SF SPECIALITY FOOD

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DROUGHT SUPPORT PACKAGE FOR FARMERS



CONNECTING THE FINE FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY



NEW COVENT GARDEN MARKET

LONDON'S PREMIUM FRESH PRODUCE WHOLESALE MARKET

Welcome.

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EDITOR'S LETTER



WITH TIME AND RESOURCES TIGHT, COMING UP WITH NEW WAYS TO REVAMP YOUR BUSINESS CAN BE HARD – BUT THE SPECIALITY FOOD TEAM IS HERE TO HELP

If you took a wild guess, how much of what you do is based around the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' adage?

Conversely, roughly what percentage of your resources are spent on innovating and trying things new – whether carefully calculated and planned out or simply put into place in the heat of an inspired moment?

The truth is, not many of us have the luxury of time to spend painstakingly figuring out each detail of every decision we make. Especially if you run or work within a small business, a fair portion of your time will be spent keeping things ticking along and putting out fires where and as soon after they occur as possible.

At the start of each new year, a huge number of people decide to honour that time by creating new habits and ridding ourselves of the old ones that no longer serve us – how long those changes last is another subject entirely – and in fine food retail that can often mean a spring clean, both of the bricks and mortar establishment itself including product ranges and a good old dusting, and in ways of working (spreadsheets work overtime at the start of each year).

Many, including the *Speciality Food* team, promote this time as an opportunity to take stock and start afresh, and while the task list of those within the fine food sector is far from slowing down as Christmas approaches, maybe we could take a leaf out of the school year's book and consider September a fresh start too.

Perhaps you'll have a slight drop in footfall as families go back to education and work, so you can use this time to come up with some exciting new ideas and revamp your counter/business/approach.

If the time to do this really can't be spared, fear not because *Speciality Food* is always here to help in any way that would be valuable to our readers and the wider sector.

For example, we are very conscious of the opportunities presented by blue cheese that it's hard to maximise, in part because of the raft of potential customers who swear they don't like blue cheese (but you know they just haven't tried the right one yet).

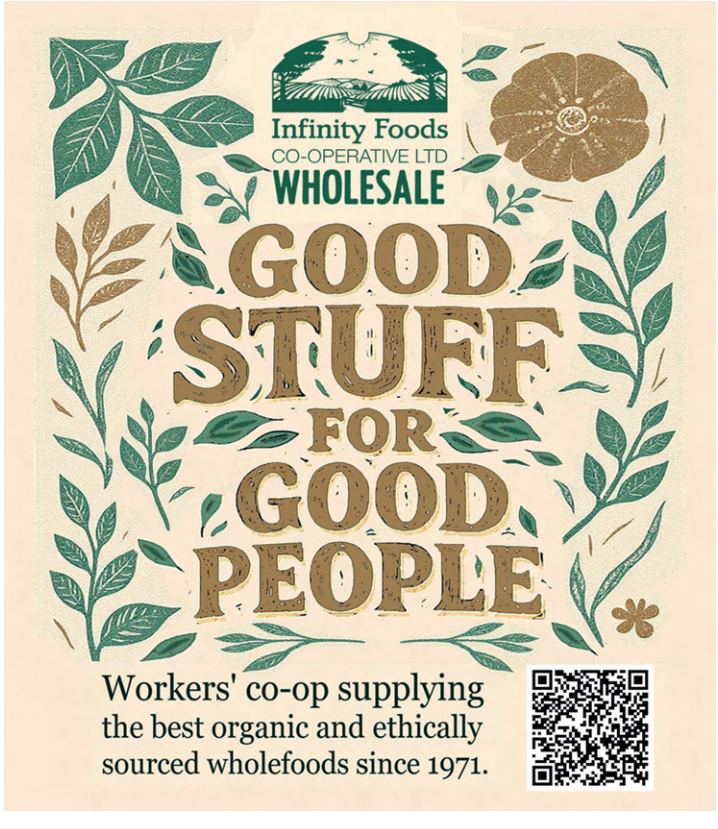
That's why we've worked with Clawson to create Stilton Week:

> *Speciality Food is here to help you and the wider sector, and that's why we're launching Stilton Week: our way of supporting you to celebrate great cheese*

our way of supporting your business to spread the good word about this iconic blue cheese, to turn naysayers into fans, and to inspire shoppers across the UK and beyond to put Stilton at the centre of their cheeseboards and kitchens at home.

You can find out more about the campaign at stiltonweek.com, and get in touch with me via the email address below at any time. We are here to serve you and the fine food sector, and I look forward to hearing from you.

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



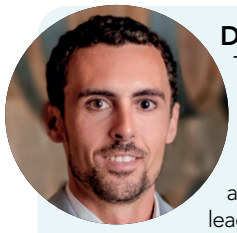


Drought 2026: The Impact

With almost three quarters of the UK experiencing drought at the time of writing, summer 2026 will no doubt go down in history as a particularly challenging period for the food industry – even amongst the myriad of other troubles the sector currently faces.

Indeed, this season has been the driest for 190 years, leading to concerns from The National Drought Group about the availability, cost and quality of the nation's fresh produce, and experts are predicting that such weather is likely to be common in the future.

We spoke to the industry to find out the scale of the issue and how the sector can create a sustainable future.



DAMIEN MALEJACQ
TUTIAC

Higher potential alcohol is a consequence of the heat and drought — the drought this summer is having an impact on our yields, the grapes accumulate sugar more quickly, which can potentially lead to higher alcohol levels. But higher-ABV wines are not inevitable. We adapted in the vineyard and at harvest, for example through canopy management and pruning choices to keep the grapes protected from direct sunlight, picking earlier and harvesting at night. All of this helps us preserve freshness and keep better control of potential alcohol.

In terms of pricing, lower yields can obviously put some pressure on production and availability, but I think it's still too early to say that this will automatically result in shortages or higher prices. The situation can vary significantly from one area and one producer to another. We should have a clearer picture soon, once we have the first reliable estimates of overall yields across Bordeaux.

"The situation can vary significantly from one area and one producer to another"



STEPHEN MORGAN MP
FOOD SECURITY MINISTER

This summer's drought is placing real pressure on our food system. Farmers are dealing with reduced yields, poor grass growth for livestock and mounting pressure on day-to-day operations, but the impacts do not end at the farm gate.

Food manufacturers and retailers all rely on a stable supply of high-quality produce, and prolonged dry weather can create uncertainty throughout the supply chain.

In recent weeks, I've met drought-affected farmers in Cornwall with the Prime Minister and visited businesses across food manufacturing, processing and retail to hear directly about the pressures on our food chain, and how we can continue to work together to build a stronger, more resilient food system in a changing climate.

We understand how difficult times are. That is why we are acting with a comprehensive package of support, providing a £65 million boost to help the farming sector respond to this exceptionally dry summer, including improved access to water and investment in on-farm reservoirs to help bolster our food supply chain from field to fork.

Our food system is deeply interconnected. Protecting our farmers means protecting the wider food economy, supporting jobs, and strengthening food security. Beyond the farm gate, we are bringing together industry leaders through our Farming and Food Partnership Board and Food Strategy to deliver a thriving food production sector.

Food security is national security, and by working in partnership across the entire food chain, we can ensure British food production is ready for the challenges of the future.

"By working in partnership we can be ready for the challenges of the future"



CHRIS CLOWES
SCALA

The effects of drought are felt far beyond the farm. Lower and less predictable yields can quickly lead to gaps in ingredient availability, longer supplier lead times, disrupted production schedules and higher prices across the food and drink sector.

Businesses need to prepare before shortages begin to emerge. Producers should identify the ingredients and suppliers their operations depend on most, line up alternative sources where possible and test how quickly production can adapt. Retailers can support them by reviewing ranges and promotions early, giving suppliers a clearer view of demand and recognising that some products may need to change temporarily. Widespread shortages remain unlikely, but shoppers may see less choice, more imported alternatives, higher prices and temporary gaps on shelves. Closer collaboration between farmers, producers, logistics partners and retailers will help businesses respond faster, protect supplies and avoid placing further pressure on already strained food supply chains.

"Closer collaborating will help businesses respond faster and protect supplies"

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The Feed.

Insider intel from the world of fine food



New research finds shoppers unwilling to pay more for health claims

Despite encouraging shoppers to try new products, consumers aren't spending more on food and drink products which promote health claims.

In the recent Emerging Trends Report by Vypr, shoppers were asked how much they were willing to pay for products which had a clean label claim and those which didn't, and the results showed that they would pay 0.5% more for clean label products.

The most successful claims were easily understood, with 47% of consumers stating that use of natural ingredients was the most attractive claim, while 39% named no artificial ingredients and 37% low sugar as draws.

Around three in 10 shoppers cited high protein and fibre content as reasons they would try a new product.

Trust is a key issue, with only 10% of consumers trusting high protein claims, and no artificial additives was the most trusted claim – by 16% of shoppers.

24% of consumers do not trust health claims on food products, with this rising to a third among those aged over 65.

The research highlights the value of credibility of claims, with consumers often checking if a product supports its messaging.

Ben Davies, founder of Vypr, said, "In this age of UPF and food quality concerns, consumers are more confused than ever before about what to choose. Brands and manufacturers need to reformulate for HFSS rules and continue to improve their product offering, but this will not correlate with a willingness for consumers to pay more.

"54% said three or more claims on a pack would make no difference to their likelihood of buying the product. While 33% said they would be more likely to buy, 14% said they would be less likely. This shows that consumers are feeling overwhelmed so brands need to build trust and belief in the health claims rather than adding more onto pack."

A quality process, producing quality winners



CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS
GREAT BRITISH FOOD AWARDS

The winners of the Great British Food Awards 2026 will soon be revealed.

Well, that's it folks. It's a wrap on the judging process for this year's Great British Food Awards.

Our experts have nibbled, sipped, deliberated and cogitated, and the winners have finally been decided. Gold, Silver and Bronze Great British Food Awards producers have been notified, while this year our Regional winners and Grand Champion are being revealed at a special food and fun-filled ceremony in London this October.

What makes the Great British Food Awards so appealing to entrants is the thorough, thoughtful judging process and quality of assessment. As food lovers and passionate supporters of the food and drink industry, with a desire to lift up and shine a light on the best of the best, our team ensures each step is transparent and detailed.

That begins in summer, when panels of food and drink specialists gather to taste and score every product on its own merit against a strict set of individual criteria.

Products scoring the highest are further tested by our celebrity head judges to decide who deserves Gold. This year is one of our strongest judging pools yet, with regulars Raymond Blanc OBE, Adam Handling, William Sitwell, Merlin Griffiths, Jack Stein and others joined by Michelin-starred Gareth Ward and Stuart Ralston, the Soil Association's Helen Browning OBE, Mowgli founder Nisha Katona MBE, pastry chef extraordinaire and Great British Bake Off: The Professionals judge Cherish Finden, chocolatier Paul A Young, Get Baked's Rich Myers, The Honey Guild co-founder Helen Rogers, and TV wine and drinks expert, Tom Surgey.

What makes the Great British Food Awards so appealing is the thoughtful, thorough judging process

Their input and insightful feedback is invaluable to producers and is also a key selling tool for all you retailers. Being able to showcase Raymond Blanc's favourite savoury biscuits or Nisha Katona's best-loved hot sauce is an extremely powerful merchandising opportunity.

Throughout autumn and winter, Great British Food will be working with retailers and wholesalers to amplify and further celebrate winners in-store.

If you'd like to find out more email charlotte.smith-jarvis@artichokehq.com

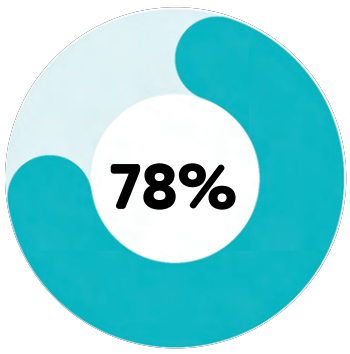
EU delays harmonised waste sorting labelling act

Expected on 12th August 2026, the European Union Implementing Act on harmonised waste sorting labelling is a key element of PPWR legislation with a primary objective of reducing the environmental and health impacts associated with packaging.

It is anticipated that details of the labels will follow the Joint Research Council proposal of a standardised pictogram-based label to represent material composition, and waste receptacles carrying matching labels to enable consumers to sort their waste correctly.

Jude Allan, managing director at the UK's voluntary labelling organisation, OPRL, said, "While any delay to the start of implementation leaves brands with a slightly longer period of uncertainty, the timeline – once the Act is announced – still allows two years' implementation time. Once the EU's plans are clear, the UK can also move forward with plans for its own mandatory label under PPWR.

"Recent OPRL research demonstrates the importance of clear communication with consumers to achieve the necessary levels of recycling. So we are pleased to see that brands are still likely to be able to include instructions next to the PPWR label. OPRL's latest research shows conclusively that consumers respond positively to calls to action."



78% of respondents said they would be likely to rinse packaging that included a call to action



51% of respondendents would rinse packaging with no call to action

OPRL



UK farmers are in cashflow and confidence crisis

"Farmers face an immediate crisis in cashflow and confidence. Rain has come too late for lost harvests and slashed yields, while livestock farmers are dealing with the worst bluetongue outbreak to reach our shores. Many are worried they will not have money in the bank to plant next year's crops or replace livestock lost to bluetongue. We're hearing daily about the cashflow crisis facing farmers. Whether it's the grower in Buckinghamshire who's down £220,000 on their usual harvest, or the dairy farmer in Dorset spending an extra £500 a day on fodder to feed their cows, the balance sheets are not adding up. "Farmers in England are now without the breathing space once provided by direct payments and are increasingly exposed to geopolitical shocks, as well as repeated weather extremes, animal disease and global wars. "Action is needed now to secure the future of British farming and enable the next generation to keep producing the nation's food. We will continue working with government to help farmers withstand this crisis and deliver on its commitment that food security is national security."

Tom Bradshaw, president of NFU, on the financial crisis faced by British farmers

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The Feed. Confectionery

Health and indulgence are closely connected



JESS RYALL
FMCG GURUS

Health and indulgence have traditionally occupied opposite ends of the food and drink industry. However, as consumers become more conscious of their diets, the relationship between the two is becoming increasingly blurred.

Rather than abandoning biscuits, chocolate, desserts and other treats, consumers are looking for ways to make indulgence fit more comfortably alongside their wider health priorities. This is creating opportunities for brands to combine the taste and enjoyment expected from an indulgent product with greater reassurance around ingredients and nutritional value.

Considered indulgence

Importantly, this does not mean consumers expect every treat to become a health product. Indulgence still needs to feel like indulgence. Instead, consumers are becoming more considered about the products they choose and the ingredients they associate with quality.

Growing attention around food processing is influencing how consumers evaluate food and drink. FMCG Gurus' research shows that 48% of global consumers consider ultra-processed food and drink unhealthy or very unhealthy. Among consumers who hold negative perceptions of ultra-processed food, 66% associate it with obesity.

Ingredient quality and transparency are becoming more important. Consumers want to understand what goes into the products they buy, particularly when trying to balance enjoyment with wider health goals.

TOP PRODUCTS



Choc Amor
Blackcurrant Salt & Chipotle Chocolate
Milk chocolate with flavours of blackcurrant and chipotle, intensified with sea salt.
chocamor.co.uk



GNAW
Crunchy Honeycomb
Bitesized pieces of honeycomb enrobed in rich 40% milk chocolate
gnawchocolate.co.uk

First UK-grown chocolate bar produced

To mark its 100 year anniversary, the University of Reading has created the Reading 100 Chocolate Bar entirely out of cocoa, sugar and milk produced within the UK.

The cocoa was grown at the university's International Cocoa Quarantine Centre, which is home to over 300 varieties of cocoa plant.

It was created by Maha Khan, a food security master's student in order to highlight the vulnerability of international supply chains. "This British bar of chocolate highlights the precarious nature of our food supplies," she said. "Cocoa plants are very sensitive to changes in temperature and rainfall, and climate change is already causing problems in countries that product most of the world's cocoa."



Britain's **chocolate** sector is **worth £10.4bn** but reliant on **imported cocoa**

University of Reading



IT ALL RESTS ON A GREAT CRACKER



PETER'S YARD

AWARD-WINNING
SOURDOUGH CRACKERS

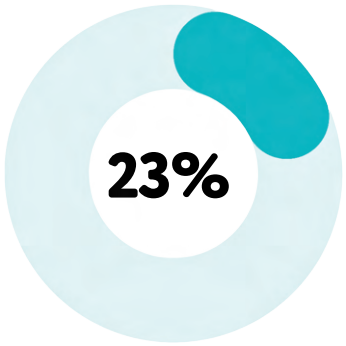
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The Feed. Retail

Younger retail workers: in numbers



of UK adults believe that part-time work is an important part of younger people entering the workforce



of youth employment is in retail and its supply chains

Opinium

The kitchen upgrade



OLIVER LLOYD
CONSULTANT

Something has shifted in the way we think about cooking at home, and I don't think it's entirely down to ingredients or recipes. It's the appliances sitting on our worktops that are quietly changing what's possible, and more importantly, what feels achievable on a Tuesday evening.

I recently got a Ninja Creami, and it has genuinely changed the way I think about dessert. The concept is simple, but the results are remarkable: freeze your base overnight, process it the next day, and within minutes you have ice cream with complete control over every ingredient. A pot of good yoghurt with blueberries and honey produces something light, fresh and genuinely virtuous. A decent custard with good quality chocolate goes in the other direction entirely, producing something deeply indulgent that you'd happily serve to guests. My daughter has taken this further still, enthusiastically adding extra elements to whatever base she can find, and our most memorable experiment so far has been dark chocolate folded into a watermelon sorbet, which sounds wrong but tastes completely right, at least according to her.

Quality food retail is perfectly placed to supply what comes next

Growing an engaged audience

My air fryer operates on the same logic. It has become less about cooking method and more about freeing up mental bandwidth. Parcelling off one element of a meal to the air fryer reduces the pressure on everything else, producing that particular crunch that the oven often can't match. In the middle of this summer's heatwave, there's an added bonus: it means the oven stays off and the kitchen doesn't get any hotter.

Then there's the coffee maker, which has quietly elevated the start of every day and means I rarely buy out. Good beans, properly extracted, make a real difference to the ritual of the morning, and that ritual matters a lot to me. A morning without coffee is a genuinely bad one.

What connects all three is a simple truth: these appliances are only as good as what you put into them.

This matters for retailers and brands, because the appliance boom has created a new kind of engaged home cook actively looking for quality inputs. The Good Food Nation survey, published this year and based on more than 2,000 UK adults, found that 87% of us enjoy cooking and 70% would like more exciting main meals. These are people who have time to explore, who care deeply about results, and who will invest in the right ingredients when they understand what's possible.

The appliance has lowered the barrier to making something genuinely special at home, and quality food retail is perfectly placed to supply what comes next, particularly when people are entertaining. The machine is already on the worktop. The question is what goes into it.



Leading multiple invests in 'craft skills'

Morrisons has announced that it has launched 1,000 new apprenticeships as part of a plan to protect the traditional skills that form its Market Street proposition.

The two-year Proper Jobs: Fresh Start programme will consist of 13 weeks working as a store colleague before a year-long apprenticeship in areas including retail, bakery, butchery and fishmongery.

The programme is designed to build retail skills that employees can take forward in their career and allow them to become leaders across retail segments.



Supermarket fails 'forever chemicals' tests

"It's alarming that PFAS were detected in every single food sample tested. While PFAS concentrations and profiles varied among samples, this pilot study highlights the urgent need to monitor PFAS in UK food items and the wider environmental context (i.e., soil, water and fertilisers) to understand the sources and risk of PFAS in our food. We need a collaborative effort among stakeholders (scientists, farmers, supermarkets, the government and the public) to take necessary action to limit PFAS risk to public health and the environment."

Dr Mohamed Abdallah, chair in environmental chemistry, University of Birmingham, in response to analysis of Tesco food products carried out by University of Birmingham for Foodrise

UK **food** and **non-alcoholic drink** inflation **fell** to **1.7%** in June, its **lowest** rate since August **2024** and far **below** previous industry **warnings** that **inflation** might approach **10%** by **Christmas**

Office for National Statistics

Latest reforms put part-time retail work in danger

The British Retail Consortium has warned that recent employment reforms could impact retailers' ability to employ for entry-level jobs.

The Guaranteed Hours reforms under the Employment Rights Act proposals are progressing through Government, and are set to cost businesses £2.9 billion.

This puts many retail roles, particularly those held by younger people, at risk as their positions can vary according to seasonal demand.

Helen Dickinson, chief executive of BRC, said, "For generations, Saturday jobs have given young people their first experience of work, helping the build confidence, develop new skills and take the first step in their careers. Retail has proudly provided those opportunities for millions of people, but they are becoming harder to sustain. If the Burnham government is serious about tackling youth unemployment, it must not make it harder to create entry-level jobs.

"After £6.5 billion in additional employment costs over the past two years, businesses need policies that encourage recruiting young people, not discourage it. That means reducing the cost of employing young people, and proportionate Guaranteed Hours reforms."



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THE UK FOOD & DRINK SHOWS

WilliamReed.

