"Organic represents a fundamental mindset shift when it comes to food production and consumption," said Roger. "As such, there's a real opportunity to deliver multiple positive outcomes. We believe organic has the power to really drive change."

It's a message, he added, that independent retailers and farm shops can get behind "by promoting the four principles that the organic system was built on: health, ecology, fairness and care. These remain core to the mission of the organic sector, and help maintain confidence in the market."





Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

John Farrer & Co expand Signature range

Kendal-based coffee roasted John Farrer & Co – the oldest in the UK – has expanded its Signature range of speciality coffees with the launch of three new variants.

The Signature collection focuses on small-batch, single origin, seasonal coffees from across the world, and now boasts the Brazilian Boa Vista – which has a distinctive creamy body and notes of tropical fruits, lemon and honey with a floral finish – La Gloria Estate from Panama, Central American – which has a smooth body with notes of caramel, tropical ftuit and citrus – and Mubuga Natural from northern Burundi in Central East Africa – which offers a complex flavour with notes of blackcurrant and stone fruits, finishing with dark chocolate and caramel.

All three options are available in resealable bags of whole beans or pre-ground.

Rob Baines, general manager of Farrer's said, "Boa Vista, La Gloria Estate and Mubuga Natural are extremely high-quality coffees, each has distinctive characteristics and interesting flavour profiles. We've taken our usual care in sourcing from small-scale growers to be able to offer our customers three distinctly different coffees. We have limited availability of each so if you would like to try them you'd better be quick."

farrers.co.uk





Fearne & Rosie unveils new look

Producer of reduced sugar spreads, Fearne & Rosie, have unveiled a sophisticated new look created in partnership with Bun Studio.

As the fastest growing jam brand in UK grocery, Fearne & Rosie is on a mission to provide consumers of all ages a healthier alternative to conventional jams and spreads.

Rachel Kettlewell, founder of Fearne & Rosie, said, "In order to become the market leader in jams, we need to broaden our appeal and become more mainstream, offering an accessible, premium alternative. Our dream is to one day become the UK's most loved and trusted family brand, helping to educate and inspire healthier lifestyle choices, and this is another exciting step on that journey. We want to be both accessible, and indulgent, sitting beautifully in customers' kitchens and making them smile. We're so excited to hear what our customers think, and hope they will be encouraged to keep and reuse the jars too".

Victoria Hemphill at Bun Studio, said, "Our mission was to create a natural, more mature look and feel whilst being mindful not to lose the essence and playfulness of the existing brand. Logo refinement, soft textures, hand-drawn illustrations and a simplistic colour palette helped us achieve this. The packaging looks clean and striking on shelf with the red berry lids aiming to give consumers a sense of home and comfort. Working with Rachel was brilliant and I feel we managed to capture everything she had hoped for."

fearneandrosie.co.uk

New Blackcurrant variant from Marlish Waters

Marlish Waters has expand its range of canned-at-source spring waters with the launch of Marlish Sparkling British Blackcurrant.



For the new product, the sustainable producer has combined Herefordian blackcurrants with slowly filtered spring water – and no artificial flavours or preservatives – to create a drink that is full of flavour and naturally light in calories.

Marlish Sparkling British Blackcurrant joins the range of drinks produced and packaged on Marlish Farm located in Northumberland, and sits alongside Pink Grapefruit, Sicilian Lemon, Raspberry, Brazilian Orange and Elderflower, as well as still and sparling spring water and tonics and mixers.

Joe Evans, co-founder and director at Marlish Waters, said, "We are incredibly excited to be launching the latest addition to our spring water range, Sparkling British Blackcurrant. The perfect grab-and-go refreshment for those looking for something light and fresh when on the move. Marlish Blackcurrant offers an exciting, sustainable alternative to the usual sugar and calorie-laden choices you're too often faced with during those out-of-home moments.

"As consumers continue to become more and more health and environmentally conscious, they're looking for options in the fridge that reflect this. Marlish Blackcurrant – as with the entire Marlish range – aims to provide that guilt-free option. Low in calories, sugar free and sustainably produced on Marlish Farm using 100% renewable energy, with Marlish Blackcurrant we're continuing in our mission to make people and planet friendly soft drinks that bring some excitement to the category.

"From farm shops to cafés, gardening centres to pubs, our sparkling flavoured water range provides operators and retailers with an offering that really captures the customer's eye. Packaged in vibrant, bright cans to deliver the ultimate standout on shelf, Marlish Blackcurrant doesn't deviate from this. With its distinct purple hue, when it's time for quick drink, there's really no missing our latest edition!"

marlish.co.uk

SHORE reveals Salt & Balsamic variant

The latest launch from the Scottish snack producer was created in celebration of the business selling over one million packs of seaweed chips in the past 12 months.



The new product is available in 80g share bags and 25g individual impulse bags, and joins SHORE's range of better-for-you seaweed crisps which are also available in Peking Duck, Sweet Sriracha, and Lightly Salted flavours.

Keith Paterson, founder of SHORE, said, "We continually get requests for new flavours and with the phenomenal growth of the SHORE brand this year, now is the right time. The new Salt & Balsamic flavour will make our seaweed chips ever more accessible. A twist on a classic crisp flavour, it has had incredible feedback from all who have tried it during our development process. Since launching in 2020 SHORE has attracted a growing, loyal fan base, thanks to the combination of great foodie flavours and better-for-you credentials. We believe the new Salt & Balsamic flavour does a great job of ticking both these boxes."

shoreseaweed.com

The British Hamper Company welcomes wholesale customers

The British Hamper Company have expanded into the wholesale market, making its range of premium artisan products available to wholesalers.



The range includes high quality products such as Cornish Fudge, All Butter Cheddar Biscuits, Lemon Butter Shortbread, Raspberry Zing Jam, fine teas and handcrafted sweets.

The move will allow retailers to stock individual products from the range, while the business's popular hampers will still be available to purchase online.

James Tod, managing director of The British Hamper Company, said, "Entering the wholesale market is an exciting step for us, as it allows our artisan products to reach a broader audience through retailers. We've spent years perfecting our product range, focusing on the best of British craftsmanship and produce. By offering these items to wholesalers, we are enabling retailers to meet customer demand for premium, quality-driven gifts that are suitable for any occasion."

britishhamper.com

New Christmas treats from Love Cocoa

Love Cocoa, the B Corp-certified chocolate brand, has released details of its festive chocolate range for 2024.



The selection includes a Petite Chocolate Truffle Selection, The Nutcracker Hot Chocolate Duo, Christmas Chocolate Truffle Selection, Hot Chocolate Flakes, Festive Bars – in Christmas Pudding Milk Chocolate, Gingerbread Dark Chocolate and Peppermint White Chocolate options – Festive Gingerbread Truffles, Salted Caramel Bauble Truffles, plus gift boxes and hampers.

James Cadbury, Love Cocoa founder, said, "Christmas is all about chocolate and we believe this year's festive range ticks all the boxes for fine food independent retailers. Sustainably and ethically produced, as well as beautifully packaged, you'll find high quality, affordable luxury chocolate that's perfect for those shoppers who are looking for something a little more indulgent at Christmas. From a new luxe advent calendar through to festive truffles and bars, plus a delightful Nutcracker for younger members of the family, there's something for everyone."

lovecocoa.com



Biona produces new healthy bread

The organic food supplier has released Organic Super Seed Bread – a protein-rich sliced loaf which contains high levels of fibre and nutrition from a high concentration of seeds.



Packed with sunflower seeds, flax seeds and pumpkin seeds, as well as oat kernels, the minimally-processed bread does not contain artificial additives, preservatives, wheat, yeast, sugar or chemical pesticids.

Carmen Ferguson, brand manager at Biona's parent company Windmill Organic, said, "We are delighted to introduce our new Super Seed Bread. Not only does it include no chemical pesticides, preservatives or artificial additives, but it is yeast free, wheat free, sugar free and vegan, which should tick a lot of boxes for those looking to follow a healthier diet. With sales of traditional wrapped bread in double-digit decline, and demand for healthier, minimally processed bakery options rising, this new launch is well-timed and should be a huge success."

biona.co.uk



US hot sauce enters UK market

Sapphire Brands has introduced a new American hot sauce into the UK speciality market.

The General's Hot Sauce is available in six flavours, ranging from Maple Mayhem – a perfectly balanced combination of sweetness and medium level heat from jalapenos – to Shock & Awe, the hottest product in the range made with 86% American-grown habanero chillies.

Ian Food, MD of Sapphire Brands, said, "With British consumers becoming increasingly adventurous when it comes to chilli products and stand-out packaging more important than ever, this is an exciting new launch for retailers. Plus, the fact that the brand was founded by war veterans really spoke to me – and I'm sure its brand ethics and story will connect with UK consumers too."

generalshotsauce.com





DISCOVER THE JOYS OF EUROPEAN CHARCUTERIE

There has never been a better time to relish the taste and heritage of quality European charcuterie – one of the region's finest exports



For centuries, European charcuterie has been delighting food lovers across the continent – and now, in 2024, the time has come for the British market to indulge in the delicacy. While Italy and Germany, as well as Britain in more recent times, boast their own charcuterie specialities, the term 'charcuterie' originated in 15th century France.

Charcutiers, the owners of shops selling 'chair' (flesh) 'cuit' (cooked) would hang their products in shop windows to the delight of food lovers, and today there are as many examples of charcuterie as there are cheese in France.

With the ingredients of French charcuterie being so simple – just salt, spices and time – it's vital that the most important ingredient of all, the meat, is of premium quality. French charcuterie makers pride themselves on the relationships they have with the farmers who supply them. Working together to produce the best quality charcuterie possible, many farmers and companies have been working in partnership for generations.

Each region of France boasts its own variations, and with 450 products registered there are plenty of options for food lovers to explore. Many of these items are protected by law through their PGI and PDO certifications, ensuring that their unique characteristics remain unaltered and enjoyed for years to come.

While tradition plays a key role in the popularity of French charcuterie across the world, that's not to say that there's no room for innovation. Indeed, many companies are adding flavour variations to their range – from familiar tastes such as garlic and herbs to chopped hazelnuts and walnuts.

The format of charcuterie products is also experiencing innovation – in addition to traditional sausages and pastes, smaller saucisson are being



HOW TO SELL EUROPEAN CHARCUTERIE

While European charcuterie is renowned as a gourmet food, there's no reason for British consumers to be unsure about how to enjoy it or to think that it is only suitable for special occasions. The key is in education – by demonstrating delicious ways that customers can serve, for example, French charcuterie and explaining the stories and provenance behind the products themselves, fine food retailers can build an audience for their range.

5 WAYS TO BOOST SALES:

- Offer samples of classic examples of charcuterie, for example rillettes and saucisson, to customers. Once they have experienced the delicious taste and texture of the products, they are more likely to purchase
- Provide inspiration around how charcuterie can be enjoyed; for example, suggest wine and cheese pairings
- Display charcuterie as part of a platter alongside accompaniments such as cornichons and cheese; this offers an opportunity to upsell other products in your shop as well as highlight your charcuterie offering
- Position charcuterie in multiple sections of your shop for optimum exposure. For example, within the cheese counter, next to wine, and alongside snacks
- Promote the products' protected status and provenance. As well as providing the story behind the items, allowing customers to connect with them, these demonstrate the quality and tradition that go into their production
- Flash Printed leaflets, advertising and sampling opportunities are available to independent retailers wishing to educate their customers about charcuterie

produced to cater for the growing on-the-go and snacking market, while charcuterie shaped like wheels of Camembert are taking the market by storm.

On *Speciality Food*'s shelves

There are hundreds of high quality charcuterie in Europe. Some French companies came to London to showcase them, let's discover them:

GROUPE PIERRE SCHMIDT & STOEFFLER

Alongside its range of meal solutions offering a taste of East France, Alsace-based Groupe Pierre Schmidt & Stoeffler produces a popular range of sausages including Sausisse de Lyon, a flavour-filled snack; Saucisse de Foie, delicious on bread or toast as a starter or snack; and Saucisson a l'ail, a smoked garlic sausage to be eaten cold or reheated and served with sauerkraut.

HENRI RAFFIN

With a history dating back to 1897 and Living Heritage Company (EPV) status, Henri Raffin provides an authentic taste of French charcuterie. Its range includes the Savoy region's iconic Diot pork sausage; sliced deli meats including Jambon de Savoie, Rosette and Noix de Jambon; and traditional Saucisson Sec in flavours including beechwood-smoked, Dauphine walnuts and Comte PDO.

MAURER TEMPE ALSACE

The Alsatian producer Maurer Tempa Alsace proudly produces a range of products including pies, sausages and cured meats inspired by the classic gastronomic traditions of Alsace and France.

BELL FRANCE

Bell France offers a traditional taste of the Auvergne and Savoy regions of France. With a range spanning Auvergne Dry Sausage PGI, Auvergne Ham PGI, Savoy Cured Ham and Savoy Leek and Spinach Diots (Pormoniers), the business is a valuable source of classic French specialities.

