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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the July/August issue of *Speciality Food*.

If you're feeling a little out of sorts as a result of the ups and downs of the Covid saga, you're not alone. As I write, the recent positive signs of stepping out of Covid's shadow seem to be taking a back seat to uncertainty around mask-wearing, a lack of confidence around Government's decision to give individuals the responsibility for their own actions, and worry about whether the latest news could lead to another lockdown.

Thankfully, *Speciality Food* readers have taken great strides in creating more solid foundations for their businesses than ever before. There's been a lot of talk over the past 18 months about advances being made years ahead of schedule, and I feel confident that the fine food sector, and its independent retailers, will be able to weather the storm ahead due to its bravery thus far. This issue is packed full of advice and tips to help you on the journey ahead. We're in it together.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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Fine food retail looks to a post-Covid future

Despite a rebalancing between retail and hospitality, the 'new normal' looks positive for indies

After nearly a year and a half, the Covid recovery is underway for the UK economy. Restrictions are lifting thanks to the success of the vaccination programme, and while we may not be returning to normal, the 'new normal' is looking better for more and more businesses.

For food retailers, rapid growth in sales seen during the pandemic is set to slow down as a long-expected rebalancing between hospitality and retail occurs. Consumer goods analyst IGD predicts that the "unprecedented" growth of 8.5% in 2020 will slow to 1.7% in 2021 and to 0.9% in 2022 as the eating out industry makes a comeback, while Kantar's data shows that a rise in store visits and a decline in average spend per trip suggests a return to more typical shopping habits.

But this sharp decline will be followed by a period of recovery, with the UK retail food and grocery market predicted to grow by 8.1% to £229.1bn between 2021 and 2026. Simon Wainwright, director of global insight at IGD, explains that this shows there is an opportunity for retailers to engage with shoppers who have built up savings during the pandemic by focusing on quality and convenience.

"Being a food hall nestled in a busy garden centre, we have been very fortunate to have retained a good level of footfall over the last six months," says Lucy Ponsbuy of Yarnton Home & Garden. "We have seen an uplift in luxury food purchases as people celebrate at home and in their gardens with friends and family, no expense spared," she said.

Other businesses have used the pandemic as an opportunity to reevaluate and implement policies and practices to ensure they are better prepared for the future of retailing. "There is no question that the recent and ongoing pandemic has provided us all with a huge opportunity to look in great detail at all areas of our businesses, as well as learn some invaluable lessons that will make us better operators in the future," says Tom Newey, CEO of Cobbs Farm Co.

"We have all had to innovate under extremely pressured (and at times quite scary) circumstances, but for the most part, that has driven positive change – from streamlining certain operations to introducing new initiatives from e-commerce to drive-through shops," Tom adds.

Optimism for the future

As we move into the next phase of recovery, many fine food independents will be focused on engaging new customers. "We were fortunate to grow our customer numbers significantly through the pandemic and retaining and building on that will be at the core of what we do," Tom says. "We keep hearing about a 'return to normality,' but I don't think anyone really believes that we'll ever return to the same world we lived in pre-pandemic – that's not necessarily a bad thing; change can be healthy, and we remain optimistic about the future for independent retailers," he adds.

If the changes brought by the pandemic become permanent for the food retail sector, that could certainly be a good thing for business. "Longer term, the grocery sector will remain bigger than our pre-pandemic forecasts," says IGD's Simon, "primarily driven by elevated levels of home working benefitting stores in suburban areas, the adoption of digital technologies in-store which will alter how and where people shop, and fewer out-of-home eateries operating. Maximising growth will be down to stores inspiring shoppers with an improved choice of relevant products and developing opportunities around events and occasions."

Especially after the challenges Covid posed to retailers over the typically busy Christmas season, shops and consumers will both be keen to go big on celebrations this year. "We are predicting a bumper Christmas to make up for last year's washout," Lucy tells *Speciality Food*. "We will be sure to stock up on local and artisan produce and also luxury food and drink."

Online potential

Yet, in this ever-changing post-pandemic world, predicting the future remains a risky game. "We're still not sure how things will look longer term for fine food retailers," says Mark Kacary, managing director of The Norfolk Deli. "I think it's all still far too early to make any accurate predictions, apart from one, and that is if your business was prepared with a good online presence, it's unlikely that you'll reach the online sales heights of mid-pandemic," he says. "But, as has been the case with us, online sales are likely to remain higher than pre-pandemic." Of online retailing, IGD predicts that the rapid growth seen over 2020 will slow down as some shoppers, particularly older ones, return to stores. However, it will still constitute food retail's fastest-growing channel post-2024.

Today, there are many factors boosting sales. "In some ways, I feel that we're trading in a period which is unlikely to be replicated," Mark continues. "We are currently enjoying great weather and lots of people who would have normally jetted off on their holidays somewhere around the world are finding that the only option available to them is to holiday here. I think this is encouraging people to seek out the type of retailers they would seek out when on holiday. This means that currently most of our customers are first-time visitors," Mark says. "This does give all fine food retailers an opportunity to highlight the differences between businesses like ours and mainstream supermarkets." While the future remains unpredictable, the present offers big opportunities for retailers.



"The Shopping Forecast"



JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES

The *Shipping Forecast* is, of course a beloved British institution. Every day it commands audiences of hundreds of thousands of listeners, many of whom believe it helps them to nod off last thing at night. If the *Shipping Forecast* was adapted to reveal the outlook for present day shopping conditions in the UK it would not make very pleasant reading. Probably something along the lines of "outlook dull, fog patches, occasional drizzle and Rockall happening". And this has nothing to do with the weather. It has more to do with the continuation of government restrictions and social distancing guidelines which are frustrating our efforts to get back to normality.

The last two weeks of June alone were down about 15% on last year. Operations are still cramped by Covid-19 restrictions and lacking the external stimuli that summer presents to food and drink businesses. There have been fewer concerts and events, no Chelsea Flower Show, reduced outside gatherings, less tourism, fewer staff applications and with my old nemesis 'disappointing weather' adding to the mix the present scene is muted to say the least. Every month this year I have been involved in conversations along the lines of, "just wait until April... May... June..." and then last week, "things should be okay by September". It is entirely right that restrictions remain in place until the pandemic is defeated, but it is hard not to feel crisis fatigue when bright new dawns dissolve into wet evenings. During our 49 years of trading, Covid-19 has been one of the biggest challenges. It is by no means the only crisis we have faced over the past nearly 50 years. A roll call of crises we have known would include power cuts, the Hurricane of 1987, several terrorist incidents, a number of wet summers, unhelpful governments, congestion charging, parking restrictions, the Millennium Bug, a Pension Fund deficit, the extension of Sunday Trading Hours in 1994, relentless shoplifting, the stock market crisis of 2002, the Bull Market of the late 90s, the 2006 financial downturn, the collapse of Northern Rock, the rise of online shopping and the growth in convenience foods. Most of which resulted in dire warnings that it was the end of delicatessen as we know them and probably traditional family businesses, too.

The biggest threat we had happened around 2002, shortly after Waitrose opened in Halkin Street (about half a mile away), and our location for selling speciality foods suddenly became off piste, so to speak. It took about three years for us to recover and involved a move several hundred yards to the south and entry into a new retail bubble. It will happen again one day I am sure, but for the time being we are enjoying our 49th year despite the infuriating persistence of the lockdown. Fewer than 1% of firms make it to 100 years, and I am not sure how many make it to 50 years. But delicatessen and the speciality food sector may have been seriously underestimated.

Openings and expansions

Celebrating the newest fine food retailers entering the market and expanding their premises



COTSWOLD FAYRE'S FLOURISH OPENS TO 'PHENOMENAL' START

Fine food distributor Cotswold Fayre has launched its brand new foodhall and kitchen near Bristol in Saltford, and CEO Paul Hargreaves says the business has got off to a "phenomenal" start. Selling locally sourced produce alongside a broad range of Cotswold Fayre products, the destination shop has seen strong demand from customers since opening its doors in June.

The team has been delighted to exceed expectations in the first weeks of trading. "From day one, we've been absolutely rammed," Paul tells *Speciality Food*. "We have actually turned people away for lunch most days."

Despite opening during the pandemic, the foodhall and restaurant has been around three years in the making. "Having seen the good, the bad and the ugly of retail for the last 20 years, I've always fancied having a go. There are some fantastic retailers out there, and I've learned quite a bit over the years about what to do and what not to do," Paul says. "This was so good an opportunity, it would have been crazy to miss it."

Working alongside managing director Paul Castle, who has years of experience in the retail sector, the Cotswold Fayre team has adapted to the fast-paced, full-on schedule of seven-days-a-week retail and hospitality.

The team has also aligned Flourish with its high sustainability standards. The building itself has been installed with solar panels, heat exchange and toilets which are flushed by rainwater, and the shop floor is as free of plastic packaging as is possible. "We were hoping to make it plastic-free completely, but things haven't moved quite as fast as I would like. It's not possible yet to do that," Paul says. "We are trying to be an example to other retailers, and we're totally happy to admit we're not perfect by any means, but we will continue to improve in that direction as time goes on."


BELVOIR CASTLE ESTATE FARM SHOP

BELVOIR CASTLE LAUNCHES ESTATE FARM SHOP

A farm shop and high-end brasserie have opened at Belvoir Castle's Engine Yard artisan shopping village to showcase local produce from the Leicestershire estate.

The farm shop has been in the works since 2018 and will source the highest quality fresh organic







fruits, vegetables and groceries, as well as freshly baked artisan bread, on a daily basis directly from local growers and partners. The new shop is delivered in partnership with wholesaler Wild Jacks, which is home to well-known Lincolnshire brands with a heritage in sustainability.

"We have an abundance of wonderful produce on this estate, and with the opening of our new farm shop it is the perfect opportunity to create a farm-to-fork offer of locally sourced food and drink," says the Duchess of Rutland. "Wild Jacks bring that unique element to help us develop an extra special, premium offering, with their experience in championing local produce."

EAST ANGLIAN BAKERY OPENS TWO NEW LOCATIONS

Two Magpies Bakery has added two new sites to its four-strong chain of bakeries across Suffolk and Norfolk.

A bakery and café on Blakeney Quay and a new bakery space in Halesworth will allow the team to boost production of their famous fermented sourdough bread.

"We've spent the last year making plans on when and how we'll continue to expand the bakery business, and this is the next stage," says Steve Magnall, who co-owns the business with wife and founder, Rebecca Bishop.

"Our teams work incredibly hard but with demand for our product growing it's hard when conditions get cramped, so gaining a dedicated baking space made sense for everyone. Our bakers and production chefs are really excited about the move," he said.

MACKNADE ARRIVES IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS WITH HOOPERS PARTNERSHIP

Kent-based food hall Macknade has revealed a partnership with family-owned department store Hoopers that will see the food business grow into a new 4,000sq ft space.

"Macknade's whole purpose is to bring communities together through quality food and drink experiences. By partnering with Hoopers, we aim to create a favourite place in the town for everyone to enjoy," said Stefano Cuomo, CEO of Macknade. "Tunbridge Wells residents have long taken pride in supporting local, independent businesses and the surrounding area of the Weald is full of producers that we already admire, and whose stories we can't wait to share," he continued.

The informal restaurant and retail space is set to open in September. As well as selling a selection of produce from the restaurant menu, plus wine, beer and cider, the shop will sell bespoke hampers, hand-tied bouquets and foodie gifts.

Shane Godwin, managing director of Macknade, adds: "Working with Hoopers presents a wonderful opportunity to bring the Macknade experience to an ever-growing audience, creating a fruitful partnership with a trusted name in Tunbridge Wells, who share our values, and from whom we can learn a great deal." Debra Angus, managing director of Hoopers, added: "The resonance of two family businesses joining in partnership with our customer at the centre is a very exciting prospect."

ONLINE MEAT RETAILER OPENS FIRST BRICKS AND MORTAR STORE

Farmison & Co, a sustainable e-commerce meat retailer, has announced the opening of Cut by Farmison & Co, the group's first physical 'concept shop' in Ripon, North Yorkshire. According to the business, the shop will blend state-of-the-art retail with traditional butchery techniques.

The store boasts self-serve checkout, as well as same-day click and collect, offering customers multiple ways to buy products. Co-founder and CEO John Pallagi said: "The profile of Yorkshire's meat is only growing as chefs and home cooks recognise the rich heritage of traditional husbandry around Ripon, with the pastures in the Dales and North York Moors giving the meat unique qualities – much like the principle of 'terroir' in wine.

"And because of the extensive range of heritage breeds that make up our online better meat offer, we reckon if you were to display it in a traditional shop, you'd have to have the longest butcher's counter in the world."



Winners of the 2021 Farm Shop & Deli Retailer Awards showcase innovative spirit

The regional winners of the 2021 Farm Shop & Deli Retailer Awards were announced after the postponement of the flagship Farm Shop & Deli Show. Whittled down from a shortlist of 153 fine food retailers, 30 independents were chosen as Commended Retailers and nine of these made the cut as Regional Winners.

"The Farm Shop & Deli finalists have illustrated how crucial they are to their communities at a time when many consumers remained in their homes. This includes dedicated online businesses which have witnessed huge growth during these difficult times, and traditional retailers who increased their online offer," said Nigel Barden, chair of judges. "But it's the stories of innovation and imagination way beyond these that took our judges' breath away."

This year's awards saw a change to the judging criteria to shine a light on retailers who deserved recognition for their work during the pandemic, with the winners selected from Best in Region, rather than the traditional categories. For John Wilson, owner of Wilson's Butchers, the winner for Northern Ireland, Covid gave him the push he needed to move his shop in a new direction. "I started a free delivery service and that grew fast, allowing me to hire some staff, and with the help of social media I was able to start changing the shop to suit the new demands for delivery and cooked products."

Sarah Barron, owner of Barron's Mobile Shop, the winner for East Anglia, said the award offered a boost of confidence. "The last year has been very challenging, and I have worked long hours in rain, snow and dark. It is so lovely to be recognised for this."

> "Stories of innovation and imagination took our judges' breath away"

And the winners are...

EAST ANGLIA:
BARRON'S MOBILE SHOP
COLCHESTER

MIDLANDS:
THE FARM STRATFORD
SNITTERFIELD

NORTH EAST:
CORBRIDGE LARDER
NORTHUMBERLAND

NORTH WEST:
SEASONS BAKERY
INGLETON

NORTHERN IRELAND:
WILSONS BUTCHERS
DOWNPATRICK

SCOTLAND:
PRO FISH SERVICES
AVIEMORE

SOUTH EAST:
EGGS TO APPLES FARM SHOP
HURST GREEN

SOUTH WEST:
VEG IN A BOX
EXETER

WALES:
BODNANT WELSH FOOD
CONWY

Retail sector voices mixed reactions to changing mask rules

There are fears that easing rules on wearing face masks indoors and ending social distancing will cause consumer confidence to fall. Andrew Goodacre, CEO of the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira), told *Speciality Food* he welcomed the announcement with "a degree of apprehension". He worries that lifting restrictions while Covid-19 cases are growing could "damage consumer confidence until shoppers come to terms with how to adjust to the new rules".

"Retailers also need more guidance on what is expected of them and what policies on face coverings they can or cannot implement without fear of a challenge on the grounds of equality," Andrew added. "As employers, our retailers also need to know what they have to do to protect vulnerable staff. In summary, we believe it is the right direction, but we need more guidance, and we would have welcomed some level of consultation on these changes."

Usdaw, the retail workers union, said changing the safety measures in stores was "too much too soon". The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) welcomed the announcement, however, saying it would "raise the hopes of millions of small businesses after 16 months of on-again, off-again restrictions" but added that clarity was needed. "After enforcing restrictions for so long, the Government must not simply withdraw and allow a free-for-all. The sooner we have crystal clear, comprehensive guidance from BEIS, the better," said FSB national chair Mike Cherry. "A strong recovery is finally within our reach. Focus, support and clear guidance from the Government are needed to make it a reality," he said.

> "A strong recovery is finally within our reach. Focus, support and clear guidance from the Government are needed to make it a reality"

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6 food trends for autumn

Heather Morris, co-founder of SHfoodie, picks the biggest food trends to watch out for

1 COMFORT AND NOSTALGIA:
"Autumn is a great time for hearty foods, and slow and low cooked dishes are evolving with ingredients like gourmet pulses and single origin lentils and spicy sriracha sauces adding extra pizazz to meaty casseroles or simply replacing the meat altogether."

2 HEALTH:
"In many different guises, whether it's gut health (fermented foods like kimchi, kombucha and kefir), or the focus on immunity, health food will continue to innovate as we think about how we keep healthy throughout the winter. 'Food as medicine' is definitely expanding."

3 NO AND LOW ALCOHOL:
"Products that offer a real choice for avoiding alcohol but also taste great will continue to rise, as we know around a third of consumers are drinking less alcohol and we've seen an increase in enquiries to support the development of no and low beverages over the past 12 months."

4 PLANT-BASED:
"Following *Seaspiracy*, we are seeing a rise in plant-based foods replacing seafood. Egg replacement is also a dynamic area with more and better options coming through all the time, and seaweed is showing up in a lot more products, both as a key ingredient but also for its many great functions."