The Feed. Seafood

Funding secured to boost training in seafood industry

Seafish has secured £1.4 million via Marine Fund Scotland and the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme to improve training for those working within the seafood sector as well as for people interested in joining the industry.

Eligible fishers based in England and Scotland can apply for up to £10,000 towards training costs in topics such as essential safety courses, career progression qualifications and Man Overboard Awareness training, subject to funding availability.

The funding will cover around 6,000 training days for professionals across the sector including fishers, processors, wholesalers and retailers.

Neil McAleese, head of industry workforce Issues, said, "The seafood industry depends on a skilled workforce and ensuring people have access to high-quality training is essential if we are to attract new talent and support those already working in the sector.

"This funding allows us to invest in people right across the seafood supply chain, from those taking their first steps into the industry to experienced professionals looking to develop new skills.

"By making this training more accessible, we're helping businesses build resilience, improve safety standards and equip the workforce with the skills needed for the future.

"We're proud to be able to deliver this support on behalf of our funding partners and would encourage eligible seafood businesses and individuals to take advantage of the opportunities available."



Connecting to place

"What we're seeing is that people really do want seafood to feel connected to where they're eating it. If you're sitting by the coast, looking out at the water, there is something much more exciting about ordering oysters, crab, mussels or beautifully prepared fish when it feels like it belongs in that setting. At Rockwater, we've always felt that if you're operating on the British coastline, you should be looking close to home wherever you can. It doesn't make much sense to be sitting beside the sea and bringing seafood halfway around the world unnecessarily. I think that's where a lot of the opportunity is now and people are more curious about where their food comes from and they want a bit of a story behind what they're eating, but it still has to taste fantastic first and foremost. If you can get the quality right and make the seafood feel genuinely connected to the place, people really respond to it."

Luke Davis, founder of Rockwater, on the importance of provenance in today's market

Indies are key to seafood market's growth



IAN BARRETT
WEYFISH

When asking most customers what they're looking for when they think about buying fish, often their minds go to a supermarket fish counter – the same few species of fish, laid on ice, with very broad origins. Although supermarket fishmongers are informed about what they have on their counters, it's the independent fishmongers, the delis, the farm shops and the food halls that are offering insight, suggesting sustainable species, and encouraging their customers to try something new – all with expert guidance and assistance.

At Weyfish, we land, prep and sell fish from local fishermen that were in the sea off the Dorset coast just a day or two before. A customer can ask what came in that morning, how to cook a fish they've never handled, and get an answer from someone who was on the quay when it was landed. Supermarkets sell fish. Specialist retailers sell judgement, and that's increasingly what people pay for.

Supermarkets sell fish. Specialist retailers sell judgement, and that's increasingly what people pay for

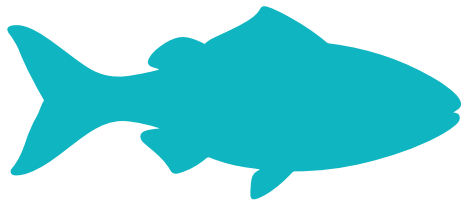
Choosing carefully

The shift we're seeing isn't really about extravagance. It's about precision. Budgets are tighter, so people are buying less fish overall but choosing it more carefully. A good counter, whether that's ours, a farm shop's, or a deli that's added fresh fish alongside its charcuterie, lets someone buy exactly the two fillets they need rather than a shrink-wrapped tray sized for four. That precision cuts waste and often costs less than it looks.

Provenance has stopped being a good to know and become the reason people buy. Customers ask where fish was caught, by what method, and how far it travelled, and want a real answer rather than a label. Independent retailers can give one, because most of us know the boats and skippers by name. That trust is portable too: a farm shop that's already earned confidence on meat and veg finds fish counter customers arrive already primed to trust the sourcing, which is why so many are adding one.

That expertise matters most in what we're actually recommending. Salmon and cod still account for most of what crosses a supermarket fish counter, and both are under real pressure from demand. Part of a specialist's job is steering customers toward gurnard, mullet, skate or whatever's landed well that week instead, species that let the more familiar stocks recover and often taste just as good for less. Supermarkets sell the same handful of species at scale; a fishmonger's job is knowing what else is worth trying, and why.

None of this makes supermarkets irrelevant. But it does mean the counter, wherever it sits, is where seafood's growth is happening.



The **value** of the **UK's seafood** industry reached **£6.09 billion** in **2025**

Seafish




MORE THAN ONLY
FOOD & DRINK
Blending
Innovation &
Quality
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EUROPEAN UNION
ENJOY
IT'S FROM
EUROPE

The Feed. Drinks

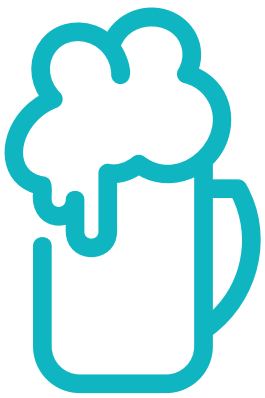


of consumers have stated that they would return drinks bottles on shopping trips once the DRS scheme begins in 2027

Danone

Online searches for 'shandy' were up 150% in the past three months

Google Trends





No, low and mid-strength drinks sector shows

Club Soda's recently released Benchmarketing Report, which draws upon a producer survey alongside market data and shows that the sector is experiencing healthy growth and rising investment.

The data shows that on average, independent producers were founded in 2018, employ four people and turn over around £500,000. Over half of the businesses surveyed have secured millions of pounds in external investment, while 86% are planning to extend production and three quarters to employ more staff.

The study also found that many of the businesses surveyed are running at 60% of capacity, showing that there is room to grow output without heavy spend on infrastructure.

It also demonstrated that over a third of these brands are exporting and earning 40% of their sales from overseas - mainly from Europe and North America.

The report values the UK category at £2.2 billion in annual turnover.

Low and **no-alcohol** beer **sales** are **growing** – they currently make up **1.02%** of total **bar** transactions, up from **0.84%** in **2025**

Square

TOP PRODUCTS



Belvoir Farm
Mulled Winter Punch
Made with real fruit juices with extracts of cinnamon, clove and nutmeg for a delicious winter warmer. Serve cold or warm.
belvoirfarm.co.uk



Shandy Shack
Elderflower Shandy
A light, crisp pilsner topped with a splash of fruity elderflower cordial courtesy of bottlegreen.
shandyshack.co.uk

Younger generations favouring health over alcohol

According to the Fruit Juice Science Centre, 29% of shoppers say that they are consuming less alcohol than they have done in previous summers, and 53% would rather spend their time on coffee dates and wellness activities than at pubs and bars.

53% of those aged between 18 and 34 are opting for alcohol-free drinks that offer added health or functional benefits when socialising, almost double the proportion of adults aged 45 and over (28%).

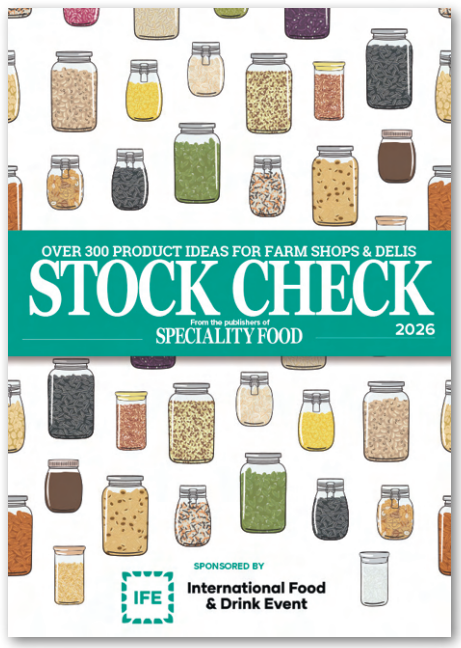
26% of 18 to 24 year-olds say they consciously moderate their alcohol intake at social occasions, compared with just one in ten (11%) adults aged 55 and over.

Dr Carrie Ruxton, dietitian and co-owner of Salt St Andrews gym, said, "For decades, the British summer has been on pub gardens and barbecues, but our research suggests younger adults are redefining what socialising looks like. They're still getting together with friends, but they're increasingly choosing coffee dates, walks, fitness classes and wellness experiences, while also being more mindful about what they drink. Hydration is becoming the main priority during warmer weather, which is encouraging to see."



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The Feed. International

Familiar formats feed appetite for world foods

The latest Summer Fancy Food Show trend report found that international flavours are increasingly being used to reinvent familiar foods. Examples included butter chicken pizza, Korean-inspired savoury oatmeal, Bombay-spiced crisps and Mexican ketchup.



The invisible export



MIKE ONYOLU
CEO, MCGROCER

British food and drink brands have long been associated with the familiarity of the high street, but demand for them does not stop at the UK border. At McGrocer, our latest trading figures show that around 93% of revenue comes from outside the UK. The United States alone accounts for 52% of total revenue, followed by Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Norway, Germany and France.

A diaspora-driven export channel

Our sales data points to an international appetite for familiar UK food and drink brands. The US regional breakdown includes California, New York, Texas, Florida and Massachusetts, locations with established British and Commonwealth communities. The pattern suggests diaspora consumers are an important part of demand for products associated with home.

For these shoppers, buying speciality food is about more than nostalgia. Familiar brands can provide continuity, trust and access to products that may not be readily available through local retailers. Online specialist food and drink platforms make it possible to meet that demand across borders, one order at a time.

Demand is being captured directly from consumers who seek out products they know and trust

This creates an export channel that can sit outside the traditional picture of international speciality food trade. Rather than moving large volumes through conventional retail distribution, demand is being captured directly from consumers who seek out products they know and trust.

What the figures mean for UK food businesses

For UK food brands and specialty food retailers, the opportunity is worth paying attention to. Our latest trading figures show that international demand can become a substantial part of a food and drink business, particularly where products have an existing connection with overseas consumers.

The geographical spread of our customers also suggests that British food businesses should not view international demand as limited to a single market. The US leads by a considerable margin, while Australia, Canada and several European markets contribute to the company's overseas business.

For brands considering international growth, diaspora communities can provide a starting point. Their familiarity with British products can help create an initial customer base, while reliable access and convenient delivery can turn that familiarity into repeat purchasing.

Our trading figures offer a snapshot of this opportunity. With around 93% of our revenue generated outside the UK, our experience demonstrates how demand for British food and drink can extend beyond traditional export to reach consumers worldwide.

As international shoppers continue to seek the products they know and trust, the British diaspora may prove to be more than a cultural connection. It can also be a commercial channel for UK brands.



Exports drop as costs rise

According to recent research by Parcelhero, nearly three in 10 exporters shipped less in June as a result of mounting red tape and price increases.

Facing both falling volumes and rising costs, exporters are being squeezed from both directions according to the international delivery provider. New analysis of official trade and business survey data via the Office for National Statistics has shown that goods exports dropped by £2.2 billion (6.3%) in June alone.

David Jinks, M.I.L.T., head of consumer research at Parcelhero, said, "Asked how their exporting in June 2026 compared with the same month a year earlier, 28.6% of currently trading exporters said they had exported less – up from 24.4% when the same question was last asked in March 2026. Only 13.8% said they had exported more, down from 15.1% three months earlier, while 2.5% said they had been unable to export at all. Looking specifically at manufacturing and retail, the results are even more concerning. 31.6% of manufacturers and 31.5% of wholesalers & retailers said they exported less than in June 2025.

"The cost of exporting is climbing too. 39% of exporters said the cost of exporting in June 2026 was higher than a year ago, up from 35.3% in March, while just 2.4% reported falling costs. The manufacturing and retail sectors again fared particularly badly. 44.1% of currently trading manufacturers and 60% of wholesale & retailers said their export costs were higher than last year. On top of this, 22.9% of exporters said costs directly linked to post-EU-transition export regulation changes were still increasing, up from 21.5% in the previous survey round, and the proportion reporting no such cost increases at all fell from 42.2% to 39.2%.

"There are signs of growing complexity too. Time spent on exporting increased for 18.9% of businesses, but the share saying their export workload had stayed the same fell sharply, from 57.1% to 47.2%, while the proportion saying they were "not sure" how it had changed rose from 17.4% to 23.1% – suggesting more exporters are finding it harder to judge or predict their own admin burden.

'"These figures confirm what a lot of exporters have been telling us anecdotally for months: it's not just that overseas demand has gone quiet, it's that exporting itself has become more expensive and more time-consuming. With nearly 40% of exporters saying the cost of exporting has gone up year-on-year, and almost a quarter saying costs linked to post-Brexit export rules are still rising, that's a real drag on competitiveness for UK firms trying to sell into the EU and beyond.

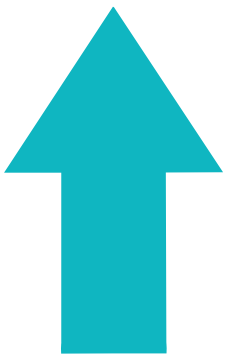
"The jump in businesses saying they're unsure how their export workload has changed is also worth flagging. When more businesses can't confidently say whether their admin burden has gone up or down, that's usually a sign the rules or processes around them are shifting, not settling.

"Our advice to exporters is to treat customs and compliance as a cost centre worth actively managing, not a fixed overhead. Reviewing paperwork processes, consolidating shipments where possible, and working with a delivery partner who understands current EU and non-EU import requirements can meaningfully reduce both direct costs and the hidden time costs that are clearly building up across the sector."



Exports to the EU are down by

£1.3 billion (7.4%)



Exports to non-EU markets are down

£1 billion (5.4%)

Appetite grows for European provenance

European food and drink is building a stronger reputation among consumers worldwide, according to new research from the European Commission.

The findings reveal growing recognition of the quality, safety and sustainability associated with EU produce, alongside increased awareness of organic, PDO and PGI labels.

However, understanding of what the schemes guarantee remains limited, suggesting retailers have an important role to play in explaining provenance and production stories in-store.



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The Feed. Convenience

Convenience doesn't have to mean sacrifice

Premium and convenience are increasingly converging in fine food shoppers' habits, with the percentage of UK consumers seeking out convenience rising by 37% while there were 44.9% more shoppers looking for premium products.

Smart businesses are selling products that provide indulgence without faff, such as premium ready meals, meal solutions such as cooking sauces and quick-cook rice and pasta with fine food and sustainability credentials.



Convenience sales **grew** by **3.6%**, their **strongest** performance in **more** than a **year**

NielsenIQ, Total Till Sales four weeks ending 8th August 2026



The evolving format of convenience

"For years, hospitality has focused on making service faster and more convenient. Customers wanted shorter queues, easier ordering and frictionless payments, and the industry responded accordingly. Today we're seeing a new shift taking place. Consumers increasingly want information alongside convenience. They want to understand ingredients, allergens, sourcing and sustainability, and they expect that information to be available instantly."

Peter Moore, CEO of Lolly, on the evolving demands of consumers

Selling premium convenience

UK shoppers are busier than ever, but more discerning too, meaning that fine food independents are perfectly positioned to tap into the growing demand for simple meal solutions that don't compromise on quality.

Here's how to make the growing opportunity work for you.

Position for ease
Convenience isn't just about how long it takes to get a meal from kitchen to plate, it's about the retail experience too. Make your meal solutions visible and easy to access, using POS to make meal deal suggestions and positioning themed options together - for example, microwave rice next to curry sauces, or premium quality pasta next to artisanal jars of sunblushed tomatoes and dried herbs.

Consider your audience
Do an audit of the segments of your customer base who are looking for ease and time saved. Do you serve a large number of families who might be looking for weeknight solutions? Promote quick and easy after-school dinners the whole family will love, either by grouping ingredients so they're easy to grab or inspiring customers with recipe cards.

Don't forget frozen
The frozen food category is becoming increasingly popular, not least with consumers who are wary of their budget. Beyond frozen peas and ready meals, consider adding some excitement in the form of international cooking sauces and ready meals, as well as indulgence in the form of ice creams, frozen desserts and ready-to-bake items.

"Retail has never been more connected. Customers don't distinguish between online and offline anymore; they simply expect every interaction to feel effortless. The retailers seeing the strongest growth are those investing in technology that removes friction, empowers staff and creates one consistent customer experience across every channel."

Claire Gatenby, co-founder of Squashed Pixel



Frozen feeds hunger for convenience

According to recent YouGov research, the convenience of frozen food makes it an important part of British shoppers' shopping habits.

Around seven in ten consumers use frozen food to prepare meals at least two to three times a week. The most common frequency is two to three times a week (41%), followed by four to six times a week (21%). A further 16% use frozen food once a week, while 7% say they use it every day.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) say they buy frozen food about as often as they did 12 months ago, while 11% purchase it more frequently and 15% less frequently. Lower-income consumers are slightly more likely than average to report both increasing (13%) and decreasing (18%) their frozen food purchases over the past year, with 68% reporting no change.

Convenience-related **benefits** rank **highly** with more than **two-fifths** picking **simplicity** to cook **(43%)** and **quick** preparation **(41%)**

YouGov



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TRENDING PRODUCTS



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



HOLOS
MULLED SPICE ORGANIC KOMBUCHA

The kombucha brand is bringing its sell-out seasonal drink back for 2026 in order to cater for consumers who wish to enjoy winter's festivities without compromise. The non-alcoholic, slightly sparkling seasonal kombucha has been created using the brand's authentic traditionally fermented brew and a carefully balanced blend of spices for a unique blend of natural acidity and warming aromatics. Joseph Landreth-Smith, co-founder of Holos, said "This isn't a novelty product. It's about life's little luxuries. It's a secret meant to be shared."

holoskombucha.com

MOLTO
DARK CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE

Founded with a passion for providing indulgence with a simple ingredients deck, MOLTO has launched a Dark Chocolate Chip cookie which satisfies the demand for honest indulgence. Virgilio Guidi, co-founder, said, "We built MOLTO around the idea that indulgence and honesty were never supposed to be opposites. What's surprised us is that the customers responding aren't a niche health crowd, they're people who just want the treat without the wellness lecture attached."

justmolto.com



Tracklements shares Pavarotti vinegars

Tracklements has added the PGI-protected Pavarotti range of artisan vinegars to its range, following the business joining the Charbonneaux Brabant family of speciality brands in June 2025. Guy Tullberg, chairman of Tracklements, said, "We're really excited to be championing British-made condiments on tables across Europe as well as being able to share some of the finest, well-made products in Italy and France with shoppers here."

tracklements.co.uk





RH Amar launches Henry's Deli

The new premium Mediterranean ambient brand is launching with a seven-strong range of Italian Antipasti Mix with Chilli, Tangy Balsamic Baby Borettane Onions, Halkidiki Olives with Lemon, Garlic & Rosemary, Halkidiki Olives Stuffed with Ranch Cream Cheese, Pitted Greek Mixed Olives, Pitted Greek Kalamata Olives and Slow Roasted Roma Tomatoes in homage to Henry Amar, father to the third generation of the family now at the head of the business. The range is designed to offer shoppers a convenient and premium solution for at-home dining.

rhamar.com

Chococo releases Festive Collection Boxes

The 2026 edition of the boxes contain a combination of popular flavours which have been showcased in previous years' boxes, as well as some innovative options that are new this year. All are uniquely decorated.

The large box contains 25 chocolates and the medium 16 chocolates. New flavours featured include Xmas Pudding Caramel, Apple Pie Caramel, Nuts About Nuts Truffle, Magic Mocha, Pecan & Maple, Date Night, Cheeky Cherry and Champagne Truffle. The large box also contains innovative and award-winning flavours including Panela Panache and Gingerbread Caramel, plus vegan options.

chococo.co.uk



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Just Gourmet Foods limited-production Puglian olive oil

Just Gourmet Foods has added Bio Orto IGP Puglia extra virgin olive oil to its range. Produced in the Tavoliere delle Puglie, the limited-production oil blends organically grown Peranzana and Ogliarola olives. Peranzana brings structure and fresh notes of green tomato and almond, while Ogliarola adds softness, balance and delicate fruitiness.Gianfranco Perri, founder and CEO of Just Gourmet Foods, said, "This is a limited and precious production, created with gratitude for Bio Orto's land and is perfect as a thoughtful gift."

justgourmetfoods.co.uk

Desi snacks brand creates Indian -inspired beer

Curry Smugglers, a brand of South Asian snacks, has launched two beers to shake up the category. DESI Lager is a 4.2% ABV basmati rice lager inspired by Indian brewing heritage, and Mango Mirchi Lager is alcohol-free and combines Alphonso mangoes with habanero chillies. Steve Dass, founder of Curry Smugglers, said, "Beer was being brewed in India before IPA became the headline, and rice forms part of that history. DESI Lager takes inspiration from that past but isn't trying to recreate an old beer. It's about asking what a modern Desi beer can be today."

currysmugglers.co



Pierre Marcolini launches premium cooking chocolate line

Award-winning patissier and chocolatier Pierre Marcolini has released a range of next-gen cooking chocolate to offer discerning home cooks and bakers the opportunity to level-up their creations. Until now this quality of cooking chocolate has been reserved for professionals, but the Maison Pierre Marcolini is making this bean-to-bar ingredient available to consumers for the first time. There are eight products in the range, from intense Grands Cru options to a comprehensive selection of Signature Blends and two milk chocolates.

marcolini.co.uk





New regenerative range from Matthews Cotswold Flour

The new flours have been created from grains grown using regenerative farming techniques which restore soil health, capture carbon and encourage biodiversity. The new Regenerative Pizza, Regenerative Churchill and Regenerative Eight Grain flours are available in 1.5kg bags.