AGRIAL GROUPE BRANCHE VIANDES

Thanks to having a number of brands within its portfolio, Agrial Groupe Branche Viandes can offer British fine food retailers a wide range of meat and charcuterie products. The product range includes such traditional French products as pure pork Andouillettes, Boudin Noir and Boudin Blancs, pates and terrines.

BERNI BAHIER, ALLIANCE GROUPE

In addition to producing a range of mini saucisson sec in flavours including white summer truffle, aromatic herbs and pepper, Berni-Bahier boasts an extensive selection of sliced cured meats ranging from Roulade au Jambon Pistachee, Smoked Saucisson (Fuseau) from Lorraine, and Rosette.



> With 450 French charcuterie products registered there are plenty of options for food lovers to explore

LES ENTREPRISES FRANCAISES DE CHARCUTERIE TRAITEUR (FICT)

100 years ago this year, butchers located across France joined forces to raise the profile of their products and professions. The Federation of Trade Union Chambers of Manufacturers of Cured Meats, Sausages, Canned Meat and Charcuterie in Wholesale of France, as it was then known, worked passionately to preserve the reputation and quality of French charcuterie. Their determination has helped to secure the popularity of French charcuterie around the world today.

Today, FICT is a professional federation that brings together:

- 310 companies, 90% of which are SMEs
- 32,500 people and a wider industry of 135,000 jobs
- 1.2 million tonnes of products
- 8.27 billion Euros in turnover
- 10% of production is exported (177,000 tonnes – more than 800 million Euros) to 70 countries



JAMES STRAWBRIDGE, CHEF AND CHARCUTERIE FROM EUROPE AMBASSADOR

EUROPEAN QUALITY LABELS

PROTECTED GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION (PGI)

The Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) identifies an agricultural product, raw or processed, whose quality, reputation or other characteristics are linked to its geographical origin. To qualify for this official sign, at least one stage in the production, processing or preparation of the product must take place in the defined geographical area.
Examples: Bayonne Ham PGI, Auvergne Ham PGI, Ardeche dry sausage PGI, Tours rilettes PGI

PROTECTED DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN

A PDO is a sign that distinguishes a product whose specific characteristics are closely linked to its terroir. All stages in the manufacture of the product must take place in the geographical area defined in the specifications, using local methods.
Examples: Jambon Noir de Bigorre PDO, Jambon du Kintoa PDO

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PLANT BASED WORLD EXPO EUROPE 2024 PREVIEW

Europe's 100% plant-based industry event returns to ExCeL London on 13th-14th November 2024

The two-day Plant Based World Expo Europe is a must-attend event for all food and drink professionals looking for an up-to-the-minute look at the fast-paced plant-based sector. From ingredients and retail-ready products to packaging, innovation is rife across the sector, and Plant Based World Expo Europe is the ultimate place to experience it all under one roof.

Attendees will be able to sample products from over 150 brands that are both established and new to the sector – including those that have travelled from countries including Italy, France, Germany and Brazil to connect with professionals within the British plant-based sphere. Highlights include ranges from Plenty Reasons, Dandies Marshmallows, Mighty Kitchen, Dragonfly Foods, BeanStalk and Novameat.

Hear expert insight

Plant Based World Europe is home to three theatres packed with educational sessions hosted by thought leaders and plant-based experts. The Pulse Theatre will host the likes of SPINS, GFI and Plant Future who will share the latest data and predict the future of the plant-based sector. The Learning Garden Theatre will showcase the sector's latest research and innovations via company-led presentations and shorter educational sessions. Meanwhile, the Culinary Theatre will offer visitors to the event the opportunity to sample products on display which have been cooked by professional chefs, who will also provide advice around incorporating the items into simple meals for all.

NEED TO KNOW

WHERE: ExCeL, London
WHEN: 13th-14th November 2024
WEB: plantbasedworldeurope.com

TRENDS TO LOOK OUT FOR

RETHINKING FOOD WASTE

With waste a hot topic at all levels of the food and drink industry, the sector is beginning to recognise the sustainable potential of waste. One business exhibiting at the event which is doing just that is Alimentos Sanygran, a Spanish company which uses spent grain from the beer industry to create a meat analogue.

FUNCTIONAL FOOD AND DRINK

Functional foods are making waves in the food and drink sphere, as shoppers look to get more from what they consume – better sleep, improved digestion and energy boosts are just some of the demands they are placing on brands today. Bar1Brands is up for the challenge and will be presenting its range of high-protein YuBi bars at the event, alongside its Jade & Joy brand of vegan collagen bars.

FREE-FROM AND INDULGENT

In 2024, there's no reason for consumers with allergens and dietary restrictions to miss out on indulgent food. Vecuisine will be launching brand new Salted Caramel and Lime Cheesecakes at the event, both of which are free from lactose, gluten, cholesterol and eggs, and offering attendees samples so they can experience the new products for themselves.

INNOVATIVE INGREDIENTS

The ingredient sector has been key to the innovation rife throughout the plant-based sector – with the taste and texture of products particularly boosted by recent innovations. A number of ingredient solution providers will be in attendance at the show, including Clextral, which will be showcasing their patented Galaxy Texturation technology, which provides soft and flexible textures in whole-cut meat alternatives; and Novonesis, which will present a new line of plant-based enzymes – Vertera – which has been created for use in meat-alternatives, yogurts and plant-based drinks.

> "At Plant Based World Expo we recognise the importance of innovation and collaboration across the entire supply chain to create enticing, delicious plant-based products that customers will love – and change their dietary habits for. The show this year will champion innovation in the space, and technologies that are making it happen"
>
> **ABIGAIL STEVENS, MARKETING DIRECTOR AT JD EVENTS**



MEET THE PRODUCER

With its unique blend of the latest technology and ancient skills, Marriage's Millers caters for today's baker with aplomb

Today's fine food world is undoubtedly one where quality, heritage and story are revered – and it's these credentials that have been delighting Marriage's flour customers since it was first founded in 1824.

In that year, twin brothers William and Henry Marriage – descended from a line of farmers and millers since the 1700s – inherited their father's mill, and so begins the story of W & H Marriage. "The brothers dedicated themselves to setting new standards for the quality of flour," explains Hannah Marriage, director of Marriage's Millers. "Working closely with local farmers, their passion and dedication continues to inspire us today, and with each generation comes new innovation."

Organic production is just one of the standards that have been set by previous generations and upheld ever since. Sampson David Marriage was an early champion of organic wheat and flour, and his son – current chairman George Marriage – helped to form the Organic Food Federation as well as support organic research projects within the agriculture and milling sectors.

This dedication to doing things properly is still at Marriage's core. "Today, we continue our commitment to milling quality flour that elevates every bake," says Hannah. "Using only premium wheat from local and international farmers, our flour makes for golden loaves and lighter bakes."

Marriage's support of local farmers has paved the way for its success. The local Essex countryside offers

> "Today, we continue our commitment to milling quality flour that elevates every bake"





the ideal soil and weather conditions for growing high quality wheat – an integral part of producing premium flour. "Flour quality is determined by the quality of the wheats used, as well as the grist and the skill of the miller in grinding the wheat," she explains.

The expertise of Marriage's millers as well as those involved in the scientific aspect of the business's operations play a key role in delivering optimum flour to customers. "We have a CLAS approved laboratory and technical baker who test the wheat and flour performance throughout the milling process. Consistency of performance is what's key for our customers, whether they're an artisan bakery or home baker, and we feel this is paramount in our success in milling for 200 years."

Indeed, this meeting of modern technology and historical technique – also relationships, as some of Marriage's farming partners have worked with the millers for generations – is what set Marriage's apart. When the business was founded by William and Henry Marriage, their mills were powered by wind and water while biting the grain was the best way to test it. In 1891, thanks to the brothers' forward-thinking, modern roller milling was introduced to Moulsham Mill and vastly increased production – so much so that the pair decided to relocate operations to Chelmer Mill, a site located a stone's through away from the burgeoning Chelmsford train station. The business has stayed there ever since, and has become a much-loved landmark for modern-day travellers.

"Today, Chelmer Mill is a unique mix of ultra-high-tech milling machinery and traditional techniques," says Hannah. "We still have some traditional stoneground flours which are milled the old-fashioned, slower way, by grinding the whole grain between horizontal Victorian French Burr stones. Milling in this way gives the flour a distinctive nutty flavour and more rounded bran texture."



A thoroughly modern range

The Essex-based miller may have historical roots, but it has its finger firmly on the pulse when it comes to satisfying the 2024 consumer's appetite for new. "Today our range stands at 18 award-winning flours, a wide range of white, brown and stoneground wholemeal flours. Whether you're looking to make bread, cake, pastry or pizza, there's a flour to suit within our range," says Hannah.



In the 1980s Marriage's launched its organic range which proudly supports sustainability, wildlife and soil fertility, and as a result of the growing interest in sourdough the business released Light Spelt and Dark Rye flours for use in long fermentation baking.

"With consumers looking for wholesome options in recent years, we added our unique Golden Wholegrain flours to the range – naturally high in fibre and protein, our Golden Wholegrain flours let you enjoy all the benefits of wholemeal with a lighter, milder taste." Using carefully selected grains and expertly grinding them whole, consumers and professionals alike can relish a delicious flour which retains all of the nutrients and natural flavour of these special grains.

While discerning consumers play an important role in Marriage's operations, the business also supplies artisan bakers, manufacturers and chefs worldwide – well and truly catering to the world's growing appetite for premium bakes.

Marriage's may have conquered the home baking category and impressed professionals around the globe, but the mission doesn't stop there: "As we celebrate our 200th anniversary, we plan to continue growing the business but remain committed to milling quality flour, like our founders were back in 1824."





Your customers will relish sharing these gifting options with their loved ones this Christmas

1 BALLANCOURT
PÂTÉ COLLECTION

"Ballancourt jute gift bags make a perfect gift for any lover of pâtés, which have been specially paired with Peter's Yard award winning sourdough crispbreads," says James Evans of Ballancourt. "Available in three fantastic varieties: Game, Farmhouse and Fish. Gift bags can be supplied with either Ballancourt label or customer own-label."
ballancourt.co.uk

2 COTTAGE DELIGHT
SPARKLING CHRISTMAS CLASSICS

Indulge yourself in the ultimate sweet and savoury sparkling Christmas selection. Perfect for gifting or sharing over the festive season, this versatile gift pack includes a splash of sparkle with limited edition gold label jars. A show stopping gift that truly encompasses the festive, sparkly fun of Christmas!
cottagedelight.co.uk

3 GODMINSTER
CHEDDAR & BLACK TRUFFLE SIGNATURE SELECTION

This selection makes for the perfect cheeseboard, featuring a pair of award-winning organic Cheddars with a box of Golden Honey & Oat Biscuits. The creaminess of the Howling Hound Black Truffle Cheddar cheese and award-winning Vintage Bruton Beauty Organic Cheddar pairs beautifully with the delicate crunch of the crackers.
godminster.com

4 WALKERS NONSUCH
GIFTING BOXES

Independent family company, Walker's Nonsuch are celebrating 130 years of toffee making. Using the finest ingredients, the taste and chew are second to none. New for 2024 are 350g gifting boxes in Assorted Toffees and Chocolate Eclairs, Salted Caramel and Liquorice. All Walker's Nonsuch toffee is free from artificial colours, preservatives and gluten, and is and vegetarian friendly too.
walkers-nonsuch.co.uk/trade



5 WBC
WICKER HAMPER

You'll make your loved ones feel special when you glam up your gifting using this 18-inch wicker hamper from WBC. Fill it with fine wines and Christmas-themed goodies and you're sure to be the most popular Santa in town! It comes with a printed cotton liner for that extra festive touch, which can be personalised for orders exceeding 50 units.
wbc.co.uk

6 HAWKSHEAD RELISH
CHRISTMAS SAVOURY SELECTION

Handmade in the heart of the Lake District using traditional open pans, these three condiments encapsulate all things festive. Seasonal spices, rich apricots, ginger and orange are just a few of the ingredients that will bring your Christmas lunch to life! All gluten-free, nut-free and suitable for vegans, and also available in various gift selections.
hawksheadrelish.com

7 MRS BRIDGES
CHEESEBOARD SELECTION

The scrumptious goodies in this Cheeseboard Selection make perfect partners for a whole range of cheeses. Each of the chutneys and relishes in this quartet have been carefully selected to pep up the Christmas cheeseboard. And they're not just for cheese, they're equally enjoyable with cold meats, sausage rolls and anything else you think needs an extra kick of flavour.
mrsbridges.co.uk

8 DRIVERS PICKLES
CUSTOMISABLE GIFT BOX

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

SETTING THE SCENE

With Christmas the most valuable season for fine food retail, now's the time to master the art of merchandising



COMMENTATORS



WILL GADSBY
GADSBY



CAITLYN SMITH
WBC



EDWARD BERRY
FLYING FORK



SHIRLEY AUBREY
HARVEY NICHOLS

The most wonderful time of the year is nearly upon us, and with the consumer expectation for fun festive experiences at every turn – and bottom lines dependent on a successful festive season – it's vital for Speciality Food readers to create the kind of atmosphere that will get customers inspired to spend. Thankfully, there's a myriad of ways to set yourself apart from the competition and create an atmosphere worth returning to.