5 INDULGENT AT-HOME BEVERAGES:
"There's a wide range of ABVs to suit all with natural ingredients, less sugar and more authenticity for that elevated bar experience at home, set to increase in demand."

6 SUSTAINABILITY:
"From ingredient sourcing to food trends, through to packaging types and ingredient waste, [sustainability] will continue to be influencing our eating and drinking habits over the months to come."

"Our industry has changed for life"



TANNY GILL
CLARKS SPECIALITY FOODS

When the lockdown started, it almost felt like a real life curfew. We felt fear, anxiety, unanswered questions, the worry of bills, and most importantly the safety of our children and loved ones, and the questions kept coming and coming...

Lockdown almost forced mankind to go cold turkey from the fast-paced material and social media lives we lived. Looking back on what we all did, I can see that we got closer to ourselves and our families, and most importantly we got closer to food. We cooked more and ate more new and different things.

I am sure we all have had different experiences of lockdown; for us being up in Scotland it had its own positives. We are north of the wall, as they say, with a population of just five million people. As a primarily food service business, when lockdown happened things went quiet overnight. We had to manage a lot of stock, freeze some, get date extensions where possible, and unfortunately wasted a lot of fresh products and Continental products which could not be cancelled because they were in transit. Of course, Brexit added logistical challenges, too.

Retail was a small part of our business, but its growth was strong and it took precedence over everything. With people working from home and cooking a lot more, baking trends took off and necessities like dry pasta went through the roof. This caused challenges in logistics and production, with only a skeleton staff around to manage it all. It made us realise and value the importance of people who keep things moving in our day to day life.

We chose not to get into home deliveries but supported our independent retailers to the max, and in turn they were supported by their local communities. We stuck to what we do and did it better. Local communities had a big part to play in creating a positive and encouraging atmosphere for a lot of independent retailers who were just about getting their head around the ever-changing rules of engagement.

A lot of businesses realised that there was no need to work 24 hours a day on paper thin margins; instead, they realised that things would be smartly simplified, and so long as you supply quality produce you will enjoy repeat business.

There have been some highs within this challenging period. For us, retail grew through the roof and made us more visible in the market; we got closer to our customers during their tough times and built strong relationships which will see us through future changes. This could not have happened pre-lockdown, as we were all distanced and busy keeping up with the pace of life.

Retail and food service have changed for life, because the consumer has changed their mindset – they are eating better quality food, and it's important for us to continue to push and reach out to local independent businesses. Technology will play a massive part in getting consumers, retailers, suppliers and hospitality together – it will help us build bridges, communicate faster, be more effective, and if needs be, keep social distancing.



‘Eco score’ food labels launched to inspire sustainable choices

A new traffic-light style system of ‘eco scores’ is being introduced to help consumers determine the environmental impact of their food. Foundation Earth will launch front-of-pack labels developed by Oxford University with the support of the WWF in September.

George Eustice, the secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs welcomed the launch of the labels, saying they have “the potential to help address the urgent challenges of sustainability and climate change”. According to the UN, the food industry contributes up to 37% of global greenhouse gases, and without intervention these are likely to increase by another 30% by 2050, due to increasing demand from population growth.

Simon Billing, executive director at Eating Better, told *Speciality Food* that the labels will help replicate what independent food producers and retailers have long been achieving in the sector on a greater scale. “Helping everyone better understand where their food comes from and how it’s been produced can help us make healthier and more sustainable choices. Many smaller producers are already embracing this by making provenance and higher animal welfare and environmental standards central to their brand." And while the labelling pilot will provide “valuable insights” about the impact of production, he added that the industry “urgently needs transformational and systemic change”.

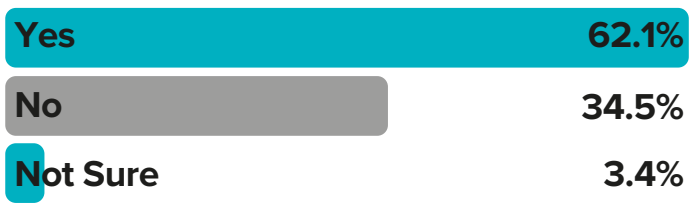
The Foundation says the Oxford and EIT Food systems are unique globally, in that they both allow two products of the same type to be compared on their individual merits through a complete product life cycle analysis.

Andy Zynga, the chief executive of EIT Food, said the launch of the labels was a “very significant moment” for the European food and drink industry.

Chris Grayling, a former cabinet minister who currently has a private members bill in the House of Commons calling for environmental labelling of food and drink products, said such a system was “long overdue”.

DO CONSUMERS WANT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT SCORES ON THEIR FOOD?

To discover consumer sentiment towards ‘eco labels’, *Speciality Food* teamed up with *Great British Food* to ask its audience of Twitter followers how they feel about the idea.



Join *Speciality Food*’s Buyer Tasting Panel

***Speciality Food* is calling on buyers from all corners of the fine food industry to register their interest in becoming part of its brand new Buyer Tasting Panel.** Launching in the September issue of *Speciality Food*, the panel will help to uncover and promote new and emerging trends in the sector.Members of the panel will review products and provide their thoughts and reactions in feedback, which will appear within the magazine. Buyers from independent retail, wholesalers and big name brands are all welcome to register.

Interested in joining this brand new initiative or learning more about it?
Email holly.shackleton@aceville.co.uk.

Demand for local shops remains strong

The pandemic sparked a revival in the local shopping trend, but what’s next for indie retailers as the easing of lockdown restrictions continues? Andy Harris, founder of Ealing Grocer, admits that opening a small, independent grocery shop during lockdown was “extremely risky” – but after seeing how much people were enjoying shopping locally during lockdown, he was convinced of his decision. “Ealing Grocer was born – selling all sorts of things from Amalfi lemons to Hedone bread, Neal’s Yard cheeses and a glut of beautiful fresh vegetables and fruit, and we are thriving.”

A recent survey from payments firm Cashflows found that the desire to support local shops is strong, with 62% of Brits saying they enjoy buying from independents, such as farm shops. What’s more, nearly three in four are willing to spend up to 10% more on an item from a local provider versus the same item from a large chain. “In a world of Amazons and ‘the big four’ it’s so heartening to see customers coming on a regular basis for their daily essentials and to chat,” Andy added. “I think people love our personal touch. It just goes to show that if it’s good, the people will come. And clearly people like that we sell things you can’t buy easily anywhere else.”



SPONSORED BY

DARTS FARM

Michael Dart, director, walks us around Darts Farm: an independent retailer with a zest for the good life



It all started with Ronald Dart, back in 1971 when he started one of Britain's first pick-your-own businesses, Pic Fresh. Long before it became fashionable, he believed that we should eat what is in season and produced as locally as possible.

In 1982, Ronald passed away and the newspapers called it the "Death of a Pioneer". It was then that Ronald's three sons, Michael, James and Paul, returned home to create Darts Farm, the place as we know it today.

Following on from what their father started, with the same ethos and family values, the three Dart brothers further developed the business, creating a vibrant, nationally award-winning farm shop overlooking the beautiful Clyst Valley.

The working farm, run by Paul, the eldest of the brothers, is still at the heart of the business. Using traditional farming methods and centuries old rotational practices means that their rich, red Devon soil is full of life and fertility. Each morning the farm team go out to the fields and hand-pick fresh, seasonal fruit and veg to sell direct through the farm shop. During the summer months, their native herd of Ruby Red Devon cattle graze on the River Clyst Meadows.

Michael and James had a vision to create a unique shopping destination that champions local food and drink from the farm and other incredible, local and passionate artisans; they wanted it to be about the home and the great outdoors, to be somewhere that you are able to go and spend the whole day. You can reconnect with nature by visiting the animals, winding your way through the vegetable fields, or wildlife-spotting in the bird hide overlooking the wetlands. If you are feeling adventurous you can hire a bike and discover the beautiful views the Exe Estuary has to offer.

WHO'S IN THE FARM SHOP TEAM?

With over 17,000 visitors a week, the Darts Farm team pride themselves on exceptional customer experience and a warm, friendly atmosphere around the store; this is enhanced by the Dart brothers' hands-on involvement nurturing and working with an amazing management team and passionate members of staff.

Across the site there are over 250 passionate people employed; from the farm boys bringing in the veg, the Farm Shop, Drink Cellar, Butchers and Deli teams who are on hand for all of your artisan food and drink needs, to our hand-picked specialist retailers for the home, lifestyle, hair, body and great outdoors... not forgetting the chefs, baristas and servers at the Restaurant, Shack or Fish Shed for when you're feeling peckish!

WHAT SETS DARTS FARM APART FROM OTHER INDEPENDENT RETAILERS?

Darts Farm is a vibrant, nationally award-winning farm shopping experience, with a working farm at its heart.

Each morning our farm team goes out to the fields and hand picks fresh seasonal fruit and veg to sell direct through the farm shop. In the summer months you'll see our beautiful herd of Ruby Red Devon Cattle grazing on the banks of the River Clyst. The food hall is filled with hundreds of hand-picked local and artisan suppliers; the best West Country and British farmhouse cheeses, incredible artisan breads, pastries and pies, luxury local wines, craft beers and much more!

As well as rearing our own herd of native Ruby Red Devon cattle, we work with a community of trusted local families who farm in harmony with nature to the highest welfare standards. Once hand selected, our master butchers, Phillip and Alastair, use traditional butchery methods and incredible skill to ensure we use the whole animal, from nose-to-tail.

It's not just about the food, though! For great ideas and inspiration for the home we have the iconic specialist retailers, Fired Earth, AGA and Orange Tree, along with all the gear to explore the great outdoors from Cotswold and RSPB. Relax your body and mind with a massage from the treatment loft or a new hair-do from Energy hair, and reconnect with nature by visiting the animals, winding your way through the vegetable fields on the farm walk, or wildlife spotting in the bird hide overlooking the wetlands.

If you're feeling peckish, a visit to the Restaurant is a must. Our brilliant chefs use the food hall as their larder, creating delicious seasonal meals; perhaps a gourmet steak sandwich, an artisan charcuterie platter or a traditional Devonshire cream tea. If you're just waiting for your Tesla to charge, you can always grab award-winning, fresh fish and chips from The Fish Shed or a delicious Ruby Red Steak Sandwich from The Shack.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF AT DARTS FARM?

Our fantastic team and loyal, passionate customers!

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED RECENTLY, AND HOW HAVE YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Lockdown! It's been rather crazy and we have had to adapt very quickly in an ever-changing environment.

For us, there are two key diversifications that stand out. We started up an online, national delivery retail service which went live within a week, and we launched The Shack, our new outdoor takeaway eatery. The Shack, along with our front field, was a lifeline to many of our customers during a difficult period where indoor hospitality was closed, allowing them to get out in the fresh Exe Estuary air and connect with the outdoors.

Both have been a great success and have changed our overall business model, however we are most excited for The Farm Table restaurant...

WHAT'S NEXT FOR DARTS FARM? ANY GRAND PLANS IN THE PIPELINE?

Finish what we have started in March 2020!

During the past year, a lot of the site has been closed, which has allowed us to spend time on things that we would never normally have time to focus on, and the project grew and grew.

We now have a brand-new Nature Trail here on the farm. Complete with insect hotels, very rare bee orchids, woodland areas, bee hives, wild flowers, hedge laying, willow sculptures, outdoor cooking and eating areas and beautiful Estuary views. It's an area for people to explore, for them to be able to understand the strong connection between farming and nature. An area where people can sit, socialise and cook on open fires; it's about taking us back to our primal years.

It also isn't long until our new Hen House will also be opening, where you can pick and purchase your very own chickens! For us, sustainably produced food is definitely at the top of the list and what's more sustainable that producing your own eggs?

Also, as part of the Nature Trail we have planted a heritage apple orchard with the help of Barny Butterfield, founder of Sandford Orchards. With 40 of our favourite Devon varieties, it is a way for us to be able to pass on traditional varieties, flavours and heritage and give something that will bring memories to new generations. We have a rich farming history here at Darts, and our job is to ensure it is enjoyed by the future generations to come.

We can't wait until we turn the fruits from the trees into amazing, unique small batch cider in our new Cidery. The orchard will also become a key part of our new restaurant, The Farm Table, where we you can enjoy home grown and locally reared meat, cooked on charcoal-fired ovens; fresh sourdough pizzas cooked in a beautiful woodfired oven; artisan charcuterie and farmhouse cheese tasting platters; plus unique ciders and beers and world class wine and spirits as well as the fresh, locally caught, grilled fish from the Fish Shed that we are already famous for!

Oh, and we will also be a bean-to-bar chocolatier along with our own ice cream, both of which will be crafted here on-site using the best ingredients including milk from our local dairy, Sutton Lucy and cacao beans sourced from small scale growers in the world's best regions! Exciting things to come.

And then who knows, hopefully there will be many more exciting projects!



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THE BEST OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Enjoy the region's cornucopia of delicious produce thanks to Invest NI's passionate support for connecting makers with discerning retailers

Passionate about supporting Northern Ireland's vibrant food and drink community since it was first launched in April 2002, Invest Northern Ireland has long been the go-to representative for the region's very best products and makers.

Its Business Development Team is proud to work closely with retailers, wholesalers and foodservice operators, aiding their efforts to build beneficial relationships for all, while simultaneously supporting producers in their product development, accreditation and other business needs.

Connecting retailers with producers has long been a vital part of the work Invest NI does, and it hosts Meet the Buyer events, Supplier Showcases and factory visits as well as promoting the region's bounty at numerous events and trade exhibitions. A lot of the Invest NI-hosted events have moved to online platforms as a result of Covid-19, and the relationships and direct connections that have been established as a direct result of these have delivered value across the industry.

If you're wondering what makes Northern Ireland such a valuable source of delicious, high quality and inventive food and drink products and brands, wonder no more.

Northern Ireland is home to a truly progressive food and drink industry. Not only is it famed for its natural, wholesome food and drink products which boast a heritage going back generations, but the region is also home to some of the world's most innovative producers. Where else can you find hard seltzer brands rubbing shoulders with single-herd cheesemakers, or innovative snack producers working alongside generations-old fish smokers?

Did you know that Northern Ireland boasts one of the world's leading food safety organisations? All of the producers represented by Invest NI work from fully accredited factories, and are proud to be associated with the internationally-recognised Institute of Global Security at Queen's University, Belfast.

Not only are Northern Ireland's producers proudly food-safe, they're constantly innovating too. With over 200 forward-thinking producers in its network, Invest NI is at the forefront of satisfying the consumer desire for delicious and exciting products. The businesses working with Invest NI are passionate about pivoting to suit the ever-evolving needs of shoppers across the UK and beyond, so that retailers will always have the best of Northern Ireland's food and drink at their fingertips.

A SMART SOLUTION

Speciality Food caught up with Michelle Charrington, from Invest NI's Food Business Development Team, about the reinvigoration of the network's mission



The continuation of global travel restrictions arising from Covid-19 has meant that the exhibitions industry, Invest NI and NI businesses, have had to look at new ways of ensuring that Northern Ireland products and services are still effectively promoted to potential buyers in markets around the world. The answer was to go virtual.

The cancellation or postponement of many major national food and drink events, as well as our own supplier showcases, in 2020, made it a challenge for NI food and drink companies to meet and present to potential buyers. In response, we developed an innovative model comprising the circulation of themed sample boxes followed by a live cookery demo and hosted our inaugural virtual 'meet the buyer' in July 2020.

The format proved so successful that the team delivered six more virtual events throughout three lockdowns. Over 70 local food and drink suppliers have presented their products to approximately 180 targeted GB & RoI retail buyers, chefs and speciality food wholesalers. Not only have these events provided a solution to companies not being able to travel to promote and market their products; they have also resulted in sales in both markets.

Invest NI plans to maintain its online activities alongside live events in future. Busy buyers can find it hard to clear their diaries for two days to come and visit us in person, but an hour of online chat on a Friday afternoon is much easier to achieve – especially if it comes with a box of delicious samples to enjoy over the weekend! Getting products directly into home kitchens has encouraged our audience to enjoy NI's finest products at their leisure and really get a feel for their quality and versatility. We are looking forward to hosting our visitors in Northern Ireland again, but in the meantime we are taking advantage of the opportunity to develop our personal culinary repertoires!



SINGLE ROSE BRIE, BALLYLISK OF ARMAGH

Famed for their iconic Triple Rose – a triple cream cheese made from single herd milk – it was only a matter of time before the passionate team at Ballylisk of Armagh turned their hand to its second creation. With a decadently creamy texture and mellow, ripe flavour, this cheese is a standout feature on a cheeseboard. It's particularly delicious when enjoyed al fresco on a rustic oatcake, whereby the quality of the single herd milk it is made from and the mastery of its makers can shine through. This cheese is part of a simple and honest food chain which its makers are proud to say both starts and ends in Ballylisk.

While the latest incarnation of Ballylisk of Armagh – headed up by the passionate Wright family – has been making cheese for just a handful of years, the land which the businesses calls its home has been farmed by the same family since 1820.