Bertie Matthews, MD, said, "Our ambition is that by 2030 every speciality flour we produce will be made from regeneratively grown British grain. Expanding this range is another important step, giving more customers the opportunity to choose flour that supports healthier soils, British farming and exceptional baking performance."

cotswoldflour.com

Forest Feast taps into texture trend

The premium snack brand have launched a three-strong range of pouches of whole freeze-dried fruits coated in Belgian chocolate. The new range consists of Double Chocolate Crispy Raspberries, Double Chocolate Crispy Strawberries, and Matcha Chocolate Crispy Strawberries. Leona McCaugherty, head of marketing at Forest Feast, said, "Consumers are increasingly seeking snacks that offer something new, from bold flavour combinations to exciting textures, with social media accelerating discovery and trial."

forestfeast.com





Pure Oaty introduces Coconut Variant

The business is launching Pure Oaty Coconut Oat Drink into the UK market to satisfy the growing demand for dairy-free milk alternatives for consumers to enjoy in their cooking and beverages. The new release is made with 15% British gluten-free oats and coconut cream, and provides a creamy and smooth texture alongside a subtle coconut flavour which pairs well with hot drinks and as an ingredient in breakfasts and baking.

glebefarmfoods.co.uk

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A Passion for Pizza

Gone are the days of soggy crusts and half-baked flavour... Next-gen pizzas are taking the UK by storm

Does pizza really need a revamp?

With shoppers increasingly – and actively – seeking out next-gen pizzas that offer artistry and provenance alongside exceptional taste, it's fair to say that the needle is shifting towards premium pizza "whether it's the method of cooking and the type of base, stone baked or woodfired sourdough, or the types of premium toppings," explains Tracklements' Becca Chapman.

"People are becoming more knowledgeable about high-quality produce and, thanks to social media, increasingly confident home cooks," agrees Josh Oliver, co-founder and creative director of Bad Boy Pizza Society. "There's a growing desire for even the most accessible foods to feel a little more premium. People are also becoming more aware of the regional differences and styles of pizza, which is pushing the industry forward as everyone looks for something new."

Are we moving beyond frozen pizza?

Depends on who you ask. Brick Pizza revolutionised the frozen pizza category, tempting discerning shoppers away from supermarket freezer aisles towards indies with their guaranteed quality, toppings which taste freshly-prepped and the kind of texture you could expect if the pizza was fresh from the oven in their Norwich city centre pizzeria. Gone are the days of limp, flavourless pizzas that a home oven can't quite master; these are prime Neapolitan pies with quality baked in.

Options are extending far beyond the 'thin and crispy' or 'deep pan' of supermarket chillers and freezers, says Dave Morgan-Ratcliffe, co-founder of Ria's. "The question used to be: 'Do you like pizza?' Pizza was largely treated as one category, without much thought given to different styles or personal preferences. Now people are much more in tune with what they actually like – whether that's thin and crispy, deep pan, charred and chewy, or something completely different."

Does Italian pizza still rule the roost?

While Naples will always hold the crown as the original home of pizza, with foodies making pilgrimages to taste the one 'true' pizza – Neapolitan-style – these days there are plenty more options on the menu, with formats with American roots garnering favour. "NYC-style pizza is becoming firmly entrenched in the UK, with its blend of uncomplicated and high quality clearly capturing British tastes," says Tom Gatehouse of Egg Soldiers. "Within the appeal, there's an element of borrowed nostalgia about NYC-style, with millions having grown up watching films and TV shows featuring the iconic slice."

The demand for Stateside-style pizzas extends beyond New York to other regions, he explains. "It's also acting as a gateway style for a whole host of other pizza iterations from the States to make their move across the pond – from New Haven and Detroit to crisp 'tavern' style."

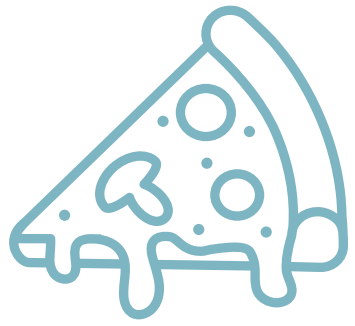
How can we cash in on DIY pizzas?

Pizza-making at home has boomed ever since Covid-19 inspired a spate of pizza oven purchases – and high quality ingredients are key to the success of the end result. Premium tomato passata – the kind that retains the sweetness of sun-ripened tomatoes as opposed to the cheaper options that can lean bitter – is a must, as is low moisture Mozzarella. You'd be forgiven for thinking that regular Mozzarella would do the job, but excess moisture is the enemy of pizza bases so either add a drier option to your counter or advise customers to slice then dry theirs on kitchen paper before using. "Ricotta and Parmesan are also finding new spotlights as part of this movement," says Tom, plus you can use this as an opportunity to push charcuterie, antipasti and, well, pretty much anything else too (toppings for Detroit pizzas in particular are fashionably eclectic).

Condiments also give customers the opportunity to transform their pizzas a dollop at a time, explains Becca. "Whether it's Pineapple & Chilli Relish with serrano ham or Fresh Chilli Jam with goats' cheese, they can create classic pizza pairings with a premium twist, without the effort. We've even seen pizza connoisseurs take to using Proper Tomato Ketchup as a base for pizzas – as over half the bottle is top-tier tomatoes, it makes for a great tasting and great quality base."

This trend feeds right into the hands of fine food retailers. "People are paying more attention to things like dough fermentation, flour, tomatoes and cheese in the same way they might with bread, coffee or wine," says Dave. "A combination of craft, culture and accessibility is a huge part of why pizza is having such a moment."

"A combination of craft, culture and accessibility is a huge part of why pizza is having such a moment"



A fifth of shoppers are making pizza at home

VYPR



The residential segment accounted for 60.65% of the pizza ovens market size in 2025

Mordor Intelligence



Mozzarella is the biggest individual cheese segment in the global market

Fortune Business Insights



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A World of Opportunity

UK Export Finance support can help British Christmas food and drink reach global markets

UK Export Finance (UKEF) is the government's export credit agency and plays a pivotal role in enabling UK food and drink producers to meet surging international demand for seasonal products, by providing vital support with products such as working capital guarantees and export credit insurance.

For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food and drink sector, UKEF's support can mean the difference between fulfilling a large overseas contract or turning it down.

We have seen strong growth in exports of festive products over the last few years, and whilst Christmas can be a crucial trading period, it can also put real pressure on cashflow.

From artisan Chocolatiers and Christmas shortbread to Whisky and premium innovative spirits and liqueurs, we have been able to provide the support needed to fulfill exports contracts, to a variety of markets including Mexico, Malaysia, Japan, Canada, USA and Singapore.

"British festive food and drink has a global reputation for quality, and demand is increasing, giving us a huge advantage to grow our overseas impact," says Jo Archer, Export Finance Manager. "We have an important role to play in helping our food and drink SMEs take on these opportunities and increase our market share".

UKEF can give you access to a network of Export Finance Managers.

They are based across the UK and provide free, impartial guidance to businesses on their export finance needs. UK Export Finance exists to complement, not compete, with the private sector. Our Export Finance Managers may introduce you to finance providers, credit insurers, insurance brokers, trade support bodies or other sources of government support. If UK Export Finance support is suitable, they will talk you through our products and services and can assist in the preparation of an application.

> *We are particularly important for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often face the greatest barriers to accessing trade finance and insurance*

CASE STUDY: **TRUFFLEHUNTER**



TruffleHunter, a producer of truffle-based products and gourmet ingredients based in South Cerney, Gloucestershire, wished to expand in new markets with new buyers with managed risk of non-payment.

Small Export Builder allows businesses to start with a credit limit of up to £25,000 and built up to £100,000 in 50% increments, as they establish a positive trading history with their buyers. The availability of insurance has allowed TruffleHunter to supply to new buyers in Malaysia and The Philippines with other opportunities being explored in Mexico, Ecuador and Thailand with full confidence of being paid.

CASE STUDY: **WOLD TOP BREWERY**



Founded in 2003, Wold Top Brewery is rooted in the Yorkshire Wolds and built on generations of farming heritage. Within just five years of operation, the brewery began exporting to Europe. However, scaling international sales created cash-flow challenges common to small exporters.

A referral from its bank led Wold Top Brewery to UKEF. Backed by UKEF's General Export Facility, the bank was able to provide a trade loan of up to £200,000, unlocking the working capital needed to maintain production momentum while managing overseas payment cycles.



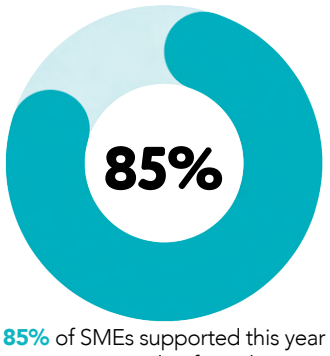
UKEF support reached **37** countries across the globe



At home, UKEF supported **937** businesses – **66%** of which were small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)



UKEF issued over **£11bn** in support of UK producers



85% of SMEs supported this year were outside of London

UK Export Finance
UKEF Impact Report 2025-2026



Jo Archer, Export Finance Manager for Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire highlights the critical role that UKEF is playing in supporting businesses to trade internationally...

"UK Export Finance (UKEF) plays a vital role in supporting economic growth, strengthening the UK's international competitiveness, and helping businesses realise their export potential. As the UK's export credit agency, UKEF exists to ensure that no viable UK export fails because of a lack of finance or insurance.

"Many businesses have world-class products and services but face challenges accessing working capital, offering competitive payment terms, or managing the risk of non-payment from overseas buyers. UKEF addresses these barriers by providing government-backed guarantees, loans and insurance that complement rather than compete with the private sector. This support helps businesses win contracts, fulfil orders and get paid. We are particularly important for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often face the greatest barriers to accessing trade finance and insurance.

"Through our nationwide network of Export Finance Managers, we provide free and impartial guidance, helping businesses navigate international markets and connect with appropriate financial support."

For more information please email jo.archer@ukexportfinance.gov.uk

NEXT STEPS

If you want to find out more about the support available through UKEF, please visit **ukexportfinance.gov.uk** or complete a contact form to speak directly to one of our Export Finance Managers. **ukexportfinance.gov.uk/products-and-services/guidance-for-uk-exporters**

10-18 OCTOBER 2026
STILTON WEEK







Join Britain's biggest celebration of Stilton

Independent retailers are being invited to put our most famous blue cheese in the spotlight during Stilton Week, taking place from 10–18 October.

Stilton is one of Britain's best-known cheeses, but many shoppers still think of it as a seasonal product thanks to its reputation as a must-have on a Christmas cheeseboard. For others, its distinctive strength can create a barrier to trial. In fact, two-thirds of people who say they do not like Stilton have never actually tried it, according to research by Clawson Farms.

That's why Clawson Farms and Speciality Food have joined forces to launch Stilton Week, a nationwide retail campaign designed to challenge perceptions, encourage trial and introduce more people to Stilton's flavour and versatility.

Free to take part in, Stilton Week will bring together 100 delis, farm shops, food halls and other independent food retailers for nine days of customer sampling, creative merchandising and in-shop promotions designed to drive sales, engage customers and demonstrate that Stilton deserves a place beyond the traditional Christmas cheeseboard.

Changing perceptions

Independent retailers are particularly well-placed to change perceptions of a product like Stilton, a cheese that many people think they know but have never actually tried. And sampling is one of the most valuable tools in the indie retailer's arsenal. Stilton Week will give retailers a special opportunity to turn the gap between perception and experience into valuable engagement at the counter.

Knowledgeable staff can explain the cheese's flavour, provenance and many different uses, introducing customers to accessible recipes, serving ideas and unexpected flavour combinations.

Bring in your USP

While participating shops will receive promotional materials to support the campaign and create an engaging Stilton Week display, they will have the flexibility to do so in a way that suits their business and customers.

A specialist cheesemonger might explore Stilton's provenance and pairings, while a farm shop could create a wider British food display. A deli or food hall might concentrate on recipes, entertaining or approachable ways to introduce younger customers to blue cheese.

Retailers can share photographs and videos of their displays, tastings and customer activity on Instagram using #StiltonWeek and tagging Clawson Farms (@ clawsonfarms) and Speciality Food (@specialityfood_), helping to build a national picture of the campaign.

There's also a brand-new award up for grabs, with participating shops invited to enter the Stilton Week Retailer Award. Entries will be assessed on creativity, visual impact, use of the campaign materials, customer engagement and the way each retailer celebrates Stilton's versatility. The winner will receive a cheese hamper, be featured in Speciality Food magazine and be invited to visit Clawson Farms to see Stilton being made firsthand. Selected shops may also be visited during Stilton Week for a campaign film bringing together retailer activity with the wider story of Stilton, from the farms supplying the milk through to the finished cheese.

43%
of Gen Z have not tasted Stilton, despite considering themselves adventurous foodies
Clawson Farms research

Two-thirds of people who say they do not like Stilton have never actually tried it
Clawson Farms research

Apply stiltonweek.com

EXPERT VIEW

Bill Mathieson, managing director, Clawson Farms

"Independent food retailers play a vital role in safeguarding and championing Britain's great speciality cheeses. Their expertise, passion and ability to engage customers are essential not only for supporting local producers, but also for protecting PDO products such as Blue Stilton, which are an important part of the UK's food heritage. We've seen firsthand through consumer focus groups and sampling campaigns at festivals and shows across the UK that when people are encouraged to try Stilton, 65% say they like it. That demonstrates the power of tastings to break down misconceptions, inspire confidence and convert interest into purchase. Stilton Week is about giving retailers the tools to do what they do best: introduce customers to exceptional cheese and create new Stilton lovers for generations to come."



"when people are encouraged to try Stilton, 65% say they like it"

HOW TO TAKE PART

- **Applications are open to independent food retailers operating physical shops in the UK**. Applicants should currently stock Clawson Farms Stilton or be willing to become a stockist before the campaign begins.
- **Places are limited to 100 retailers, and applying does not guarantee selection.** Approved retailers will be expected to participate throughout Stilton Week, display the campaign materials, offer samples and promote the activity to customers.
- **Retailers can find further information and apply at stiltonweek.com.**

STILTON: AT A GLANCE

As a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) product, Stilton can only be made in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, according to strict production standards. As well as holding a reputation as the go-to cheese for Christmas gifting and cheeseboards, Stilton is brilliant for cooking, bringing depth to pasta, pizza, salads and sauces.

Clawson Farms is a farming co-operative with more than 100 years of cheesemaking expertise and traditions passed down through generations. Its award-winning cheeses are made with fresh milk supplied by 30 member farms, all located within 30 miles of the dairy.



Each wheel of Clawson Farms Stilton is carefully hand-turned and hand-graded as it develops its creamy texture, gently crumbly body and distinctive savoury blue veining.

WHAT YOU'LL RECEIVE

Each retailer will receive a specially created Clawson Farms Stilton promotional kit containing point-of-sale materials, merchandising inspiration, recipe cards and a complimentary 450g starter supply of Clawson Farms Stilton for customer sampling.

JOIN BRITAIN'S BIGGEST CELEBRATION OF STILTON®

This October, join retailers nationwide in bringing Stilton to life through sampling, inspiring displays and irresistible pairings. Stilton Week is a simple way to attract customers, create excitement in-store and boost sales.

10 - 18
OCTOBER 2026

STILTON

WEEK



SF
SPECIALITY FOOD

CLAWSON
19 FARMS 12
MASTER CHEESEMAKERS

A partnership between Clawson Farms and Speciality Food

Be part of the UK's biggest celebration of Stilton and inspire customers to discover, taste and buy more.

Visit stiltonweek.com to apply today.

THE LONDON FOOD & DRINK FESTIVAL 2026
16-17 SEPTEMBER 2026
EXCEL | LONDON

London Food & Drink Festival 2026

Some of the UK's most unmissable events join forces at Excel London 16th-17th September



AT A GLANCE

London Food & Drink Festival
Wednesday 16th September to Thursday 17th September
Excel London
lunchshow.co.uk

- ***lunch!***
  An unmissable resource for businesses which offer on-the-go drinks and snacks solutions
- ***The National Restaurant, Pub & Bar Show***
  An exclusive event showcasing the best of hospitality
- ***London Drinks Exchange***
  Filled to the brim with the latest drinks trends and products
- ***Natural & Organic Food Show***
  An in-depth exploration of sustainable and clean-label products and brands
- ***Artisan Food & Drink Show***
  A valuable source of inspiration for fine food and drink operators

Multiple pillars of the food and drink industry will collide at Excel London 16th-17th September, as a number of must-visit events come together to form an iconic date for your diary. The free-to-attend event is an exciting new format which allows food and drink professionals across many sectors to gather under one roof, offering unparalleled insights and opportunities.

The new format will host thousands of buyers, retailers and operators from across the food and drink industry, giving them access to over 600 exhibitors from within the sector as well over 200 speakers located across eight stages of free-to-enjoy content – making it the season's most comprehensive trade event.

Must-visit features range from Start-Up Zones, Innovation Challenge Galleries and interactive festival features which will run across both days of the festival, as well as the Natural & Organic Food Stage, Casual DINING Stage, Coffee Shop Stage, Retail & Convenience Stage, Food To Go Stage and Pub & Bar Stage – and the new live DJ sets are not to be missed.

The co-location of these events allows specialist channels to connect with household names, meaning that retailers can build relationships with a wider set of businesses and surprising opportunities are now on the table.

"Natural & Organic Food Show is pivotal in connecting people from across the globe with a unified vision - making natural and organic products accessible to all"

Dave Christie, founder of Flourish Foundry

"lunch! is a fantastic event showcasing world-class innovation that will help take our industry forward"

Pano Christou, CEO of Pret A Manger

"We have always been incredibly proud of our unique, high-quality events serving key sectors within hospitality and the food retail industry. We have a strong track record of delivering the most innovative exhibitors, the most forward-thinking buyers and industry leaders talking across our keynote stages. But the lines between sectors are becoming more blurred, with many companies operating across sectors, so this is an incredibly exciting time, offering even more value for both exhibitors and visitors"

Chris Brazier, group event director, London Food & Drink Festival



The **co-located** events will collectively feature **thousands** of new **food**, **drink, tech**, and **equipment** products from over **600** exhibitors, as well as **200+ world-class** industry **speakers** across **8** stages









NEW FOR 2026: **CHEF LIVE!**

The stars will be aligned at this year's event as multiple renowned and Michelin-starred chefs will be in attendance, being interviewed and conducting not-to-be-missed demonstrations, providing an invaluable glimpse behind the curtain of one of the most exciting and innovative segments of the food and drink industry.

The chefs set to attend are:

- **Tom Aikens**
  Muse
- **Atul Kochhar**
  Atul Kochhar Restaurants
- **Nikita Pathakji**
  MAAI
- **Maria Bradford**
  Shwen Shwen
- **Cyrus Todiwala OBE**
  Café Spice Namasté
- **Tasos Gaitanos**
  Brother Marcus
- **James Golding**
  The Larder House
- **Abbie Hendren**
  Teal
- **Ayesha Kalaji**
  Queen of Cups,
- **Steve Mangleshot**
  Wagamama

Plus, Three Michelin starred **Mark Birchall from The Barn at Moor Hall** will be taking part in an exclusive interview on the Restaurateurs Stage.

To find out more and register for free (subject to verification ahead of the event) visit lunchshow.co.uk



STAND:**L271**

Cambrook

Cambrook has grown its retail brand from the company's origins supplying famous hotels and cocktail bars. Working with leading chefs it has developed a unique collection of nut mixes which form the core of its range of baked (not fried), salted, seasoned and caramelised nuts. Three seasoned Peruvian giant corn products were recently launched – Hickory Smoked, Truffle & Pecorino, and Sriracha Chilli & Lime.

cambrookfoods.co.uk



STAND:**NF272**

Crafty Cook

Crafty Cook creates luxury handcrafted meal and pudding kits using quality natural ingredients, beautifully layered in compostable tubes. Many are vegan and just require water and a heat source. Proudly SALSA approved, their award-winning range is stocked in independent food halls, garden centres, delis and Booths stores nationwide.

craftycook.co.uk

Emilia's Crafted Pasta

Emilia's Crafted Pasta brings award-winning Italian pasta to the modern pantry. Crafted in Gragnano using 100% Italian durum wheat semolina, this premium range is bronze-die extruded and slowly dried for exceptional texture and flavour. Discover three distinctive shapes – Casarecce, Rigatoni and Bucatini, made for elevating everyday meals with authentic Italian quality.

emiliaspasta.com

STAND:**NF231**



Eddys

Eddys is here to positively disrupt the disposable cutlery market with something deliciously sustainable; a spoon with benefits! Made from five seeds and grains – amaranth, quinoa, golden linseeds, chia and poppy – and only 76 calories, eddys is the tastiest, crunchiest, munchiest alternative to using disposable cutlery.

teameddys.com

STAND:**L1450**





Perfect Partners.