"Merchandising is crucial in retail at Christmas for four key reasons," says Will Gadsby, managing director of Gadsby. "First, increased consumer spending during the season makes it vital for retailers to showcase products that appeal predominantly to shoppers' emotions. Second, festive merchandising – softer lighting, filled Christmas-themed hampers and decorations – enhances the shopping experience and encourages customers to spend more time in-store. Independents can create a cosy, more personalised shopping atmosphere with bespoke decorations and holiday-themed displays that reflect their brand's character."

If that 'character' is local and rustic, Will has a simple display solution that will help you stand out from the crowd. "Highlighting niche, artisanal or locally made products in well-organised gift sections helps attract customers seeking unique items. Place these products in rustic wicker display baskets or wooden crates to add to the 'handmade' appeal. Baskets and crates are great for reusing and repurposing throughout your store."

"In a sea of competitors, you need to stand out, making your store the go-to choice on every list, whether it contains gifting must-haves or grocery supplies," says Caitlyn Smith, product manager at WBC. "With beautiful displays, noteworthy packaging or a vibrant fabric bag, you have the opportunity to give your brand identity extra visibility, creating a memorable impact and ensuring that customers can distinguish you from the crowd."

The aim of the game is to invite your customers into a wonderland of festive fine food, and that doesn't need to cost much money to create. "Customer expectations run high during the festive season, so creating an emotional buy-in is essential," says Caitlyn. "Think out of the box and introduce elements that appeal to the senses and embrace the Christmas spirit using mouthwatering aromas, visually appealing counter displays and music that sets the mood. Think along the lines of beautifully presented mince pies, fresh from the oven and piled high on raised food stands and branded ribbons tied around enticing hampers of your best ploughman's selection."

Plan for success

While Christmas is the most profitable time of the retail year – and therefore should be maximised wherever possible – there's a fine line between attempting to sell the festive spirit when people aren't quite ready and missing out on sales from your more organised customers. This is the season when planning ahead really comes into its own – without investing time into how those busy weeks will ideally run you run the risk of unnecessary stress and, even worse, missed opportunities.

"Christmas adds an extraordinary and exceptional dynamic to the retail year, and food shops encounter unbelievable experiences," says Edward Berry, partner at The Flying Fork. "Many, in fact most regularly take substantial percentages of their annual income in only a few short weeks. Average spend rises and items are bought that are never repeated at other times of the year.

"When to launch your Christmas range? I recall visiting Harrods some years ago and finding a Christmas department trading in July," says Edward. "The explanation that I was given at the time was demand from overseas visitors. I was more concerned at the sanity of the employees having to listen to Jingle Bells every day for nearly six months!"

Naturally, opinions differ across the sector, which means it's important to learn from last year's triumphs and errors to find the correct balance for your business. "Traditionalists would say that you shouldn't begin your Christmas sales thrust before December, but as so much emphasis is put on this period, then ensuring sufficient time to meet targets may mean an earlier start.

RETAILER INSIGHT

Shirley Aubrey, food development and buying manager at Harvey Nichols shares festive merchandising tricks used by the iconic London store

We group products into themes in the stores, particularly around hampers and stocking fillers that our customers are shopping for. Using plinths and shelves to add height to make more impactful displays. Our Christmas theme runs throughout the store from the windows to the shop floor and continues into the foodmarket.





But then many consumers leave everything until the last minute. As ever, previous years provide much of the evidence for decision making – and confirms the importance of a post-Christmas analysis and review in January."

"What is essential beyond anything else is planning," says Edward. "Some of this is prompted by suppliers who require pre-orders and commitments, in particular cheese producers and wholesalers. But they are not alone. No one within the supply chain wants Christmas stock unsold in January."

Make it easy for your customers

Dividing your festive section into clearly-defined segments is a smart move that will help customers navigate your store during a particularly busy – and often rushed – time, says Will. "Creating festive-themed easy-to-navigate sections like 'gifts for her' or 'stocking fillers' simplifies shopping and is an easy merchandising win. Use chalkboard signs to easily update your messaging as and when you need to."

Making it easy for customers to find what they need is imperative, whether that be a gifting item or a more incidental seasonal purchase. "What is important is to identify clearly the Christmas items, be it food or gifts, so that they are easily found," says Edward. "Don't forget the all-important impulse purchase, so have plenty of spots with quick grab stocking fillers."

As well as having clear differentiation between Christmas and all-year-round products in terms of the layout of your shop, there are smaller ways but no less valuable ways you can increase both the visual strength of your festive offering and its efficiency. "It's always good to have check lists or order forms that prompt customers," suggests Edward. "In butchery it's a given that turkeys are ordered in advance. This is the moment to give the customer a lead on supplementary goods, anything from other items on the Christmas dinner list, to suggestions of things they might not have considered."

Plus, be sure to bring in promotions to aid your upselling efforts. "Don't be shy of promotions," says Edward. "Although you can be sure of higher spend, a well chosen and costed promotion can provide opportunities to upsell."

"Effective merchandising, especially around checkout areas, can make your store stand out and boost impulse purchases," says Will. "Make sure your signage is clear and highlight any seasonal promotional items."

Think beyond floor space

While merchandising may seem to be an easier task the more space you have, that's not necessarily the case – all small-scale retailers require is to think vertical and versatile. "Even if retailers are limited in space, they can still make a big impact," agrees Will. "We designed CrateWall specifically for those who don't have a huge amount of space to work with. The units can be rearranged however you like. Dismantle and move around your store as and when you need to."

"Utilise your vertical space further by incorporating multifunctional fixtures like metal display stands, tiered shelves or hanging displays. Keep things looking up-to-date and fresh over the Christmas season by rotating stock regularly. Using wooden crates as risers allows you to create a tiered effect on countertops, creating the illusion of even more space."

Caitlyn agrees then when space is at a premium, think beyond floor space. "Take advantage of your vertical space by finding display options that can be stacked or built upwards," she says. "Our Matlock tripod risers and Railton range are a great example and are designed to help you show off your produce without the need for additional fixtures. Give your bestsellers top priority (Christmas cakes, fine wines and bespoke chocolates) and fill the remaining space with items that are eye-catching and profitable. Plus, using trolleys and vertical freestanding shelving units gives you the option to carve out new walkways or points of interest while optimising your floor space."

Ultimately, once your displays are attractive and functional, don't feel you need to reinvent the wheel each and every Christmas. "Unlike other times of the year, I rarely encourage much innovation at Christmas," concludes Edward. "It's for many a deeply consistent time, in particular when it comes to food, with family traditions passed down through the generations. This means providing recognisable items that meet the Christmas menu list."

THE **DOS** AND **DON'TS** OF FESTIVE MERCHANDISING

Two retail experts share their retail display tips

DOS

WILL GADSBY, GADSBY

- Stick to a theme to create a cohesive retail space. Consistent colours, patterns and decorations offer a more enjoyable shopping experience. Use vertical space and wall-mounted shelves to make the most of limited space - ensure products are easily accessible and visible.
- Create bold signage to help highlight key products. Place these popular seasonal products prominently using store focal points and POS. Lastly, don't neglect lighting. Use warmer lighting to enhance the mood and highlight specific areas or products. String lights or spotlights can add a festive glow.

CAITLYN SMITH, WBC

- Use clear signage and include prices so that time-pressed shoppers don't have to waste time asking
- Create a sense of flow – your walkways should be spacious, allowing customers to navigate your retail space seamlessly, despite the crowds
- Place your most popular products at eye level and use your higher and lower shelves for less important merchandise or gift packaging
- Have some lovely personalised fabric bags on sale to encourage a bit of extra shopping

DON'TS

WILL GADSBY, GADSBY

- It's important not to overcrowd your displays. Avoid cramming too many products into one display as this can detract from the festive atmosphere. Above all, don't forget about the practicality of it all. Whilst merchandising is important, it shouldn't interfere with your customer's shopping experience

CAITLYN SMITH, WBC

- Don't leave it too late to plan your festive season retail display and gifting ideas, especially if you intend to get some of them personalised. If you start 12 to 16 weeks in advance, you'll be properly prepared to make stellar sales
- Create displays that are visually overwhelming. There is such a thing as too much
- Make your decor more important than your products. They should be used as support acts rather than the main show
- Don't let your shop get messy – it's a sure way to put people off

> "Christmas adds an extraordinary and exceptional dynamic to the retail year, and food shops encounter unbelievable experiences"



10 FOOD AND DRINK TRENDS TO KNOW FOR CHRISTMAS 2024

What should you be stocking up on ready for the festive season? *Speciality Food* finds out



It's been a thrilling year in the speciality food and drink sphere. So much change. So much innovation. And the driving force behind it all... quality. The movers and shakers, new product launches, and inventive new flavours and ideas we've seen emerging in 2024 have proved just how much of a moveable feast this sector is.

We've witnessed the rise of adaptogens and functional products in response to consumer interest in wellbeing. HFSS regulations have led to the creation of new brands and new lines from existing producers, with a laser focus on reducing sugar, fat and salt whilst still igniting taste buds.

The desire from shoppers to be more sustainable has sped up the packaging sector, with compostable and plastic-free becoming much more commonplace.

And products boasting 'clean' ingredient decks, free from artificial additives and UPFs, are increasingly taking up shelf, chiller and freezer space in response to the gut-friendly food movement.

Underpinning everything though in 2024, is the hunger for nostalgia. Consumers want newness, yes, but they're also craving comfort, and tastes that remind them of childhood and family.

As you finalise your Christmas plans, we reveal 18 of the biggest food and drink trends we think you need to consider stocking.

1 GINGER

This aromatic root is the flavour trend no one saw coming, though it's thought its rising star has something to do with the nostalgia hook in food and drink right now, or perhaps the wellbeing trend. We're seeing ginger popping up in kombucha, RTDs, cakes, biscuits, puddings and cereals, with many brands saying it's fast becoming their bestselling flavour.

2 CLASSIC CHUTNEYS

Speciality shoppers are appreciating spice and new flavours (Hawkshead Relish, for example, plans on keeping its new aubergine relish due to strong sales), but on the whole it's classic flavours that are hitting the mark in 2024. Across the board we've been told onion marmalades, ploughman's relishes and piccalillis are topping the chutney charts, with consumers especially interested in jars that are all-natural, lower in sugar, and high in fruit and vegetables.

"People are willing to pay for what they get," says Candi Robertson of Candi's Chutney. "And, like always, they like a story, and to know who's behind what they're buying."

3 MEAD

Still, sparkling, RTD cans, bottled...the entire spectrum of mead has taken off in a big way both in the UK and in the USA, with Fortune Business Insights projecting a category growth of 11.33% this year.

"They've become hip and trendy again," agrees Peter Taylor, founder of Nidhoggr Mead, saying part of the drink's popularity comes down to it being completely natural, with no chemicals or sulphites, appealing to those veering away from artificial additives. Peter also reflects that there's concern around protecting Britain's bees. "There's a big campaign at the moment to save the bees, and the best way is to buy more ethical honey, mead and honey wine."



4 HOT HONEY

Speaking of honey, those varieties infused with chilli and spice have shaken up the condiments aisle this year. You'll see hot honey everywhere – from retail to restaurants. Consumers just can't get enough of its swicy profile. We highly recommend stocking up on this product for Christmas. Hot honey gift sets could be a great seller alongside food and drink using it as an inclusion, such as Tom Savano's Hot Honey Margarita RTD.

5 ALCOHOL-FREE SPIRITS

Brands across the sector have reported rapid growth – some of them doubling or even tripling sales year-on-year. Recent statistics demonstrate this is not a category to be ignored. "Part of this is down to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis," says WSTA chief executive Miles Beale, "but also a noticeable change in drinking habits. There are clear trends of consumers choosing to drink less, or finding alcohol alternatives. The no and low alcohol category remains relatively small, but it is consistently growing." Alcohol-free spirits, Miles adds, have seen the largest percentage rise within the category in volume sales during the last year, up an incredible 23%.

6 HOT SAUCE

If you add just one condiment to your aisle this Christmas, let it be hot sauce, says Kier Kemp, co-founder of Condimaniac. "I've been saying for a long time hot sauce is the new craft beer, and it has been for a while," he explains.

"Hot sauces are just such a trend," agrees Becky Vale, marketing director at Tracklements. "Our recent quantitative research showed that 44% of shoppers are using hot sauces to go with everyday meals at home!"

7 ALPINE CHEESE

Cheesemongers and wholesalers across the UK tell us they're seeing a greater demand for Alpine-style cheeses, whether Continental, or made in Britain.