BALLYLISKOFARMAGH.COM

TOM & OLLIE

No picnic would be complete without a delicious array of nibbles and dips, and Tom & Ollie are perfectly placed to tempt tastebuds with their delicious range of mezze products. Their selection includes *Speciality Food*-favourite, Chilli Basil & Garlic Hummus – delicious with breadsticks and crudites as well as baked into pastries and used as a flavour-booster in sandwiches – olives and slow-roasted tomatoes, tapenades and pestos, and much more besides, making them a one-stop-shop for retailers seeking delicious mezze-style foods on their doorstep.

Founders Seamus Mullan, Hugh Cushnan and Fergal McGrainne have years of experience within fine food, and are passionate about connecting discerning retailers with locally-produced Irish and European mezze products.

TOMANDOLLIE.COM





SAUSAGE ROLLS, ASHER'S BAKING CO

No picnic would be complete without a sausage roll, and Asher's delivers a delicious range with aplomb. As well as its deliciously moreish classic sausage rolls – the perfect partner for Burren Balsamics' Balsamic Onion Jam – Asher's offers options out of the ordinary and perfect for adventurous picnickers, such as sweet chilli or curry sausage rolls. These savoury pastries are ready to be eaten as they come, making them perfect for enjoying alfresco.

Family-run Asher's is driven by a pure passion for baking. Headed up by a husband and wife team, the first Asher's shop was opened in their hometown of Newtonabbey before another six were added to the business's portfolio as a result of their popular bakes. There's a whole host of treats in the Asher's range, from savoury bakes to breads and sweet treats.

ASHERSBAKINGCO.COM

SPECIALITY SHOWCASE

In June, Invest NI hosted an online showcase named Picnic Picks which highlighted some of the finest food and beverage businesses Northern Ireland has to offer. *Speciality Food* was in attendance, and is delighted to present the occasion's best bites.

BALSAMIC ONION JAM, BURREN BALSAMICS

While many are familiar with onion jam, only those who have tried Burren Balsamics' Balsamic Onion Jam can say that they have experienced one of the very best. Its deliciously punchy yet sweet flavour means that it pairs beautifully with all manner of dishes – it's a favourite addition to a cheeseboard and suits a number of cheeses – including picnic favourites like sausage rolls and sandwiches. It also ticks the consumer box for versatility by being great for cooking; stir into a gravy or sauce for an extra kick of rich flavour.

Founded in 2014, the Burren Balsamics team is on a mission to combine the most delicious flavours of its local area with quality balsamic vinegar sourced from Modena. The business uses only 100% natural ingredients, making it an ideal choice for independent fine food retailers.

BURRENBALSAMICS.COM





SMOKED SALMON, EWING'S SEAFOOD

It's not for nothing that for generations Ewing's has supplied fish and seafood to some of Northern Ireland's finest establishments. This smoked salmon is a surefire picnic hit thanks to its perfectly crafted flavour and texture, and it is as delicious served simply with fresh bread or crackers as it is cooked into a picnic-ready quiche or prepared with a salad. Caught fresh from the waters around Portavogie and Kilkeel before being expertly smoked by Ewing's dedicated team, this delicious salmon is a longtime favourite of Michelin-starred chefs.

For 100 years Ewing's has been cementing its reputation as Belfast's premier fishmonger and seafood supplier. Now, run by Walter Ewing together with his sons Crawford and Warren, the business continues to satisfy the most discerning palates.

EWINGSEAFOOD.COM

WHEATEN MIX, THE COOKIE JAR (MOURNE & BREAD)

Hot on the heels of lockdown's most successful trend - home baking – comes The Cookie Jar's famous Wheaten Bread Mix. Perfect for home bakers who are looking for a convenient way to enjoy delicious, homemade bread, this mix has everything home bakers need to create a loaf in no time – making it perfect for spontaneous lunches outdoors. To bake up a storm, simply add oil and water; the mix already contains buttermilk, so you're guaranteed a flavourful and perfectly-textured loaf without any hassle.

Third generation family business The Cookie Jar has family values at its heart. Its recipes are inspired by the current owners' grandmother, Jean Herron – who opened The Cookie Jar bakery in 1965 – and the range currently consists of Wheaten Mix, Soda Mix and Scone Mix.

MOURNEANDBREAD.CO.UK



FENNEL SALAMI, CORNDALE FARM

A perfectly balanced salami is a thing of beauty, and Corndale Farm's Fennel Salami is just that. Gently sweet and expertly seasoned with fennel and garlic, this is a showstopping product which is just as enjoyable served on a cheeseboard as it is as a pizza topping. Its yielding texture melts beautifully however it is presented, and we particularly enjoy it when served as part of a smorgasbord of picnic-worthy products such as sausage rolls, cheese and snacks.

Farmer Alistair Crown established Corndale Farm in 2012 with a mission to produce some of Northern Ireland's finest pork from his herd of free-range rare breed pigs. The animals are farmed using sustainable methods, with a high attention paid to the welfare of the pigs.

CORNDALEFARM.COM





HARD SELTZER, WHITEWATER BREWERY

Delivering on the trend front is craft brew expert Whitewater Brewery with its range of vegan-friendly, ready-to-drink hard seltzers. Available in Yuzu, Coconut & Raspberry, Passionfruit & Peach and Grapefruit & Pineapple flavours, this range is low calorie and produced using natural flavours. Each drink in the range is fermented from scratch and contains no artificial preservatives or sweeteners. We love these when out and about, not least because they bring the sunshine whatever the weather.

Located on Northern Ireland's breathtaking Mourne Mountains, Whitewater Brewery has been passionate about craft brewing since it first launched 25 years ago. In that time it has made a name for itself as an award-winning producer of 10 beers and is excited to be quenching the consumer thirst for hard seltzers with its refreshing new range.

WHITEWATERBREWERY.COM

ICE CREAM SUNDAY CUPCAKES, GENESIS' AFTERS RANGE

Nobody can resist the allure of a pristinely flavoured and decorated cupcake, so it's only natural that Genesis's Ice Cream Sunday cupcakes – part of its Afters range – was such a hit with the Speciality Food team. While ready-made baked goods can sometimes taste artificial, these cupcakes are nothing of the sort; their sweet (but not too sweet) and buttery flavour is sure to be a hit with sweet-toothed consumers of all ages.

Genesis's Magherafelt home produces far more than delightful cupcakes. Also in the range are bread products such as seeded subs and rolls, scones, pastries and tartlets – all of which are produced to the highest standards by passionate bakers.

GENESISBAKERY.CO.UK



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OUTDOOR COOKING

Outdoor eating is an outsize opportunity for indies, says Sally-Jayne Wright

Expert Marcus Bawdon of CountryWoodSmoke, who has written two books on outdoor cooking and edits a BBQ magazine, launched a BBQ school this spring. Though he's been teaching people to grill from his Devon home for six years, he's been "inundated with interest" since the pandemic.

Daylesford Organic proved remarkably on-trend when in May, at their destination farm shop in the Cotswolds, they launched an "experiential retail space dedicated to outdoor living". A selection of Weber barbecues awaits visitors, plus a new range of garden furniture.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE TREND?

As we took to our gardens during lockdown so there was a surge of demand for Kamado-style grills, gas barbies and wood-fired pizza ovens.

To show off new skills – and also to justify outlay on new equipment – we're cooking outside even on cooler days and school nights. With restaurant tables harder to book, and many of us still anxious about Covid, it's the default way to socialise.

SO CREMATED DRUMSTICKS AND CRUMBLY CHICKPEA BURGERS, THEN?

We are more aspirational than that. When Marcus showcased his new BBQ school to journalists this month, his menu included: plank-cooked salmon, smoke-roasted beef with salad, horseradish cream and dirty bone marrow bread, an abundance of grilled veg with chimichurri, pulled fennel with slaw and grilled peaches with honey and thyme.



WOW. THAT SOUNDS GOOD. WHICH CUTS OF MEAT ARE TRENDING?

Simon Maynard, head butcher at Macknade Food Hall in Faversham, Kent reports, "There's been a shift to larger joints and slow cooking methods. Pulled pork, slow-cooked chuck, butterflied leg of lamb and shoulder. The type of barbecue used has also evolved with the (ceramic) Kamado style trending. In line with our ethos, we also supply cuts that are still considered unusual, such as flat iron, skirt and pork rib eye steaks from the shoulder."

Marcus adds that large tomahawk steaks are in, plus ribs and brisket cooked American smokehouse-style.

ANY OTHER TRENDS?

Ethical meat. Simon says, "Beef is a big topic of conversation right now. Not only the environmental effects of commercial beef farming but also what the animals are fed and how much grain as a percentage of their diet. We work closely with Pasture For Life (the only certification scheme for 100% grass fed meat) to ensure our meat is reared using sustainable farming methods." Marcus agrees that local, sustainable meat tastes far better than its industrially produced counterpart.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO YOU SEE?

Fire up customers' imaginations with themed BBQ promos; mains, sides, desserts and even drinks and sauces as a package. Food producer Mandira's Kitchen offers an Indian vegetarian BBQ box which includes marinated cauliflower and aubergine, paneer skewers, and mango and cardamom gelato. Your ideas could range from Korean, Caribbean, vegetarian and Mexican to Middle Eastern, Deep South USA and German.

GERMAN? DOES THAT MEAN BRATWURST, VIENNAS AND FRANKFURTERS?

Why not? Try the Sausage Man, a Dartford wholesaler who also supplies artisan German breads, beers, sauerkraut and outstanding mustards. To complement those sausages, offer potato salad and slaw from your deli and Vadasz award-winning ferments and pickles.

WE SELL OUR OWN LOUISIANA-STYLE BBQ RUB. IT SMELLS FANTASTIC!

Great idea. We like Hunter & Gather Barbecue smoky sauce or for a touch of luxury, Truffle Hunter's sweet and smoky Black Truffle BBQ Sauce.

I READ SALES OF VEGAN AND VEGGIE FOOD WERE UP 80% AT WAITROSE ONE HOT WEEKEND LAST YEAR. DOES THAT MEAN SOYA BURGERS?

Fake meats have improved. Last year, a vegan sausage burger made by Moving Mountains won a three star Great Taste Award. Their sausages scooped two stars. As for beef burgers, the Beyond Meat ones are "just extraordinary" and "seriously passable", reports vegan food expert, Arianna Halshaw. Study labels; many products contain wheat gluten unsuitable for coeliac customers. Some contain egg white so may offend hardcore vegans.

> "To show off new skills – and also to justify outlay on new equipment – we're cooking outside even on cooler days and school nights. With restaurant tables harder to book, and many of us still anxious about Covid, it's the default way to socialise"

WHAT CAN WE OFFER THAT EVERYONE CAN EAT?

Fruit skewers and prepared veg. Not just corn on the cob but char-grilled spring greens, broccoli and courgettes in your house marinade.

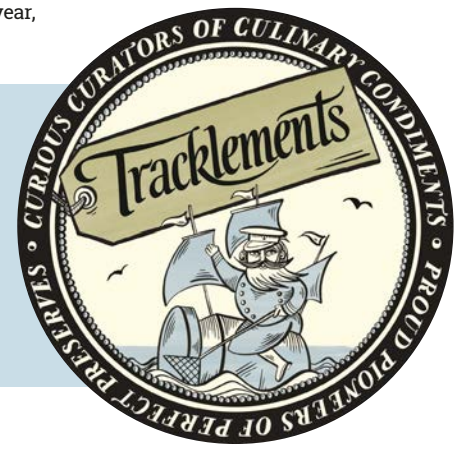
WHAT ELSE CAN INDIES SELL TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE TREND?

- Portable wood-fired pizza ovens such as the Ooni Fyra, table-top grills and digital meat thermometers such as the Meater Plus to reassure diners meat is safe and not overcooked
- Face-to-face or Zoom BBQ classes
- Ready-made sourdough pizza dough and pizza 'fixings', pizza wheels and other accessories
- Coal chimneys, tongs, brushes, fire gloves, oak and hickory chips

WILL OUTDOOR COOKING CONTINUE TO TREND?

Marcus expects the outdoor cooking scene to see huge growth over the next few years, with many people building outdoor kitchens and sheds for all-weather cookouts. Argentine open fire and hearth cooking is the Next Big Thing.

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MEET THE DISTRIBUTOR

Celebrating 25 years in the fine food industry, Seggiano – pioneer of bringing the finest Italian food to the UK – is as passionate about its mission as ever



Seggiano is celebrated among foodies for its unique no-cut-corners commitment to excellence in food production and its resulting range of seriously delicious artisan products.

Founded by Peri Eagleton and David Harrison in 1995 after discovering a shared passion for Italian food and rural life, following a chance encounter at Roma Ciampino Airport, within a few years they were producing their now bestselling extra virgin Olivastra Seggianese olive oil from their organic Tuscan farm and surrounding groves. "Our own olive grove has about 500 trees – many over 1,000 years old – of a variety unique to Monte Amiata, the dormant volcano sacred to the Ancient Etruscans, where Peri and I had by chance ended up," explains David.

A meticulous focus on good practice

Over time the range has expanded to offer a wide selection of regional specialities sourced across the Italian peninsula, each product from other smallholders and family businesses which share the same passion for quality ingredients, provenance and non-industrial production methods.

"If it's not something we'd happily eat ourselves or feed to our family and friends, you won't find it under the Seggiano brand," says Peri, whose meticulous, unswerving focus on good food production practice has always been core to brand decisions.

"Each ingredient of every recipe is scrutinised during product development. Anything potentially having a negative effect on health is out. If there's any aspect to production that may degrade nutritional content or the taste of a product, we'll push our producers for an innovative workaround. It can add years to the process but is always worth it in the end."

Peri continues, "Our intimate partnership with producers gives us plenty of room to experiment with recipes in pursuit of perfection. There's an open line between us: a shared goal to create truly exceptional products, leading to lots of innovation over the years, such as extending shelf life using natural antioxidants in place of chemical preservatives. We've always favoured slower, natural production methods, strictly avoiding any use of industrial additives, emulsifiers, binding agents, thickeners and colourants. We're totally involved in product development, every step of the way: from farm to fork".

This hands-on approach isn't just confined to quality control; Seggiano's Organic Chocolate Spreads were the first to market made without palm oil, years before this environmental issue became a mainstream consumer concern. "We've been donating a percentage of profits from Seggiano Raw Honey sales to fund research into bee colony collapse and preserve insect habitats for nearly 20 years," explains David. "All of the milk, butter and eggs used in our recipes are organic, as this certification ensures better animal welfare than free-range and other options, and our brand will never sell meat or fish products. We're working towards eliminating plastics from our packaging, too. We're not just following consumer trends, though – ethics have always held a lead role in our business, ever since we first wrote our company manifesto many moons ago."

The Anglo-Italian connection

Italians are very attached to their local culinary customs, which can vary even from village to village. "Maybe it needed us non-Italians to see the bigger picture and to cherry-pick Italy's standout regional specialities," says David. "Our experience in the UK and international markets has helped us further refine the products likely to do well overseas.Travelling across Italy to spend time with suppliers is a big part of the job, and it's certainly a highlight."

A good grasp of rural Italian culture has been essential throughout. "Our producers appreciate that these eccentric Brits speak their language, farm their land, understand artisan food and the nuances of their culture. The fact we're also artisan producers ourselves hasn't hurt either – our endeavours arise from mutual respect between us and the producers we've partnered with," he continues.

Peri and David are still as active as ever and have a few new exciting products coming to market soon, including an amazing chocolate panettone, an entirely new category of semi-fresh herbs (that taste freshly picked but have 6+ months shelf life once opened) and a single-estate organic Taralli using ancient wheat cultivars. They plan to continue making their premium extra virgin olive oil long into the future.

> "As long as we and our partners endeavour to leave the farmlands we tend in better condition to how we received them, we will retire happy"

A word on sustainability

David explains, "In the early eighties, a master olive pruner of local legend said something to me that made a lasting impression: 'This land and these trees were here long before us. They nourish and provide for us and our families. We're but their temporary custodians, tasked with helping them continue to flourish long after we're gone'".

"This man was taught olive husbandry by his father, who had learnt from his own father and so on; this was the continuation of an oral tradition stretching back some 8,000 years, to when humankind first began domesticating this marvellous, health-giving evergreen.

"This holistic, sustainable way of relating to the lands that feed us is central to countless agricultural communities across the planet and will continue to inform our decisions both as producers and brand curators," he continues. "As long as we and our partners endeavour to leave the farmlands we tend in better condition to how we received them, we will retire happy".





COMMENTATORS



MARIA WHITEHEAD
HAWKSHEAD RELISH



LAURENCE EDWARDS
BLACK MOUNTAIN HONEY



AL OVERTON
PLANET ORGANIC



MIKE DUCKWORTH
NUTCESSITY



PAUL GARROD
SKOULIKAS BEDFORD

SWEET SUCCESS

The next generation of jams, honeys and nut butters aren't just toast-toppers, they're versatile storecupboard stalwarts too

While a slice of toast smothered with jam will always be a go-to treat for many come breakfast-time, today's consumers are using conserves and other sweet and savoury spreads in more inventive ways than ever before. Perhaps we have lockdowns to thank for forcing shoppers to become more experimental with the jars in their cupboards, but whether or not this is the case one thing is for certain: the era of innovative spread usage is here. As well as being more open-minded when it comes to the uses of the jarred jams, honeys and spreads they have stored in their cupboards year-round, the new habits we've all got into during the last 18 months – whether we've been home-working, home-schooling or home-cooking much-loved and missed dishes from our favourite restaurants – have created new occasions to enjoy even the most simple of products.