Discover the versatility of Emmi's exceptional cheeses through imaginative pairings designed to inspire retailers, excite customers and bring fresh flavour to the cheese counter.



Kaltbach Creamy
with jamón and cornichons

Silky Kaltbach Creamy meets savoury jamón and the bright, vinegary crunch of cornichons. Rich, salty and sharply balanced, this Continental combination makes an appealing addition to sharing boards and offers an easy pairing recommendation for customers.



Kaltbach Le Gruyère AOP
Gilda pintxo

A new take on the classic Gilda pintxo combines Kaltbach Le Gruyère AOP with a gordal olive and guindilla chilli. Salty, tangy and gently fiery, these cocktail-stick bites provide a colourful serving suggestion for tastings, drinks occasions and informal entertaining.



Kaltbach Truffle
with kimchi and crisps

A bold meeting of earthy Kaltbach Truffle, tangy kimchi and crunchy crisps. The fermented heat cuts through the cheese's richness, creating an adventurous, contemporary combination that will appeal to customers looking beyond traditional cheeseboard accompaniments.



Kaltbach Creamy
with honey

A drizzle of honey lifts the smooth, savoury character of Kaltbach Creamy with floral sweetness. Simple, familiar and highly accessible, this two-ingredient pairing is ideal for sampling at the counter and makes an effortless recommendation for cheeseboards or after-dinner serving.



Kaltbach Le Gruyère AOP
with dark chocolate and pistachios

Nutty Kaltbach Le Gruyère AOP and dark chocolate create a sophisticated balance of savoury, sweet and gently bitter flavours. Present as a cheese-and-chocolate bark, topped with pistachios and crystallised ginger, for an eye-catching tasting sample, indulgent after-dinner serve or memorable gifting idea.



Kaltbach Truffle
with caramelised nuts

Earthy Kaltbach Truffle is complemented by the sweetness and satisfying crunch of caramelised nuts. This indulgent contrast of flavour and texture offers retailers a distinctive sampling idea and gives customers fresh inspiration for cheeseboards and special occasions.



Emmi Raclette
with pickles and bread

Melted Emmi Raclette, tangy pickles and crusty bread deliver richness, acidity and crunch in every bite. It is a classic, comforting combination that works brilliantly for counter demonstrations while giving customers an uncomplicated way to enjoy Raclette at home.



Kaltbach Gouda
with fennel salami

The rounded character of Kaltbach Gouda pairs naturally with the savoury depth and aromatic fennel notes of salami. Serve them in alternating slices to create a simple but striking counter display, grazing board or ready-to-enjoy pairing.



Bettine Pearls
with chilli jam on a charcoal cracker

Creamy Bettine Pearls soften the sweet heat of chilli jam, while a charcoal cracker adds crunch and visual contrast. Colourful and easy to assemble, this pairing makes an effective counter sample or a simple canapé suggestion for customers entertaining at home.



Emmi Raclette
with bresaola and new potatoes

Melted Emmi Raclette coats tender new potatoes, with savoury bresaola bringing additional depth. Comforting yet easy to assemble, this pairing offers retailers an inviting sampling idea while demonstrating Raclette's potential for casual meals, entertaining and seasonal occasions.



Kaltbach Gouda
with English cider

Kaltbach Gouda's gentle spice and caramel notes pair beautifully with the crisp fruitiness of English cider. Serve with flatbreads for contrasting crunch and an approachable combination suited to guided tastings, grazing boards or relaxed entertaining.



Bettine Pearls
with English sparkling wine

The fresh acidity and lively bubbles of English sparkling wine cut beautifully through the creamy richness of Bettine Pearls. Serve alongside a light salad of lamb's lettuce and figs for an elegant pairing that moves effortlessly from the counter to the dining table.

KALTBACH

Bettine®

Emmi offers fine food retailers a compelling story for the counter and plenty of inspiration for tastings, pairings and seasonal displays thanks to its acclaimed range of distinctive cheeses

- **emmi.com**
- **emmi-kaltbach.com**
- **info.uk@emmi.com**
- **bettine.nl**

Authenticity, Culture and European Wine Culture at the Forefront of the Modern International Market.



The Evolution of the International Wine Market

In the global wine market, which is evolving at a rapid pace, trust, safety and unwavering reliability have emerged as the most critical selection criteria for every buyer. In this highly competitive environment, European wine clearly stands out, as it is approached not simply yet another consumer product, but as a deeply cultural asset, endowed with centuries of living history, unique tradition and incomparable identity. For modern connoisseurs, premium importers and professionals seeking genuine and enduring value, fully documented origin constitutes the sole and ultimate guarantee of commercial success and reaching the top.

The Power of PDO & PGI (ΠΟΠ & ΠΓΕ) Indications as the Ultimate Tool for Commercial Differentiation

European quality indications PDO (Protected Designation of Origin - ΠΟΠ) and PGI (Protected Geographical Indication - ΠΓΕ) are not merely formal bureaucratic notations; rather, they create a strict, unwavering and internationally recognized framework of absolute authenticity. By inseparably and permanently linking the final product with its specific geographical environment, soil, climate and the strictest European production specifications, they offer importers, distributors and consumers clear, indisputable information and a profound sense of confidence. In a global market flooded with anonymous mass-produced labels, the PDO (ΠΟΠ) and PGI (ΠΓΕ) seal functions as the ultimate competitive advantage. It enables products to be positioned with confidence in the most premium distribution channels, specialized stores and high-end wine shops. Ensuring traceability and strict compliance with European standards eliminates every doubt, protects the importer's investment and offers the final consumer a product of a superior taste and quality tire.

A Complete High-End Gastronomic Experience at the Modern Table

The authentic and captivating story of a great wine is always completed and vindicated around a laid table. Premium European wine is born and designed to showcase the world's gastronomic traditions, ideally accompany a broad spectrum of flavours and elevate every social occasion. It is not simply an accompanying beverage, but the ideal partner of haute cuisine. The integration of PDO (ΠΟΠ) and PGI (ΠΓΕ) wines into the menus of leading restaurants enables sommeliers and chefs to create unique, multisensory gastronomic journeys (wine pairings). Every bottle brings to the customer's glass the story of a place, the passion of the producers and the distinctiveness of a particular climate. This high level of presentation gives enormous prestige to food-service businesses, transforms a simple dinner into an unforgettable high-end hospitality experience and educates consumers to recognize and appreciate the subtle nuances of authentic taste.

Moderation, Quality and Conscious Choice: The New Premium Philosophy of Life

The promotion of responsible consumption is the central and non-negotiable core of modern European wine culture. This philosophy steadily and decisively shifts the emphasis from mere quantity to superior quality, promoting a mature, conscious and fully balanced relationship with wine. When consumed in moderation, wine reveals its true richness: its complex aromas, structure, balance and the uniqueness of its character. Responsible enjoyment is inseparably connected with a modern, refined lifestyle, in which the consumer chooses to act as a conscious collector of experiences rather than as a mere consumer. Knowledge of origin and respect for the product's history transform consumption into an act of culture, encouraging the public to enjoy wine as part of a healthy, responsible and high-quality way of everyday living. Discover the timeless magic and excellence of the European wine tradition. Invest in absolute authenticity; choose European PDO & PGI (ΠΟΠ & ΠΓΕ) Wines. Elevate your gastronomic reality. Enjoy responsibly.

Promotion and Education Programme.

Within the framework of Intervention P2-58.5 "Promotion of Wines in Third Countries" of the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027, the action aims to provide information on the origin, traceability and responsible consumption of wine. The project is co-financed by the European Union and Greece. The action targets demanding markets, with the aim of providing comprehensive information, educating market professionals and familiarising the public with the fundamental concepts of authentic geographical origin and strict traceability. Through organised activities, presentations and seminars, the gap between the producer and the final buyer is bridged, ensuring that the value of Europe's wine heritage is fully understood at a global level. Industry professionals thus acquire valuable tools to develop their portfolios with products that can support long-term profitability and high levels of customer satisfaction.

ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑ ΣΥΓΧΡΗΜΑΤΟΔΟΤΟΥΜΕΝΗ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗ ΕΝΩΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ
PROJECT CO - FINANCED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AND GREECE

Heritage Brands 2026

Celebrating Britain's iconic food and drink producers combining time-honoured stories with modern appeal



Innovations come and go frequently in the food industry, but the bedrock of the speciality sector are the businesses which passionately hold on to the skills and traditions that have lasted for generations.

Britain is rich with foods crafted with recipes that have stood the test of time, being passed down from family member to family member and delighting customers at every turn.

Regional delicacies become as beloved to local audiences as they are to those travelling to the area for an authentic taste of the UK, and the traditional skills utilised to make them as special as they are create lasting legacies in the process.

85%
of UK shoppers purchase from nostalgic brands, with nearly two-thirds buying them every month
KP Snacks

That's not to say that the heritage businesses in the following pages don't move with the times; in fact, they are masters of evolution – satisfying the constantly changing tastes and appetites of the day's shopper while staying true to the principles at their foundation, they are able to not only retain their sizeable base of loyal customers but gather new ones, too.

At the heart of all of these businesses are individuals who have helped to shape the fine food sector for decades, applying their expertise and unique understanding to create operations which delight food lovers throughout the years, and passing this insight on to those who take on the mantle after them.

In the following pages, we highlight some of the independent producers and artisan makers who have been operating for 20 years or more, who showcase some of the very best craftsmanship and dedication in Britain today.

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



Nostalgic products lead **39%** of shoppers to feel **comforted**, **38%** to feel **nostalgic** or **sentimental**, and **35%** to feel **happy**
KP Snacks

COTSWOLD FAYRE

Exceptional Brands Across Retail & Food-To-Go

Whether you're looking to elevate your café or food-to-go offer, or introduce a curated retail range, Cotswold Fayre brings together exceptional speciality food and drink brands to help you offer your customers something different.

Discover more choice across ambient, chilled and frozen categories - all from one trusted wholesaler. Create an offer that keeps customers coming back for fine food and drink from respected brands with provenance and quality producers with a story to tell.

Discover more choice, more brands and more opportunities with Cotswold Fayre.

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marketing@cotswold-fayre.co.uk

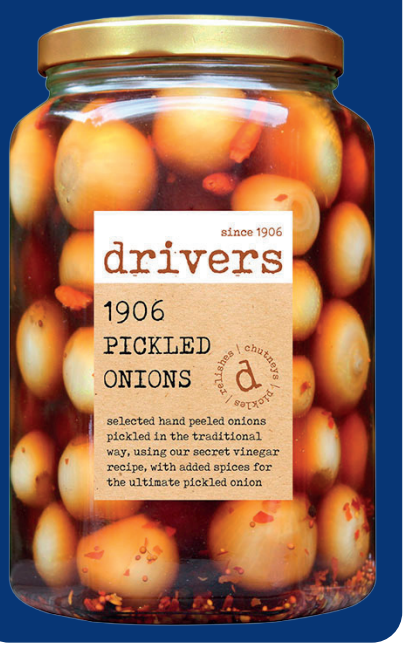




Drivers Pickles

Drivers Pickles has been producing premium pickles and condiments for five generations, building a reputation for quality, consistency and exceptional flavour. Proudly independent since 1906 and rooted in traditional British food manufacturing, the business combines time-honoured recipes with carefully sourced ingredients to create products that have become trusted favourites across the speciality food sector. From award-winning chutneys and pickles to seasonal favourites, every product is crafted with the same commitment to taste, authenticity and attention to detail. Designed to complement artisan cheese boards, charcuterie and premium grazing occasions, the range offers excellent shelf appeal and strong consumer demand, making it a valuable addition to independent retailers, farm shops, delis and food halls. While honouring its heritage, Drivers Pickles continues to innovate with new flavours that meet evolving consumer trends without compromising on quality. The result is a range of products that celebrates Britain's rich pickling tradition while helping speciality food retailers offer customers something truly distinctive.

pickle-lovers.co.uk





Luscombe

Crafted in Devon since 1998, Luscombe Hot Ginger Beer was the original artisan soft-drink alternative to alcohol in hospitality. Its organic ginger and fiery depth contributed to Luscombe's Royal Warrant from His Majesty The King, and it is still made without shortcuts today.

luscombe.co.uk



Tracklements

Stalwart of the speciality farm shop and deli scene and makers of the UK's first chilli jam and wholegrain mustard, B Corp Certified Tracklements have been transforming the condiment scene since the 1970s. To this day, Tracklements stay true to their artisanal roots, handmaking in small batches with best-quality ingredients.

tracklements.co.uk



Walker's Nonsuch

For more than 130 years, Walker's Nonsuch has remained true to its heritage, producing England's finest toffee with quality ingredients and enduring family values. Independently owned and spanning five generations, the brand continues today delighting customers worldwide with timeless confectionery.

walkers-nonsuch.co.uk



Billington's Gingerbread

Since 1817, the artisan bakers of Market Drayton have kept a closely guarded secret: the coveted recipe of Billington's Gingerbread. These iconic gingerbread fingers are crafted using one of the oldest gingerbread recipes in the country for a satisfying crunch and experience.

billingtonsgingerbread.co.uk



Macsween of Edinburgh

Scotland's leading haggis brand, proudly family-owned since 1953. Renowned for quality, craft and innovation, Macsween combines traditional recipes with modern tastes, producing award-winning haggis and puddings with a strong commitment to sustainability and provenance.

macsween.co.uk



Chapman's Seafoods

Established in 1972, Chapman's Seafoods has been proudly crafting premium seafood in Grimsby for over 50 years. The Chapman family's connection with the fishing industry spans generations, providing the knowledge and expertise that continues to shape the business today. At the heart of the Chapman story is the late Mavis Chapman, whose treasured recipes and passion for quality laid the foundations of the brand. Together with her husband Terry, she built a family business rooted in traditional methods and exceptional seafood. Her sons, Kevin and Paul, continued Mavis's philosophy, growing Chapman's into a trusted premium seafood brand supplying farm shops, delicatessens and independent retailers across the UK. Today, led by Paul Chapman, the company produces handmade fishcakes, gourmet ready meals, fish wellingtons, oven-ready seafood and frozen seafood favourites. Following the reunion of all four Chapman brothers under Subzero Fish of Grimsby, Chapman's continues to invest in innovation and new product development, proudly honouring its heritage while looking confidently to the future.

chapmans-seafoods.co.uk





Matthews Cotswold Flour

Matthews is one of Britain's leading independent flour mills. Based in the Cotswolds, they produce a wide range of flours for artisan and home bakers. The mill champions regenerative farming and long-term partnerships that connect British farmers, millers and bakers.

cotswoldflour.com



Halen Môn/ Anglesey Sea Salt

Made only from the crystal-clear waters surrounding Anglesey, Halen Môn is world-famous for its pure sea salt and Protected Designation of Origin status. Artisan sea salt remains at the heart of the brand, complemented by distinctive condiments and smoked water.

halenmon.com



Carnevale

Founded in 1966, Carnevale has grown from a small family business producing fresh Mozzarella and Ricotta into one of the UK's leading suppliers of authentic Italian food. Proud of their Italian heritage, they continue to deliver quality, tradition and exceptional service nationwide.

carnevale.co.uk



Summerdown

For over 30 years, Summerdown has grown and distilled signature Black Mitcham peppermint on the family farm in Hampshire. Their award-winning Peppermint Thins carry that legacy: single origin Colombian cocoa infused with single-estate Black Mitcham peppermint oil for heritage worth savouring.

summerdown.com



Stockan's Oatcakes

Based in the picturesque harbour town of Stromness, Stockan's is a fourth generation, family-owned, award-winning business which is very proud of their Orkney Islands heritage. As one of the leading UK oatcake brands, they are particularly famous for their traditional triangle shape.

stockans.com



Doves Farm Foods

Since the 1970s, Doves Farm Foods founders Clare and Michael Marriage have pioneered organic farming, growing the business into a 350-acre operation and the UK's number one organic flour brand, while helping revive ancient grains including rye, spelt, einkorn and emmer.
dovesfarm.co.uk



Tom Parker Creamery

Founded on the legacy of Tom Parker, who began delivering milk by horse and cart in 1921, Tom Parker Creamery honours generations of British dairy craftsmanship. Today, they produce natural dairy using traditional values and a commitment to quality and taste.
tomparkercreamery.com



The Garlic Farm

The Garlic Farm produces organic garlic, sources speciality garlic and creates garlicky products. The family farm on the Isle of Wight has offered quality garlic for over 50 years and their accreditations prove high standards of social and environmental impact.
thegarlicfarm.co.uk



Wilkin & Sons

The Wilkin family have been farming at Tiptree, Essex, since 1757, and making quality preserves there since 1885. They grow traditional fruits and use them within their wide range of products, made in their nut free factory by the farm.
tiptree.com

SPECIALITY FOOD HERITAGE BRAND



Franklin & Sons

Founded in 1886, Franklin & Sons is a producer of premium mixers, tonics and sodas. Established by brothers Frederick, Albert and George Franklin, the business began as a confectioner's shop before evolving into a pioneering soft drinks company. A trip to America in the early years led the brothers to an encounter with exciting new flavour innovations. After feeling inspired by the discoveries on the trip, they started bottling mineral waters and flavoured sodas under the name, Franklin & Sons. The pursuit of flavour discovery continued with a trip across seas to India in search of more vibrant spices, and not long after, the classic Ginger Beer was born. The Franklin brothers had then expanded their range by the 1930s to include flavours like Cherryade, Limeade and Cream Soda, a nod to their creative commitment in bringing new, exciting flavours to drinks enthusiasts. In 2026, Franklin & Sons celebrates 140 years of being pioneers in flavour innovation and is now proudly part of the Global Brands family, founded by chairman Steve Perez. "To be a part of Franklin & Sons' story is something we're incredibly proud of at Global Brands, and 140 years later, we continue to honour the rich history and pioneering heritage," says Steve. "The journey the Franklin brothers embarked on back in 1886 continues to inspire us, with their curiosity for worldly flavours and commitment to innovation still influences the products we create today, like our Yuzu Soda."
Today, Franklin & Sons offers an award-winning range of premium mixers, tonics and soft drinks, crafted using only natural ingredients and extracts. Designed to elevate any serve, the range can be found in cocktail bars, restaurants and hotels across the UK and internationally.
franklinandsons.co.uk





Durrus Cheese

In 1979, when Jeffa Gill began making cheese on her small hillside farm, she embarked on a journey of artisanal innovation by creating one of Ireland's earliest farmhouse cheeses. Close to fifty years later, Durrus Cheese remains true to these values, handcrafted on the family farm by their daughter Sarah Hennessy.
durruscheese.com



Yorevale

Delicious real dairy ice cream made on the farm since 1989. Staying true to their roots and original recipes, for over 37 years Yorevale has been crafting dairy ice creams and sorbets at Fossfield Farm in York, Yorkshire.
yorevale.co.uk



Welsh Lady Preserves

Founded in 1966 on the Llŷn Peninsula, Welsh Lady Preserves is a family-owned producer celebrating 60 years of preserving tradition. Using time-honoured methods, including open copper pans, they craft award-winning preserves that champion provenance, craftsmanship, quality and flavour.
welshladypreserves.com



Gadsby

Since 1864, Gadsby has crafted premium packaging, hampers and in-store display for the UK's leading retailers. Now in its sixth generation, this family business blends heritage craftsmanship with sustainability, holding B Corp, Positive Luxury and Planet Mark certifications.
gadsby.co.uk



Suma

Since 1977, Suma has championed ethical food choices with organic, Fairtrade and natural ingredients. As the UK's largest independent worker-owned wholefood co-operative, they share equal responsibility and commitment to quality, sustainability and positive change, inspiring customers to choose better.
suma.coop



Boddington's

Founded in Cornwall in 1946, Boddington's began as a family market garden before evolving into a preserves producer. Now run by the fourth generation, it continues to craft premium preserves using traditional methods, quality ingredients and zero additives.
boddingtonspreserves.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS



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BARNES EDWARDS THE GARLIC FARM





The Asian Flavour Trend Meets Fine Food

Asian food has gone from special occasion to weekly shop. For fine food retailers, the question isn't whether shoppers want it, but how to sell it properly, says Charlotte Grainger

Not so long ago, savouring an authentic bowl of ramen meant a trip to Tokyo, rather than a trip to your local fine food shop. Back in the pandemic, though, with borders closed and passports unused, shoppers started travelling through their kitchen cupboards instead. Five years on, the trend is going strong, with Asian products becoming commonplace in many households.

The TikTok effect

From fluffy Japanese milk bread to fiery gochujang, in 2026, British shoppers are embracing a new wave of products, with the numbers to back it up. Asian food claims across the UK are up 20% year on year, with Japanese claims rising 36.9% and Chinese claims up 38.9%. So, why is it that these flavours are gaining popularity and having a moment?

As Isabelle McKeever, event manager at International Food & Drink Event (IFE), explains, the answer may lie on our phone screens. "Social media, and viral trends on TikTok in particular, are playing a major role in driving interest in international flavours in the UK," she says. "Many supermarkets now openly acknowledge that popular TikTok flavours and recipes are influencing their buying and new product development decisions."