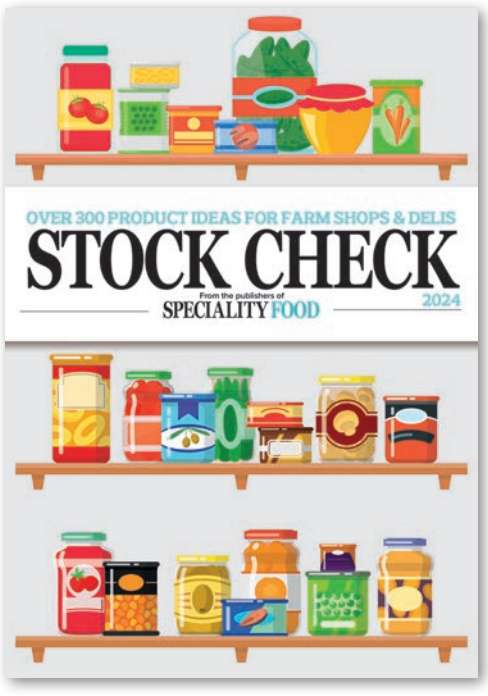
Svetlana Kukharchuk of The Cheese Lady says she believes its appeal lies in "the cheesemakers' unwavering commitment to quality, especially the quality of their primary ingredient – milk. This dedication inevitably translates into phenomenally delicious and complex cheeses." Alpine cheeses are also "timeless, always appropriate, and versatile. They can shine as part of a cheeseboard, elevate the flavour of a dish when used in cooking, and become the star of the show when melted into a fondue."

8 SHEEP'S MILK CHEESE

This is no longer a cheeseboard obscurity. Shoppers are being drawn to new generation

STOCK CHECK
From the publishers of SPECIALITY FOOD

Stock up for 2025
300 exciting product ideas for independent retailers



For further information contact Louise on 01206 508629 or louise.barnes@artichokehq.com





varieties, which are shrugging off its 'farmyardy' image, presenting it as luxurious, sweet and wholesome.

Cheesemongers say they are being asked more and more about sheep's milk cheese, and there's certainly a cheeseboard's worth available just from UK makers – from Feta to blue, Pecorino and Brie-style. The only issue is its scarcity. Sheep's milk is a precious commodity at the moment, and the industry continues to struggle to keep up with demand. Order yours early so you don't miss out.

9 SAVOURY BISCUITS

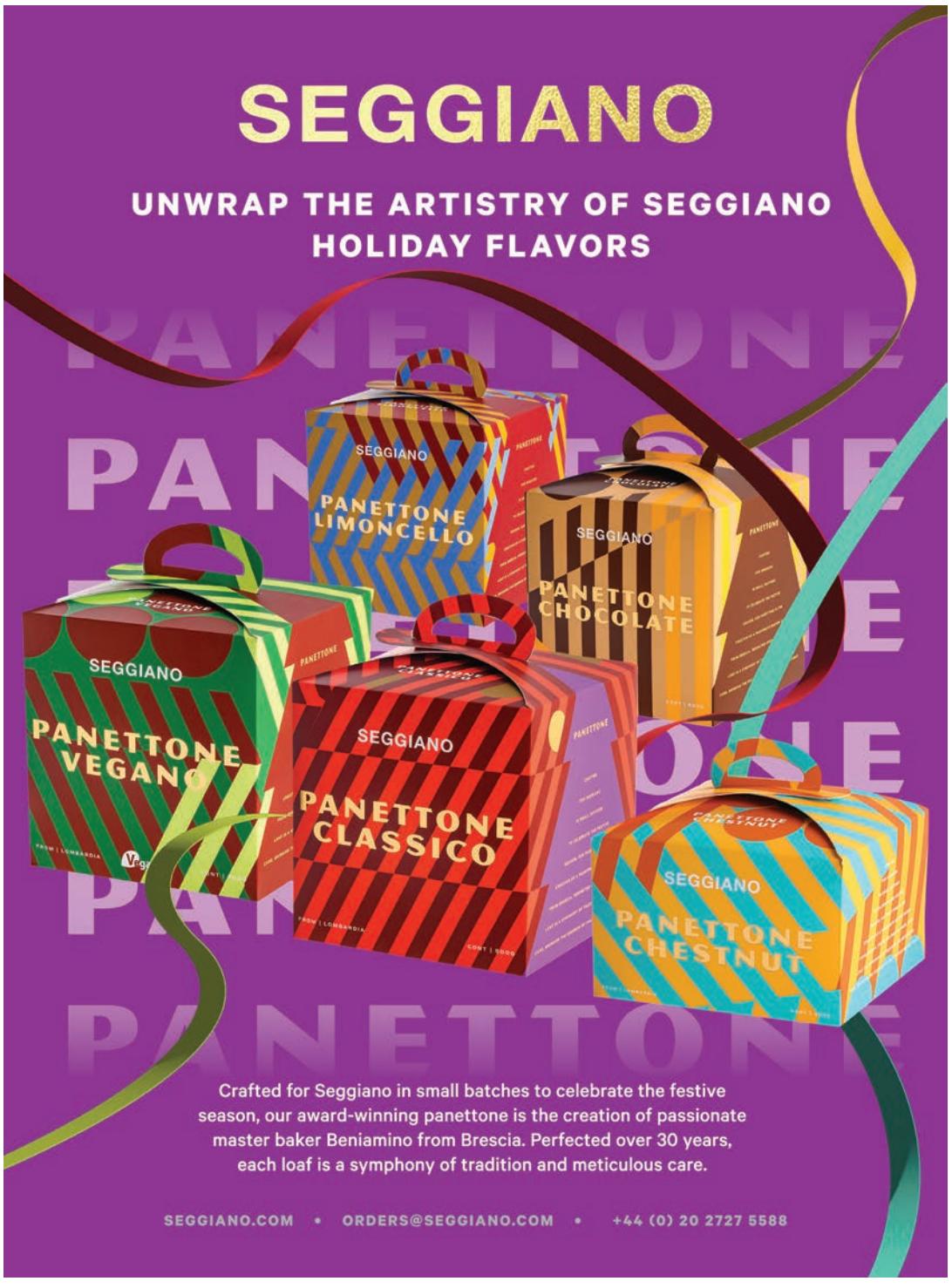
Mintel's *Savoury Biscuits Report 2023* shows 69% of those who eat savoury biscuits do so every day, and there are new faces showing up in this space, offering snacks that go beyond pairing with cheese.

We've tried some delicious vegetable and spice-filled biscuits from Cradoc's, melt-in-the-mouth cheese biscuits from Island Bakery, and low-calorie Cheddar wafer thins from the Good Guys Bakehouse. It's certainly one to watch.

10 CONTINENTAL CAKES

Christmas cakes, puddings and mince pies are all musts, but panettone has fast become a British Christmas staple too. Shoppers are attracted to the romanticism of the ingredients (from the finest candied peel to real butter), and the packaging. Bound in glossy printed wrap and ribbons, or tucked into hat boxes or tins, they have real 'wow' factor in store.

Seggiano says, "Unlike bread, the sweet sensation is more lavish, and richer in both taste and price. Only the most skilled producers can create real and authentic panettone." The brand says to choose varieties from makers who use only natural ingredients, and from those with long heritage and good provenance. The best are made without industrial emulsifiers, stabilisers, binders or preservatives.



STOCK CHECK



FLOWER & WHITE CHOCOLATE CRUNCH MERINGUE BAR

An all-natural decadent chocolate meringue bar, smothered in sustainable chocolate and sold in paper recyclable packaging. Only 92 calories per bar.

flowerandwhite.co.uk



MRS BRIDGES GINGER & CHILLI CHUTNEY

Ginger is hitting the note with consumers right now, and this warming, Asian-inspired chutney ticks all their boxes, being sweet and a touch spicy.

mrsbridges.co.uk



MR FILBERT'S SNACK TIME GIFTING TIN

Perfect for snack lovers. This special tin is filled with award-winning nuts, from Rosemary Almonds, to Salt & Pepper Cashews.

mrfilberts.com



TRUEFOODS BEEF GRAVY

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truefoodsltd.com



ROSEMULLION DISTILLERY DARK RUM

A 40% dark rum, fermented, distilled and aged in Cornwall, with a lightly spiced, botanical flavour and deep notes from molasses.

rosemulliondistillery.com



SEGGIANO CLASSIC VIN SANTO PANETTONE

Handmade for Seggiano by a family-run bakery in Tuscany, with the best ingredients, and leavened with mother yeast. Enriched with 12% DOC Vin Santo del Chianti.

seggiano.com



TIME TO PARTY

With customers' diaries filling up with all sorts of sparkling events, these are the products to stock to satisfy their appetite to celebrate

COMMENTATORS



MATT WHELAN
FIELDFARE



NATASHA JONES
FAIRFIELDS



GEORGE RICE
SERIOUS PIG



NICHOLAS JINKS
RANDOM HARVEST

The halls are being decked, the twinkly lights are being draped all around, and party season is rearing its glittering head once more. While Christmas is, to many, the jewel in the crown of the festive season, the weeks before and after the day itself are often packed with get togethers of all descriptions. Family members returning home, reunited friends, and gathering with loves just because – arguably, party season offers more sales opportunities than the annual feast.

The variety of the occasions in peoples' diaries is what makes it such a valuable season for fine food retailers. A casual gathering may simply require delectable crisps and dips, and a really good bottle of fizz, while grander scale occasions may bring the need for cooked canapes, charcuterie and cheeseboards.

The luxury of time

At this busy time, retailers can ensure success by taking the hard work away from their customers, so they can enjoy the time with loved ones rather than feeling chained to the kitchen. "People want to offer their guests delicious food but without having to spend hours in the kitchen. So, taste, presentation and convenience are all equally important. Variety is also a big consideration as hosts want to ensure that everyone gets to eat something they love!" says Matt Whelan, director of Fieldfare.

Whatever the occasion, a selection – big or small – of freshly cooked party food is sure to be gratefully received, and if starting from frozen there's no need to worry about waste. "Many of our savoury and sweet foods are perfect for the party spread, and our delicious savoury bites range is particularly popular at this time. Hosts can just pop the nibbles in the oven straight from the freezer, and they are ready to serve within minutes."

Fieldfare's selection is as varied as it is convenient. "The range includes mouth-watering Mac 'n' Cheese bites with classic macaroni in a cheddar, Monterey Jack and mozzarella cheese sauce, moreish crispy on the outside, gooey on the inside Mozzarella Bites and delicious, always popular Sweetcorn and Chilli Fritters. And for something sweet, Fieldfare's single serving Vanilla Panna Cottas or moreish Sicilian Lemon Tarts are perfect. Simply defrost and serve!"

The fact that Fieldfare's products can be stored in the freezer not only means that it's ready to be cooked or defrosted at whatever time or quantity is required, but that wastage is easily avoided. "The naturally longer shelf life of frozen foods, when compared to chilled or fresh, allows consumers to stock up on a range of items and keep them in the freezer until needed. This can be immensely helpful with pre-planning and preparation for a party, or if they suddenly find themselves catering for the inevitable unexpected guest," says Matt. "With a well-stocked freezer, hosts can just pop some of Fieldfare's delicious quick-cook foods in the oven and everyone is catered for. Furthermore, Fieldfare's unique scoop-your-own concept allows shoppers to choose how much they need of each party food, rather than being limited to prepacked quantities. In turn, this also helps shoppers to avoid food waste as they only take as much as they need."

The UK's favourite snack

Whatever the size and style of the gathering, no party is complete without crisps – and Fairfields Farm have a myriad of delicious options that are suitable for every guest. "We are a nation of absolute crisp lovers," explains Natasha Jones, commercial manager at Fairfields. "Consistently in research, we find that the most frequently snacked on item in the UK is crisps, and everyone wants to trade up at Christmas." A single-serve pack of Walkers won't cut it for fine food customers during party season – shoppers want to share, and to offer their guests something extra special.

Fairfields' range of premium crisps is the answer. Attractively packaged, available in a range of delicious flavours – including Salt & Vinegar, Sea Salt & Aspall Cyder Vinegar, Cheese & Onion, Sweet Chilli, Roast Rib of Beef, Bacon & Tomato, Sea Salt & Black Pepper and the outstanding new Prawn Cocktail – and with sustainable credentials to boot, they're a real crowd pleaser.

Plus, the brand's festive offering is sure to go down well with guests of all ages. "This is our year selling our Maple Glazed Ham crisps because they've been so popular in previous years." Indeed, the richly spiced, addictively sweet-salty snack saw a sales boost of 400% between 2022 and 2023, no doubt aided by its attractive – and party-ready – gold packaging.

Thankfully, all products in the Fairfields range are ideal for every guest at the party to enjoy. Gluten-free and suitable for vegans – including the ever-popular Cheese & Onion flavour – every crisp made by the business is suitable for all.

Party-ready platters

With time a valuable commodity during party season – for hosts especially – having everything needed for a delicious platter all in one place is a real luxury. Thankfully, Serious Pig is on hand with a varied range of party-ready products to satisfy all tastes.



Of course, no platter is complete without cheese, and Serious Pig's Snacking cheese more than fits the bill. Addictively savoury, with a light, crunchy texture and rich cheese flavour, it's surprisingly versatile – serve solo with drinks, include on a cheeseboard for a crunchy new taste experience for cheese aficionados, or add to the ultimate Serious Pig platter.