Take jam for example. Hawkshead Relish, the Lake District-based hub of all things preserves and condiments, found that the classic occasions in which customers would enjoy their products were growing in impact throughout the past year. "Baking was huge in 2020 and we saw a large uptake in sales reflecting that," says Maria Whitehead, co-owner of Hawkshead Relish, "but also people at home with more time on their hands would bake and have breakfast instead of dashing out of the door to work. Afternoon tea also took off in lockdown." The flavours of jam that particularly experienced growth in sales are a pretty clear indication of the mindset of Hawkshead Relish's customers at the time of sale. "Especially early on in the first lockdown, when baking and home cooking were at the top of everyone's agenda, 'safe' flavours were popular with those seeking out comfort foods. Since then we've been selling more indulgent flavours such as our Sour Cherry & Prosecco and Mojito Marmalade." Indeed, the demand within the UK market for nostalgia-tinged, classically British flavours has led to the business launching a range of new flavours including Blackberry & Apple, Rhubarb & Ginger and Strawberry & Rhubarb.

Even these traditional flavours saw increasingly innovative uses as 2020 wore on. "With the shortages last year we all rediscovered the treasure trove of flavours hidden in our cupboards, and we've seen a huge increase of our jams being used in everything from salad dressings to cocktails. Hawkshead Relish's cookbook, *Embellish With Relish*, is full of recipes to inspire home cooks to become more creative with the preserves in their cupboards. Indeed, the book was recently reprinted due to sheer demand for innovative ways to make use of storecupboard condiments.

An appreciation for better

Hannah Anderson, managing director at 44 Foods, believes that the days when jams and spreads were the ugly sisters of the breakfast table have long gone. "The best way to light up any breakfast table is with a supporting cast of luxury jams, unique spreads and perfect preserves," she explains.

"Back in the 70s and 80s a jar of Robertson's was all you may have needed, but these days people are prepared to spend more in order to give their brekkies the wow factor. Just as our barbecues are now packed with rare breed sausages and exotic fruit punches, breakfast has had a makeover and provenance is huge. And it's not just breakfast either. A traditional Victoria sponge is given a new lease of life with some luxury filling rather than supermarket-own spread and the same goes for Bakewell tarts."

44 Foods, a nationwide farm shop which pays a fair price to suppliers in order to attract the best quality, has signed up brands such as Thursday Cottage and Black Bee Honey in order to give customers the very best on the market.

"With lockdown in the main giving people more money in their pocket, we are seeing increasing numbers of people push the boat out when it comes to ensuring quality throughout their storecupboard staples," says Hannah. "And after such a tough year, who can blame them wanting a little more luxury in their lives?"

The sweet spot

A storecupboard-favourite, honey is one of the most versatile sweet spreads out there, so it's no wonder that it's become one of consumers' culinary saviours over the past few months. Naveed Bashir, co-founder of Maters & Co, has found that the business's customers have been particularly experimental when it comes to using their range of honeys. "There are numerous ways to use honey," he says, "and our customers are using it for things such as marinades, glazes, baking, hot drinks, on desserts, in mocktails, biscuits, granola, on pancakes and yoghurts." Despite its day-long versatility, traditional is best when it comes to honey shoppers. "Breakfast is certainly the most common occasion for our honey," explains Naveed.

"I expect sales of honey to increase," says Al Overton, buying director at Planet Organic, "but more as a cooking ingredient than something to spread on crumpets. The new cooking-heavy approach from consumers is great news for Laurence Edwards, bee farmer at Black Mountain Honey, home of Hot Fire Honey. The product came about as the result of a collaboration

> "Nut butters have really boomed as a category and become a staple for many more people, rather than just a sandwich filling for kids"



with a local pizza company, who suggest that it's a perfect pairing for pepperoni pizza. "Hot Honey has long been a 'thing' in the USA," he explains. "It's been made popular by drizzling on woodfired pizzas, southern fried chicken and American BBQ." American-inspired trends aside, "the UK honey market is definitely changing at a rapid rate," he told *Speciality Food*. "We believe consumers are placing greater importance on provenance and ethical manufacture, and that they are more adventurous with their product purchases and willing to try new products and flavours." Laurence also suggests serving the honey alongside cheese, and even as an accompaniment to sweet dishes like chocolate cheesecake.

From commodity to gourmet option

"Nut butters is the area of greatest change," says Al Overton, buying director at Planet Organic. "It has gone from a commodity category of peanut butter to a broad category with lots of nuts and seeds being used." Nut butters are another product for which versatility has been key to its success over the past 18 months. "It has really boomed as a category and become a staple for many more people, rather than just a sandwich filling for kids," says Al.

According to Mike Duckworth, founder and director of Nutcessity, as well as becoming increasingly confident when it comes to using nut butters in new and different ways, shoppers are branching out into previously unchartered products – often led by health requirements and desires. "Peanut butter is still number one, but almond butter, cashew butter and more experimental varieties are growing in popularity as consumers turn towards incorporating lots of different mineral and vitamin combinations into their diets," he says. "As people become educated as to what their body needs, they seek out ways of introducing such ingredients into their diets in fuss-free ways."

THE UK **NUT & SEED** SPREAD MARKET IS **WORTH** OVER **£140M**, WITH **GROWTH** OF **10%** BETWEEN **2015-2020**

SOURCE: EUROMONITOR

According to Mike, the consumer move towards healthy options has "completely transformed the market. In the 'sweet spreads' market, Euromonitor data shows us that the UK nut and seed spread market is worth over £140m, with growth of 10% between 2015-2020 (versus 2% for jams/preserves)." This growth is set to continue, not least thanks to the continuous development of new and exciting products. "I think we'll see many more seed spreads appear, to complement the popularity of tahini, and a much bigger focus on ingredient origin and sourcing policies," says Mike.

For Paul Garrod, managing director of Skoulikas Bedford, now is the optimum time to launch a range of nut and seed butters. "Consumers are always looking for new and different products," he told *Speciality Food*, "and we felt that combining the experience and expertise we have in sesame products, and with the growing consumption of nut butters, we could launch an exciting range of products which are a twist on the 'normal' products you find in the marketplace". There are four products in the range – Almond & Sesame Butter, Cashew & Sesame Butter, Cocoa & Sesame Butter and 4 Nut Butter – and, in line with the consumer appetite for internationally-inspired foods, Paul's team has chosen this sesame-rich line up thanks to its popularity in different recipes around the world. "It offers many health benefits, and its smooth texture combines well with almonds and cashews to give a creamy texture and distinctive taste."

As well as satisfying the consumer demand for world foods, the range is ideal for shoppers following a healthy lifestyle, making it a strong contender in the ever-evolving marketplace.

STOCK CHECK

2021 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE



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Cheese Talk

Being a lockdown lifeline: "Each lockdown was slightly different and required different services for the community"



RORY MELLIS,
I.J. MELLIS

From our first shop on Victoria St. in 1993, to the opening of our cheese lounge in 2018, our family has always focused on serving a loyal local customer base. It's what keeps us thriving.

With most of our shops located in secondary trading areas, away from tourists, we're able to regularly speak and interact with our neighbours that visit. Building these interpersonal connections has also enabled us to better understand and cater to the needs of the locals that buy from us.

The shift in consumers' buying habits over the past few years has also helped. Increased popularity of shopping locally and independently has given local small businesses like ours a chance not only to survive, but flourish. In the last year, independent food businesses have benefited from an increase of new customers, with many of them coming from larger supermarkets. As a result, we've been able to play around with our range, adding new products that reflect and cater to local tastes. And in response to shortages in larger retailers, we also adapted our offerings to include staple pantry items we hadn't previously stocked, like pasta and milk – these were two of our most popular products (other than cheese) sold in our shops during the lockdown period.

In recent times, the second trading areas have slowly become a destination for many visitors and popular living areas for those from the area. Even in the last year, there has been lots of new local coffee shops, delis and bars open nearby to support the residential communities in Edinburgh and Glasgow specifically. This really gives the area a sense of community as all the businesses work together to help recommend places to eat, drink and shop – it's a great way of keeping the area thriving.

A large part of our business is direct supply to restaurants, bars, and cafés in Scotland and afar, which obviously came to a standstill during the pandemic. This inspired us to launch a free local delivery service using the drivers we employ for our trade sector. The sales increased online and balanced the loss of our trade customers which helped us massively. It allowed us to keep our team employed and supply the I.J. Mellis customers who were shielding. Although the past 15 months have been hard, with having to adapt to new guidelines to ensure that customers feel safe shopping with us, we're so grateful for the continual support we've received.

The future for us here at I.J. Mellis looks bright, thanks in massive part to our customers – old and new! We recently reopened our Cheese Lounge, and have received fantastic reviews so far, and we reopened our Victoria Street store just off the Grassmarket.

With so many new customers discovering the world of farmhouse produce over the past year, we can only hope that people will continue to shop small and support their local producers. We have all had more time over the past year to appreciate the skill, time and effort put into the making of farmhouse produce, with many of us opting to shop small in the hope that these businesses didn't disappear for good throughout the pandemic. We are also more conscious and considerate regarding where our food comes from than ever before. We hope that this current trend in shopping habits and appreciation of small scale and farmhouse produce continues for years to come.



GEMMA WILLIAMS,
THE LITTLE CHEESEMONGER

A year after the start of the first lockdown, my customers or friends and relatives of my customers still say to me, "We had a great cheese box delivered to us in lockdown, thank you". It's really stuck in the minds of the community; it must have felt like a treat or a special occasion. Something that cheered them when things seemed so uncertain. I'm not going to pretend to you that I did that out of the goodness of my heart initially, heck no. Just like that, Rhuddlan, our little village community, had turned into something out of a Wild West movie – all that was missing was the tumble weed.

I was going to have to get to my customers. Something I wasn't used to doing on a larger scale. I quickly created some exceptional cheese selection offers on my website and offered a 10 mile radius for free local delivery. Closing the shop to customers (not that there were any) had its benefits. I could spend the morning and afternoon making the orders for my new 'Lockdown Selection' then get out and about in the car to deliver them. Family members of our most loyal customers who are in their twilight years started getting in touch – "Please pop round on Mum with some cheese?" – and I started to realise that it was my duty to not only deliver their order but make sure they seemed well and happy; not just drop and run like an Amazon delivery.

Sometimes after tracking around roads and hills I didn't know existed, getting lost and thinking I've spent any profit made that day on fuel, I remembered that the takeaway of my cheese was making someone's day. One occasion comes to mind: a local charity group for visually impaired ladies who I've done cheese tastings for in the past asked me to deliver them all a little hamper. It took me most of the day to get around all their houses. They were delighted by not only being sent a gift but having a visitor, and they remembered me from the cheese tasting.

I was only able to do this with the government grants; financially it wasn't profitable.

Each lockdown was slightly different and required different services for the community. I had to adapt my courier service to be more suitable to do the local deliveries myself, but also to be able to offer national deliveries. I found a more competitive courier service and did some research on delivery costs. My website, which in previous years I'd felt was a waste of money because it was hardly ever used, was now busy with orders. People were sending gifts locally and nationally. Locals would send over a list of birthdays that needed orders dispatching.

Another drastic change was doing Zoom tastings. 'Tasting Packs' were mainly picked up by our local customers we would usually see, but also as far as Cardiff and Scotland. Groups of friends booked us for private Zoom tastings too, and we'd have a non-snobby fun cheese and wine experience.

At Christmas I opened my second premises. Rhuddlan had been too small for some time, but with the added web orders a bigger shop was needed and Rhuddlan could stay open in its strength as a little community shop. I was worried opening a new shop only 15 minutes away in the car would affect our little community-based shop in Rhuddlan, but no. The customers still tell us even now that their decision to come in and support us was because they want their high street to survive.



MEET THE CHEESEMAKER

Richard Newton-Jones, commercial director at Snowdonia Cheese Company, introduces Rock Star: the cheesemaker's brand new vintage cave-aged Cheddar with provenance at its core



Snowdonia has consistently produced some of Britain's best-loved cheeses since its launch in 2001. The family business, which began life on the edge of the lush and rugged Snowdonia National Park and is run by the sons of third-generation dairy farmers, is passionate about offering cheese lovers and retailers a delicious blend of tradition and innovation. Since its launch, this carefully crafted proposition has earned the business a multitude of awards, including accolades from the British Cheese Awards, the World Cheese Awards, the International Cheese Awards and France's prestigious Mondial Du Fromage.

Its most recent honour, the Queen's Award, was presented to the Snowdonia team in recognition of its outstanding achievements in export; not only does the cheesemaker supply some 2,000-plus cheesemongers and independent retailers, but it is now enjoyed in 25 countries across the globe. Consumers and industry alike will be familiar with Snowdonia's outstanding offering. From its inaugural launch, Black Bomber, to its more recent Truffle Trove – extra mature Cheddar with Black Summer truffle – and other flavour-filled and eye-catching waxed truckles, the range has been a standout success across the UK for well over a decade.

Provenance at its heart

Snowdonia's latest creation was not only formed within the cheesemaker's picturesque location, it has it at its core. Rock Star, Snowdonia's first ever vintage cave-aged Cheddar, is imbued with its environment thanks to being matured in the Welsh slate caverns in the heart of its home region. The business's master cheesemakers explored the local area in search of the ideal location for cheese maturation, and found it buried deep within the mountains of North Wales, surrounded by Snowdonia National Park and the protected Dark Sky Reserve.

The slate mines they discovered were ideal for the task at hand; the underground cave environment is perfect for cheese-ageing as a result of its consistent temperature, high levels of humidity and low barometric pressure. These conditions help to develop distinctively rich and complex flavours within the cheese – an exceptional taste which can only be achieved through cave ageing. This move to the mountains, although a brand-new development for Snowdonia, has centuries of heritage behind it; located 500 feet underground, the caves feature 25 miles of walkways, many of which were hand-carved when its ground was first broken in around 1836.

"We're very proud to introduce our first ever vintage cave-aged Cheddar," says Richard Newton-Jones, commercial director at Snowdonia Cheese Company. "It's a real labour of love to mature a cheese deep underground in such a remote setting and for us, it's absolutely worth it. The flavour is stunning and the setting is incredible – it's a real honour to work with the natural landscape in this way, surrounded by the majestic beauty of Snowdonia."

The true taste of Snowdonia

Rock Star has credentials to be proud of even before it reaches the slate caves. Crafted by expert cheesemakers using a very special recipe and profile, only the finest is selected to be transferred deep into the caves. Once there, it completes its 18 month maturation in sealed slate chambers, 500 feet underground, for the optimum development of the cheese's unique flavour and characteristics.

The result is an impressively deep and complex flavour, moreish savoury aroma and a smooth, creamy texture with the occasional crystalline crunch: a sure sign of a well-aged cheese. Its combination of umami and caramel notes and savoury tang make it a must-have on the cheeseboard of any taste-lover, and it's the perfect partner for a range of accompaniments. For the ultimate Rock Star experience, present alongside a rich and fruity red wine such as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon or port, a rich and dry white wine – for example, a white Burgundy – or a dry farmhouse cider. It's delicious served with crusty sourdough or walnut bread as a fondue or as part of a traditional ploughman's lunch.

"Rock Star is sure to elevate special occasions with family and friends," explains Richard. "It brings a real sense of luxury and wow-factor to the cheeseboard and we have no doubt it will prove an extremely popular addition to the Snowdonia Cheese range."

A retail favourite

As well as being the centrepiece of any foodie's cheeseboard, Rock Star is destined to be a standout success on the cheese counter, too – its cobalt-coloured wax casing is a fitting tribute to the historical mines which host its finely tuned ageing process – and its makers have no doubt that it will appeal to its legions of dedicated fans. These consumers are bound to be impressed by Rock Star's sustainability credentials, too - the caves which provide the final notes to this finely-tuned cheese are entirely self-sufficient thanks to two hydroelectric power plants.

With its perfectly curated combination of heritage and innovation, and a smorgasbord of truly great cheese, Snowdonia is set to set cheese counters alight for years to come.

> "It's a real labour of love to mature a cheese deep underground in such a remote setting and for us, it's absolutely worth it. The flavour is stunning and the setting is incredible – it's a real honour to work with the natural landscape in this way, surrounded by the majestic beauty of Snowdonia"



"Keeping it real"



JAMES GRANT
NO2 POUND STREET

For a few years now, I have been travelling the length and breadth of the UK in search of real artisan cheese. So what does artisan mean? Well, loosely, a person or company that makes high-quality or distinctive products in small quantities, usually by hand or by using other traditional methods.

Over the last decade our little cheese and wine shop has only ever supported genuine artisanal producers. As professional cheesemongers, part of our job, much like a sommelier, is to know all about the cheese, how it is made, who the cheesemaker is, the back-story, the animal used to produce the milk, the grazing (are they using herbal lays, cover crops etc), whether the milk is heat treated or pasteurised and most importantly the taste.

Good cheesemongers are without doubt ambassadors for cheesemakers and put great producers on the map. This naturally encourages other good cheese shops, wholesalers and delis to buy.