Spontaneously trying a new flavour has never been easier for consumers. McKeever explains that the advent of TikTok Shop has shortened the buying cycle, meaning that an experimental food purchase is just a click away. Mintel research supports this. A recent report found that 30% of British social media users had bought food or drink through a social media platform.

For independents that may be devoid of a TikTok following, capitalising on the trend is still very possible. Customers arrive already primed to try popular flavours and ingredients they've seen online. It's the retailer's job to meet their curiosity with a well-stocked shelf of Asian produce.

The secret may be in selecting products that entice all of the customers' senses. "Asian flavours are particularly popular with British consumers and often have a distinctive visual appeal, with bright colours, layered ingredients and eye-catching presentation making them highly shareable online," adds McKeever.

From matcha to makgeolli

The starting point for any retailer is knowing which flavours are genuinely trending, and which have real staying power. Matcha has, in McKeever's words, "arguably completed the transition into the mainstream." She points to Costa Coffee's nationwide matcha launch at the start of 2026, which the chain says was selling one drink every four seconds by February.

Looking beyond the matcha trend, there are a few other ingredients worth keeping an eye out for. Yuzu and kombucha are steadily gaining more exposure, while Filipino ube, a yam variety known for its purple colour, should also be on your radar. The latter often shows up in coffees and cocktails, adding a vivid hue and vanilla-coconut flavour.

EXPERT VIEW



Fermented condiments deliver deep, layered umami flavours that help consumers create distinctive restaurant-quality meals at home

DEIRDRE WALTERS UNTAPPED INNOVATION

Making new flavours accessible

Stocking the latest trends has the potential to attract new customers. However, there's an obstacle in how consumers use the trend in their own kitchen. "The strongest propositions explain who the product is for, which occasion it's designed for, what unmet need it fulfils and why consumers will choose it over existing alternatives," explains Deirdre Walters, founding partner of Untapped Innovation, a leading R&D consultancy.

Products that either educate or are simple to prepare are likely to win over even the most discerning customers. Walters gives two clear examples of this. "Premium noodle kits combine fresh aromas, vibrant colours and authentic textures to help people cook something exciting with confidence," she suggests. "Frozen dumplings offer a comforting, satisfying and shareable eating experience, helping consumers put a great meal on the table quickly while also creating highly interactive opportunities to connect with family and friends."

Meeting customers halfway

When introducing Asian produce to existing stock, some may be concerned about alienating existing customers. McKeever recommends taking a classic product and adding a unique twist.

"Start with a familiar format and change one element. A matcha latte, yuzu lemonade, lychee spritz, chai cold brew or Japanese whisky highball is easier for customers to understand than an unfamiliar drink presented without explanation," she says. Folding the unfamiliar into staples allows shoppers to try something new without it feeling like a dramatic change in habits.

For genuinely unfamiliar products, sampling remains the strongest tool available. "It allows brands to explain a product while giving customers an opportunity to experience an unfamiliar flavour or texture without financial risk," McKeever says. "It is particularly valuable for independent and speciality retailers, where knowledgeable staff can explain how a drink is made, how it should be served and what it pairs well with."

That could start with something simple, such as accessible signage. For example, McKeever suggests labelling Korean makgeolli as "a lightly sparkling Korean rice drink with a creamy, gently tangy finish" to build consumer confidence when selecting something a little different.

Nigel Kaye of Suma applies the same logic when introducing new ranges.

"We love to share recipes that help customers experience authentic cuisines and feel more connected to the countries the products come from," he says, suggesting that retailers pair Asian products with complementary items, such as bamboo serving utensils.

Telling a captivating story

The provenance-led approach that retailers already use for European and British products applies just as well here. With Asian food increasingly becoming more

£ HOW TO SELL

Three tips to get baskets brimming with Asian food

- ***Let customers try before they buy.***
  Sampling is the quickest way to introduce shoppers to something they've not tasted before. Create an experience — showcasing how different ingredients can elevate dishes.
- ***Educate the floor staff first.***
  Customers are bound to have questions about new product lines. Before stocking Asian favourites, get the team up to speed. Knowledgeable staff can make all the difference to the experience.
- ***Avoid scattering the stock.***
  Group related products with clear point-of-sale material to give your Asian offering a real presence. Make it simple for customers to find what they're looking for, and know what to pair it with.



mainstream, the story behind each product on the shelf can in itself become a selling point.

"As globalisation has opened up access to more cuisines than ever before, foods such as Asian offerings that were once considered exotic have become much more familiar," says Kaye. "With this has come an interest in where these foods come from."

Suma sources its coconut milk, creamed coconut and coconut cream directly from farming co-operatives in Vietnam and Sri Lanka, adding value back to local communities. Kaye explains that this relationship builds trust as much as it does quality. "By sourcing directly from the producer, it allows us to work closely with them, and we're able to ensure responsible and transparent approaches to their work and practices. We're then able to bring to market authentic produce with transparent supply chains," he explains. "This helps our customers know that when they buy from us, we've done our homework so they don't have to."

Barnes Edwards of The Garlic Farm, a three-generation family producer, makes a strong case that heritage only pays off when it's properly communicated on the shop floor. "Heritage is a great asset in this sector, when this is backed by the clear communication of the purpose behind a brand then good connections with customers are made," he explains. He credits his staff with integrating that story into every single customer interaction. "It's the comments and enthusiasm from the retail team to the customer that make a big impact."

> *By sourcing directly from the producer, we're able to bring authentic produce to market with a transparent supply chain*

SPECIALITY FOOD **Stock Check 26**



Yep Kitchen
Hunan Salted Chillies
Infused with a rice wine tang, these fermented chillies give dishes a new dimension.
yepkitchen.com



Fermary
Crisp Clean Pink Kimchi
Featuring mild spice and sweet undertones, this kimchi illuminates shelves with a pink hue.
fermary.com



Yutaka
Yuzu Ponzu Sauce
Perfect for salad dressings, gyoza dips, or a marinade, this citrus-seasoned soy sauce is a crowd pleaser.
yutaka.london



Moicha Premium
Ceremonial Matcha
Boasting a smooth umami flavour, this matcha is sourced directly from farms in Uji, Japan.
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From the Alps to abbeys – the EU's diverse cheeseboard

If you're looking to expand your counter, there's a wealth of exciting options to consider on the Continent

Europe is rightly revered and applauded for its exquisite, varied, devoted cheesemaking heritage.

The creamy, unctuous, yielding Bries of France; Italy's melting Gorgonzola, mottled with a palette of cobalt and cerulean blues; Spain's moreish Manchego.

This trio, along with a breadth of others (Parmigiano-Reggiano, Comté and Gouda, for example) may well form a significant slice of your Continental offering – but look a little closer, and you'll see the cheese landscape of the EU has so much more to deliver for you and your customers.

Over 300 PGI and PDO varieties are crafted on pillars of tradition, quality, authenticity and expertise [European Commission, geographical indications and quality schemes]. And exciting new cheeses, taking their cue from the masters, bringing freshness and a modern touch to an industry that's been emboldened by growing consumer interest in 'real' food, the best ingredients, sustainability and traceability.

Speciality Food, in collaboration with the EU's More Than Only Food & Drink campaign, recently held a masterclass in some of Europe's lesser-known cheese varieties.

Led by cheese writer and expert Patrick McGuigan, it gave retailers and hospitality operators a glimpse into the window of what's available to breathe new life and excitement into their business.

Attendees said they found it a fascinating voyage of discovery – Patrick leading them in a tutored tasting spanning eight countries, demonstrating why the EU is an "absolute powerhouse" for cheese production.

The pillars of EU cheese production

Retailers and consumers can put their trust in EU cheeses thanks to stringent measures designed to safeguard the environment, animal welfare, authenticity and quality.

● SAFETY:
EU food safety is built around traceability and strict health and safety requirements throughout the production and supply chain. These cover areas ranging from animal and crop health to food hygiene, disease prevention and secure packaging.

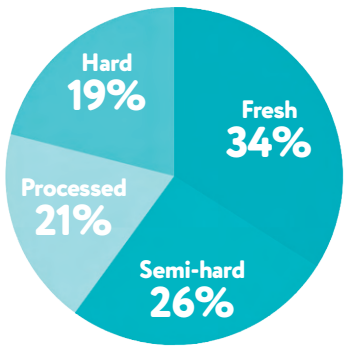
● TRUST & QUALITY:
EU cheeses combine generations of cheesemaking knowledge with modern production methods, recognised farming practices and quality controls from farm to fork. PDO, PGI and organic labels also help buyers identify products that meet defined requirements or have a particular connection to their place of origin.

● SUSTAINABILITY:
The EU sustainability strategy has been designed to protect the environment while supporting farmers and their livelihoods. Key factors are protecting biodiversity and protecting local animal breeds. Many dairies have adopted circular solutions to improve soil and optimise animal feed to reduce methane emissions.

If you want to find out more please visit
enjoy-its-from-europe.campaign.europa.eu/united-kingdom/en



The EU Cheese Market in Numbers



More Than Only Food & Drink Campaign







> *Pairings are going bigger, bolder and more unusual. Don't be afraid to offer something you might consider 'challenging' at the counter or on your menu*

CHEESEBOARD TRENDS

Stay ahead of the curve with these upward trends

● **Girolles**, which slice semi-hard to hard cheeses into lightly furled 'flowers', are all the rage, says cheese expert Patrick McGuigan. Not only do these speciality devices cut melt-in-the-mouth thin pieces of cheese, but the results are stunning, helping customers to create real 'wow' centrepieces. Hiring out or selling these, alongside suitable smaller, hard cheeses, is a modern must – if you have space.

● **Pairings** are going bigger, bolder and more unusual. Don't be afraid to offer something you might consider 'challenging' at the counter or on your menu alongside cheese, says Patrick. Modern cheese lovers are all for exploration. Think fudge with blue cheese, or shiitake mushroom salad with a washed-rind cheese.

● **Cheese layering** is happening right now, he says. Customers are, for example, buying a large Brie for a party, slicing out the centre, and popping a ripe Époisses PDO in the centre for dipping.

● **Cheese plates** are having their moment. Served as small plates, appetisers or standalone desserts, offering a single cheese with something delicious prepared specially to go alongside it, is hot right now, Patrick suggests. That might be a strong, hard cheese with a slice of homemade malt loaf or an Eccles cake, blue cheese with a brûléed top served alongside caramelised white chocolate shards, or a washed-rind paired with a homemade digestive biscuit, drizzled in local honey.

● **Picky bits and snacking plates** are chiming with consumers. You might want to put aperitifs and Vermouths front and centre of a nearby display, with pots of salted almonds, fancy crisps, and the best quality dried fruits. Demonstrate how they can put together quick picky teas using European cheeses and prime ready-to-eat ingredients, says Patrick.

● **Whipped Feta** is everywhere. All the premium and mid-range supermarkets now have a version of it in their chiller aisles, and there's nothing stopping you from making your own, demonstrating that you're using the best Feta PDO. Again, this can be sold alongside sweet and savoury accompaniments, he continues, from crackers and grilled artichokes, to fruits, honey and nuts.



● **Cheese gougères** (loved at dinners parties in the '70s and '80s) have made a comeback, big time, in hospitality, says Patrick. Customers love the theatre of these puffy cheese bombs (made usually with Le Gruyère PGI or Comté PDO) landing on the table, and waiting staff theatrically grating more cheese over the top. It's Instagrammable and delicious.



WHAT DO THE LABELS MEAN?

More than 300 cheeses and dairy products in the EU proudly carry PGI or PDO status. For consumers, these give assurance of the products' unique characteristics, quality and authenticity. While for producers, they not only increase visibility and credibility, but recognise the traditional practices and passion that are at the heart of their craft.

PGI: At least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation takes place in the region.

PDO: The raw ingredients need to come from the region of origin where all steps of production need to take place.

European Commission, geographical indications and quality schemes

Seven cheeses to boost your counter this autumn

Selected by cheese expert Patrick McGuigan, these standout European varieties promise compelling provenance


Cabriolait


Džiugas PGI


Pérail PGI

1 Xigalo Siteias PDO *from Greece*

This cheese is traditionally made in the harbour town of Sitia in Eastern Crete, with raw goat's milk, sheep's milk, or a blend of both. Recognised with PDO status in 2011, its name comes from the Greek word oxygala, roughly translating to acid-milk.

It's a simple, sharp, very soft spreadable cheese, made purely with milk, a little added salt, and sometimes a small amount of rennet. Cretans enjoy it year-round as a spread or dip, also incorporating it into salads and cooking.

"I like that it's a bit yoghurty," Patrick revealed. "What they do is take the milk and let it acidify for a long time. You're literally leaving your milk for up to 10 days until it eventually splits and sets into this really delicate curd."

This process is one of time and tradition, he explained. "The landscape is dry in Crete – around 40°C in summer. It's not suitable for cows, but the special breeds of goat and sheep that live there are very tough. This is what we mean when we talk about a sense of place and terroir.

"The reason the milk is left for a long time is that you don't get a lot from a sheep, so you continuously add the next day's milk. It's a way to make use of what you've got."

Patrick found the cheese "fluffy, fresh and zingy" and said he felt it would work best with herbs, honey, crispbread, watermelon and fresh tomatoes.

2 Shadow Blossom *from Germany*

Alp Blossom – rolled in colourful Alpine flowers – has become a modern classic in British cheese counters. Retailers have long told us it's one of their bestsellers. This popularity has paved the way for the success of Shadow Blossom, created by the same producer, Albert Kraus of Hofkäserei Kraus in Germany's Allgäu region. The recipe was developed with Michelin-starred restaurant, Schattbuch, coating the smooth, rich Alpine-style cheese (created with thermised cow's milk from two local farms and aged to three months), with wild Madagascar, long, tailed and kampot peppercorns, crushed pink peppercorns and cardamom.

This number packs a real punch, being sweet and melting in the mouth, with a lingering warmth from the rind. We're starting to see its star rise in the UK already.


Shadow Blossom

3 Queso de Murcia al Vino PDO *from Spain*

Stock this, and your customers will immediately ask, 'what's that?'.

Queso de Murcia al Vino PDO's unique, showstopping magenta colour is conjured by the cheese being soaked in Monastrell wine sourced from Jumilla, Yecla and Bullas – combining two of the region's biggest agriproducts.

This is a brilliant demonstration of the partnerships fostered between producers within the EU – one traditional maker working alongside another to create something striking representing the place they are proud of.

Pasteurised goat's milk is used in the make, from the very hardy Murciano-Granadina breed – a hardy, sturdy animal that's adapted to the hot climate.

"Goats are better suited to the landscape here," said Patrick. "It's sparse and mountainous. A lot of work has gone on in this part of Spain to encourage shepherds to use this breed, and this cheese is really helping because you have to use their milk to make it."

Aged for a minimum of 30 to 45 days, but often longer, the cheese can be soft (lightly pressed) or cured, resulting in a crisp white paste, in contrast to the pinky-red exterior.

It's perfectly suited to today's growing appetite for 'picky teas'.

4 Džiugas PGI *from Lithuania*

Lithuania isn't somewhere that might immediately spring to mind when you think of cheese, but the country is justly proud of its Džiugas PGI – a pasteurised cow's milk variety named for the legendary giant and warrior.

Tales speak of Džiugas being a fearless, humungous knight, who built Telšiai, dug out the city's lake, and fashioned the nearby landscape.

There are four maturations of this cheese, from 12 to 48 months – with some very rare versions going slightly over this ageing. Produced using summer milk from cows grazed on pasture, its profile switches between sweet and smooth to savoury, spicy, hard and crystalline. It's one of Lithuania's most important dairy exports.

"It's very smooth on the outside," Patrick explained. "That's because they stagger the ageing, putting the cheeses on their sides on rollers, and turning them every few days. So it doesn't really have a rind."

Džiugas works as a cheeseboard feature or within cooking.

5 Organic Sörmlands Ädel PGI *from Sweden*

Artisan cheesemaking is on the rise in Sweden, and this striking organic blue (inspired by France's Bleu D'Auvergne) showcases some of the best of what the country has to offer.

"Sweden is a very interesting place for cheese," explained Patrick. "There's a real revolution of cheesemaking there. A lot of it became industrial in the '60s and '70s, and small farms went out of business. Only a few producers exist, but there's some really nice cheeses coming out of there."

> *More and more consumers are reaching for something 'new' as an easy way to get conversations started*

More and more consumers are reaching for something 'new' or 'unusual', searching for niche varieties like this as "an easy way to add a point of difference to your menu and get real conversations started".

Sörmlands Ädel PGI is made with low-pasteurised organic whole cow's milk, and aged from five to 12 months, coming in a small 3kg format. Made with a traditional process, it has a warm yellow surface, mottled walnut brown and dark grey, with even blueing in the paste, which bursts with complexity: umami and caramel notes, the aroma of sour cream, butter, woodlands and truffle, and tastes of toasted almond, digestive biscuits and white chocolate.

A treat with honey, figs or sweet biscuits.

6 Cabriolait *from Belgium*

This organic, raw goat's milk cheese from Belgium's East Flanders region is made in the traditional abbey style, with a washed rind giving it an approachable character.

Semi-soft, it was developed by one of the country's pioneering artisan organic cheese producers, part of a co-operative of three friends rebelling against factory-made, mass-produced cheese.

Underneath the orange-brown, subtle rind, Cabriolait is milder than you might expect of this variety. There are sweet, milky notes, hints of brioche and toasted nut, underpinned by a tang of acidity. The 'funkiness' is understated, making this a fantastic discovery cheese for customers unsure about dipping their toes in the washed-rind world.

7 Pérail PGI *from France*

This raw milk lactic-set cheese from Aveyron in the Midi-Pyrénées is a by-product of Roquefort production, made using leftover milk from Lacaune sheep, who graze across the wild pastures of the Grands Causses. "The terrain in this part of France is so unique," Patrick explained. "There are plants there that just won't grow in the UK." This diet contributes to the cheese's flavour, with its delicate, bloomy rind and buttery, earthy notes of wood, sweet hay and roast lamb.

"It's got a lot of richness and fattiness," Patrick said. "It's quite musky and savoury but subtle and it keeps going, opening up the more you chew it."

Often spread on bread, this is a versatile cheese that taps into increasing UK demand for soft sheep's and goat's milk varieties.

If you want to find out more please visit **enjoy-its-from-europe.campaign.europa.eu/united-kingdom/en**

Counterpoint.

SPONSORED BY PETER'S YARD



The Art of Pairing

With a plethora of options to explore, finding your customers' favourite cheese partners can be a joy

While some cheeses are standalone stalwarts of the cheese counter, pure and delicious as they are with no need for accoutrements, a great many cheeses can be brought out of their shells with a great pairing – be that simply presented atop a cracker for star status or its more delicate notes brought out with an artfully chosen chutney or drizzle.

The great joy of cheese pairing is, of course, that it is subjective – your ultimate duo may not suit a customer's palate, and theirs might not match yours – but the exploration of the kaleidoscope of flavours and textures at your disposal is one of the reasons why the topic is so enjoyable for food lovers of all persuasions.

Morgan McGlynn-Carr, owner of Cheeses of Muswell Hill, star of Sunday Brunch on Channel 4 and writer of cheese pairing bible *The Complete Cheese Pairing Cookbook*, has been a fan of Peter's Yard for decades – ever since the brand's founder, Wendy Wilson-Bett, entered the shop with early samples – in large part thanks to the crackers' natural versatility, premium quality and moreish crunch.

"The cracker is really the foundation of the pairing," Morgan explains. "It's not simply there to carry the cheese; its crunch, acidity and flavour become part of the mouthful." Once the cracker and cheese are decided, Morgan considers what the combination needs: "freshness, sweetness, acidity, or heat" and builds from there.

There are plenty of options to choose from throughout the year, but September offers some of Morgan's favourite pairing opportunities. "September is such a lovely month for pairing because we're right at that crossover between summer and autumn," she says. "There are still beautiful fresh fruits around, but we can start introducing slightly deeper and warmer flavours too."

> *For me a great cheese pairing is about making the cheese taste even better. You're looking for balance, something that cuts through richness, complements saltiness, adds sweetness or acidity or brings out a flavour in the cheese that you might not have noticed before*

Morgan's ultimate pairings with Peter's Yard's Original Sourdough Crackers

BARON BIGOD, FRESH FIG AND HONEY

September figs are incredible with soft, buttery cheese – their jammy sweetness balances Baron Bigod's savoury, earthy richness, while a little honey rounds everything out. The crisp sourdough cracker provides acidity and texture, stopping the pairing from becoming too rich.

GORWYDD CAERPHILLY, APPLE AND HOT HONEY

Caerphilly has a wonderful combination of fresh, lactic acidity and deeper savoury flavours towards the rind. Crisp September apple echoes that freshness, hot honey brings a sweet-spicy contrast, .and the cracker provides the crunch that pulls everything together.

COMTÉ, FRESH PEAR AND TOASTED HAZELNUTS

A beautifully mature Comté has notes of roasted nuts, browned butter and caramel, so rather than contrasting those flavours, I love to echo them. Sweet, juicy pear brings freshness, toasted hazelnuts draw out the nuttiness in the cheese, and the sourdough cracker gives everything a crisp, savoury foundation.