For this, think big. From the traditionally-seasoned and pre-cut Snackingham charcuterie to Spicy Snackalami to add a hit of heat, there's plenty in the Serious Pig repertoire to delight meat lovers. For savoury crunch, think Snacking Pickles and Pickled Chillies, and serve alongside Corn Scratchings and Cornish Sea Salted Almonds for the perfect snacking platter to serve with drinks. In a hurry? Partner Snacking Cheese with Snackalami and a Snacking Pickle for a super speedy and seriously tasty party nibble.

Serious Pig has collaborated with craft brewers Vocation and Thornbridge for the curation of wildly popular hampers, and the









range has a natural affinity with beer. Try Corn Scratchings with Thornbridge's Lukas 4.2% Helles Lager for a refreshing and perfectly seasoned pairing that will work for all occasions, or Snackingham with Vocation's Love & Hate 7.2% New England IPA, a well-rounded and satisfying pairing.

The extra details

For your customers who are opting for the all-out approach this party season, it's well worth giving your ambient aisles a revamp – or including some choice oil and vinegar options alongside your charcuterie and snacks to promote upselling and inspire shoppers to create an impressive party platter.

Charcuterie, cheese, cornichons, grissini... All delicious, but made extra special with the addition of high quality oils, vinegars and seasonings. Enter Random Harvest, the Australian producer of premium ambient products that are taking the UK by storm. As well as superlative Australian truffle products including oil, mustard and salt - all of which would add a sense of occasion to a party spread, Random Harvest produce a range of gifting products which are ideal for entertaining during the festive season.

"The Mini Me Entertaining pack is ideal for entertaining platters or great as a party gift. You've got the Fireball Chilli Mustard which contains Western Australian mustard seeds which pop in your mouth for a unique taste experience, Kalamata & Roasted Garlic Tapenade, and Lemon, Garlic & Dill Dressing, which is perfect for seafood or as a side dipping sauce," begins Nicholas Jinks, general manager at Random Harvest. In addition to the three versatile – and delicious – condiments, within this set is an attractive bamboo spreader. Random Harvest also sell condiment sets which come with cheeseboards, as well as the best-selling Australian Truffle Oil & Salt Packs – which come complete with a serving dish – so whether your customers are hosting or a guest, they'll have all they need to make their platters extra special.



STOCK CHECK



FAIRFIELDS FARM PRAWN COCKTAIL

A tangy, but creamy take on this popular retro flavour. Made with potatoes grown, cooked, seasoned and packaged on the North Essex farm. Suitable for vegans.

fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk



TWO FARMERS HEREFORD HOP CHEESE & ONION

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twofarmers.co.uk



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SMOKIN' BROTHERS SMOKED SALMON SASHIMI STYLE

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RANDOM HARVEST AUSTRALIAN TRUFFLE OIL

Australia's finest extra virgin olive oil infused with expertly selected Australian black truffle.

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exmoorcaviar.com



SERIOUS PIG SNACKING CHEESE

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seriouspig.co.uk



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olivesetal.co.uk



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mr-organic.com



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REDUCING WASTAGE

'Tis the season of excess – but by sourcing cheese smartly and having a few tricks up your sleeve, Christmas doesn't have to lead to wastage

While wastage can seem to be an inevitability of working in the food industry, by planning ahead and having smart solutions in place for when wastage does occur it doesn't have to be an unsurmountable issue. We speak with three expert cheesemongers to uncover their tips for avoiding waste throughout the festive season and beyond.

Smart stocking

"The secret to avoiding wastage? Planning like your life depends on it – and maybe being just a tad bold," says Perry Wakeman, director at Rennet & Rind. "We start getting our act together as early as June because there's no such thing as being too prepared when it comes to cheese. First, take a good look at how much you've grown over the year (hopefully not just around the waistline) and tack that percentage onto your last year's orders. Voilà, you've got a solid starting point! Then, have a good hard look at your cheese lineup. Feeling confident? Consider adding an extra 5% to around an eighth of your counter. That way, you keep it manageable while still being bold enough to make an impact. Just make sure you've got all the styles covered – soft, hard, blue, and everything in between."

For Tom Brady, owner of Star Plain, having a core range of cheese as a solid base is key. "Pick your essential cheese so once everything else sells, your core Xmas is still a great offer – Baron, Stichelton, Sinodun Hill, Brillat truffle and Dale End Cheddar will make a great board. Place your bulk in 15-20 of your options. Options will naturally sell out, stock reduce and your core stock take over."

Recognising that some customers might walk away without the cheese they were hoping to buy will help reduce stress levels. "You can't please everyone by having all cheese available up to Xmas Eve so accept some cheese will sell out early on but your core cheese is great," says Tom.

In addition to different cheeses require varying approaches in terms of care, get to know how your various suppliers present their cheese. "I've found different suppliers have different maturing qualities, so often I won't buy one version of a cheese to arrive early if I know that supplier prefers their cheese to be more mature so it all gets to the customers' boards in peak condition," says Tom. "I also use my large wine fridge as a cheese cave as it keeps the cheese in better condition than wrapped up on a counter (even with cleaning and checking the cheese)."

Connect with customers

At grate Newcastle, owner Moz Murphy has found that engaging with customers early reaps rewards. "Offering an incentive for early ordering is always good, such as an overall discount on the order, or a gifted piece of cheese, but obviously I don't want to be out of pocket – but there's a balance to be found!"

In the heat of the Christmas rush, make sure your cheese is visible and tempting. "The trick is to keep things moving. Don't let those cheeses gather dust – get them out there, front and centre, and let customers have a taste," says Perry. "The more they taste, the more they'll buy. And remember, just because Christmas Day has come and gone doesn't mean you can kick back and relax. There's still New Year's around the corner, so keep that cheese moving!"

Don't be downhearted if some cheese is leftover after Christmas – see it as an opportunity. "We usually offer specials on a cheese toastie or grate it down and freeze for use later on," says Tom.

"Ideally, we aim to sell cheese when it's at its best, but if there's some cheese still hanging around after the festive fun, we'll look at repurposing it or maybe offering a cheeky discount," says Perry. "But really, the best plan is to sell the lot when it's in its prime and save yourself the headache later!"

"We use Too Good To Go as a way of disposing of short-dated cheeses when we have them," says Moz. "I don't like to discount prices too much or too often, but I also work with several local restaurants who can take an excess from to time. We also do precut 'Saturday night cheeseboards' which use up anything that's getting close to its date (but still tasting good!) – these are precut, prewrapped and grab and go style, to be eaten that night."

In those quieter days between Christmas and New Year, the team at grate keep it simple. "Although many of our suppliers will deliver between Christmas and New Year, we tend not to get any deliveries of cheese for stock (we will of course order stuff for customer orders!), and for New Year, the only thing you can preorder is a mystery cheeseboard. Pick a price, and we decide what goes into it – that way we can move some stuff that otherwise might be wasted."

"The key to avoiding wastage is to stay on your toes. Keep a close eye on your stock, be ready to switch things up, and make sure your team is as clued up as possible. Christmas is hectic, no doubt about it, but with the right game plan and the right attitude, you can turn it into a cheese-lover's paradise," Perry concludes.

> "The secret to avoiding wastage? Planning like your life depends on it – and maybe being just a tad bold"

PETER'S YARD
NEW OREGANO & OLIVE OIL SOURDOUGH CRACKERS
EXCLUSIVE TO SPECIALITY & FOODSERVICE


Golden Hooves launches two new regenerative products



The regenerative farming cheesemaker has added to its range with a a new Double Gloucester and range of crackers.

Available in 200g pre-packs and 2.5kg blocks for deli counters, the Double Gloucester has been made using the recipe that was used for the Supreme Champion at the International Cheese & Dairy Awards 2023.

With a moderately firm body and smooth texture, the cheese boasts a clean flavour with well-balanced savoury and nutty notes as well as a rich and buttery mouthfeel.

There are two options in the new cracker range: Sage & Onion Crackers and Rosemary & Garlic Crackers. Made using 100% regenerative flour and butter, the crackers have been designed for snacking, spreading and dipping, as well as serving on a cheeseboard.



Leona McDonald, director of Golden Hooves, said, "Getting regeneratively farmed food and drink into more people's homes is what we're all about, so it's incredibly exciting to be entering a new category with our crackers and expanding our cheese range still further with the arrival of our Double Gloucester. We've had this one up our sleeves for a while, after our recipe took the top prize at the ICDAs last year, but with Christmas coming, it seems like the perfect time to share it with the world!"

New release from Feltham's Farm

Organic, non-traditional cheesemaker, Feltham's Farm, has just revealed a brand-new cheese for 2024, bringing it to market at peak Christmas cheese buying time.

Lucky Marcel, a cow's milk variety, was officially launched at the Abergavenny Food Festival, where it proved a huge hit. It's based on two favourites of the cheesemaker's team – St Felicien and St Marcellin and is described as a yeast-ripened cheese that's creamy, flowery and yielding when fresh, breaking down to become buttery, liquid and intense as it ages.

The vermiculated, rippling rind makes it an attractive new addition to the cheeseboard this year.

Head cheesemaker, Michael Leech, said, "We have had a lot of fun tasting and developing this new cheese over the spring and summer, as the range of tastes develops over six weeks - and is always accessible."

While Feltham's Farm co-founder, Marcus Fergusson, added, "This is such a delightful cheese for everyone – and to our knowledge the only organic purely geo-ripened ripened cheese on the market in the UK."

Pre-orders and samples are now ready to be sent out on request from the award-winning Somerset farm, which runs on solar panels and ground source heat, and uses milk from a single source herd at neighbouring Godminster Farm.





Scottish cheesemongers celebrates first birthday

Must Be Crackers, the Dunfermline-based cheesemonger and fine food retailer, is celebrating one year of successful trading since opening on 28th September 2023.

Founded by experienced retailers Aileen and Tristan Wright in partnership with Tristan's brother and sister-in-law Kirstie Wright one year ago on Dunfermline High Street, Must Be Crackers has become a go-to destination for local cheese lovers and visitors to the city.

The business's tagline is 'Great Food, Thoughtfully Sourced', and the team has worked passionately to deliver that promise to its customers in the form of high quality cheese, charcuterie, crackers and edible treats alongside produce from across the UK and Europe.

In 2025 the business is set to launch a bespoke cheese wedding and celebration service.

Aileen Wright, director and retail manager of Must Be Crackers, said, "I cannot thank our customers enough – we have built up a steady stream of regulars alongside welcoming new folk to the shop every day. We are incredibly happy to celebrate a strong first year and we have our extended shop community and the encouragement of other local businesses to thank for that. Our success is also thanks to the unstoppable enthusiasm and hard work of our shop team, and we are very excited to continue to bring delicious food to Dunfermline. We look forward to what the next year has in store!"



The Shilling joins the White Lake family

Roger Longman, founder of White Lake Cheese, is never one to sit still, constantly conjuring up new varieties to add to the brand's collection.

The latest is The Shilling, which has just landed on the market. The small but perfectly formed Crottin-style goats' cheese is sticky and dense due to the pre-draining of the curd, and can be eaten young, when it expresses flavours of macadamia, almond and mushroom, or matured, which opens up its depth further, introducing a touch of blue to the rind.

"Ever since I introduced our herd of Alpine goats to Bagborough Farm, my aim has been to show something that the French already knew – that goats' cheeses can be as diverse and interesting as cow's cheeses, if not more so," Roger said. "My love of a good French Crottin-style cheese, as well as several customer requests, led to us developing The Shilling. I am really pleased with the depth of flavour we have managed to achieve with this cheese. This is fast becoming one of my favourites from our range."





"Support artisan producers"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

Having been around cheese all of my working career I have never grown tired of it, instead I crave it more. Cheese comes in many forms, soft, crumbly hard, hard cooked, blue, washed rind, soaked in alcohol, covered in leaves and so on... There quite frankly is never a dull moment.

Recently I travelled to Crete with my family. We had a tremendous time soaking up the sun, enjoying the magnificent scenery, diving into the culture and importantly enjoying the traditional food and cheese.

I visited an amazing cheesemaker at Arkadianos Farm set high up in the hilly area of Latzima Mylopotamos Rethymno. The cheesemaker Michalis Arkadianos was out selling his cheese but his sister was there to show me around. Farming started in 1980 where the family were grazing sheep and milking by hand. Today there is a larger herd of 100 sheep and goats, which is still very small.

When I get into the dairy there are ladies yogurt-making, filling tubs with thick creamy sheep's yogurt. The smell in the dairy is heavenly with a gentle milky sweetness filling the room. I am offered a tasting of all that's on offer and naturally agree. Then I was presented with all of the yoghurts and cheeses. Oh my goodness – I have never tasted yoghurt like it! All was so delicious it was a euphoric foodie moment as I had never ever experienced such exceptional quality in yoghurt.

The Greeks certainly know there stuff – at least the artisan producers do. The yoghurt that I sampled was of a traditional sheep's yoghurt. The consistency was out of this world. Think of clotted cream top, nice and dense and super creamy almost a little grainy where the fat has crusted. When you break through the surface there is a thick yogurt that holds the shape, as its spooned it releases with a satisfying squelchy sound. The flavour is rich and fatty with a big creaminess on the surface followed by a thick mousse under the thick crust offering up sweet milky and citrussy notes. It was quite frankly sublime.