One thing that helps to make a great cheese shop is by choosing cheese from producers that connect with you personally. These people are connected to their product and are as passionate today as they were when they first started. Take for example the Holden family that produces Hafod in Lampeter, James Montgomery in Cadbury, Julie Cheyney in Bungay, or Selina Cairns in Lanarkshire. All of these producers are able to connect with the cheesemonger personally and totally get the importance of our role.

When what started as an incredible artisan cheese starts spilling itself onto the shelves of shops like Budgens, Tesco, Sainsburys and so on, you begin to wonder about how production to keep up with demand might then be impacting on the environment and quality of the cheese. Please don't get me wrong, there are several great artisan cheesemakers that have a presence in supermarkets. However, what makes them different from other so-called artisan cheesemakers is that they stay true to artisanal farming, sustainability, environmental impact and production methods and personally connect with the cheesemongers that helped get them to get recognised for their cheese in the first place.

Imagine walking into your local supermarket as I did recently and seeing a wonderful artisan cheese being sold some 20% lower than the producer's recommended retail price and as sold through their website. This only undervalues the cheese and demonstrates how supermarkets have operated over the years: by undercutting small businesses such as ourselves. Ask yourself, do you want to be part of something that helped to close independents? SMEs are the backbone of the UKs workforce, and now is the time to start supporting them. Why support faceless producers and supermarkets?

Another challenge that we face is certain wholesalers who are hellbent on selling to anyone that asks, such as supermarkets, and do not consider the impact that this may have on the true value of the products. Supermarkets like Budgens, a franchise owned by Tesco, allow a small percentage of local produce to be sold – this is to give the impression of supporting local and small producers. Selling these products at lower prices only serves to undervalue the items' true worth. The small percentage of local and national artisan produce sold in Budgens at lower prices does not impact their bottom line. Supermarkets buy en masse and dictate what they pay producers. For example, milk prices are managed nationally by the supermarkets; this affects the way milk is produced up and down the country and leads to shorter lifespans on livestock as a result of over milking due to the price per litre that supermarkets offer dairy farmers. As small business operators, we need to spread the word on how these multinationals operate. Do you really want to help fund the purchase of their CEO's third home and yacht?

As small business retailers of quality food and drink we have to be vigilant and innovative to be able to fight the good fight and keep it real. Those great producers of cheese need us and, with the greatest respect, should remember that we helped to get them recognition. As a retailer of cheese and a delicatessen, your passion and taste should and needs to be fully appreciated – we too work very hard.

> "SMEs are the backbone of the UKs workforce, and now is the time to start supporting them"

New sustainable cheese factory to create 100 jobs

Mona Island Dairy on Anglesey is set to convert its existing facility into a £20m cheese factory, creating 100 new jobs. Due to open in September, the site will be the most sustainable dairy factory in Europe, running solely on renewable energy.

The investment includes a £3m grant from the Welsh Government's Business Innovation and Tourism Escalator Scheme (BITES). Once complete, the factory will be the most modern site of its kind in all of Europe, and it will be capable of producing 7,000 tons of cheese a year. What's more, biodegradable wastes such as milk residue will be processed at the nearby Mona Biogas plant on Anglesey. "This will make it the most environmentally friendly factory in Europe, running completely on renewable electricity," said managing director Ronald Akkerman. The factory will produce Cheddar, Gouda, and Edam, as well as a range of artisan cheeses using locally produced milk.

"It is good to see that milk from local farms will be used in the production of the cheese, which will be a boost for the dairy industry, and it is great to see the measures taken to minimise the impact on the environment," said Lesley Griffiths, the minister responsible for rural affairs and North Wales.



NEWS IN BRIEF

TRADE DEAL WITH NON-EU NATIONS TO BOOST CHEESE EXPORTS

The UK government has revealed it signed a post-Brexit trade deal with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Liz Truss, secretary of state for international trade, said the deal would cut tariffs on UK farm products, such as cheese and meat, boosting exports. Trade between the four non-European Union nations is already worth £21.6bn. However, Norwegian farmers have voiced their concerns over opening their domestic market to British cheese and beef imports. Despite this, the Norwegian prime minister said the deal "allows growth in trade for both our countries".

CHEESE PRODUCER JOINS REFILL MOVEMENT

Gloucestershire-based dairy farmers and producers of Godsells Cheese have shown that refill stations are for more than rice and pasta, as the dairy farmers introduced a station where customers could refill bottles with fresh milk from the farm. The move is estimated to have saved 13,000 single-use plastic milk cartons from entering the market. The refill machine, alongside a vending machine offering other fresh produce, is available for customers to access 24 hours, seven days a week.





Buffalo Farm makes Scotland's first Buffalo Mozzarella cheese

Steve Mitchell from the Buffalo Farm is poised to put Scotland on the map for Buffalo Mozzarella after getting the green light to begin production from his farm in Fife.

Steve's aim is to create a "world-class" Buffalo Mozzarella, a first across Scotland. Previously, the farm was producing buffalo meat and burgers from its small herd of water buffalo. Steve's dream was put on hold recently when a major investor pulled out at the last minute, forcing him to sell a large part of his herd.

However, thanks to a crowdfunding campaign which raised £800,000 he was able to build a custom-designed dairy parlour and Mozzarella production facility just outside Kirkcaldy in Fife, where production is now underway.

"Provenance is so important in food, and never more so than in Buffalo Mozzarella. Our cheese is produced in a matter of hours from milking to finished balls of Mozzarella," Steve said. "As a result, you can really smell and taste the freshness compared to one from an overseas producer that has had to travel for days – I am absolutely thrilled at the quality we have achieved.

"We have been given the opportunity to create something quite special and the team is determined to make Scotland a force to be reckoned with in the world Buffalo Mozzarella market," Steve continued. Lucy Husband, market development and business engagement director at Scotland Food & Drink, said the Buffalo Farm team's ambition has been "nothing short of inspiring".

She continued, "This is another excellent example of how diverse Scotland's larder truly is, which is only made possible by having producers like The Buffalo Farm."

Canada's Saputo buys Wensleydale Dairy Products

Saputo, the Canadian dairy giant, has grown its presence in the UK with a deal to acquire Wensleydale Dairy Products for £23m. Earlier this year, the business snapped up dairy-free cheese maker Bute Island Foods, and in 2019 it bought the Cathedral City owner Dairy Crest.

Wensleydale sources its milk from 40 local farms and uses its own unique cheesemaking starter cultures to create its range of speciality and regional cheeses out of two facilities in North Yorkshire.

In a statement, a spokesperson for Wensleydale said the shareholders and directors were delighted to announce the deal. "Following the creation of the business in 1992 we are immensely proud of the journey over the last 29 years and would like to express our gratitude to all of the staff – many of whom have been with us throughout its existence," the statement continued. "We are now equally proud to be handing over the reins to Saputo, and are confident that they will continue to build upon the legacy built by our sadly departed former MD David Hartley."

Lino A. Saputo, CEO of Saputo, said, "Wensleydale Dairy Products is home to an immense amount of passion, care, and tradition. I'm delighted to welcome the entire team into the Saputo family."

CHEESE FACT FILE...

BERNER HOBELKASE

- **Country of origin:** Switzerland
- **Milk:** Raw cow's
- **Region:** Bernese Oberland
- **Description:** Sought-after Alpine cheese produced in small quantities in the summer months. Intense flavour full of sweet caramel notes.



UK in Cheddar trade surplus with Europe

The UK is now exporting more Cheddar to the European Union than it imports after the effects of Covid-19 and Brexit hit trade. While both the UK's Cheddar imports and exports have been disrupted this year, exports were less affected, causing Cheddar trade with the EU to reach a 470 tonne surplus between January and April.

It represents the first time a multi-month surplus for UK-EU Cheddar trade has occurred in more than 20 years, according to the AHDB. Plus, because the UK imports Cheddar almost exclusively from Europe, including non-EU trade boosts the surplus up to 7,400 tonnes more Cheddar exported than important over the same period.

PAIRING IDEAS



SVETLANA KUKHARCHUK
THE CHEESE LADY

WHAT'S ON YOUR DREAM CHEESEBOARD?
La Tur, Munster, Appenzeller Edel Wurzig, Corra Linn and Rogue River Blue.

WHAT'S YOUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE CHEESE PAIRING?
Délice des Crémiers with Champagne.

ANY UNUSUAL PAIRINGS YOU'D RECOMMEND?
Burrata drizzled with chestnut honey on toasted date and walnut bread.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE TO DRINK WITH CHEESE?
Mostly wine – the colour depends on the cheeses served, but an elegant oaky Chardonnay is always a good choice for me as it is very cheese-friendly.

WHAT MUST-HAVE CHEESE KIT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?
My only must-have is a great board to serve cheese on – I recommend both slate and olive wood varieties.

WHILE **CHEDDAR** EXPORTS TO **THE EU** WERE **DOWN 39%**, IMPORTS FELL **47%**

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CENTRE



This top notch cheeseboard will satisfy all lovers of great cheese



1 SHEPHERDS PURSE BLUEMIN WHITE

Made from quality Yorkshire cows' milk, and matured in carefully managed ripening stores, Bluemin White is a 3 star Great Taste award winner. A blue coated cheese with a creamy rich interior, it's incredibly versatile for pairing with wine.

shepherdspurse.co.uk



2 TREUR KAAS MÈKKERTALER ORGANIC GOAT CHEESE

Thanks to pure craftmanship, this delicious goat cheese with beautiful round eyes has been created with a special recipe. It is a goat cheese with a perfectly balanced taste, characteristic and with a light sweetness, combined with the mild taste of goat cheese.

treurkaas.nl



3 PETER'S YARD CRISPBREAD SELECTION BOX

A selection of sourdough crispbreads created to complement a well-balanced cheeseboard. Made from simple, natural ingredients including organic flour and milk, they are then baked until perfectly crisp. The three varieties include Spelt & Poppy Seed, Charcoal & Rye and Original.

petersyard.com



4 SNOWDONIA CHEESE ROCK STAR



Rock Star, Snowdonia Cheese Company's first ever vintage cave-aged Cheddar, has been matured to perfection within Welsh slate caverns in the heart of Snowdonia. The result is irresistibly creamy with a distinctively rich and complex flavour.
snowdoniacheese.co.uk

5 SNOWDONIA CHEESE RHUBARB & GIN CHUTNEY



Zingy Rhubarb meets aromatic London dry gin in Snowdonia Cheese Company's new Rhubarb & Gin chutney. Fruity and sweet with botanical notes and just a hint of warm stem ginger, it is the perfect accompaniment to cheese and charcuterie.
snowdoniacheese.co.uk

6 LE GRUYÈRE AOP



A popular cheese from the western cantons of Switzerland, the award-winning Gruyère AOP is revered for its unique and delicious flavour. Made with raw milk sourced from a small cluster of dairy farmers in the region, which is transformed by master cheesemakers using customs shared throughout the generations.
gruyere.com/en

7 BOOK & BUCKET CHEESE COMPANY SHAKESPEARE



An award-winning Brie-style cheese from Dorset, Shakespeare is a white bloom-rinded cheese created using sheep's milk sourced from Dorset and Devon farms. Its pure white appearance and perfectly balanced flavour are the result of quality fresh milk plus careful storing and aftercare.
thebookandbucketcheesecompany.co.uk

THE CHEESE SECTOR AFTER COVID

Following an unprecedented year for the artisan cheese industry in 2020, *Speciality Food* speaks to cheesemongers, makers and distributors to discover how the sector is approaching the Covid recovery

COMMENTATORS



DR JUDITH BRYANS
DAIRY UK



PETER ALVIS
RABDF

In the 2020 edition of *Speciality Food's Cheese Report*, the effects of Covid-19 were only beginning to be felt across the dairy sector. While worrisome challenges were presenting themselves – in the form of shuttered hospitality markets, a hamstrung supply chain, mismatched supply and demand and staff shortages – glimmers of hope were beginning to appear, too. "At the very outset, the sudden closure of hospitality and out-of-home foodservice was an issue," explains Dr Judith Bryans, chief executive of Dairy UK. "However, the increased retail demand as people ate and cooked at home was helpful in offsetting some of the negative effects. As time went on, both retail demand, and then takeaway demand, were helpful." Indeed, Amy Price, senior food and drink analyst at Mintel, says in the group's most recent cheese market research that for the sector overall, Covid-19 actually provided a boost to cheese sales.

For the year ending January 2021, the AHDB found that total retail sales of cheese increased in both volume and value terms, providing a record year. Regionals, speciality and Continental cheeses as well as soft white cheese saw volume uplifts of more than 20%, while Cheddar rose by 15%. "All in all, the dairy industry coped well with Covid, kept product moving and ensured supplies to customers and consumers in difficult circumstances. We proved to be a flexible and resilient sector," Judith says.

Changing behaviours

Despite these positive statistics, smaller producers in particular have faced challenging circumstances. "Any farmer supplying a processor who has been involved in the foodservice sector has been affected, smaller niche processing businesses on farms have in many cases been badly affected, as any product they had produced was difficult to place in their normal market and they did not have access to the supermarkets where demand was strong," Peter Alvis, chairman of the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF), explains. Yet changing consumer behaviours have buoyed speciality cheesemakers who could successfully shift their products to retailers. "Many farm shops have thrived during this time, with local shoppers supporting local products," Peter says. And this newfound taste for locally made cheese is likely to last. "Dairy is faring very well with consumers," Judith says. "The first lockdown saw consumers move towards indulgence, then to comfort food and foods that were versatile and good for cooking with. After that, health came back on the agenda. In all instances, dairy has tracked well with consumers."

The Brexit challenge

As the impacts of Covid fade, there are still other challenges that the cheese sector must learn to cope with, including the impact of Brexit. The most recent data from the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) showed that exports to the EU almost halved in the first three months of the year compared to the same period in 2020. Cheese sales were the hardest hit, down a whopping 72% in the first quarter of 2021 compared with 2019. "The additional processes and the burden of administration in terms of exporting to the EU has caused issues for companies," Judith said. "The cost burden associated with all of the additional admin is also an issue affecting the bottom line. Some smaller companies have said they will no longer export, or at least not for now, because the costs have had quite an impact on their businesses." Whether it's small producers exporting their cheeses or retailers looking to



> "The dairy industry coped well with Covid, kept product moving and ensured supplies to customers and consumers in difficult circumstances. We proved to be a flexible and resilient sector"

THE **CHEESE** MARKET WAS PREDICTED TO SEE **15.5%** GROWTH IN VOLUME SALES TO **434 MILLION KG** AND **16%** GROWTH IN VALUE **SALES** TO **£3.2 BILLION** IN **2020**

SOURCE: MINTEL



import artisan Continental varieties, Brexit has disrupted the usual flow of business between the UK and the rest of Europe. Peter agrees that many smaller businesses have "effectively stopped exporting" due to new Brexit rules. On the flip side, however, worldwide demand for dairy has been strong. "Despite the trade figures for export to the EU being down, dairy has great export potential globally," Judith says. Indeed, the Asian market for cheese is growing, and interest in British-made products is high.

Brexit is also impacting labour on dairy farms. A report by the RABDF highlights the importance of skilled EU dairy workers on UK farms. Following its most recent survey, almost half of dairy farmers said they employed foreign workers in the last five years, and of those, 74% said they did so because they couldn't recruit from the UK, up from 63% who said the same in 2016.

"Access to foreign labour is extremely important for the continued function of our industry," the RABDF said in its report. "The tasks dairy workers undertake on-farm require skill, experience and in some cases formal qualifications. It is important the Government understands this and can distinguish dairy workers from workers in other agricultural sectors," it concluded.

A brighter future

While the cheese industry works to adapt to a new trading environment caused by Covid and Brexit, one area posing opportunities for those who are ready to act is sustainability. Consumers can expect the dairy sector to be more front and centre in discussions about environmental credentials in the years to come, says Judith, including explaining "how we're tackling our environmental impacts and our commitments to continuous sustainable development, but also showcasing more about the positive contribution we make to biodiversity, the circular economy and to all pillars of sustainability. This is something that's important to the whole sector and also to our consumers." The sector has already had successes in this regard. "UK dairy farmers have been part of a major effort to successfully reduce antibiotic use in food production, and we need to take this drive forward in reducing emissions to meet the challenges of the Government's Clean Air Strategy," Peter says. "There is a lot of work currently being done to ensure we have the correct data and practices in UK dairy farming to reduce emissions, increase sustainability and still produce wholesome and nutritious food for the UK population."

It is clear that improving production practices in line with sustainability targets will not only guarantee a more environmentally friendly way of producing cheese, but it will also align with the continuously shifting desires of customers.

"Opportunities will continue to present themselves for UK dairy farmers as consumer demands change in the UK and export customers want to purchase the high-quality produce made by UK dairy farmers to some of the highest animal welfare and environmental standards in the world," Peter says.

42% OF DAIRY FARMERS HIRED **FOREIGN WORKERS** IN THE LAST **FIVE YEARS**

SOURCE: RABDF SURVEY

CHEESEMAKERS FACE BRIGHTER OUTLOOK

After Covid inspired more consumers to enjoy artisan cheese, producers are optimistic about the future of their industry – despite the challenges

When the pandemic struck, the economy came to a grinding halt almost overnight. Tim Jones, the maker of Lincolnshire Poacher Cheese, tells *Speciality Food* that for the first time ever, pallets of cheese were sent back, and milk produced on the dairy farm went unsold for three months. "We were suddenly faced with either throwing [the milk] away or turning it into cheese that we didn't know we were going to be able to sell," he explains. But like so many others, Tim turned a challenge into an opportunity. The team shifted from producing five days a week to seven, and embarked on an experiment to create a new, slower maturing cheese. "We wanted to kick the problem down the line, because we didn't know what the future was going to look like," Tim says.