STILTON AND BLACKBERRY

Blackberries are wonderful in September, and their combination of sweetness and tartness works brilliantly against the salt and intensity of Stilton. The sourdough cracker creates that all-important crunchy base and allows those two bigger flavours to work together.

TOP TIPS

From thinking seasonally to creating contrast, these are Morgan's top tips for forming the ultimate pairing

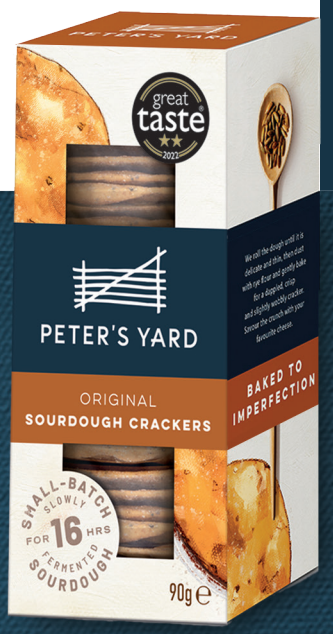
- **Make the cracker your foundation**. Don't think of the cracker as an afterthought or simply a vehicle for the cheese. Its texture, acidity and flavour are part of the pairing, so use it as your starting point and build from there.
- **Think about balance**. Rich, creamy cheeses often love acidity, salty cheeses work beautifully with sweetness, and something fresh can completely lift a more intense cheese.
- **Play with contrast.** Creamy with crunchy, salty with sweet, rich with sharp – contrasting flavours and textures are often what make a pairing exciting.
- **Look for flavours to echo too**. Pairing isn't always about opposites, sometimes you can pick up a flavour already present in the cheese and amplify it – for example, toasted hazelnuts with a nutty Comté.
- **Follow the seasons**. I always look at what is naturally delicious at that moment. September gives us figs, apples, pears and blackberries, and using seasonal ingredients makes a cheeseboard feel instantly more interesting.
- **Don't overpower the cheese**. The best accompaniment should reveal something new about the cheese rather than disguise it.
- **Taste the complete mouthful**. Cheese, cracker and accompaniment together. My golden rule is simple: everything on that cracker should taste better together than it does apart.



PETER'S YARD

IT ALL RESTS ON A GREAT CRACKER

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



The Cut.

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

CHEESES THAT I LOVE

JEN GRIMSTONE-JONES

CHEESE ETC/THE PANGBOURNE CHEESE SHOP



MONTGOMERY'S CHEDDAR

If I could only eat one cheese for the rest of my life, it would be Montgomery's Cheddar. Every time. I love its earthy, savoury flavour, that wonderful clothbound rind and the way every mouthful seems slightly different. Other cheeses suit particular moods. I am always in the mood for Montgomery's.

SINODUN HILL, NORTON & YARROW

I have a real soft spot for Sinodun Hill. It's a beautiful little pyramid of goat's cheese, but it's the flavour that keeps me coming back: fresh, bright and citrusy when young, becoming softer, earthier and more complex as it matures. It's also proof that a small cheese can have an enormous amount of personality.





ROLLRIGHT, KING STONE DAIRY

Rollright is one of those cheeses I can never resist. It's rich, buttery and wonderfully savoury, with flavours of warm milk, woodland mushrooms and just a little earthiness as it matures. There's a gentle funkiness there too, but it never takes over. Comforting, delicious and dangerously easy to keep eating.

SHEEP RUSTLER, WHITE LAKE CHEESE

Sheep Rustler is one of those cheeses I could happily keep nibbling long after I'd decided I'd had enough. It's firm but not hard, with a lovely sweet, nutty, slightly caramel character from the sheep's milk. Hugely approachable, but absolutely not boring — and a brilliant reminder of just how good British sheep's cheese can be.





BLUE STILTON, COLSTON BASSETT

Colston Bassett is everything I want from a Blue Stilton. Rich and creamy, with that lovely balance of savoury, salty and blue flavours, but never so strong that it overwhelms you. It's one of those cheeses I can go back to again and again — and far too good to save just for Christmas.

ÉPOISSES AOP, FROMAGERIE GAUGRY

There are cheeses you politely nibble, and then there's Époisses. Sticky, pungent and gloriously unapologetic, its bark is actually far worse than its bite. Underneath that famously smelly rind is a beautifully soft, rich and surprisingly delicate cheese. It's messy and it's magnificent.







Chili-laced Cheddar joins Godminster's prepack range

Somerset cheesemaker Godminster has extended its award-winning pre-packed Hunkey Punk range to include a 200g flow-wrapped format of Red Chili Devil's Dance.

The cheese is a combination of Mighty Middlewick Witch Mature Cheddar and the chili hot sauce recipe of owner and founder of the business, Richard Hollinbery. The Cheddar is matured for up to six months for a rich and creamy profile before being combined with the spice blend for a gentle lingering heat.

The launch joins Godminster's Hunkey Punk range of individually wrapped speciality cheeses which satisfy the increasing consumer demand for convenient formats and premium options. The range also includes Scarlet Crumb Sunrise Red Leicester and Mighty Middlewick Witch Mature Cheddar.

Jessica Kimber-Holloway, commercial and operations director at Godminster, said, "We've had such a fantastic response to the Hunkey Punk range since launch, so introducing our Red Chili Devil's Dance in the same format was a natural next step. It completes the range and gives our retail partners another cheese prepack that offers something different, combining premium quality with a warming chili flavour that continues to perform well with consumers."

Entries for Young Cheesemonger of the Year close soon

Cheesemongers around the world who are under 30 years of age are being invited to enter the Young Cheesemonger of the Year competition, organised by the Academy of Cheese.

The event is designed to celebrate the rising stars of the sector and highlight the skills, knowledge, passion and professionalism of the next generation of cheesemongers, who will compete at the World Cheese Awards in Córdoba, Spain in order to win career-enhancing opportunities and invaluable industry recognition.

Applications close on 20th September.





Versatility feeds growth of world cheeses

The global cheese market is forecast to hold a value of $328.71 bn in 2034, up from $208.66 bn in 2026, according to Fortune Business Insights, with Mozzarella holding the largest individual cheese segment as consumers seek out cheeses that can be used in pizzas, pasta and sandwiches.

Cheeses that are suitable for use in Italian and Mexican dishes are also forecast to experience growth, as are speciality cheeses which have short ingredients lists and artisan production methods.





Feta PDO prices set to rise

Greece's outbreak of sheep and goat pox could led to the country's Feta production being reduced by 11% in 2026 [Npi Fund].

Prices of the cheese have already risen by around 33% on last year's figures, while prices of sheep's milk have seen an increase of over 10%.

Gen Z and **Millenials** are the **largest** audience for **high-protein** cheese

Saputo Dairy UK

Starting afresh



NEIL CUNNINGHAM
THE BIG CHEESE

Opening a cheese shop sounds like a romantic idea: find brilliant producers, fill a cheese gallery with beautiful cheeses, the shelves with complimentary provisions, and spend your days introducing people to something delicious. The reality is more commercial – but that doesn't make it any less exciting.

Edinburgh presented an interesting opportunity. Despite being a city with a strong food culture and appetite for quality produce, it had been around 15 years since somebody had opened a new specialist cheese shop. That made me ask, why?

Perhaps the answer is simply that specialist retail isn't easy. You need to give people a compelling reason to come through the door rather than buying cheese alongside their weekly supermarket shop. For us, that means a range that gives customers something genuinely new to discover. We opened with more than 50 cheeses from Scotland, the wider UK and continental Europe, with around half unavailable in a specialist cheese shop in Edinburgh. Mia Cowie, our head cheesemonger, and I want to maintain that ethos: ideally, around 50% of what is in our cheese gallery should be cheese customers can't find in another specialist cheese shop across the city.

Being small and independent can be your greatest strength

Being a small independent gives us an advantage here. We don't necessarily have the volume requirements or supply constraints of a larger specialist retailer. We can work with smaller producers, take smaller quantities and introduce cheeses that might otherwise struggle to find their way into the Edinburgh market. That flexibility keeps the cheese gallery interesting and gives customers a reason to keep returning.

The challenge now is balancing discovery with demand. We are already receiving a high volume of wholesale enquiries, which creates another opportunity, but we need to be selective about who we supply and ensure we can maintain availability and quality for our own customers.

The practical reality of opening is cash. Creating the right environment and brand requires investment before you sell a single piece of cheese. Then there is stock: as a new business, most suppliers require payment upfront until you establish a trading history leading to credit terms.

So, the biggest lesson is not that there are hidden pitfalls. It is that a strong idea needs adequate funding behind it. Get the location, proposition, range and finances right, and being small and independent can become your greatest strength.

DalterFood Group introduces new-format Parmigiano Reggiano shavings

Combining the authenticity of Parmigiano Reggiano PDO with the versatility of Spinoro, a 100% Italian hard cheese also suitable for vegetarians, this format is designed for summer fresh dishes.

DalterFood Group - a company with over 45 years of experience in the national and international dairy sector — offers its Parmigiano Reggiano shavings as a solution that combines raw material quality, ease of use and enhancement of the final product.

Made from Parmigiano Reggiano PDO produced in the Group's dairies located in the Reggio Emilia Apennines, through a short and controlled supply chain, these shavings are ideal for enhancing the flavour of light, fresh summer dishes such as ready-to-eat salads, pasta salads, and other seasonal ready meals. They are also an excellent accompaniment to carpaccio and packaged cured meats, and can add a premium touch to ready-made pizzas.





A New Chapter for British Cheese

Resilient through tough times and remarkably creative, our domestic cheese sector is one to be proud of

CONTRIBUTORS



DAN BLISS
PAXTON & WHITFIELD



NED PALMER
CHEESE WRITER



JESSICA SUMMER
MOUSE & GRAPE



ALEX CULLEN
SOIL ASSOCIATION CERTIFICATION

British cheese is an industry shaped by resilience. It has survived industrialisation, changing consumer habits, Brexit, Covid-19, rising costs and increasingly unpredictable weather – yet the sector continues to evolve, with established producers joined by a new generation of cheesemakers, affineurs and retailers.

For Dan Bliss, e-commerce and marketing manager at Paxton & Whitfield, that adaptability is one of the most exciting aspects of the industry. "I love that the cheese sector is so adaptable," she says. "I love that we're still seeing new cheesemakers come through, and that we're still seeing a real burst of energy within the affinage space in particular, with cheesemongers wanting to really get the most out of cheese."

An evolving feast

That energy is particularly evident in the way British cheesemakers are combining tradition with experimentation. Cheese writer and author Ned Palmer points to the history of the modern British cheese renaissance, which began in earnest in the late 1970s, when cheesemakers looked to the Continent for inspiration. Alongside those new styles, traditional British varieties that had all but disappeared are now being revived in farmhouse versions. "British cheesemaking has always been a mixture of tradition and innovation," he says. "I think cheesemaking in the UK will always be evolving and innovating and still taking the best of our traditions and terroir."

Indeed, the near-loss of traditional cheesemaking has arguably given contemporary producers an unusual freedom. "British cheesemakers are not rigidly bound by tradition," Ned explains. "In the last few years I've seen more novel styles of cheese appearing, and cheesemakers are not scared of being really experimental – mixing different styles and using new methods."

For Jessica Summer, owner and founder of Mouse and Grape, that freedom is central to British cheese's appeal. "British cheese is really exciting because we have so much creativity in our cheesemaking," she says. "While many European cheeses have stricter rules around how they're made, British cheesemakers have more fluidity to experiment, while also going back to traditional methods that were lost through industrialisation and standardisation."

The joy of territorials

Central to the British cheese story are our territorial cheeses, which offer a strong sense of place primed to be appreciated by both national and international audiences.

"Our milk quality is fantastic, and territorial cheeses really celebrate that sense of place," says Jessica. "You can explore cheese region by region, just like wine, and have fun with regional pairings too, whether that's wine, cider or something completely different."

The power of stories and sustainability

There is a growing opportunity for retailers to communicate those stories to consumers. British consumers have been rediscovering artisan cheese since the late 1980s, initially driven by an interest in quality and provenance, points out Ned, but questions around animal welfare and sustainability are increasingly influencing purchasing decisions.

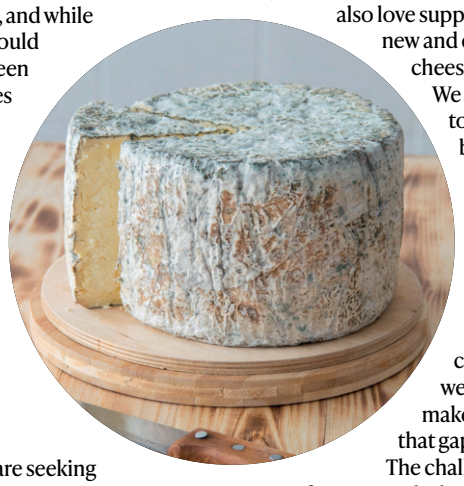
Dan believes the industry needs to broaden the way it talks about sustainability. "We need to think about how we approach the topic, because we often talk about sustainability from an environmental impact standpoint. We must ensure that our land and ecosystems are sustainable, but we need to make sure businesses are sustainable as well and that farmers and cheesemakers are paid a fair wage."

A challenging time

That is particularly important at a time when producers are facing significant financial pressure. "Everybody knows that costs are rising across the board," says Dan. For farmers, those pressures are felt throughout the supply chain. "We work directly with farmers who've got a huge amount of rising costs related to directly producing food, including the significant price increases for feed and fertiliser," she explains.

Ned highlights the combined pressures of Brexit, Covid, continuing wars and climate change. Drought has made feeding livestock particularly difficult, he says, while the wider increase in costs is being felt by both cheesemakers and consumers.

"It's a difficult time," says Dan, particularly for small and territorial cheesemakers, and while connections could be made between the experiences of Covid-19 and those felt today there are significant differences. "During the pandemic people were actively seeking out good cheese, whereas at the moment they are seeking it out more specifically for special occasions and in smaller quantities."



Building connections

This makes the role of cheesemongers and retailers increasingly important, and social media is a valuable tool – it has already opened up new ways for businesses to educate consumers and communicate directly about producers, styles and provenance. "I think one of the wonderful things about social media is that it really does mean you can have a cheesemonger in your pocket," says Dan.

There is also growing confidence amongst cheesemakers themselves, she continues. "British cheesemakers have been really good at flying the flag. I'm really excited about how they are willing to stand up and say, 'hi, this is my cheese. It's great. Let me tell you about it'."

For Dan, supporting the next generation is essential to the industry's future. "We've got such a wealth of incredible cheesemakers in this country that have been going for generations," she says, "but I also love supporting new and different cheesemakers. We need them to be there because the reality is that someone's going to retire, to stop making cheese, and we need new makers to fill that gap."

The challenges facing British cheese are substantial, but so is the appetite for reinvention. From revived traditional varieties to cheeses that deliberately cross borders and styles, the sector is demonstrating that heritage does not have to mean standing still.

EXPERT VIEW

Room for growth

Alex Cullen, commercial and marketing director at Soil Association Certification

"Organic dairy is a key entry point for organic shoppers, but compared to organic milk and eggs, organic cheese has less availability in retail. As a result, while sales of organic eggs are in double-digit growth at 16.3% (compared to 1.8% for conventional) and organic milk sales are 9x that of conventional [NielsenIQ], there is less growth currently in organic cheese.

"The healthy performance of the wider dairy category demonstrates that making organic accessible is key to getting shoppers on board. With 83% of British households now buying organic [Worldpanel by Numerator] it is an everyday part of people's lives."



"Accessibility is key to getting shoppers on board"



WILL YOU BRAVE THE BLUE?

LOVE IT? LOATHE IT?

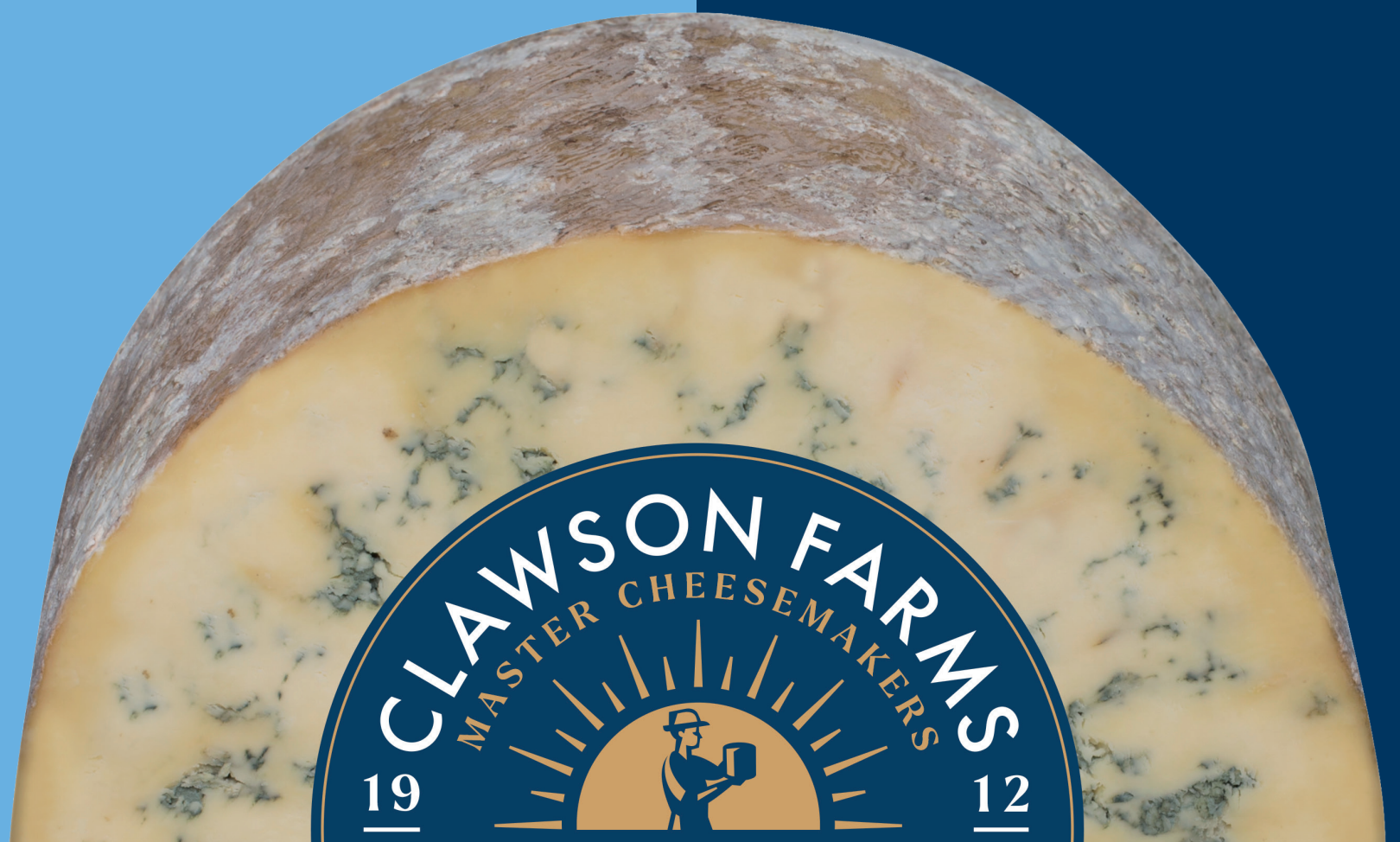
Nobody ignores Stilton®

90% of younger consumers say they enjoy experimenting with bold flavours yet only a fraction of those engage with the British Blue category.

Help a new generation discover Britain's original bold flavour.

DRIVE TRIAL – SPARK DEBATE – BRAVE THE BLUE

clawsonfarms.co.uk





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Britain's Best Delis:
Delilah Fine Foods, Nottingham

Meet the deli built on great food, faith in the power of community and a fearless leap into the unknown

When Nottingham's Delilah Fine Foods first opened its doors in 2005, founder Sangita Tryner had no previous experience of running a deli – just a deep love of food, a clear sense that something was missing from the city and the determination to make it happen.

The idea had been years in the making. After around a decade working in the food industry, she had learned not only how to taste food properly but also how much food matters to consumers. A visit to Valvona & Crolla, with its ladders, bustling atmosphere and family feel – a taste of the magic a brilliant food emporium can showcase – provided the inspiration for her own retail establishment.

"I fell in love," she recalls. "I did some market research in Nottingham and there was a gap in the market. There was nothing like it."

Creating magic

Turning that idea into reality was considerably harder. As a first-time business owner with no property or retail background, she spent around 18 months trying to persuade someone to give her a premises. Eventually, with the support of her husband Rick, she opened Delilah Fine Foods in a modest 1,000 square foot unit.

The limitations were considerable, but so was the ambition. The space had to accommodate the deli, coffee service, breakfast and kitchen, while the concept itself was built around a simple principle: showcasing exceptional food and the people who make it. "I just wanted to showcase the amazing people that make the food and drink we sell, getting them in front of people who have never seen something like it," she says.