In the UK there are many producers of yogurt but how many are hitting that quality mark? In my opinion only a few. I have never experienced such quality yoghurt anywhere, Arkadianos have nailed it. Whilst on the farm I also met the father of Michalis. Yiannis has over time learnt that the products are only as good as the milk. In order to produce quality milk, the sheep need to be well cared for and without stress and importantly the feed has to be managed. The diet is organic and managed by finding the perfect mix of ingredients helping to produce the right fats, proteins, minerals and fibre.

Recently I attended a conference where I met "Pastures for Life" who were giving a presentation and practical lesson in soil and pasture management. This further ensconced in my mind the need to move away from aggressive farming that destroys the soil and cannot provide the varied rich diet that pasture fed animals can and should truly enjoy.

When on a recent farm visit, I met Mark and Jen from Torpenhow Farm in Cumbria. The story is simple. One day Mark saw the cows grazing in a perfect straight line. He scratched his head and realised that the area being grazed was a part of the land that the fertiliser missed. The cows actively sought out the nutrient rich and dense grass that had not been synthetically fertilised.

A decision was made later that evening at Torpenhow to go fully organic and follow a pasture for life system. Find out more about pastures for life and ask your cheesemakers to consider making real yogurt.

Real artisan cheese and yoghurt are rare to find – circa 3% compared to the industrial 97% market share. These numbers need to change for our planet's sake. Do buy cheese from Torpenhow and try yoghurt from Fen Farm Dairy. Buy artisan and from wholesalers that are passionate and care for the environment.

"Real artisan cheese and yoghurt are hard to find – circa 3% compared to the industrial 97% market share. This needs to change for our planet's sake. Buy artisan and from wholesalers that care for the environment"

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EDIBLE INSECTS

Put your squeamishness aside – edible insects are the taste of the future

WHAT ARE 'EDIBLE INSECTS'?

While we're not suggesting that you tuck into the wildlife residing in your garden path, insects are being cited by experts around the world as the future of the food industry. Commercially-farmed insects might not sound like fine food fodder, but crickets, mealworms and grasshoppers actually tick a lot of boxes right now.

WHY'S THAT?

Edible insects are considered a much more sustainable choice than conventional arable farming. For example, insects require significantly less water and land to farm than cows and produce much lower levels of greenhouse gas emissions, plus they have a much lower carbon footprint than traditional alternatives as well as efficient feed conversion rates.

IS THE APPETITE FOR EDIBLE INSECTS GROWING?

"Business has been buzzing!" says Leo Taylor, co-founder of Yum Bug. "The edible insect market is definitely growing, and it's all about people becoming more aware of their food choices. We've seen more and more folks curious about trying new things, especially when they hear about the environmental and health benefits."

WHY NOW?

"There's so much potential here!" says Leo. "One of the biggest opportunities is to change how people think about protein. Education is also a big opportunity – helping people understand that eating insects isn't weird; it's actually a smart choice for the future. And let's not forget the innovation side. There's so much we can do with insects in food, from snacks to gourmet dishes. The possibilities are endless, and that's what makes this space so exciting."

ARE PEOPLE SQUEAMISH ABOUT EATING BUGS?

While Eastern cultures got on the edible insect bandwagon generations ago, they're definitely new to the Western palate and so education is required. "The biggest challenge we face is convincing people to try something new. There's still a bit of a 'yuck' factor when it comes to eating insects," says Leo.



WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

In terms of meal solutions, we rate Yum Bug's Mince, Burgers, Sausages, Brisket Chunks, and Meatballs. Not only are they innovative versions of approachable family favourites – so even naysayers may find it easier to add insects to their diet – they're healthier, too, so everyone wins. "Retailers that stock these kinds of items will not only stand out but also attract a growing crowd of eco-conscious foodies," says Leo. "It's about offering something that's exciting but not too out there, so customers feel comfortable giving it a go."

CAN I EAT THEM ON-THE-GO?

There are plenty of options out there these days, but most reside in the snacking arena. From Crunch Bars, Lollipops and Trail Mix from Crunchy Critters to Roasted Grasshoppers, Mealworms and Buffalo Worms from Eat Grub – not to mention their Roasted Crickets in Salted Vinegar, Smoky BBQ, Sweet Chilli & Lime, Peri Peri and Salted Toffee – the edible insects available on today's shelves are surprisingly varied (and delicious).

ARE THEY HEALTHY?

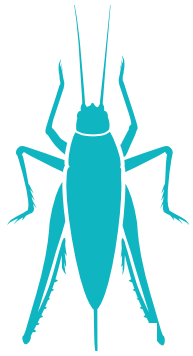
Proponents of edible insects certainly say so. High in protein and low in fat, they are a much leaner snacking option than the more conventional stuff, and if you consume them in powder form as an ingredient in smoothies or healthy savoury dishes (Eat Grub sell Cricket Protein Powder), you're adding to your levels of fibre, iron, Vitamin B12 and calcium too.

IS THE SECTOR REGULATED?

While the idea of eating insects can be a challenging one, consumers and retailers can rest assured that all products on the market are safe. While this can be a challenge for producers it provides a safety net, too. "Since the market is still relatively new, there are some hoops to jump through to get our products approved and on the shelves. It can be frustrating at times, but we're optimistic that as the industry grows, these challenges will get easier to overcome," says Leo.

WHAT'S THE ETHICAL ANGLE?

As a relatively new agricultural sector entering the market, it's only natural that there are questions around the ethics of rearing insects for food. Jo Cooper, senior marketing and communications manager at Compassion in World Farming, said, "We are not opposed to the farming of insects for food, if humanely reared and killed – however it is best if they are reared on waste foods. If insects are fed on human edible feed, the same issues arise as with feeding other animals, though insects may be slightly inefficient." With the right education from reputable sources, professionals within the industry and consumers themselves will weigh up the pros and cons.



THE EDIBLE INSECT MARKET IS PREDICTED TO GROW BY 47% BY 2032

SOURCE: GLOBAL MARKET INSIGHTS

WHAT'S NEXT FOR EDIBLE INSECTS?

"We're at a really exciting point where people are starting to realize that we need to make changes in how we eat if we want to take care of the planet. Edible insects are one piece of that puzzle," says Leo. While our collective squeamishness may take a little while to subside, with considered education and product ranges catering to today's consumer's needs, edible insects could well be the taste of the future.

> "We're at a really exciting point where people are starting to realize that we need to make changes in how we eat if we want to take care of the planet. Edible insects are one piece of that puzzle"

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VICTORIA'S CHEESES



JONNY CRICKMORE
FEN FARM DAIRY



CAROLINE BELL
SHEPHERDS PURSE



PRIYA TAYLOR
CLAWSON FARMS

A GREAT BRITISH LOVE AFFAIR

Artisan cheese in the UK isn't an industry... it's a passion, a tradition and a vocation for the many people who produce it. In this special report, we speak to makers and retailers about their pride and love for this very important part of the British food scene

Peeking into the cheese cabinet or counter of any good specialist retailer today is a feast for the senses. There are striking, whole, hand buttered, clothbound Cheddars with mottled edges not unlike the leather binding of ancient books. Delicate, silky soft goats' cheeses dappled with ash or rolled in dried flower petals. Plump, supple Bries and Camemberts with velvety rinds. And bold blues which cut open to reveal sage-coloured ripples.

These are only a small representation of the British contingent. It's astonishing to think that just three decades ago what we could find at the cheesemonger was vastly different. There would have been Cheddar, maybe a few pieces of territorials such as Lancashire or Cheshire... a wheel of Stilton. Beyond that the lay of the land would be swathes of Continental varieties – antidotes to the bland, waxy, mild and mature block cheeses that had become ubiquitous in supermarkets.

The so-called renaissance of British cheese has turned the sector on its axis, with more retailers than ever before leaning into local and regional varieties which have strong links to the landscape and terroir – be it the craggy hillsides of Wales, Scotland and Yorkshire, or the lush meadows and pastures of the West Country.

Paul Heasman, purchasing manager at Rowcliffe, says he admires the resilience of our modern cheesemakers. "A lot of them used to be in milk and dairy and because of milk pricing had to diversify. Their ingenuity is quite incredible. It's amazing to think that when we first started expanding into speciality cheeses at Rowcliffe we were benchmarking against the French, Italians and other countries. Now they come here to see how we make cheese, and to learn from us. The diversity and variety we have here is great."

Rather than standing still, the British cheese world is ever evolving and looking to the future, Paul adds. "I'm seeing second generations of cheesemakers coming through, like over at the Leicestershire Handmade Cheese Co where Jo and David Clarke's son is now involved, at Lynher Dairies where Catherine's son Otto is making cheese, and the Keen family, who are now sixth generation cheesemakers."

"There's a lot of new people who are interested in cheesemaking coming through now," agrees Jonny Crickmore of Fen Farm Dairy. "It's brilliant to see so much happening, and we've been trying to do our bit, helping new cheesemakers who come to visit us. We're always happy to give people advice and to encourage them."

There's an enormous sense of pride across the entire British cheese industry at what has been achieved. "We've got to be proud of what we're making and our farmers," says Rory Mellis, director of IJ Mellis. "And the more we support British cheesemakers, the more fantastic products we'll have to show off. We're visited by a lot of tourists where we are in Edinburgh, and they're shocked at the sheer quality of what's being made in Britain."

As well as fostering the next generation of makers, and welcoming new cheeses to the market, Rory is

> "We're in the middle of a movement towards good food again, and cheese has led the revival, alongside other foods like bread. It's right at the centre, which is amazing"
>
> **JONNY CRICKMORE, FEN FARM DAIRY**

R

We have put together an inspiring selection for Christmas 2024.

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keen that territorials continue to be championed. "It's vital that they don't die off. Things like Lancashire cheese and Wensleydale are hugely important and the only way to maintain them is by encouraging new people into cheesemaking – to get them excited about it!"

The importance of British cheese

Victoria Dunthorne of Victoria's Cheese is excited by the growth of the British cheese industry and says it's more integral to the food and drink sphere than we might think. "Yes, it's brilliant for our livestock farmers and cheesemakers, but it's also great for our national speciality food scene in general," she explains. "As a retailer, who hasn't had their Continentals held up at customs? And what about price hikes?"

Buying cheese from British makers, Victoria says, is a "no brainer. It creates jobs and brings people back in touch with where their food comes from."

In addition to being culturally significant, especially territorial varieties, artisanal cheese has its part to play in a more sustainable future for dairy – and in British food security – adds Priya Taylor of Clawson Farms, and the ongoing success of these products relies on supporting farmers.

"As a farming cooperative, it's really important for us to look after our farmers and local communities," Priya explains. "They are a big part of what makes us who we are. Farmers go through a lot of stresses, in terms of rising feed costs and production costs. It does make things quite difficult, but we're there for them, supporting them. We've got 30 member farmers, all within 30 miles of our dairy, and they really matter."

Looking after British farmers and buying from British cheesemakers helps to preserve this short, traceable chain of local food production and sustains local communities agrees Caroline Bell, managing director of Shepherds Purse. "It also reduces carbon footprint compared to imported cheeses thanks to low food miles."

British cheese "just keeps getting better," Caroline adds, saying the richness and variety available today is in part thanks to innovation, and makers having the gumption to riff off traditional styles to create delicious new varieties. "Lincolnshire Poacher, Baron Bigod, Cornish Yarg and our own Yorkshire Blue and Mrs Bell's Blue are good examples of unique cheeses which have become established in Britain that are distinctive to their makers," she says. This freedom and experimental nature has been crucial in steering British cheese in the right direction, and contrasts with the restrictive PDO model many larger European manufacturers find themselves in. "There are certainly pros and cons to each," Caroline says. "But its unquestionable that the British model has led to rich diversity, which has been possible in part thanks to the support of retail too."

What are shoppers looking for?

A metric for shoppers that's become even more noticeable in 2024 is wellbeing and health. Consumers are thinking about their gut and microbiome, and have become cautious about ultra processed foods and ingredients. They're turning to natural, artisan-made products in a bid to improve their diets. And that includes choosing better cheese.

Jonny says artisan cheese has a role to play in people's quests for cleaner, more wholesome baskets. "We're in the middle of a movement towards good food again, and cheese has led the revival, alongside other foods like bread. It's right at the centre, which is amazing. Cheese is such a simple product, which is an important part of its appeal. It's just milk, but with time and cultures it gets turned into all these amazing flavours and it's really good for you. It's a fermented food, so it's great for your gut, and it has all those proteins and carbs combined into something wonderful and tasty."

We must, Jonny adds, thinking about the conversation around ultra processed food, separate out specialist cheeses. "They are a natural food. Yes, they are processed, but virtually every food is processed in some form. Cheese is positive for health, like many other things, in moderation."



As well as looking for better quality options, Jonny says he's finding more people resonating with the story of cheese, wanting to know where it's from and who's made it, which is where retailers and their expertise come in.

"We've been making Baron Bigod for 11 years and we've stuck to our core beliefs from day one," he says. "We've had an ethos from the start, that our cheese should be made by hand, on the farm, using our milk. Staying true to that, and having that continuity of story, is one of the reasons I think customers love our cheese so much."