New routes to market

More than a year on from those moments, producers must still navigate uncertainty. But many businesses responded with the same innovative spirit as Lincolnshire Poacher. "As a company, we've learned not to be blinkered by strategy," says Jessica Kimber-Holloway, commercial operations director at Godminster. "This year required the team to think more broadly about company survival." Plus, being small has its upsides. "We could be really agile about how we responded to the situation," Jessica says. This forward-thinking mentality helped many small cheesemakers seize onto new opportunities. "In early 2020, we were actually planning to reduce our gifting range to focus on some key SKUs, but after the surge in online gifting we found ourselves increasing our offering to invent ways to supply fresh demands," Jessica explains.

There have also been opportunities online. Catherine Mead, chair of the Specialist Cheesemakers Association and owner of Lynher Dairies, found success with e-commerce. "Online became quite a significant route to market for cheesemakers." Through new modes of working, Catherine says producers found ways to engage with consumers. "Covid has brought us closer to our customers," she says. "We are talking directly to our customers, and we're not just talking to them about buying cheese, we're talking to them about how we produce cheese, and the reason for buying British speciality as opposed to some of the products they may have been buying previously." This budding interest in speciality cheeses is driving more customers to the sector, and as restaurants, exports and events all begin to open, many cheesemakers are actually worrying about demand soaring too high. "I haven't spoken to a cheesemaker who is not very, very busy at the moment," Catherine says. "It's looking like it's going to be a very big summer for us."

Alison Williamson of Whyte Wytch cheese has also experienced

COMMENTATORS



CATHERINE MEAD
SPECIALIST CHEESEMAKERS ASSOCIATION



TIM JONES
LINCOLNSHIRE POACHER



GARY BRADSHAW
HAMM TUN



ALISON WILLIAMSON
WHYTE WYTCH



JESSICA KIMBER-HOLLOWAY
GODMINSTER

R

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01892 838999 or
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strong uptake, and she believes a time will come soon when her microdairy is unable to meet demand. A bit of lucky timing helped bolster her business – Alison opened her dairy in March 2021, just when the lockdown reopening began. "The first weekend of opening, I sold so much cheese because everybody wanted to spend, and it was their first weekend out." While that has since slowed somewhat, she remains positive about the opportunities for growth. "I'm really optimistic. I think people are wanting to shop local and get fresh produce."

Planning ahead

Not every producer has been so lucky. When the pandemic struck, Gary Bradshaw of Hamm Tun had just moved to a new premises and was excited about expansion. But Covid-19 flipped everything on its head. "Our small, artisan business has been built on the hospitality sector, so closures due to Covid pretty much closed our business," he explains. "We were running at about 5% of usual sales during the lockdown." And things still aren't quite straightforward for the business even as the industry moves towards recovery. "The hardest aspect is building stock as the investment is significant when the business is not there. We can spend on making the cheese and not realise a penny for four to six months. This made getting ready for the world reopening a real struggle," Gary says. Although he remains in survival mode, a successful crowdfunding campaign helped raise awareness and prove that demand is strong. "This was a massive boost because we ended up getting some very good new customers from the exposure," Gary says.

Hamm Tun is far from the only maker finding challenges in the Covid recovery. "The uncertainty is quite difficult when you're running a business that's working two years in advance," Tim says of Lincolnshire Poacher. "I'm making cheese now for 2023, and nobody can confidently say they know what the world's going to look like and what their sales are going to be, so we're constantly rejigging our estimates. But," he adds, "we're lucky we're in an industry that people are suddenly really interested in." This changing mindset plays into the trends that Tim and other cheesemakers are hoping will evolve into longer-term habits. "People are more interested in taking the time to look into what they're eating, and I think that will continue to some degree. So we're very optimistic about the future."

What's next?

Today, cheesemakers are facing a brighter future after a challenging lockdown period. With the public more engaged than ever in artisan cheese, producers have an opportunity to bring new and exciting products to market. "During lockdown, we kept ourselves incredibly busy developing new products for the Godminster range," Jessica says. "As we emerge out of the pandemic we're now launching our new products into a market that is revitalised and renewed after all the lockdown stagnation."

After adapting to disruptive market forces, Catherine warns makers not to lose their momentum but to continue to showing their resilience. "We've demonstrated through the last 18 months how agile and flexible we are as a sector." Now, cheesemakers can turn this energy to other fresh challenges, like sustainability. The industry has shown that there are real reasons to look to the future with positivity, not least of which is consumers' newfound support for farmhouse cheese. "We saw the British public rally around homegrown British cheese during lockdown, and we know that passion won't go away," Jessica says. "With increasing awareness of how Brexit will impact cheesemakers now as well, we're optimistic that the public will continue to recognise how brilliant and diverse British cheese is."

33% OF **BRITS** SAY THEY WOULD **PAY** MORE FOR **BRITISH-MADE** CHEESE, MAKING IT THE **HIGHEST** RANKING FACTOR

SOURCE: MINTEL



"SUSTAINABILITY IS OUR BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY"

Catherine Mead, Specialist Cheesemakers Association

The biggest threat and the biggest opportunity for cheesemakers lies in our approach to the environment and climate change mitigation. If we sit on our hands and ignore it and hope it goes away, we will fail. We lay ourselves very, very open to criticism because it's well documented that there are areas of our businesses that have significant carbon impacts. However, I think we have two tasks. The first task is to understand where our big carbon deficits are. Where are the areas where we can affect the greatest level of change? And then, against that, we also need to better understand how we contribute, because we are positive contributors, particularly those of us who are farming.

I think we have so many opportunities that are there and available to us now, like no-till farming, widening one's hedges, diversity of grasses and species, water conservation and renewable energy. We can be the masters of our own destiny in looking at sustainable food, and we must all of us embrace that fully and believe in it and get behind it.

THE CHEESE RETAIL REVIVAL LIVES ON

After the strong support seen in 2020, how will cheesemongers maintain the bonds built with cheesemakers and customers going forward?

COMMENTATORS



LISA GOODCHILD
THE COTSWOLD CHEESE CO



BILL DE LA HEY
THE MAINSTREET TRADING COMPANY



MATHEW CARVER
FUNK

Cheesemongers are the all-important conduits between cheesemakers and the British public, and that role was never more important than during the pandemic. When producers struggled to shift stock, retailers stepped in to champion artisan cheeses and educate consumers about why supporting Britain's makers is so important. In turn, cheesemongers saw an outpouring of support from the public, who were energised by the conversations around food that Covid-19 was inspiring and became more interested in shopping locally and supporting producers. Research from Mintel reveals that consumers are increasingly looking to alternative channels to buy their cheese, with 23% reporting they shopped more at local businesses since the start of the pandemic, and 43% shopping more online. These figures demonstrate the exciting opportunity for cheesemongers and delis today.

Lifelines emerge

For The Cotswold Cheese Co, e-commerce played a pivotal role in sales when footfall was low. "The online shop became the reason to keep the doors open. Our online store kept us extremely busy shipping nationally, and we offered free delivery within 10 miles for sales over £25 and click and collect, both of which became so popular we had to buy a new van!" says owner Lisa Goodchild. Cheese retailers who could take advantage of the growing interest in online shopping saw their sales fly, and experts predict that most of the e-commerce growth seen during the pandemic is here to stay. Lisa says support from the community was "amazing" during the pandemic, and the retailer in turn lent its support further up the supply chain. "We tried to do our bit to support cheesemakers and wholesalers and adapted quickly to different delivery and production schedules," Lisa says.

Other industry players began new retail journeys to create in-roads for cheesemakers. "Our mission is to champion British cheese," says Mathew Carver, the director of The Cheese Bar restaurants in London. During lockdown, he started up his first retail establishment, Funk, to continue serving artisan cheeses to the local community. "We felt we had a commitment to keep doing that even when the restaurants were closed, creating opportunities for the cheesemakers that we work with." Demand has been strong, and today Mathew is even looking at opening a second shop.

A new mindset

For Bill de la Hey of The Mainstreet Trading Company, the turning point of the pandemic came when Neal's Yard teamed up with Jamie Oliver to build public support for British cheesemakers through a dedicated



cheese box. In his own shop, Bill began speaking with suppliers to find out which products needed to be sold urgently and was flexible to promote cheeses in surplus. "It was strangely quite exciting," he reflects. With a family history of dairy farming, it was a cause dear to Bill's heart. "I really enjoyed the campaign because you felt really good that you were doing something for the industry." The initiative also changed the way the public saw British farmhouse cheeses. "It was exciting for them as well. Generally, people have been treating themselves a bit, eating better food," he says. "I really feel that the prospects are good." Through Bill's conversations with consumers – and the shop's growing sales – he has found that more and more shoppers are buying cheese from local delis rather than supermarkets.

"We sense a different mindset from our customers, even now," adds Lisa. "There has been a shift to customers wanting to shop more locally and focus on quality. Even after lockdown, our website has remained very busy and customers will patiently wait outside if the shops have too many people already in them."

Looking to the future

Now, as the impact of Covid fades somewhat, retailers have an opportunity to continue building on these relationships with both customers and suppliers.

On building stronger relationships with cheesemakers, Lisa says retailers should speak to their local producers directly. "This will hopefully build a working relationship that will benefit both parties," she says. "The relationship between the cheesemonger and the cheesemakers is symbiotic, and we find that for the cheesemakers who support us directly, we in turn are proud to promote their products and can articulate to the prospective customer the benefits of that particular maker's products."

Cheesemongers can also foster new relationships with customers who are branching out to artisan cheeses. "People are interested in British cheese," says Mathew. "Now more than ever, people care about where their food comes from, so we feel fairly confident. We've seen from our restaurants that more and more people are coming in and know different names of what used to be quite niche British cheeses. People seem to take an interest in them, and I think that's only been strengthened through the pandemic. People have made a conscious effort to be more thoughtful with their food purchases," Mathew says. Long may this continue.

> People have made a conscious effort to be more thoughtful with their food purchases



> There has been a shift to customers wanting to shop more locally and focus on quality. Even after lockdown, our website has remained very busy and customers will patiently wait outside if the shops have too many people already in them



DISTRIBUTOR RESILIENCE

As an industry entwined with the foodservice sector, many wholesalers were blindsided by the pandemic. But they have come out the other side stronger than before

COMMENTATORS



NICK MARTIN
HARVEY & BROCKLESS



GEORGE LANG
THE CHEESE MERCHANT



RICHARD HOLMES
CRYER & STOTT

Fine cheese distribution was one of the sectors hit the hardest by the Covid-19 pandemic. Hard-won relationships with foodservice operators disappeared as the hospitality industry was shut down overnight. Brands that had once put significant resources into supplying restaurants, hotels and events had to reconsider the value of retail.

"One of the main effects of the pandemic was to make us look at the markets we serve and realise that focusing exclusively on the foodservice sector is no longer an acceptable strategy for Harvey & Brockless moving forward," explains Nick Martin, managing director of Harvey & Brockless. As a result, the business has been building up its range of products and looking at various retail channels to see how they can best grow their sales into this area. "We appreciate that this will be a learning process, but we see the retail segment as key to the company's performance in the future and in the development of our brand awareness with the consumer." Indeed, while foodservice is expected to recover at the expense of retail, Mintel's senior food and drink analyst Amy Price says habits will be slow to change over the recovery period between now and 2025, signalling good news for retail sales.

Pivoting to retail

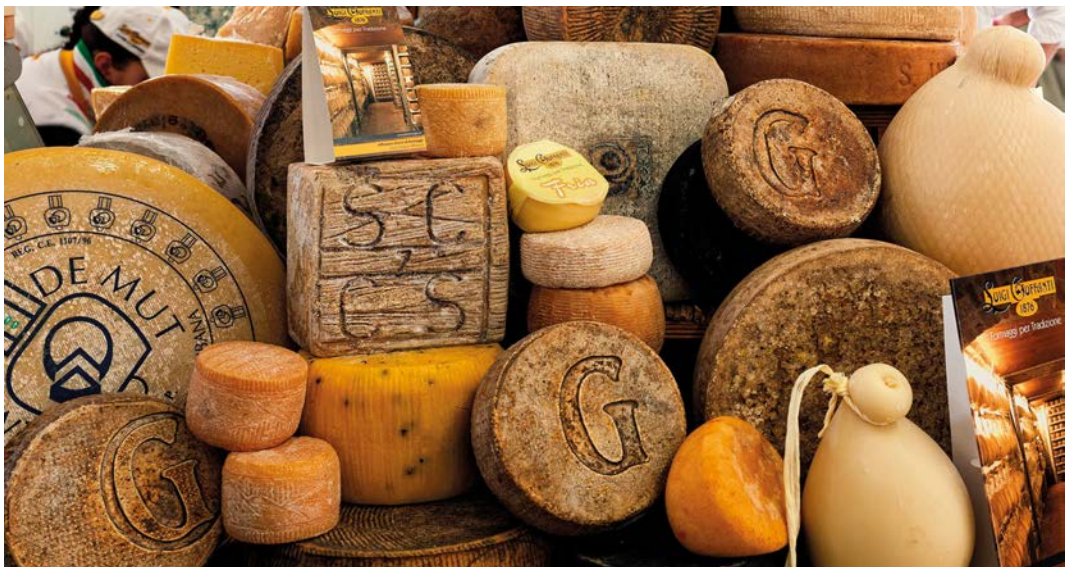
When lockdown first hit, wholesaler The Cheese Merchant lost 70% of its business overnight due to the closure of hospitality. However, an agile and collaborative approach allowed founder George Lang to find new ways of working. "We were able to be flexible and had to quickly look into other routes to get our products out. We champion our producers and didn't want this to affect them as well, so we worked with all our clients to bring them to market through a number of different routes," he explains. "We've also tried to support our chefs that buy from us. We've helped them open up a shop so they could sell pre-packed products and meal kits," George says. The business found opportunities in retail, too, and sees this as an important sector for the coming months. "As home deliveries started to slow down coming out of lockdown, a larger focus has been on the retail sector in terms of delis and farm shops looking to expand their selection of products and cheeses," he says. "Due to this demand, we've created a range of our products and sizes specifically for retail."

Supporting one another

Cryer & Stott, cheese retailers and wholesalers, also found around 85% of their distribution business disappeared after Covid arrived in the UK, and the team moved more business into farm shops and independent retailers to make up for the shortfall. Managing director Richard Holmes says a feeling grew during the pandemic that the artisan cheese industry – from dairy farmers to cheese sellers – were all in this together. "At every stage people have got more confidence in talking to each other and helping each and everybody's business develop and grow," he says. Cryer & Stott found ways to support cheesemakers through new product development and innovation. "Sometimes you need to adapt and evolve and go through some pain to bring your business out the other end a lot better and a lot stronger. As an industry, I'm hopeful that that's what will happen. My experience is that by working together, everybody's getting stronger."

Opportunities ahead

Events and hospitality still hold strong prospects for distributors. "We have seen a good return in volumes since the easing of restrictions in restaurants and hotels, particularly outside the main cities," says Nick. However, he does not expect the sector to return to pre-Covid levels "for some time". Until then, cheese distributors will be bolstered by a shared sense of passion and optimism. "Everybody understands the plight of what the last 16 months has had on the industry," says Cryer & Stott's Richard, "and I think people will pull together and share their optimism."



THE INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

Speciality Food takes a look abroad to find out how cheesemakers, mongers and distributors in Europe and the US are approaching the Covid recovery

While Covid-19 has dominated headlines globally, when the virus struck, the UK's cheese industry turned inwards, focusing on internal supply and demand dynamics and shifting consumer habits in the British market. But internationally, global cheesemakers and mongers have experienced similar scenarios, with artisan producers across Europe and America facing dramatically changed markets.

Europe's state of play

As in the UK, cheese producers in Europe were hampered by the closure of foodservice, which left them with extra stock and strained cash flows. "In countries such as France, those producers were also less able to pivot to e-commerce as many UK producers did due to the lower population density (ie, logistics cost) and for the fact that many artisan producers are much larger, so less able to clear a meaningful proportion of stock through starting a B2C offering from scratch," explains Tom Chatfield, managing director at European Fine Cheese. Yet overall, Elena Kontareva, senior category manager at France's Savencia Fromage & Dairy, says a positive impact was seen on the cheese and dairy market in France during Covid. "Dairy and cheese has been growing ahead of total FMCG despite the pandemic," she says.

However, the news wasn't good for everyone. With much of Continental Europe's cheese industry linking in with its tourism sector, the regions which usually sell large volumes to visitors were heavily impacted, says Alexandre Renault, co-founder of the cheesemonger COW in Paris. But for retailers, the pandemic offered a chance to foster relationships with local customers. Even as foodservice reopens, Alexandre is confident that retail sales will remain strong.