That focus remains at the heart of Delilah's USP. It is not simply a shop selling premium cheese, charcuterie and other speciality foods; it is a place designed to make those products accessible, exciting and part of an experience. "Tastings, a visible cheese and meat counter, café food and events all connect the retail and hospitality sides of the business," she explains.

Sangita also credits the independent food community with helping shape the operation. She sought advice from established retailers, spent time working behind the counter at a Nottingham farm shop, and took inspiration from tasting bars elsewhere. "I cobbled all these things I loved from other destinations together and Delilah was born."

A risk that paid off

The original premises eventually became a victim of its own success. "At Christmas, queues formed at the door, with customers waiting for one of the handful of seats to become available," she explains. With the business already operating seven days a week, producing hampers and supplying Trent Bridge Cricket Ground, there was little room to increase revenue; the team and space were at capacity. "Then the landlord increased the rent by £20,000," she continues. "The answer was either to move or close."

The solution was an old bank building in the city centre, which had been empty for around 12 years, was enormous compared with the original deli and was difficult to see into from the street. "Buying it meant taking a huge financial risk at the height of the recession, but the building offered something the original site never could: room to grow," she says.

> *I wanted to showcase the amazing people that make the food and drink we sell*

The new Delilah Fine Foods site incorporated five apartments upstairs – providing additional financial security - while the ground floor became a 70-cover destination combining deli, café and food bar.

"The move transformed our customer base," says Sangita. "Regulars followed while students, their families and new visitors also discovered us." The building evolved, too: large windows were designed to make the space welcoming and transparent, allowing passers-by to see people drinking coffee and enjoying food rather than wondering what was inside.

People at its heart

Today, the concept remains deliberately broad. "There are spaces for solo customers at the bar, and tables for groups and food woven throughout the building," she says. "Crucially, the deli has not been sacrificed for the sake of hospitality. Nothing goes on the menu without having at least three or four ingredients from the deli."

That philosophy extends to the events programme, including elaborate food and wine evenings hosted by Rick, Sangita's husband, who brings a decade of experience in the wine industry to the table.

But perhaps Delilah's most important USP is less tangible: its people. Sangita believes customers return because of the personalities behind the counter, and the business has invested in developing its team, bringing new ideas and energy to the business, to the delight of all.

TOP PRODUCTS



Sea Sisters Cornish Hake with Rosemary & Capers
Hake fillets preserved in rosemary, capers and garlic-infused extra-virgin olive oil.
seasisters.co.uk



Cox & Co Bee Pollen & Honey Dark Chocolate
60% cacao chocolate blended with honey and bee pollen.
coxandcocacao.com



Poon's Chilli Vinegar Dressing
An addictively vibrant dressing that perfectly balances piquant, savoury and tangy flavours.
poons-pantry.com



Perello Gordal Olives
Very large, succulent pitted green Gordal olives with a mild flavour.
perellofoods.com



Honest Toil Unfiltered Extra Virgin Olive Oil
Cold pressed extra virgin olive oil. Incredibly vibrant.
honest-toil.co.uk

Flour Power: Winning the Festive Baking Customer

Home baking at Christmas takes many forms, from nostalgic classics to dietary-inclusive show-stoppers. Retailers who stock for all become the first stop of the season, says Charlotte Grainger



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LEANNE CROWTHER
THE GLORIOUS MESS

As the nights get longer, the streets come alive with the enticing aroma of spiced fruits and browning butter. 'Tis the season of baking, and inside kitchens across the country people eagerly mix batter, roll pastry, and fill their homes with the promise of truly scrumptious treats.

The UK has a delicious history steeped in home baking, and the numbers show it's going nowhere anytime soon. 74% of Brits say they bake "at least occasionally," with 14% baking at least once a month, and 11% baking several times a month.

In the months leading up to Christmas, casual bakers are likely to up their game. British grocery sales hit a record £13.8 billion in the four weeks to 28 December 2025 alone, up 3.8% year on year. For fine food retailers, this serves up a real opportunity to not only supply shoppers with high-quality ingredients, but also give them the confidence to get started.

60%
The gluten-free market is expected to grow by more than **60%** by **2031**
Mordor Intelligence

Stocking staples and surprises

While there's certainly space for originality, every solid range starts with the basics. "Ahead of the festive season, retailers should be introducing premium versions of popular ingredients to make the most out of each customer's spend capacity," advises Sophie Carey, bakery development manager at Matthews Cotswold Flour. "Customers indulge around the festive period, but home bakers can be relied upon to see the value in additional skill and premium ingredients."

Opting for high-end versions of classic ingredients, whether that's a single-origin vanilla, an aged butter or a specialist spice blend, gives customers permission to upgrade a recipe they already know, transforming it into something special.

With a 700,000-strong following on Instagram, content creator and baker Ash Baber has built a community around his viral recipes. He predicts a clear shift towards hybrid desserts that borrow from classic recipes while embracing new trends. From mince pie cheesecake bars and gingerbread tiramisu to hot chocolate lava cake, he says there's a real appetite for the unconventional. "They have the traditional aspect to them, but with a slight twist," he adds. Stocking the ingredients that let customers build these hybrids is one way to win them over.

Of course, traditional bakes still have their place. Matthew Jones, founder of Bread Ahead, argues that most food trends loop back to a well-made version of the classic. He points to the hot cross bun trend, loaded with extra flavours such as milk chocolate, as a cautionary example.

"A hot cross bun for me is a hot cross bun," he says. "It has those twelve or thirteen ingredients that represent something." He prefers his own approach



Creating products that are naturally inclusive feels super positive. It means nobody feels they're missing out or being an awkward guest



Speciality Food Stock Check 26



Freda's Crunchy Peanut Butter – Toasted Coconut
Deep-roasted peanuts with organic toasted coconut and coconut oil. .
fredas.co.uk



BoTree Royal Cinnamon
Sweet, spiced, and vibrant, BoTree Royal Cinnamon is sourced from Vietnam.
bakersandlarners.co.uk



Premium Madagascan Vanilla Extract
Created using hand-selected beans cultivated on the Bourbon Island of Madagascar.
vanillamart.com



Menier Cocoa Powder
Complete with intense rich chocolate flavour, this is ideal for elevating seasonal cakes.
menier.co.uk



Nutriseed Dried Cranberries
Boasting natural sugars and a delectable tang, these give festive bakes a twist.
nutriseed.co.uk



Doves Farm Organic Heritage Seeded Bread Flour
A blend of wholemeal bread flour and grains.
dovesfarm.co.uk



The Bottle Baking Co Cookies & Creme Muffins
This handy bottle helps users create muffins packed with creamy Belgian white chocolate and Oreo pieces.
bottledbaking.co.uk



Matthews Cotswold Flour Regenerative all-Purpose Flour
The first four of its kind in the UK, made using regenerative wheat. Suits all kinds of baking.
cotswoldflour.com



Pump Street Chocolate Milk Baking Pastilles
Delicious baking drops made in Suffolk using single farm 58% milk chocolate. Wonderful baked into gourmet cakes and cookies.
pumpstreetchocolate.com



Craft & Crumb Bake & Stamp Baking & Craft Kit
This kit contains everything you need to bake, decorate and personalise delicious biscuits.
craftandcrumb.com

a proper four-ounce mince pie made with mincemeat from scratch with no gimmicks in sight. "I think it's really important to honour traditions," he adds.

Turning browsers into bakers

Getting the ingredients on the shelves is only half the job. Through education, retailers can turn first-time bakers into return shoppers. Baber explains that he aims to make baking less intimidating for the average person, using the age-old rule of 'show, don't tell.' Across his social media accounts and website, he shares easy-to-follow videos, showing bakers how each step should look in real-time. "That's something you don't always get from a written recipe," he says.

74%
of Brits bake occasionally. **14%** bake at least once a month. **11%** bake several times a month
Mordor Intelligence

Carey supports this notion, encouraging retailers to consider how they can support customers beyond the checkout.

"Seeing is learning in bakery, especially for home bakers," she says. "Tutorials or demos are incredible for helping keen home bakers understand how to improve their skills. In the digital age, it's really beneficial to have an inventory of demos that home bakers can access whenever needed."

While many fine food retailers may not be able to commit to online tutorials, the same lesson can be applied on the shop floor. Investing in in-store demos, to instil customers with the confidence to bake at home, elevates the shopping experience. Failing that, recipe cards that include simple step-by-step photography offer shoppers something more for their money.

When done right, educational activities can also build a sense of community. At Bread Ahead's bakery school, those who take a class together often stay in touch afterwards. Jones sees this as central to what separates



£ How to sell

How to ace your festive baking range this season

- ***Upgrade the classics first.*** *Before chasing trend-led additions, make sure premium versions of your best-selling staples are on the shelf. Give regular customers an easy way to spend a little more without needing to be sold on something entirely new.*
- ***Make baking easy.*** *Stocking ingredients alone may be enough for some customers, but others can find baking intimidating. Educate shoppers and help first-timers to commit.*
- ***Avoid segregating the free-from range.*** *Don't confine gluten-free and allergen-friendly products to a single, hidden shelf. Dual-site them and introduce them to a new crowd.*



> *Retailers should be introducing premium versions of popular ingredients to make the most out of each customer's spend capacity*

his business from a purely transactional brand.

Baking for every guest

Free-from ranges are much more than a passing trend, and catering for every diet can mean big business for retailers. The UK's gluten-free food and drink market is worth approx. £173.88 million in 2025 and is on track to grow by more than 60% over the next six years. Christmas only magnifies the growing demand. Families hosting guests with a mix of dietary requirements want one dessert everyone can eat, rather than preparing separate ones.

Leanne Crowther, founder of The Glorious Mess, designed her meringue range around precisely that conundrum. "Customers increasingly need meals that work for everyone," she explains. "Creating products that are naturally inclusive feels super positive. It means nobody feels they're missing out or being an awkward guest."Her products are naturally gluten-free, and she wants shoppers buying them "because they look and taste amazing," with the dietary benefit as an added bonus.

Crowther's merchandising advice for retailers looking to stock free-from products is to avoid hiding them away at the back of the shop. She recommends placing them in the main dessert display as well as the free-from aisle. "Dual siting really works," she says. "It improves visibility, encourages impulse purchases and introduces products to consumers who may never visit the free-from fixture."

Think like your customers

Christmas baking doesn't look the same in every household. Deirdre Walters, founding partner of Untapped Innovation, argues that the strongest festive ranges reflect how different demographics engage with the act of baking. Someone baking alone for comfort wants something entirely different to a family baking with children for the first time, or a host catering for a full table. "The key question for buyers is not 'does this look festive?' but 'does this meaningfully enhance how different people experience Christmas?'" she explains.

For a customer planning a solo bake, that may mean smaller batch ingredients combined with simple recipes that don't pose a big time commitment. Families, on the other hand, may be on the lookout for mess-friendly ingredients and recipes suitable for all ages. Of course, anyone planning to host a crowd is looking for scale and spectacle. Simply put, they want to look effortlessly accomplished without having to spend hours in the kitchen. Understanding what each customer needs before they walk through the door is a strategic way to tailor your range.

"When this depth of user understanding is visible, seasonal products feel genuinely relevant, which justifies their place in a highly competitive festive range," concludes Walters.



The Spread.

Inspire your customers to wow their guests with this festive table



Loacker

1 Featuring festive flavours such as Cinnamon and Gingerbread, as well as classic Vanilla, Dark Chocolate and Napolitana – a traditional Italian blend of Chocolate and Hazelnut – Loacker's wafer Minis and Quadratini are moreishly crisp bite-sized treats that will satisfy every sweet tooth.
loacker.com



Summerhouse Drinks

2 Ensure that non-drinking guests feel deliciously catered for with Summerhouse Drinks' range of Lo festive fizzes. Winter Spice is fruity with mulled spices, Merry Berry combines pressed brambles, raspberries and blackcurrants, and Festive Fizz pairs apple juice and pressed ginger. They also work brilliantly as versatile mixers.
Summerhousedrinks.com



Mont58

3 Choose from a smooth and award-winning Espresso Blend of seasonal beans or signature Mont58 Blend of three favourite beans for a full-bodied brew post-festive feast, and start the next day refreshed with the best-selling and punchy The Wake-Up Call Blend.
mont58coffee.com



Gordon Rhodes

4 A festive essential with year-round appeal, Gordon Rhodes' new Yorkshire Pudding Mix brings proper Yorkshire tradition to the Christmas table. With standout packaging and strong shopper appeal, it's a versatile store-cupboard staple that's perfectly placed for Christmas displays, seasonal entertaining and traditional roasts throughout the year.
gordonrhodes.co.uk



Adamas Caviar

5 Add a touch of luxury to the Christmas table with Adamas Caviar, sustainably farmed in Northern Italy. From delicate Baerii to refined Oscietra and indulgent Beluga, the range offers something for every festive occasion. Award-winning, beautifully presented and exclusively available in the UK from Caviar & Cocktails.
caviarandcocktails.com



Spoilt Pig

6 Bring some sizzle to the Christmas table with Spoilt Pig Black Treacle Streaky Bacon. Sweet, smoky and beautifully caramelised, it delivers rich flavour and crisp perfection every time. A standout addition to festive breakfasts, indulgent brunches and seasonal menus, it's premium bacon with a cheeky streak that customers will love.
spoiltpig.co.uk



Cotswold Gold

7 3 star Great Taste winning festive butters. Indulgent condiments for warm mince pies and Christmas puddings. Made with a good glug of Cotswold Distillery signature single malt and Cognac, along with British Butter and British Sea Salt. All on the brand's family farm in the Cotswolds.
cotswoldgold.co.uk



Drivers

8 Drivers Christmas Pickle delivers exceptional seasonal appeal, combining premium ingredients with a rich, festive flavour. Ideal for gifting, hampers, cheeseboards and entertaining, this limited-edition favourite offers retailers a proven opportunity to attract discerning shoppers and drive incremental Christmas sales.
pickle-lovers.co.uk



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How to Create Retail Magic This Christmas

While you may not want to go full-Santa, there are ways you can create a festive cornucopia while staying true to your fine food roots





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We are all familiar with concept of Christmas being a bit... overdone. Mariah Carey's most famous hit being blasted out at full volume, tinsel as far as the eye can see, and extravagantly packaged food and drink products that will look old hat and frivolous the moment the clock turns midnight on Boxing Day. While that might be favourable to some, to others it doesn't scream fine food.

Instead, you may opt for more subtle touches of the season. Stacks of panettone, effortlessly attractive in their gift-ready boxes. Cheese counters piled generously high, with a showstopper cheese as their centrepiece. And opportunities to connect your customers with the people who crafted the treasures they are purchasing which may not be available at other times of the year.

We spoke to retailers who are experts in the field of festive merchandising for their tips and tricks to make both spirits and tills sing this festive season.

Creating a commercial masterpiece

At its heart, "the best merchandised spaces inspire the customer and sell the product," says Cat Pound, visual merchandising manager at Westmorland Family, home to Gloucester and Tebay services. "At a motorway service station, customers often arrive with preconceptions of what they're walking into; that's where visual merchandising works its magic. A customer can walk in wanting a sandwich and a drink and walk out with a whole basket of delicious treats, or an unexpected sheepskin."

Few independent fine food establishments would have the space to bring in swathes of new display units in order to ramp up their displays come Christmas time, so smart operators have learned how to work with what they have. "Tabletop displays are one of the most powerful tools," suggests Cat. "They are a platform within a retail space to shout about a product and bring a supplier's story to life through aesthetic scene setting, props and texture. But they must be practical too. You need to create foundations that are easy to replenish and maintain, with commerciality at the forefront, from product placement to maximum and minimum stock holding on a display. Ultimately, you want a space to speak to the customer as they walk by. A wow moment at every turn."

Cat's ideal festive merchandising set-up would be "an immersive Christmas Feast space; grand but rustic, full of lights, a plethora of greenery and vegetable chandeliers. Giant cheese rounds piled high, cascading fresh produce, handcrafted chocolates on towering cake stands, magnums of fizz stacked into Christmas trees," but this is far beyond the means of many of us...

"On a smaller scale," she suggests, "you could invest in beautiful reusable fixtures, elevate a rotating selection of producers, and use sampling and high-level decoration to create that immersive experience without overcomplicating what's underneath."

Building in-person experiences

Stephen Fleming, founder of George & Joseph, has found that the festive season brings ample opportunity for creative merchandising – and generosity, in-person experiences and enjoyable connections are part and parcel of his offering. "Christmas is when independent

EXPERT VIEW

The spirit of generosity

Paul Donoghue, founder of Green & Lovely

"Our key philosophy, which is amplified at Christmas, is generosity. Rather than stocking up on a lot of products that scream Christmas with themed packaging, we pile high the products that we know will be popular but work to a 'once it's gone, it's gone' mentality so that people know that if they want something they have to come to get it. We decorate the shop tastefully and opulently - absolutely no tinsel – so that when people walk in it feels Christmassy without the need for Jingle Bells to be playing in the background."



"Ultimately, you want a space to speak to the customer as they walk by. A wow moment at every turn"





food retailers can really make sampling part of the theatre of shopping," he begins. "Customers are more open to trying something new and are actively looking for inspiration, so one taste can completely change what ends up on their Christmas cheeseboard."

In terms of making the cheese counter a destination for the festive season, Stephen has a valuable suggestion.

"Last Christmas, we had a huge wheel of Gorgonzola Dolce on the counter, which we scooped straight from the wheel into little pots to order. It looked incredibly indulgent and festive, but it also created a real talking point," he says. "Customers could taste it, watch it being served and ask how they might enjoy it at home. It turned buying cheese into an experience rather than simply another transaction." Also making the shop a must-visit come the Christmas season are opportunities for customers to connect with the people behind the food they're buying. "In the run-up to Christmas, we invite cheesemakers into the shop to meet customers, explain how their cheeses are made and, of course, offer samples," he explains. "That personal connection is one of the real strengths of independent retail. A cheese stops being just another product on the counter: customers hear its story and meet the person behind it."

Sampling is a key selling tool at any time of year but comes into its own at Christmas when shoppers are leaning on staff for assistance in building a cheeseboard. "Sampling gives the team a natural way to start a conversation. We can find out what someone already enjoys, introduce them to a cheese they might not otherwise choose and help them put together a balanced Christmas cheeseboard. From there, we can suggest the right crackers, chutneys, charcuterie or wine to serve alongside it," he says. "That personal guidance is genuinely useful to the customer and can increase basket spend without it ever feeling like a hard sell."

A sense of occasion

"For me, festive merchandising isn't just about making the shop look Christmassy. It's about creating a sense of abundance and occasion and making the whole experience of shopping feel special," Stephen continues. "A busy counter, generous samples, cheesemakers talking to customers and people discovering a brilliant cheese for the first time all help to create that. It's something independents can do exceptionally well, giving customers a reason to make the visit part of their Christmas tradition."



The Hebridean Baker Christmas Cookie
A distinctive festive gift, hand-baked in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis
www.stagbakeries.co.uk

£ HOW TO SELL

Great merchandising starts with abundance; inspiring, full displays that draw customers in, says Cat Pounds, visual merchandising manager at Westmorland Family.

- ***Stock should be pulled forward.***
  Rotated regularly and presented to the highest cleanliness standards throughout the day.
- ***Clear, consistent signage and pricing.***
  Removes friction and lets the product story do the talking.
- ***Consider flow and product placement carefully.***
  Grouping similar products, creating impulse spaces and cross-merchandising opportunities.
- ***Always assess what's earning its prime position.***
  Underperforming displays shouldn't take up valuable space, and availability should always be addressed.

At Nottingham's Delilah Fine Foods, owner Sangita Trynor works hard to create a festive feel the moment customers walk through the doors. "We have a vibrant entrance during the festive season, with people arriving straight into the gifting section and the area with panettones, Christmas puddings and stollens," she says, from which point they can "see the cheese counter in front of them and move from the biscuit section through the savouries, oils and vinegars, and then condiments."

Stock rotation is also vital at this time of year, she advises. "Nothing deserves to be on the bottom shelf hidden from sight, so we work to the famous saying 'eye line is buy line'. We keep everything in their categories so people know where they're going if they're looking for something in particular, but keep the stock moving and keep an eye on the sales."

A little trick that has proved invaluable to the Delilah's team is making it clear if a product is the final one in stock. "It never hurts to let people know, and more often than not they're going to be tempted to buy it!"

> ***Customers are more open to trying something new and are actively looking for inspiration***

The Ultimate Christmas Cupboard

The modern definition of 'premium' is a tool smart retailers are tapping into for the upcoming festive season and beyond



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Christmas is the moment when shoppers give themselves permission to trade up. Whether it is a beautifully made charcuterie, a hand-finished panettone or a box of ethically produced chocolate, the festive season creates opportunities for fine food retailers to put premium products at the heart of their ranges – and to give customers compelling reasons to choose them.

This does not necessarily mean stocking the most expensive products available. Instead, premiumisation is about offering something that feels worth paying more for: provenance, craftsmanship, quality ingredients, distinctive flavours, beautiful presentation or a story that imbues products with added meaning.