They also appreciate, he says, the fact that Baron Bigod might change in appearance slightly depending on the seasons. "As a cheesemaker, you're always striving for consistency, but we can't change the fact the milk changes through the year, depending on what the cows are eating. We could standardise that by keeping them in a shed and feeding them grain all year, but what makes cheeses like ours special and so appealing is celebrating those differences."

Food tastes better when it has a story behind it, Jonny adds. "People appreciate it more when they know their cheese has been made by hand for them."

As well as health and storytelling, Paul says the team at Rowcliffe have noticed a surge of interest in robust flavours – be it hard, Alpine-style cheeses, goats' cheese or blue.

"In blues the growth we've seen is in creamier, slightly milder ones like Montagnolo. There's a bit of a misconception about blue cheese. Most people will say they think it's too strong, but there are some fabulous sweeter British blues such as Cornish Blue, Isle of Wight Blue and Perl Las. They have a Continental feel and an indulgent texture that really seems to be popular at the moment."

Another trend worth paying attention to is Brits' ever-growing love for sheep's milk cheese. "We're always getting asked for it," says Paul, adding that this newfound desire for these varieties comes at a time when sheep's milk is scarce, pushing up prices.

Sheep's milk cheese producers across the UK are reporting strong sales. Amongst them is Shepherds Purse, founded by Judy Bell in 1989, and continued today by her daughters Caroline and Katie.

The sisters are overjoyed by the interest in sheep's milk cheese, especially as it is something Judy so fiercely advocated for. "When we first launched them there was a reluctance to try this new style of cheese," Caroline says. "It was unusual at the time." Thankfully British palates have come a long way, and consumers don't shy away from trying different varieties of cheese. "People are more open and embracing, and perhaps more experienced of sheep's milk cheeses having travelled to France, Spain and the broader Mediterranean region," Caroline thinks.

"Modern consumers are more informed and conscientious about their food choices," she adds, saying that in addition to an uptick of interest in sheep's milk cheese, she's finding a growing demand for transparency around sourcing, production methods and environmental impact.

Echoing Jonny's thoughts, Caroline says, "We all want to know where our food comes from, not just where it was packed. More work on this via clear

> "When my dad started, there were about 30 cheeses on his bench. Now, we list between 65 and 70, and a huge proportion of those are British"
>
> **RORY MELLIS, IJ MELLIS**



labelling and communication is vital."

Over at Clawson Farms tradition goes hand-in-hand with innovation. Priya says the dairy will always celebrate its cheesemaking heritage, which sees it produce award-winning, renowned products such as PDO Blue Stilton and Rutland Red, but that it's also important to appeal to those consumers new to the speciality cheese world.

Thanks to targeted social media campaigns, and ongoing work with foodie influencers, Clawson Farms is challenging the perception that blue cheese is just for Christmas or cheeseboards with its 1912 Artisan Stilton. "We're using 1912 to drive inspiration around blue cheese," Priya explains. It has so much flavour and is so versatile, and signposting recipes on our website and working with young influencers who love food and love cheese has been a great way to show just how delicious blue cheese is, and all the different ways it can be used."

Another huge launch for Clawson Farms has been introducing its premium waxed truckle range this year. Truckles are considered a 'gateway' cheese in speciality retail. Something fledgling cheese appreciators can easily grab to go before working their way along the rest of the cheese counter.

Each of the cheeses has its own unique 'character' both beneath the wax seal and embodied in the beautiful illustrations printed on their labels. "They take our traditional British cheeses and give them a twist, pulling them into the modern day, and elevating them," Priya says. "So they might have truffle or mango and ginger, or harissa and Scotch Bonnet chilli. They appeal to such a broad range of people, but particularly the younger market. And they're good for gifting as well."

Show your support for British cheese

The expanding speciality retail sector, across farm shops, delis, food halls and garden centres, has opened up a huge range of channels for cheesemakers, with many of them saying they simply couldn't survive without the backing of these cheese champions.

By buying British, not only are retailers building the confidence of farmers, they are helping to grow our food economy, says Priya. "I think it's also important to talk about carbon footprint, which is something we are very aware of at Clawson Farms. We are always thinking of ways to be more sustainable, and we're finding that's something our customers are very interested in.

"The whole farm to fork story is one speciality retailers are experts at delivering. You don't get that most of the time when you think about Continental cheeses. Often you don't know where the milk is from, or who made the cheese, or how sustainable it is. We know all of those things and we can shout about the people behind our products."

Those people are the backbone of our food culture, adds Jonny. "What they are doing is producing food locally, employing local people, and making really good food with provenance. They are also generally being greener and trying to do more environmentally to be sustainable."

Rory says retailers should remember there is also so much more choice available now in British cheese.

If there's something you think you're missing from your counter, the odds are there is a homegrown variety being made somewhere in the UK. "When my dad started, there were about 30 cheeses on his bench. Now, we list between 65 and 70, and a huge proportion of those are British, whereas before we had a lot of French and European varieties," he explains. "In my time I've seen at least three to four new cheesemakers pop up, and there's always something new going on, particularly with the younger generation looking to invent and put a different spin on classics."

Buying and eating British cheese has also become "the cool thing to do," he adds.



2024 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE STOCK CHECK



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NEXT-GEN BAKING

With more home baking products in the market than ever before, we explore what shoppers want now – and the brands innovating to cater to their appetite



> Consumers are increasingly seeking out unique and indulgent culinary experiences at home. This shift has been driven in part by platforms like TikTok, which have sparked a renewed interest in home baking and the use of artisanal ingredients

COMMENTATORS



SOPHIE ZIEGLER-JONES
SUMA



TOBY HOPKINSON
ALL THINGS BUTTER



HANNAH MARRIAGE
MARRIAGES



PAUL GILDER
LITTLEPOD



DAN LEPARD
CHEF

It stands to reason that with so many pro-baking influences in consumers' lives in 2024 – Great British Bake Off is a huge one, not to mention the countless social media feeds espousing expert tips and inspiration for novices and keen bakers alike – the appetite for home baking is increasing, and the menu is more varied than ever.

"Consumers are increasingly seeking out unique and indulgent culinary experiences at home," begins Toby Hopkinson, CEO and co founder at All Things Butter. "This shift has been driven in part by platforms like TikTok, which have sparked a renewed interest in home baking and the use of artisanal ingredients." Tightened budgets are also playing a part, he says. "Combined with the pressures of rising living costs and inflation, this drives more consumers to prepare their own restaurant or bakery-quality dishes at home, seeking to recreate the eating-out experience in their own kitchens."

Demand for better

What does the growing audience of UK-based home bakers want to buy, and what are the credentials they look for? At Suma Wholefoods, Sophie Ziegler-Jones, co-operative member, has found that consumers aren't willing to sacrifice their values for the sake of saving money. "Fine food shoppers are increasingly seeking products that align with their values," she begins. They want transparency in sourcing, quality ingredients, and options that cater to specific dietary needs like vegan, gluten-free, and low-sugar and sugar alternatives. There's a growing trend towards products that are both eco-friendly and health-conscious, reflecting a broader awareness of sustainability and wellness."

While this demand for better is nothing new, particularly in fine food spheres, it is growing – and the onus is on retailers and suppliers to supply shoppers with better quality products that suit their preferences. Suma Wholefoods, which sells organic flours, Fairtrade sugars, nuts, grains, seeds, dried fruits, and plant-based and gluten-free alternatives, has found that consumers are more informed than ever. "This shift has been noticeable over recent years," says Sophie. "Consumers have become more discerning and informed about what goes into their food, pushing for higher standards in both ethical practices and ingredient quality. As we see a greater emphasis on sustainability and health, it's clear that these factors are becoming central to purchasing decisions. Our buying policies are incredibly stringent and consumers can trust us to do our homework around quality and sourcing, supply chains and certification so they don't have to."

A new era for butter

An ancient ingredient it may be, but social media is at the heart of All Things Butter's origin story, with founders Toby Hopkinson and chef Thomas Straker inspired to launch the brand following the success of Thomas's Instagram series of the same name. "The series was extremely popular, amassing over 1 billion views, and made us realise there was a real appetite for a high-quality, chef-led butter brand in home kitchens," says Toby, CEO. "We created All Things Butter to be the ultimate convenience ingredient, not just at breakfast but for any meal of the day. Butter is the basis of most restaurant dishes and why they taste so great, and we're on a mission to inspire and equip an army of 'at home cooks' who want to take their cooking to the next level."

A far cry from being a basic commodity food product, butter is well overdue its time in the spotlight, believes Toby. In line with the consumer demand for ingredients which not only taste great but support British Farmers, All Things Butter's products are crafted from 100% high-quality British cream from their farm in Somerset. Ultra-processed food-free (UPFs) and twice-churned, making it extra creamy, the range includes flavours as diverse as Garlic & Herb and Cinnamon Bun, alongside the classic Salted and Unsalted options. "Butter has the unique ability to carry and enhance other ingredients, making it the perfect base for experimentation in restaurants and at home," he says. "This is why we've crafted flavours that complement a wide variety of dishes and bakes to create a versatile kitchen staple that aspiring chefs and bakers can utilise at home in their kitchen to add something extra to their recipes."

One such flavour is Chocolate, which is a surprisingly versatile addition to the home baker's arsenal. "Our Chocolate Butter has one of the lowest sugar counts on the market, but that doesn't make it any less indulgent," says Toby.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL VANILLA



Paul Gilder, media manager at Little Pod, explains the business's education mission

What's the difference between vanilla extract and vanilla essence? This is a question we get asked a lot. Too few consumers understand that whilst the former is made using REAL vanilla, an endangered orchid of great environmental importance, the latter is an inferior artificial substitute – a byproduct of a petrochemical used in the wood pulp industry. It was this knowledge gap that inspired the launch of LittlePod in 2010. Fourteen years later, we are still educating shoppers and telling the story of vanilla and its value.

In the beginning, we were told vanilla was on a precipice and could be lost forever unless action was taken. Having developed our innovative natural vanilla paste in a tube, making it easier for professional chefs and home bakers alike to use real vanilla, we have helped slow the demise. 97% of all the vanillin used in western kitchens is synthetic, but if we could make just a 1% incursion into that market, we would double demand for the real thing. So our Campaign for Real Vanilla continues, both at our base in East Devon and at our orchard in Indonesia, where LittlePod's farmers use a pioneering polyculture system to increase biodiversity, improve soil fertility, and regenerate the rainforest around them.

This is the difference that choosing high-quality natural ingredients makes, and LittlePod's sustainable approach continues to benefit both the planet and its people. Real ingredients taste better too! Whereas real vanilla contains 250 complex compounds, artificial vanilla – vanilla essence – has just one, vanillin, which gives only the scent. Whether using vanilla or other ingredients, such as LittlePod's chocolate or coffee extracts – perfect partners both in nature and in our kitchens – we urge all to consider their ingredient choices carefully. Demand is rising and the message getting through. It is making a REAL difference!

> Whereas real vanilla contains 250 complex compounds, artificial vanilla – vanilla essence – has just one, vanillin, which gives only the scent



"It's perfect for making pancakes or chocolate croissants; it can also be used to create a chocolatey crumble topping, blended with icing sugar to make decadent cake frosting, or even used to cook apples or plums for a luxurious topping on breakfast porridge or yoghurt. And let's not forget, it's a grown-up, luxurious way to spread on bread, though kids love it too!"

Next-gen flours (with heritage)

A winning combination of quality, innovation and versatility is the name of the game at Essex-based millers Marriages, too, and since launching their range of home baking flours in the 1950s the team has witnessed the evolution of the sector. "Since then, we've seen a much bigger choice of flours for home bakers," says Hannah Marriage, director. "We have a wide range of 18 award- winning quality home baking flours and we also have a wide range of customers all baking for different reasons (trying a new recipe/baking for a special occasion etc). Our customers are looking for artisan ingredients and quality that shows in rise, flavour and texture of their bakes and they trust us because we also supply leading professionals and artisan bakers. When home bakers look to bake at home they 're looking for reliability and just as our trade customers, they want to know they will have consistency with every bake."

Advances in technology – for example, the advent of bread machines – and shared experiences such as recessions and the Covid-19 pandemic have played their part, too. "We saw home baking increase during the last recession," explains Hannah. "In a time of cost-of-living pressures, baking is an affordable leisure activity with children, you can use store cupboard ingredients, and baking together can be fun as well as educational.

"Our sales of home baking flours increased significantly during Covid – especially the first lockdown when there was a huge spike in demand, however sales have normalised now. The pandemic bought new people into baking – and many liked the sense of achievement about the bakes they could make and share with family/friends/neighbours. It also reminded people how calming and mindful the process of baking is, and they've maintained a regular bread making habit since then."

What's to come for home baking

Sophie predicts an increase in alternative ingredients entering the market, an evolution shaped by consumers' ever-more informed demands. "Looking ahead, we anticipate continued innovation in this space and expect to see more emphasis on alternative and unusual ingredients, like ancient grains and plant-based options, as well as increased transparency in product sourcing. The market will likely continue to evolve with a focus on both environmental impact and meeting diverse dietary needs."