Like here in Britain, a spirit of generosity also blossomed during Covid, which saw cheesemongers selling products from struggling producers without making a profit in order to ensure a future for French agriculture. "Without these guys, we are nothing. That's just the minimum we can do," Alexandre says. The view from The Netherlands was much the same. Willem-Jan Oudehinken, international account manager at distributor Treur Kaas says sales rose at independent cheesemongers across the country. "Our customers (the cheese speciality shops) had a very busy time, and they had good turnovers like they normally have during the Christmas season."

But the cancellation of trade fairs and in-person visits made it hard for the group to discover new cheeses to introduce to its range. Elena agrees that new product development was "limited" in 2020 but noted that the market is now catching up. "Since health became an obvious concern during the pandemic, the development of products and sectors addressing shoppers' needs remains an opportunity. We see traditional cheeses which are mostly clean label and natural being part of the healthy and varied diet, which will be always in demand," she says.

"We are also seeing a return to new listings and innovation from retail that all but disappeared in 2020 due to the fallout of the initial crisis," agrees Tom. The big question now is whether retailers and wholesalers can keep this momentum going. "We have to make sure that the consumer who discovered our cheeses in the speciality shop during Covid-19 will still buy our cheeses in the speciality shops after this period," Willem-Jan says.

Across the pond

America has been slowly but steadily fostering an impressive artisan cheese scene, but the dairy industry was forced to pivot to adjust to the impact of Covid. "Most US cheesemakers were highly exposed to foodservice channels. It was the darling channel," says Mike Koch, president and co-founder of Firefly Farms. "I think [Covid] scared the bejesus out of just about everyone in the industry, wondering how long will this happen? How will we survive? What will we do with raw milk?" As in Britain, the shift towards e-commerce was dramatic. "When you roll the clock back, a lot of 'enlightened cheesemakers' looked at internet fulfillment channels as unsustainable," Mike says. "But those who pivoted ended up doing not so bad during the pandemic. My own business ended up about 4.5% up year-over-year from 2019 to 2020."

While a recovery is certainly underway in the US, Covid's long-term impacts are equally evident – including the growing awareness and support of local makers and suppliers. "Consumers all of a sudden understood food system dynamics in a way that they perhaps didn't pre-pandemic," Mike says. "There was a groundswell of support for local makers, and so far that has lasted."

Similar to the UK's 'Save British Cheese' box, which was championed by Neal's Yard Dairy and Jamie Oliver, the Victory Cheese movement in the US brought the cheese community – from mongers to makers and chefs – together to celebrate and preserve American cheese during Covid. "The Victory Cheese movement really galvanised a call to action that was about American artisan products: choose it or lose it," Mike says.

While cheesemakers and mongers around the world have faced similar roadblocks posed by Covid-19, they are also seeing nearly identical opportunities, as consumers around the world opt to support small businesses and artisan makers. Now, the challenge for the industry, globally, will be whether it can continue to inspire new customers in the 'new normal'.

COMMENTATORS



TOM CHATFIELD
EUROPEAN FINE CHEESE



ALEXANDRE RENAULT
COW



ELENA KONTAREVA
SAVENCIA FROMAGE & DAIRY



WILLEM-JAN OUDEHINKEN
TREUR KAAS



MIKE KOCH
FIREFLY FARMS

73.5% OF RESPONDENTS **AGREED** THAT THE **'NEW NORMAL'** GIVES THE AMERICAN **CHEESE** INDUSTRY THE **OPPORTUNITY** TO REACH **NEW** CUSTOMERS

SOURCE: AMERICAN CHEESE SOCIETY SURVEY, MAY 2020



MEET THE DISTRIBUTOR

The Curd & Cure team is passionate about bringing a unique range and service to the UK's independent market





An independent speciality food and drink wholesaler based in Kent, Curd & Cure was established in 1988 before being bought in 2018 by two young, local foodies who had an exciting vision for the business. They put their passion into creating a new warehouse with a custom-built cutting facility, built to BRC standards and fully SALSA certified, which enabled them to offer a wide range of products specially cut and packed into larger pieces as well as pre-packs for retailers.

"We have a diverse selection of local products in our range that is not restricted to our hub in Kent," begins Jessica Smith, commercial manager at Curd & Cure. "Local to us means local to our customers. As we move supply into new counties, we actively seek producers in these areas not only to support these customers, but also bring fantastic products to all of our customer base." The business is passionate about offering custom services to their customers, enabling retailers to offer something unique to discerning shoppers. "We are flexible with our cuts facility, which means we can supply custom cuts enabling anyone to stock artisanal cheese. Our pre-pack and deli tub ranges enable retailers who want to offer something different the ability to stock high quality pre-packed produce on shelf."

As well as paying close attention to providing customised products, the Curd & Cure team put their customers' requirements at the forefront of their efforts. "We hold regular training sessions, which are crucial to helping us advise our customers," says Jessica, "and our team of friendly, customer-focused drivers deliver in our own temperature-controlled vehicles across Kent, Surrey, Sussex, South-East London, Hampshire and most recently Essex. We use a courier service to share our products with the rest of the UK."

> "It's our mission to find special items, and if we fall in love with a product we cannot help but share this excitement with our customers"

A valuable USP

A well-rounded selection of carefully curated cheeses is on offer through Curd & Cure. "We stock a huge range of cheese from British producers all over the UK and import many popular Continental cheeses to ensure we offer our customers the best range to choose from," says Jessica, and as well as supplying retailers with some of the UK's finest cheeses, Curd & Cure produces its own. "Tiddly Blue was developed in partnership with a Cheshire producer using local Dudda's Tun Cider," Jessica explains. "This is a rind washed, un-spiked cheese with a mild, creamy flavour, and is very popular in our range."

The team at Curd & Cure is proud to support dairies by providing them with a single, reliable route to market by ordering products in especially for customers if they do not have stock in their own site. As many of the producers that they work with are artisanal, and some micro, this is not only greatly appreciated by makers but means that Curd & Cure is the sole distributor of some cheeses. Says Jessica, "It's our mission to find them and if we fall in love with a product, we cannot help but share this excitement with our customers."

The cheeses that Curd & Cure supply are even more valuable to the independent retailer thanks to their pre-packed, pre-priced format. "We pride ourselves on being able to offer an extensive range of size options due to our cuts facility, and this means it is shelf-ready as soon as it arrives in the shop," explains Jess.

Perhaps even more vital is the exceptional service provided by the team, not least by retail and deli account manager, Anna, who Jessica describes as having an unbelievable passion for speciality food and drink. "We offer a very consultative and supportive service to help you find the right products for you," says Jessica. "If you are a new business, we can be on hand to help with deli setups and staff training, and our friendly telesales team are always on hand to help advise on products and understand the differences between our customers' needs."



In the Curd & Cure pipeline

Christmas 2021 is set to be bigger than ever for Curd & Cure, with a larger range of cheese, charcuterie and other speciality foods than ever before. "Our favourites this year include a range of products from The Fresh Fish Company in Haywards Heath," says Jessica, "and our team is particularly excited about the Cold Smoked Mixed Fish Platter which contains halibut, trout, salmon and mackerel in one. Due to the success of listing Peter's Yard last Christmas, we have added their flatbreads and increased our range of crackers. Finally, I Am Nut OK. These delicious vegan cheeses taste incredible and are beautifully packaged, which is perfect for hampers." Looking forward, the business will begin ranging for its 2022 brochure in January, and welcomes contact from new producers in the market.



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PETER'S YARD

AN INTRODUCTION TO AFFINAGE

Maturation is a key stage in the development of many cheeses, and learning the art of the affineur offers cheesemongers a way to differentiate themselves from competitors



Cheesemaking is both an art form and a science. As well as being rooted in flavours, feelings and smells, cheese is ruled by biochemical reactions and fractions-of-a-degree differences in temperature or humidity. Maturing is an important stage of the process which can have a significant impact on the flavour and texture of the finished product.

Affinage, a French term that translates as 'to refine' is the process of expert maturing and ageing of cheese by a specialised individual, Tracey Colley, director of the Academy of Cheese, tells *Speciality Food*. While on one hand cheese is aged for practical reasons – it extends the shelf life of the milk – on the other, it is a key step in developing flavour, aroma, texture and appearance. "The affineur has expert knowledge in maturing cheeses in caves or temperature/humidity controlled rooms to nurture and develop the flavour and texture of the cheese," Tracey says. But you don't need to be an expert in maturation to begin experimenting in your own shop.

The role of the affineur

As well as caring for cheeses, affineurs introduce moulds, wash the cheeses and bring in new flavours. "Affinage is a key part of the cheese's life, when care and time allows the affineur to produce outstanding cheeses with specific textures and flavours," says Tracey.

For cheesemongers, affinage offers a way of setting oneself apart from other cheese sellers and creating a brand that can gain a reputation for fantastic cheese in its own right. "Affinage is a way of differentiating yourself from your competitors and working more closely with cheesemakers in your local area," Tracey adds. "It requires skill and much patience." Maturing cheese also requires a controlled environment and knowledge of the ins and outs of creating cheese. Before you begin, Tracey advises, "Ensure your cheesemaking knowledge is adequate, get some specific training and talk to other experienced affineurs."

> "Affinage is a key part of the cheese's life, when care and time allows the affineur to produce outstanding cheeses with specific textures and flavours"

But even amongst the best prepared cheese lovers, things can go wrong. "Faults may include cracking, unintentional blueing, cheese mite or a too dry or too wet cheese," Tracey says. "Every maturing room will have its own character and microflora, so the conditions and the effect on each cheese will be different."

Experiment and record

Although Tim Jones, the maker of Lincolnshire Poacher Cheese alongside brother Simon, does not claim to be an affineur, years of experience maturing his own cheese has helped him understand the maturation process more and more over the years. It all started around 15 years ago, when the cheesemakers conducted an experiment by taking four cheeses from the same batch and placing them in the site's four different cheese stores.

"We tasted them at maturity with Randolph [Hodgson] from Neal's Yard Dairy, and we were struck at how different they were. At the time, we thought everything we did with the milk and making the cheese was what was key to the end result." Having learned the huge impact maturation could have, the team has since brought it into focus.

For Lincolnshire Poacher, Tim says, maturation is focused on airflow, humidity and not allowing the cheese to dry out. The cheeses are constantly watched and managed in the cheese store to ensure they stay in good condition. "I think it's that attention to detail that's so important with maturation of our style of cheese," Tim says. For those who are just starting out and are wanting to learn more about ageing and maturing cheese, he recommends getting stuck in with recording and experimenting. Record weight loss and when weight is lost; humidity, temperature and how both vary throughout the store; and air movement, Tim advises. "A lot of it might well be superfluous, but if you record things and try lots of different things, that's how you learn with cheese. Cheese is a difficult mistress. But I think the more data you've got, the more you're able to make informed decisions."

In spite of his years of practice and record keeping, Tim is still keen to learn more about the art of affinage, so he's joining in with an inaugural Affineur of the Year competition in order to share insights with other industry experts. "Truthfully, I think a lot of cheesemakers, particularly hard cheesemakers, in the UK probably don't understand masses about cheese maturation. We all focus quite heavily on milk production and cheesemaking. I think it's going to be a moment for all of us to have a really, really interesting evening, discussing the whys and wherefores of what has happened with the maturation." From experienced industry professionals to cheesemongers who are looking to broaden their shop's horizons, there are always more mysteries to uncover in the world of cheese.

THE ROLE OF THE AFFINEUR INCLUDES:

- Ageing cheeses
- Introducing and/or promote external moulds
- Washing the cheeses
- Brushing or vacuuming to prevent cheese mites from consuming the cheeses
- Wrapping, rolling or flavouring the cheeses



Every independent retailer's shelves could do with a revamp every now and then, as much to keep shoppers excited as to showcase the very best of the fine food and drink industry at that moment. That's why the *Speciality Food* team has put together this collection of delicious food and drink products; from snacks, confectionery and cakes to meal solutions and hot drinks, there's plenty here to satisfy your customers' tastebuds.



TBOSA

Juan Valdez®, Colombia's No. 1 coffee brand is now available in the UK from TBOSA, The Best of South America. Stand out from your competitors and offer one of the world's best, high quality Colombian coffees in whole bean, ground, instant jars, instant sticks and the new innovative one cup ground coffee drip sachets. Single Origin, Organic and Decaf are available. Ideal for coffee retailers, coffee shops, hotels, delis and other retail establishments.

The amazing Café Quindío Colombian coffee and confectionery brand is now available from TBOSA! Gourmet coffees in whole bean, ground, instant and organic, alongside 100% real Café Quindío coffee infused cookies, meringues with macadamia nuts and blackcurrant jam. Unique and new to the UK, these products will make your store stand out from the rest.



tbosa.co.uk

Nuttyogoo Peanut Crackers

Nuttyogoo's Peanut Crackers snacks are made from 97% organic peanuts, contain only four ingredients and are a great healthier alternative to most savoury snacks that are available on the market without compromising on the taste.

Their snacks are packed with the 'good stuff' as due to their innovative manufacturing process they are able to reduce the fat content of peanuts by almost 68%, therefore the snacks are very high in protein and fibre and low in carbs.

The crackers can be a perfect post workout snack for any gym goers or anyone else who simply enjoys low carb tasty snacks.



info@nuttyogoo.co.uk
nuttyogoo.co.uk



Vie's Jamaican Rum Cakes

Brimming full of juicy fruits and laced with fine rums, Vie's Jamaican Rum Cakes will leave you wanting more. The cakes are baked to founder Elaine's mother's traditional recipe, and their Cumbria cakes are infused with rums from The Cartmel Spirit Company, Richardsons of Whitehaven and The Rum Story in Whitehaven.

The cakes are hand-wrapped using biodegradable, compostable, cellulose (cellophane) food grade bags, natural raffia and card.

The utmost care has been taken to ensure that both the original and gluten-free versions of the cakes are as fruity, flavoursome and fantastic as Elaine's mother's used to be.

07748956223 sales@viesjamaicanrumcakes.co.uk
viesjamaicanrumcakes.co.uk



Mr Lee's Noodles

Mr Lee's Pure Foods, the award-winning company of gourmet instant noodles with absolutely no nasties and the finest ingredients, is introducing an option for businesses, caterers and the foodservice industry to provide quick, hot food options for their employees and clients.

The "Back to Work" Restart Scheme addresses the restricted availability of food options for employees coming back to work.

From only 36 cups to pallets of noodles, all at trade prices, Mr Lee's are able to fulfill all order sizes for you or your clients. FSDUs (cardboard display stands) can also be supplied for those, who do not have facilities to keep the noodles in the kitchen.

Suitable for most of the dietary needs incl. vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free and nut-free, Mr Lee's noodles are a great addition to every canteen and office kitchen.

01202 242 241 sales@mrleesnoodles.com
mrleesnoodles.com/uk/shop

ChicP

ChicP creates a variety of unique and natural sustainable houmous from wonky fruit and vegetables.

The London-based brand is passionate about reducing food waste – it is committed to ensuring that 20-25% of its raw ingredients come from surplus over the course of every year, in effect supporting farmers (whose 'wonky' vegetables are rejected by supermarkets) as well as promoting food sustainability.

As well as being good for the planet, ChicP's products are high in protein and free from added sugar, dairy and gluten. Not only that, but they're made primarily from raw vegetables – one of the healthiest food options available.

Their flavours include Beetroot & Horseradish; Carrot, Ginger & Turmeric and Herby, each of which has a shelf life of 24 days. They will also be bringing out a limited edition line later this year.

07788474803 hannah@chicp.co.uk chicp.co.uk





Le Gruyère AOP

Made in western Switzerland, Gruyère AOP has been produced in the same way since 1115AD, using raw milk from cows fed on grass in summer and hay in winter. The skilled cheesemakers use 400 litres of fresh milk to make a single 35kg Gruyère AOP wheel. It is the only cheese that has won the title of Best Cheese in the World at the World Cheese Awards four times, which just goes to show how much work and skill is needed to create its unique and delicious flavour.

Gruyère AOP can be found with different maturities: the Classic is matured for six months and has a delicate, nutty, creamy flavour. The Reserve is matured for 10 months and has a drier, more grainy mouthfeel. Then you can find an older Gruyère AOP, 14 months or more, giving it a much stronger flavour. The age brings a difference in taste, but the recipe always stays the same.

gruyere.com



Hawkshead Relish Savoury Sauces

New to Hawkshead Relish's vibrant and diverse range are four savoury sauces, each one a perfect addition to your collection. Smoky Mustard Sauce is mild, smooth, and smoky, a must for hot dogs! Versatility is key for Hawkshead Relish's products and the Smoky Mustard Sauce is no exception; it can be used to brighten up mashed potato or added to vinaigrettes for a refreshed dressing. With smooth textures and vivid colours, the new sauces are as eye catching as they are delectable – and all free from preservatives, colourings and artificial flavourings.

01539 436 614 info@hawksheadrelish.com hawksheadrelish.com

Original Biscuit Bakers Gingerbread



If you're looking to add some sugar and spice to your Christmas then look no further than Original Biscuit Bakers' enchanting Christmas gingerbread collection. Their gingerbread biscuits are lovingly crafted before being hand iced by a team of talented artists into a variety of Christmas favourites. Each biscuit is individually wrapped before being placed into an attractive display unit for easy countertop sales.