"Christmas is the season of gathering, gifting, and sharing," begins Winette Winston, president and managing director of Seggiano. "It's a time when people like to put in extra thought to choose something extra special." Premium products can provide a talking point around the table, an impressive contribution to a gathering or a thoughtful gift for a host. Winette highlights the importance of products with a story or legacy behind them.

That sense of discovery is particularly relevant to *Speciality Food* readers. That might mean telling the story of a producer, explaining a regional tradition or highlighting an ingredient that would not normally feature in a mainstream Christmas product.

The gifting opportunity

At Christmas, shoppers are actively looking for products that feel gift-worthy. For fine food retailers, this makes presentation an important part of the proposition. Consumers are not only looking for something delicious, they are also attracted to products that are beautifully presented and worthy of display. "A premium food gift becomes part of the decor," explains Winette.

That is an important consideration for retailers planning their festive ranges, as packaging can help communicate premium positioning before a customer has even tasted the product. A seasonal design or distinctive format can turn a food item into a gift in its own right. It also creates an opportunity for indies to merchandise products differently during the festive season; rather than treating premium food as another grocery purchase, retailers can create displays that communicate gifting, celebration and indulgence.

Products that require little or no additional wrapping can be particularly attractive to busy Christmas shoppers, and Seggiano's festive range is designed around this idea. "A beautiful wrapping for the delicious treat and sharing a gift that's worthy of display is one of our key focuses, especially limited edition runs of packaging just for Christmas," Winette continues.

Charcuterie ticks the boxes

French charcuterie is one category that can play directly into this appetite for quality, indulgence and celebration. Claire Geroudet, export manager for FICT (French Federation of Delicatessen and Catering Companies), believes that charcuterie should be considered an essential festive line because it combines versatility with the sense of occasion that defines Christmas.

"Charcuterie embodies conviviality and indulgence – two values at the heart of Christmas celebrations," she says. For retailers, its flexibility is part of the appeal. Charcuterie can be positioned as part of a festive sharing platter, used for an elegant starter or purchased as a gourmet gift. French charcuterie also gives retailers the opportunity to introduce customers to regional specialities and traditional production methods.

Among the classic favourites Claire identifies for Christmas 2026 are Jambon de Bayonne PGI, Saucisson Sec, Rosette and Rillettes. For those looking for something more overtly festive, gourmet hams and charcuterie featuring seasonal ingredients such as figs and chestnuts can extend the range to the delight of discerning shoppers, she says.

Why chocolate works

Chocolate is another category where premiumisation can work across multiple festive occasions. Lydia Stubbins, marketing director at Divine Chocolate, describes Christmas as one of the most important trading periods for the category, with advent calendars, chocolate coins and festive gifting ranges driving shopper engagement.

The breadth of these occasions is significant for retailers. Chocolate can be purchased as a stocking filler, an advent calendar, a gift, a contribution to a sharing occasion or simply as a personal indulgence. That creates multiple opportunities for repeat purchases throughout the season.

> *Christmas is the season of gathering, gifting, and sharing. It's a time when people like to put in extra thought to choose something extra special*

HOW TO SELL

Seggiano's Winette Winston shares her thoughts on premium food markers.

- ***Look for visible ingredients.***
  Visible, high-quality ingredients are one of the markers of a premium festive product. In panettone, for example, shoppers can see ingredients such as chestnuts and candied citrus peel.
- ***Seek tangible quality.***
  That might mean a richly marbled charcuterie, generous pieces of fruit or nuts in a traditional confection, or chocolate made with a higher cocoa content.





According to Lydia, the seasonal advent calendar category delivered 5% year-on-year value growth, while dark chocolate coins recorded 47% year-on-year value growth [Nielsen]. The figures suggest that there is scope for retailers to move beyond the most traditional festive formats and introduce customers to more premium or sophisticated options.

"Quality remains a key purchase driver," she says, but shoppers are increasingly looking for products that offer something beyond taste. That might be high-quality ingredients, a distinctive festive format or a compelling story. For Divine, its Fairtrade and B Corp certifications and co-ownership by Ghanaian cocoa farmers provide an additional point of difference.

This reflects a wider shift in the meaning of indulgence. Christmas remains a time for treating yourself, but premium products can increasingly be expected to deliver values as well as flavour.

Divine's research conducted by OnePoll found that 60% of people associate chocolate with feeling happy, 43% with feeling indulgent and 40% with feeling relaxed. Yet the brand also says indulgence is becoming more considered, with consumers looking for products they can enjoy with confidence.

EXPERT VIEW



Confectionery plays an important commercial role during the festive period, encouraging gifting and increasing customer spend. When we think about Christmas, we think about gifting, sharing, indulgence, celebration, tradition and nostalgia. The right confectionery offering taps into all these consumer needs, while bringing a sense of fun to the occasion

BEN YATES
BON BONS

The luxury of discovery

Premiumisation does not mean filling the entire shop with expensive products. In fact, a strong festive range can be built around a mixture of familiar favourites and more unusual discoveries.

Classic French charcuterie can provide reassurance, while a regional pâté or terrine gives adventurous shoppers something new to try. A traditional panettone can sit alongside an unusual EVOO panettone, such as Seggiano's new festive launch, while familiar chocolate can be complemented by darker, higher-cocoa options or products with a distinctive ethical story. This creates a sense of discovery without alienating shoppers who want the classics.

It also allows retailers to curate rather than simply stock. The independent retailer's advantage is the ability to explain why particular products have been chosen and to make recommendations based on the customer's needs. For Christmas 2026, that curation could be particularly valuable. Shoppers are surrounded by festive products, so the challenge is to offer something that feels more personal and considered.

Ultimately, the case for premiumisation at Christmas rests on the emotional role that food plays during the festive season. Consumers are buying for people they care about, preparing meals for family and friends, contributing to gatherings and looking for ways to make the occasion feel special. A premium food product can fulfil all of those roles when it has the right combination of quality, provenance, presentation and story. By making those qualities visible in their range, fine food retailers can showcase and celebrate the quality and passion behind the products they sell.

Speciality Food Stock Check 26



Tracklements Special Edition Wholegrain Figgy Mustard
Made with plump, sticky figs for a tangy sweetness and gently spiced for warmth.
tracklements.co.uk



Leonce Blanc 70% Abricot
70% fruit, for an exceptionally rich taste and the sensation of fresh fruit.
hoogebrands.com



Figgy's Luxury Christmas Pudding
Infused with cask-aged Somerset Cider Brandy and Hanlons champion Port Stout then slow-matured.
figgys.co.uk



Fairfields Farm Honey Roasted Chestnut & Sage
These vegan and gluten-free crisps use carefully selected ingredients and are a must have for festive gatherings.
fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk



Standing Out as the Multiples Move In

How do you compete when the supermarket next door sells premium too? Charlotte Grainger spoke to destination independents around the UK to find out



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TEALS

The premium aisle once belonged solely to speciality shops but, as the old adage goes, times are changing. Multiples are increasingly stocking single-origin, small-batch and provenance-led products that would have been unthinkable on their shelves a decade ago, edging further onto turf that used to be uncontested.

Quality used to be the main differentiator, drawing customers to delis and farm shops as a point of pride. Lumina Intelligence reports that over a third of UK consumers say they'd pay more for provenance alone, particularly when it's backed by a traceable supply chain. But with supermarkets now offering premium ranges complete with named producers and emotive marketing stories, what do independents have that the multiples still can't buy?

Knowledge a supermarket can't stock

At The Norfolk Deli, the answer starts with expertise. "One of the biggest misconceptions is that personal service is simply about being friendly," explains Mark Kacary, managing director. "It isn't. It's about having the time, knowledge and authority to do what's right for each individual customer."

In a supermarket, product knowledge and staff numbers are spread thinly across an enormous range, leaving a noticeable gap in customer service. "How often have you wandered around a supermarket looking for somebody, anybody, who could help?" asks Kacary. "And when you finally found someone, how often did they know where the product was, never mind being able to tell you anything meaningful about it? That's not because they don't care; it's because they're operating in an environment where breadth is valued over depth."

Walk through the doors of an independent, and the experience is markedly different. The person serving customers is often the very same person who hand-selected the stock. The knowledge they have comes from researching its provenance and building relationships with producers directly. As Kacary explains, the team doesn't follow a script or push to beat sales targets.

"Customers don't expect you to know everything, but they do expect you to know more than they do," he adds. "That's why we invest so much time in learning about our products, visiting producers, tasting regularly and understanding not just how something tastes, but why it tastes that way, how it's made and what it pairs well with."

That level of expertise speaks volumes when customers ask for a special cheese for a wedding or a bottle of wine to complement a certain meal. It's a real conversation rather than sales patter, and the team takes the time to understand exactly what the customer is looking for.

HOW TO **COMPETE**

Top tips to make your shelves stand out

- Know the stock better than anyone. Put education at the centre of your offering, and keep customers coming back for more.
- Make regulars feel recognised. A small team seeing the same faces every week builds rapport.
- Create a 'feel good' experience. Offer unique events or a genuinely different range to turn a visit into an occasion.
- Stand as a collective voice. Joining forces can create real change, from rates to supplier terms to lobbying government.

Sometimes that means steering them towards a £6 cheese rather than a £12 one, just because it better suits their tastes. "Customers quickly recognise that you're helping them make the right choice rather than trying to maximise the value of the sale, and that's how trust is built," explains Kacary.

Of course, when it comes to the good, old-fashioned weekly shop, price and convenience will always win. Kacary is the first to admit this, agreeing that it's the area in which multiples do tend to excel. However, he firmly believes independents have the edge when a purchase carries more weight than a block of cheddar. In those moments when a customer is looking for something particular–say a birthday gift, or a new flavour–it's the experience that stays with them.

"People remember how you made them feel long after they've forgotten what they paid," he says. Over time, the questions customers ask change too. "Once you've earned that trust, customers stop asking, 'What's your best cheese?' and start asking, 'What would you choose?' For me, that's one of the greatest compliments a customer can pay."

What a self-checkout can't do

While supermarket stock may slowly start to resemble speciality fare, consumers ultimately meet one of two fates upon reaching the checkout. Either a rushed conveyor-belt, complete with a queue looming behind them; or a faceless self-service machine. Julie Wright, owner of Porter Brook Deli in Sheffield, believes this is the moment a specialist shop wins the customer back.

"In an independent, the customer is very likely to see the same person or persons every time they visit, so rapport is created and grows with every visit," she says. "In a multiple, there's far less chance of being served by the same person each time, which means personal relationships are far less likely to form. You may not even interact with a person, just a self-service checkout."

> *Our market is a canvas on which to showcase our brilliant local farmers and makers*

The purpose of the visit matters too, Julie says. Supermarket shoppers are often following a list or know exactly what to buy before they enter the building. A visit to a specialist shop like Porter Brook, which focuses on cheese and wine pairing, is an altogether more leisurely experience.

"You are going for something that you won't find in the supermarket and have more specialist knowledge available to you about the products," she adds, explaining that there's more space for interaction between the staff and customers and, therefore, more room for exploration, too.

Staff attentiveness and a personalised service create a sense of community that you won't find in multiples. "I think our customers feel they belong and that they are special to us, which indeed they are, and this brings them back through the door on a regular basis," Wright concludes.

An experience worth travelling for

Set away from bustling city or town centres where footfall is a given, destination retailers often have to work twice as hard to attract consumers. Teals Somerset, a food market with a restaurant, butchery, cheesemonger and bottle shop under one roof, rises to the challenge by offering customers something worth travelling for.

Location, says founder Ash Sinfield, works in Teals' favour. Situated just off the A303 in Somerset in what he calls a "beautifully rural location," the rustic building was designed to sit comfortably within its surroundings while complementing the scenery. Sinfield says the team makes a genuine effort to give visitors not only products they wouldn't find in a mainstream supermarket, but also an experience in itself.

Sinfield aptly describes the



food market as “a canvas on which to showcase our brilliant local farmers and makers,” with it stocking everything from honey and jams to Somerset cereals. “This is the reason that our guests visit us over the supermarkets,” he explains. “We offer the opportunity for guests to buy local and seasonal and support local British Farmers, makers and growers and contribute directly to the local economy.”

Teals opened during the second Covid lockdown and the team were immediately faced with the challenge of attracting local shoppers while movement was restricted. Sinfield’s advice for retailers considering a rural or out-of-town location is simple. “I would make sure that you have solid marketing plans and a realistic budget in place to make sure that you can connect and communicate with your local population and let them know what you are offering and give them a reason to visit. If you can engage this demographic you can grow from here,” he says.

The power of collective voices

From April 2026, business rates in England moved to a five-tier multiplier system, replacing the retail, hospitality and leisure relief scheme that had discounted bills since 2022. That leaves many small retailers now facing a higher effective rate than they paid in 2025/26.

Research from the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira) illustrates how business rates are central to traders’ concerns. Its Heartbeat survey of independent retailers across the UK, carried out in January and February 2026, found that 69.41% said business rates had reduced their investment decisions over the past year, with 42.35% describing the drop as a “significant reduction” in investment. With the general cost of running a shop set to climb, Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira, calls upon retailers to stand together. “As a collective voice we can put it in front of ministers and get it taken seriously. We want a system that reflects the reality of trading on the high street today, not one built for a retail landscape that no longer exists. Success would mean a fairer, more proportionate system that doesn’t penalise independents simply for having a physical shop,” he says.

> *I believe people don’t visit independent businesses just to buy a product. They come because they value expertise, authenticity and confidence*

EXPERT VIEW



> *“An independent retailer on their own has no way to challenge a rates bill that takes no account of their turnover or footfall, but together we can make that case to government with real weight behind it”*

ANDREW GOODACRE
BIRA

Last Words.

The Social Punch



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

Paying attention to your engagement can pay dividends, making your social media efforts work smarter, not harder.

When is the last time you took a look at your social media engagement rates? Not just a quick peek at your topline views on Instagram, with crossed fingers for a little green arrow pointing up, but an in-depth look at which posts your followers – and non-followers – are engaging with by sharing, saving, commenting on or liking?

These numbers, though they may not paint as clear an overall picture of your performance, can be incredibly valuable. In fact, Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, recently shared that engagement rates are a key part of your performance data because they tell the algorithm that people are interested in your post, which in turn surfaces it to more people, giving you a bigger reach.

Views and follower counts are still valuable, of course, but when other accounts are sharing, saving, commenting on or liking your post? That's gold in the eyes of the algorithm. In fact, he says that even if your follower count is going down, as long as your engagement rate is going up you have nothing to worry about.

It's also worth keeping in mind that not all interactions will happen over the first day or two after a post is made. It's easy on social media to post your photo or video and then move straight on to your next task. But by checking in a few times over the next few days or even weeks, you can boost your engagement rates by encouraging more people to engage. This shows the algorithm that your content is still as valuable a few days on as it was the day you posted it.

Responding to comments – whether it's questions from followers, new followers reaching out or simply someone sharing that they enjoyed your post – can have a big impact on your performance, too.

Your task? Take some time to review your engagement data from the past month or two. What prompted people to take action and engage? (Pay special attention to shares, reshares and saves, as these are the algorithm's favourite.) Was it a post with a call to action to leave a comment? A light-hearted joke? A collaboration with a brand or another shop? Use this data to make a super-charged content plan for the weeks and months ahead.



Take some time to review your engagement data from the past month or two. What prompted people to take action and engage?

TRIED & TESTED



Froot Pops *Cherry*

I've never been the biggest fan of chocolate and cherry-flavoured foods – including black forest gateaux, much to the dismay of many of my loved ones – but this is a total gamechanger thanks to the perfect balance and punchy flavours of the cherry and chocolate which complement each other perfectly. My tip: if you can, give it a minute or two out of the fridge before devouring, to bring about a velvety texture in the cherry.

frootpops.com

Woolf's Kitchen's *Chilli Crunch with Avocado Oil*



With all manner of spicy flavours trending today – from maximum heat to 'swicy' and everything in between – you can never have too many chilli-laced products on your shelves. This features premium avocado oil from Omega Pressery. We had it drizzled over gnocchi topped with Parmesan for a quick and satisfying meal.

thewoolfskitchen.com



Wee Smoky *Old Fashioned*

Call me old fashioned, but I like to stick to the classics when it comes to cocktails, but I make an exception when it comes to subtle twists on tradition that just make sense. This is one such example, a rich and full-flavoured old fashioned that marries perfectly with aromatic smoky notes. Satisfying in summer, but I'm looking forward to sipping on it when the weather turns chilly, too.

weesmoky.com

Fairfields Farm *Cajun Barbecue Ridge-cut Crisps*



Cajun spicing is just as much as taste of summer to me as traditional barbecue flavours are, so when office favourite Fairfields brought out this new flavour which combines the two – as well as heady tomato notes – I couldn't have been happier. Bonus points for the ridged format, which we all know levels up any snacking opportunity.

fairfieldsfarmcrisps.co.uk

Coming Up Next...



We're going all out on **CHRISTMAS** in our October issue to power you up to have your best season yet, including **FESTIVE TRENDS**, **TOP PARTY FOODS** and **GIFTING** ideas. We share expert-recommended **TIPPLES** and all you need for the ultimate **CHEESEBOARD** including celebratory **CHUTNEYS AND PICKLES**. Plus, **CHOCOLATE & CONFECTIONERY BUYER** is primed to satisfy your customers' sweet cravings.



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Store Spotlight







Laura's Larder

OWNERS: LAURA ROBERTS
LOCATION: ORPINGTON

What's the philosophy behind the business?
Before moving to Petts Wood I lived near Borough Market and loved having so much brilliant food right on my doorstep. When I moved here, I wanted to bring a little bit of that to my new doorstep! Laura's Larder is about bringing the best of London, Kent and beyond to Petts Wood, from great cheese and wine to delicious products you didn't know you needed until you spotted them on the shelf.

What inspires the team?
Food, mainly! We're all genuinely excited by good products and there's nothing better than discovering something new, having a taste and immediately knowing our customers are going to love it. Tastings definitely help with the product knowledge, as do team nights out... we take our research very seriously!

Who shops with you?
A real mix, which is one of the things I love about Petts Wood. Lots of young families, families with children at university, and people who grew up here and have lived here all their lives. We've been open for over six years now, so we've watched children grow up, families change and new people arrive. The shop has become a bit of a meeting place along the way.



What exciting plans do you have in the pipeline?
More events are definitely on the cards. Our wine and food evenings have become a really lovely part of the business and I'd like to do more of them. We're also introducing wine by the glass, so customers can stop for a really good glass of wine without needing an occasion. Beyond that, I think independent retail is about constantly tweaking and trying things. There's always another product, idea or excuse to eat and drink something delicious.

What do you love most about what you do?
Finding delicious new products and introducing them to customers. I still get ridiculously excited when I find something brilliant that I know will work in the shop, especially when customers come back and tell me they loved it. There's a lot of hard work involved in running an independent shop, so those little moments are still the best bit.

What's trending for you right now?
Levelling up the everyday. People still want really good food, but it doesn't necessarily need to be for a special occasion. Our freshly made salads, sandwiches and quiches are some of our bestselling items, alongside great coffee, cheese and wine. We're also seeing lots of interest in products that deliver loads of flavour without loads of effort. I think what we make ourselves is increasingly important too. It differentiates us from other retailers in the area and, quite simply, nothing beats freshly made.

I still get ridiculously excited when I find something brilliant that I know will work in the shop, especially when customers come back and tell me they loved it

Talking Italian

Sponsored by Garofalo



Tradition with a Twist

It may be a dangerous game, but (occasionally) tweaking the classics can reap rich rewards

Italians are famed for their passion for good food, made properly, using good quality fresh ingredients and can be known to be a little territorial when it comes to the dishes they really cherish.

There are many recipes which are simple for a core reason – they don't need anything apart from the small handful of ingredients that make the dish what it is, for example spaghetti carbonara - so beyond levelling-up the quality of the produce you use (egg yolks, Parmigiano Reggiano and guanciale, or bacon if you must, but never – ever – cream) anything else you add beyond a grinding of black pepper would be a waste and transform the dish into something else entirely.

There are also plenty of recipes which benefit from personalisation. The ragu recipe of your Italian friend's mother would be very different to my Italian cousin's, and based on the preferences of the family in question as well as the quality, quantity and availability of ingredients on any given day. In Italy, nothing will compare to your own family's menu, so best not veer too far from it.

Cross the water to the UK, though, and it's a different story. This writer adds charcuterie offcuts to their ragu to provide near-instant savoury depth, as well as a splash of premium balsamic vinegar near the end of the cooking time for a slight sweetness (cook off the acidity before serving). I know other food lovers who couldn't imagine serving up a bolognese without an obligatory splash of Lea & Perrins, and hot heads who add dried chilli flakes to theirs.

While it's important to be respectful of the tastes and traditions that make Italian food so unarguably great, it's also fun to play around with it a little to suit our own tastebuds - so long as the foundations sit with our fine food philosophies. Clean label, authentic Italian pasta, tinned tomatoes which were picked at their sunny peak, and locally-reared beef are the cornerstones to one of Britain's most-loved weeknight meals so let's sing their praises from our rooftops and counters... But save room for innovation, too.



Garofalo

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