For Hannah, the future looks bright for healthier bakes with a homegrown story. "There seems to be a big focus on health, and we wonder if more people will start to bake more of their own cakes/ bread/sourdough at home. We don't think the interest in local produce will go away and we're proud to still say that after 200 years we're working with local farming families, sourcing the majority of quality grade 1 wheats within 30 miles of our mill." Marriages believes that the rise in home baking is far from a flash in the pan. Indeed, from a survey of 500 respondents that they conducted in 2023, they found that 61% of people are baking at least once a month and 38% bake weekly.

> "The market will likely continue to evolve with a focus on both environmental impact and meeting diverse dietary need"

HOW TO SELL: BAKING INGREDIENTS



Dan Lepard, chef, shares his five top tips for boosting home baking sales

1 EXPERIMENT WITH SPICE MIXES

Spice mixes made in-house are a great idea to add some personality to your home baking range. Mince pie spice, Christmas cake spice and stollen spice would be strong sellers during the festive season. Small jars can be bought cheaply in bulk, and these could be a good gifting option, too.

2 CUT EXPENSIVE INGREDIENTS WITH CHEAPER OPTIONS

Customers don't necessarily need to use 100% expensive ingredients in their cooking; it's fine to cut them with cheaper options to keep costs down – it's not going to affect the finished product that much. I like to use sunflower oil in my baking recipes. This means that retailers can sell variations of the same product at different price points, they just need to display clear signage to explain the concept.

3 CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS

I find that I'm not spoken to as much in speciality stores as I used to be. There's a generational difference, with older staff more open to communicating with customers than younger staff, but this is an important part of getting people to buy what you're selling.

4 ADD PERSONALISED TESTIMONIALS TO YOUR DISPLAYS

By including a small card with a hand-written testimonial about the product from a member of staff, you'll add personality and an element of trust to that product. They can explain how they used it and what they enjoyed about it, and customers could be persuaded by that connection with a real person.

5 PRODUCE RECIPE CARDS

A simple recipe card could help to promote your baking ingredients. It doesn't need to be complicated or expensive; just a photocopied A5 piece of paper with the creator's name at the top to add personality and connection could inspire customers to try something new with your products.

> "By including a small card with a hand-written testimonial about the product from a member of staff, you'll add personality and an element of trust to that product"

STOCK CHECK



MON DESSERT PISTACHIO MACARON BAKING KIT

Everything you need to recreate delicate Parisian macarons with a pistachio and white chocolate ganache filling. Step by step instructions ensure perfection every time.

mondessert.co.uk



TERRE EXOTIQUE SUCRE FOU

There is simply nothing else like this sugar, made on the island of Reunion. Its hints of vanilla, Madagascan pepper, cocoa and maple lend it to all kinds of baking and desserts.

souschef.co.uk



THE YORKSHIRE KITCHEN HONEY & CINNAMON BUTTER

Sold ambient, with a long shelf life, only Yorkshire butter and natural ingredients make it into the jar. Perfection in homemade cinnamon buns

theyorkshirekitchen.com



JOYSPREAD CRUNCHY CHOCOLATE HAZELNUT

This is a lusciously creamy spread, filled with crunchy wafers and pieces of hazelnut. A next level cake filling, or swirl for homemade brownies.

joyspread.co.uk



NIELSEN-MASSEY PURE LEMON PASTE

The thick consistency of this paste, made with the best quality lemon oil, brings a light, bright citrussy hit to a variety of recipes without the need to juice or zest.

nielsenmassey.com



LITTLEPOD PURE CHOCOLATE EXTRACT

An intense-flavoured extract, made using cocoa beans from the Ivory Coast. More intense than cocoa powder and with no added sugar.

littlepod.co.uk





FINAL CALL

At the time of writing, the *Speciality Food* team is gathering its thoughts on what was a very successful Speciality & Fine Food Fair recently.These events are real highlights in our annual calendar. Not only are they an opportunity to chinwag with clients and friends in the food and drink industry, but they also give us a window into the ever-changing marketplace.

What consumers want from the speciality sector is a moveable feast, and shows such as SFFF and Farm Shop & Deli really do have their finger on the pulse, bringing together key, valuable speakers, and new producers who are shaking things up.

In the past 12 months we've seen the rise in popularity of wellbeing and health-focused products, gut-friendly drinks, Mexican snacks and ingredients, HFSS-compliant snacks... and even mead.

While these trends continue to endure, we've discovered many more rising categories retailers need to know about. Keep an eye on our social media posts, daily newsletter, website and within these pages, where we'll be sharing everything we've learnt over the coming months. The sheer level of innovation is incredibly impressive.

We can't sign off this issue without talking about Christmas either. Most of you will be fully into the swing of buying and assessing stock right now, spending time rummaging through warehouses and cupboards for the tinsel and baubles in preparation for seasonal displays.

Putting a bit of time into staff training to embrace and foster those new to speciality food stores is worth the effort say experts. Be prepared to dazzle them at the counter with stories about the heritage, provenance and makers of your cheese selection. Host more regular tastings in the weeks leading to Christmas and actively encourage them to try something new. Consider the strength of your in-store messaging around Christmas products, and how appealing it is to all generations.

And, in an era where experience is everything, think of events that might lure the younger generation in too – wine and crisp pairings are a great place to start!

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 ELLA MCKAY, FATSO



WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
Waitress (though I did quite a lot of babysitting when I was 14 but I wouldn't call that an official job – watching TV and eating snacks while the kids slept).

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
The stories of people who challenge and change the status quo.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
I honestly can't think of a bad job – I've enjoyed all my jobs! They have all involved working with people, so perhaps that's why.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
You mean aside from tasting lots of chocolate?! Probably getting lost in the world and history of cocoa/chocolate. The history is fascinating and the future of chocolate is so intriguing and exciting. But the industry can also be deeply depressing, so I make a point of understanding it and putting knowledge at the heart of our business decisions as well as deliciousness.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
Catching up on all the admin I'm not organized enough to keep on top of...

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
Its blend of innovation and tradition. I love how it constantly evolves with new flavours, sustainable practices, and cutting-edge technology. The way food connects cultures and brings people together is also incredibly inspiring. Plus, who wouldn't love a job where taste testing is part of the gig?

TEA OR COFFEE?
TEA!

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
Something crab-based or fishy to start, then beef wellington, followed by a huge bowl of ice cream with every FATSO flavour crumbled on top and extra toppings.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
Live Life More FATSO.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
Sea urchin?

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Oh this is tough. It's so mood dependent... So I've chosen four – sorry! Non-Fiction: *Becoming*, Michelle Obama OR *Red Notice*, Bill Browder... Fiction: *A Gentleman in Moscow*, Amor Towles OR *The Thursday Murder Club* series, Richard Osmond.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
As if I could answer anything but sweet... though really I'm a both girl – starter and dessert. Life's short – why choose?

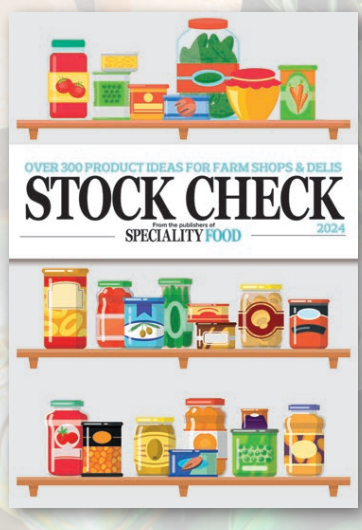
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SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE

- Italian Food Special
- Selling Christmas Ideas
- Storecupboard Essentials
- Boxing Day Centrespread
- Blue Cheese
- Hot Drinks

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TRIED & TESTED



MR TROTTERS PORK SCRATCHING

For too long pork scratchings have had a bad reputation. Flabby, hairy and mainly found behind the bar of questionable pubs, it's fair to say they haven't been considered fine food material. Thankfully, Mr Trotters is here to save the good name of pork scratchings with its new-look livery and range of flavours. They're available in Original, Salt & Vinegar and Jalapeno, and our favourite out of the lot, English Mustard. With a perfect soft-crunchy texture that comes from being triple cooked, these are masterful snacks.
mrtrotters.com

UP-UP DARK ESPRESSO CHOCOLATE

Chocolate and coffee are a match made in heaven, particularly for people who adore both (guilty), so the latest offering from Up-Up was a popular delivery to the *Speciality Food* offices. The balance between the two could be a tricky one to perfect, but this bar has it nailed. The chocolate isn't too dark but instead rich and gently sweet, while the coffee adds a hint of bitterness and crunch – plus that all-important hit of caffeine. A grown-up indulgence for sure.
upupchocolate.com



SEA SISTERS CANNED FISH

Canned fish is having a moment, and fans of gift-worthy tins of the good stuff no longer have to stash it in their suitcases on their return from warmer climes. Dorset-based Sea Sisters have an impressively wide range of canned seafood in their range – everything from classics such as Sardines, Smoked Trout and Mussels to Cuttlefish in Ink, Cornish Octopus in Chilli Oil and Norfolk Whelks in Kimchi Sauce (among others) is not only sustainably sourced but utterly delicious, too.
seasisters.co.uk



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Mark Hartstone, owner of La Fosse at Cranbourne

For almost two decades now, La Fosse at Cranborne has been a labour of love for my wife Emmanuelle and me. Nestled in the heart of Dorset, our small restaurant thrives on a strong commitment to local produce, whether it's grown on our allotments or sourced from excellent local suppliers. This commitment not only enriches the quality of our offerings but also supports the vibrant community around us.

One of the unique aspects of running La Fosse is our proximity to the Cranborne Estate, which has invested in an incredible game larder. This allows us to source top-quality venison literally from our doorstep. Additionally, we have access to rabbit, pigeon, Sixpenny Brewery beers, and Orchard Bay sourdough, all originating from our village. Our fish comes directly from local fishermen or Premier Fish Wholesale in Downton, just a few miles away. This close-knit network of suppliers ensures that our ingredients are fresh, sustainable, and packed with flavour.



Living in Dorset, with its diverse landscapes, is a chef's dream. The countryside of Cranborne Chase and the nearby coast offer a wealth of natural ingredients that I love to explore. Foraging is not just a hobby; it's a way of life here at La Fosse. From dandelion tea to woodland mushrooms, I strive to incorporate native elements into our dishes. This practice not only enhances the flavours but also connects our guests to the natural beauty of the region.

Our relationships with local suppliers are the backbone of La Fosse. Everything we do is centred around community, and we take immense pride in the quality of produce available to us. Supporting small producers is crucial. It ensures that we can all continue to enjoy homegrown, locally sourced, and carefully curated products. These relationships foster a sense of community and mutual support, which is integral to our philosophy at La Fosse.

Emmanuelle's heritage also plays a significant role in our approach to food. We produce our own wine vinegar from our vines, which is perfect for cooking. Emmanuelle's family had vines and were fishermen in the Loire, and my parents were commercial growers. It's no wonder that I inherited my green fingers from them. This personal touch adds an extra layer of authenticity and love to our dishes.

In a world that is rapidly changing, our dedication to local produce and suppliers remains steadfast. It's not just about creating delicious meals; it's about preserving a way of life, supporting our community, and staying true to our roots. At La Fosse at Cranborne, we believe that the best food is born out of love, community, and a deep respect for the land. We invite you to join us and experience the extraordinary flavours and heartfelt hospitality that define our restaurant.

PARTNER CONTENT

Garofalo



TIME TO INDULGE

With the cooler seasons ahead, it's time to comfort your customers with soothing, slow-cooked dishes and other warming indulgences

As the nights are drawing in, so our collective appetite turns to comfort food. The kind of thing that can be scooped from a bowl while curled up under a blanket on the sofa is the ultimate treat, and the good news is that providing this to your customers isn't a question of getting new products into your store – rather, it's a subtle change of approach.

This is new-season indulgence, but that doesn't have to mean spending big. Time is the biggest investment for these kind of dishes – think slow-cooked ragu, meats in rich sauces that fall off the bone, and cheeses that have been lovingly tended for months to develop unbeatably complex flavours.

As ever, Italian cuisine has the delicious answers in droves. A punchy well-aged Parmesan can lift a simple dish to new heights, imbuing it with a satisfying savouriness that would otherwise take hours to create. A simple sauce of onions, tomatoes and oregano, gently simmered on the stove for hours, replaces the liveliness of a fresh tomato sauce to bring a family-favourite pasta dish into the new season with very ittle effort.

Cheaper cuts of meat are ideal for slow-cooking, so it's worth considering how you can up basket spend with this drop in revenue from the butchery counter. Perhaps you could upsell the dish into showstopper territory – rather than serving a low-and-slow beef with British-standby mash and vegetables, suggest it as the ideal partner for polenta. Unctuous and luxurious in texture and taste when enriched with lashings of butter and Italian cheese, you could well be onto a new household staple.

And while your customer is in the Dolce Vita mindset, direct them to the Italian red wines and fine dark chocolate... After all, autumn is the perfect time to hunker down and indulge in the very best.





CHRISTMAS CHEESE WITH STYLE

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