These delightful Christmas treats are perfect for customers looking for something delicious and unique for stocking fillers, Christmas Eve boxes, Christmas gifts or simply a treat to be enjoyed on a cold starry night with a mug of hot cocoa.

01630 650 780 info@originalbiscuitbakers.co.uk originalbiscuitbakers.co.uk

BitesWeLove

Meet BitesWeLove's delicious and healthy nut-based snacks. BitesWeLove makes healthy snacking easy and delicious under the motto: little things to brighten your day.

We don't compromise on health or taste. Our bites are full of natural ingredients and come in bio-plastic portion packs for on the go. Healthy: always your daily dose of nuts and less than 200cal. Delicious: unique flavour combinations. Sustainable: biodegradable packaging.

biteswelove.nl



Stokes Sauces Perfect with Cheese Collection



Containing four of their most popular relishes and chutneys and packaged in a stylish gift box, Stokes Sauces' Perfect with Cheese Collection provides cheese lovers with the ultimate partners for their favourite cheeses.

The box contains 215g jars of Fig Relish, rich, sweet and slightly tart and brimming with dried figs; Chilli Jam, a 'must have' flavour-packed blend of sweet chilli peppers and red peppers; Red Onion Marmalade, a full-flavoured combination of caramelised red onions, sticky black treacle and balsamic vinegar; and Sticky Pickle, crunchy vegetables in a sweet and spicy sauce.

01394 462 150 hello@stokessauces.co.uk stokessauces.co.uk



Jelly Belly Christmas Gift Boxes

Make the most of the festive season with any one of our irresistible Jelly Belly jelly bean gift boxes perfectly suited to gift giving. Apart from the stunning classic and ultimate 50 flavour compartmentalised version, the 10 and 20 flavour versions are now offered in a fabulous bauble design so don't even need wrapping!

Plus, introducing the latest design 5 flavour Acrylic boxes with a suitably festive vibe 'HO HO HO' and 'NOEL' to choose from, perfect stocking fillers for the Jelly Belly fan.

You can always rely on Jelly Belly for providing the seasonal cheer this Christmas.

01727 829 010 uksales@bestimports.co.uk bestimports.co.uk



Thai Taste Revamped Range

Thai Taste, creators of authentic Thai food products and brand leader in the UK's Thai market, has revamped its range for 2021.

Bold and colourful, its new packaging evokes the vibrancy of Thailand while simultaneously reducing the quantity of packaging materials used by 33%. Each pack provides a new-and-improved recipe suggestion designed to reflect the exciting flavours of Thailand and give customers the opportunity to enjoy a taste adventure.

Made using traditional fresh ingredients from Thailand and no artificial colourings, flavourings or preservatives, every item in the range is MSG-free as well as being suitable for vegans and vegetarians.

0208 537 4080 sales@empirebespokefoods.com thaitaste.co.uk

Banhoek Chilli Oil

Handcrafted in the beautiful Banhoek Valley near Stellenbosch, Banhoek Chilli Oil is a handcrafted, premium grade, artisan chilli oil made from just two ingredients: the highest quality rapeseed oil and dried Thai Birdseye chillies. 100% natural, no preservatives.

Winner of a Great Taste 2019 award, this delicious, golden-hued oil delivers just the right level of spice. Whether your customers like their food fiery hot or just a tickle on the tongue, Banhoek Chilli Oil has been specifically created to complement a wide range of ingredients and consistently delivers that something special to stir fries, marinades, vegetarian and vegan cuisine, meat, fish, seafood, pasta, pizza, eggs – the only limit is your imagination!

ed@banhoekchillioil.uk banhoekchillioil.co.uk



Walker's Nonsuch Smashing Toffee



Since 1894, independent family company, Walker's Nonsuch have specialised in making quality toffee. Using only the best ingredients like whole milk and premium nuts, the quality is second to none. Great for giving, and perfect for sharing, Luxury Selection is a unique gift.

Including four chunky toffee bars, in Roasted Hazelnut, Brazil Nut, Liquorice and Original Creamy and a toffee hammer. Much fun can be had by all!

All Walkers Toffee is free from artificial colours, preservatives, hydrogenated vegetable oils and gluten. It is vegetarian-friendly and the new box and lid packaging creates a luxe feel for the consumer and is 98% recyclable.

01782 321 525 hello@walkers-nonsuch.co.uk walkers-nonsuch.co.uk

Cooks&Co Store Cupboard Essentials



A 40-strong range of the world's best ingredients and meal solutions, Cooks&Co is a must-have for any keen home cook's kitchen.

From the latest plant-based inspiration to antipasti and olives, as well as a wide range of products which are ideal for Christmas entertaining – such as Goose Fat and Duck Fat – home cooks are bound to discover a new store cupboard staple within the Cooks&Co range.

Try Cooks & Co's Sweety Drop Peppers, sourced from the Peruvian Amazon and a delicious addition to all manner of dishes – bringing a sweet and sour flavour with a kick.

01494 530 200 info@cooksandco.co.uk cooksandco.co.uk



Olina's Bakehouse Crackers

With their distinct range of high-quality Seeded Toasts, light and crispy Wafer Crackers and an unrivalled range of gluten-free and vegan-friendly crackers, Olina's Bakehouse has become a must-have range for this summer.

The Seeded Toasts are competitively priced and packed full of flavour with a moreish crunch, while the Wafer Crackers, being thinner than traditional crackers, offer a wonderfully subtle taste and lighter texture which gives precedence to the dip or cheese they carry. A cheese connoisseur's finest companion.

The Simply Seed products are gluten-free, vegan-friendly and low-carb but crammed with flavour and a delightful texture.

07771981420 mash@gourmetpartners.co.uk gourmetfood.au/uk

Cocoa Social Enterprise CIC Beetroot Chocolate



Cocoa Social Enterprise CIC has developed a new chocolate bar recipe which has no added sugar and sweetened only with beetroot.

Beetroot is rich in antioxidants and nutrients that have proven health benefits for everyone. Consuming beets appears to be especially beneficial for people with diabetes. Beets lower the risk of common diabetes complications, including nerve damage and eye damage.

Cocoa Social Enterprise's 'No added sugar' beetroot chocolate comes with the inclusion of goji berries which are high in fibre, promotes healthy skin, immune system support and prevents liver damage, aside from improving sleep, depression and anxiety.

07961041231 notetodami@yahoo.co.uk cocoasocialenterprise.co.uk



Jelly Belly Tree Shaped Advent Calendar

Introducing the latest tree shaped Jelly Belly Advent Calendar, famously the tastiest way to celebrate the family countdown to Christmas.

This year, Mr Jelly Belly and his ever faithful dog Fido, are featured decorating their perfect tree. It is the ultimate and idyllic seasonal scene.

Behind each numbered day are Pyramid Bags of popular Jelly Belly jelly bean flavours – with an extra special surprise behind the Christmas Eve window. A delightfully festive treat for all ages.

Generously proportioned, the box accommodates 24 Pyramid bags of Jelly Belly jelly bean deliciousness. The perfect gift.

01727 829 010 uksales@bestimports.co.uk bestimports.co.uk



OTC Beverages Signature Drinks

OTC Beverages' signature drinks consist of a healthy and refreshing sparkling and still non-alcoholic ginger beer and sorrel drink made from high quality ingredients which are sourced from sustainable farmers.

They offer a taste of the Caribbean in a premium package which is recyclable and kind to the environment.

OTC presents its sparkling drinks in 250ml cans, and in 2020 released a new flavour called Blue Butterfly Pea Flower & Lime, which aides in reducing depression/anxiety and is great for the immune system.

0844 357 0441 info@otcbeverages.com otcbeverages.com



Tiptree Mayonnaise

Tiptree has taken time and great care to create a range of flavoured mayonnaise using only the finest ingredients. Each is made in small batches in their nut-free factory using free-range eggs and natural oils.

Whether it's Sriracha's fiery kick, Roasted Garlic's soft sweetness, Herb's savoury mix, or perhaps the unique flavour of Truffle, there's one for every occasion. Add a little Tiptree magic to your plate!

With no artificial colours or flavours, it's all you need to add to a sandwich, a salad or a jacket potato.

01621 815 407 tiptree@tiptree.com tiptree.com



Shepherd's Purse Harrogate Blue

Harrogate Blue by Shepherd's Purse is a golden bodied, creamy blue cheese. Made with milk from classy Yorkshire cows, the cheese is the first to have been launched back in 2012 when sisters Katie and Caroline took the reins of the company.

Since its launch Harrogate Blue has quickly found its feet and become a firm favourite across the UK and beyond. Creamy and buttery with a full bodied, savoury flavour, it is impressively versatile and sits well on any cheeseboard, makes great pairings and livens up even the simplest of recipes.

01845 587 220 orders@shepherdspurse.co.uk shepherdspurse.co.uk



Summerdown Mint Dark Chocolate Peppermint Cream Dominoes

Introducing Summerdown Mint's Dark Chocolate Peppermint Cream Dominoes: award-winning soft-centred cream bars, infused with single-estate Black Mitcham peppermint oil and enrobed in the finest, ethically-sourced dark chocolate.

Svelte and sophisticated, vegan-friendly and gluten-free, these Dark Chocolate Peppermint Cream Dominoes are perfect for after dinner and can be snapped down the middle for two perfect bites.

Summerdown Mint grows, harvests and distills their signature Black Mitcham peppermint on their farm in Hampshire - and have been doing so for over 25 years. Black Mitcham is an extraordinary peppermint prized for its pure, bright character.

summerdown.com

Taylors of Harrogate



Taylors of Harrogate Coffee Bags are proper coffee made easy. The clever bags let the ground coffee brew perfectly in two minutes in your cup.They work just like a teabag but for ground coffee – all the flavour without the mess. Each bag is individually wrapped to ensure it stays fresh and delivers on the extraordinary quality and taste Taylors is renowned for.

Coffee Bags are perfect for busy people looking for convenient proper coffee at home but are also ideal when on the move and in the workplace.

Four blends are available from your local wholesaler: elegant Rich Italian, smooth and sweet Decaffé, rich and fierce Hot Lava Java and new Flying Start for a kick-start to your day.

0800 328 1886 hello@taylorsofharrogate.co.uk taylorsofharrogate.co.uk



PLANNING FOR CHRISTMAS 2.0

The fine food industry is primed to capture the spirit, optimism and joy of Christmas ahead of this year's campaigns, says Natasha Spencer-Jolliffe

For many of us, heartwarming television adverts mark the official arrival of Christmas. It has been this way, born from the industry's stellar lesson in marketing 101, ever since John Lewis emerged in 2007 with its Shadow campaign. Luxury, premium and fine food and drinks brands spotted a powerful formula to capture consumers' hearts and loyalty at what is traditionally the most lucrative time of the year. One that combines strong storytelling, engaging characters, and effortless campaigns.

From mid-pandemic to post-lockdown

The wholesome and tear-jerking social narrative we have become so familiar with and embracing of in recent years took on a very tangible meaning in 2020, as consumers felt the moving sentiment behind its popular Christmas campaigns even more. Yet, for fine food and drink brands and retailers behind the scenes, it was a completely different tale.

'Christmas in July' – the marketing phenomenon that sweeps through food and drink every year to leverage new and evolving trends, shifts in behaviours and changes in purchasing habits – paused in 2020. Instead, retailers battled to keep afloat, oversee supply chains and accompanying disruption, and manage orders as best they could.

In 2021, while the pandemic has not disappeared, as retailers are fighting hard to navigate disruptions, delays and demands —2021 is full of the promise that this year's Christmas will be a reflection of the spirit, hope and positivity of the festive season itself.

Planning for Christmas: creating something special

Unique and novel fine food and drink products and ingredients that are of the highest quality are always the top priority at Christmas. When it comes to planning fine food and drink campaigns, it is all about trying to find the best and most excellent product on the market. "Quality has to be second to none," confirms Drogo Montagu, founder of Fine Food Specialist. It is not just the content of products that need to be carefully considered at Christmas either, but the product's outer casing and branding too. "Packaging is definitely part of what we look for as the product has to look good if you are a customer buying from a website," adds Montagu.

> "With many families having missed out on their traditional Christmas gatherings, we expect that people will be planning a big Christmas this year. Little luxuries, special treats and impressive centrepieces will all play an important part on the menu"

include plates of salami and seafood, as well as small tasting sets with products such as Iberico pork, yakiniku cuts and baby squid. "It becomes exclusive to us because it cannot be copied," says Montagu.

Returning customers is not the only recurring aspect of strong Christmas campaigns; much-loved products also stand the test of time. "If you like glazed ham and potted Stilton on your table at Christmas, you are likely to buy that year after year," shares Montagu.

Staying on top of the big trends ahead of Christmas is vital too, though, Montagu emphasises: "We will have all the staples and then we always go and look for cutting-edge and amazing new products."

What's set to be big in 2021's Christmas campaigns?

So what new products are likely to be on the menu in 2021 to reflect growing consumer demand? Food as a luxurious present is set to transform Christmas campaigns this year. "We have seen a big increase in gifting this year so intend on really pushing that side of the business," reveals Montagu.

Looking ahead to this Christmas, brands know that it is as much about what they do not source and bring onto their product list as what they do choose. Fine Food Specialist will take on panettones and Amaretti, for example. "But you have got to be careful about taking on too much just to look Christmassy," says Montagu. The brand plans to take on up to 30 products this Christmas, many of which will be small items such as nougat or almonds that can easily be added to baskets.

Amid the pandemic, Valia Christidou, founder of The Food Launchpad envisages that 2021 Christmas campaigns will be different to 2020. "I expect a lot of the campaigns will focus on the fact that this Christmas families and friends will finally be allowed to meet – get-togethers will be larger than last year or even previous years, as we have all realised how precious these opportunities and occasions are and that they cannot be taken for granted." Also, consumers may well be looking to treat themselves with fine food and drink that is both memorable and extraordinary.

"With many families having missed out on their traditional Christmas gatherings, we expect that people will be planning a big Christmas this year," enthuses Matt Whelan, managing director of Fieldfare. "Little luxuries, special treats and impressive centrepieces will all play an important part on the menu," he adds.

There is also another key trend we can expect to see in this year's Christmas campaigns, Whelan explains. "Nostalgia will play a big role this year with some classics returning to the table such as 'Granny's famous trifle' as families and friends come back together and make up for the lost time last year."

Planning food and drink Christmas campaigns

For fine food and drink retailers wanting to get ahead of the Christmas period now, there is one key tip Montagu shares based on years of experience in the sector: "Planning, planning, planning."

Fine Food Specialist's 2021 planning is set to be an easier task than last year as the brand has more key people involved and



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therefore, more overall resources and bandwidth. "Christmas in this sector is always difficult, but as long as you have all your campaigns ready, a happy team and know your limits you will get through it," Montagu adds. As for guidance on what to avoid, the fine food brand founder notes, "Taking on too many orders and not being able to fulfill them is the worst mistake you can ever make."

With online so huge, email and social media marketing make up increasing advertising spend and areas of campaign planning. Fine Food Specialist focused heavily on email marketing last year. Ahead of this year's campaign planning, the brand will look at 2020's figures, statistics and every email sent to analyse its content, engagement and sales. "It is massive planning," says Montagu. When it comes to planning food and drink Christmas campaigns, firstly, fine food and drink brands must consider their overall offering. Brands will explore their product range including packaging formats and the retail sales pack to explore the type of advertising and promotional campaigns they will adopt.

Typical campaign timescales

The founder of strategic consultancy, The Food Launchpad, talks through a typical schedule for brands. "Campaigns that will be running are ready by February/March each year," says Christidou. "Production starts in the summer and often for the big lines well before that, as the first few products find their way onto the large supermarket shelves in September," Christidou notes.

"So effectively everything has been sold in and production is starting by now for Christmas 2021," notes Christidou. For some brands, preparation is going far beyond 2021, demonstrating the need to plan ahead. "The innovation teams are now starting to think about Christmas 2022," says Christidou.

From the big retailers that focus on the conceptualisation and creation of Christmas TV ads, campaign themes are finalised as concepts in January and February, so that the sales teams can give an overall picture of the support that will go behind the Christmas ranges to the retailers when they present these concepts in February and March. The final details and the execution of the filming of the ads happens much later. Creating product range lists and carrying out promotions happens earlier in the year, Christoidou notes, before "the biggest push takes place in November and December".

Highlighting the specific considerations and uniqueness of organising Christmas campaigns, Chrisitdou says, "By the time you can evaluate the effectiveness of a campaign and that of your competition, you need to be putting the final touches to that of the next year." For many brands, it will often be December or January before they receive all of the data demonstrating what was successful and what failed to deliver, but Christidou says, "By then you are already well down the line with the campaign for the following year."

Meeting consumer demands

"Most people like to be prepared at Christmas to prevent a last-minute panic, but they also like to have flexibility so they can plan for the unexpected," says Whelan. Ahead of this year's Christmas period, frozen foods provider Fieldfare undertook an extensive rebranding project in January 2021. The move reflects the brand's new strategy to challenge the way consumers shop, encouraging more sustainable habits whilst delivering a high-quality frozen produce range.

Commenting on its proposition, Whelan details, "[It] encourages people to take what they want but not more than they need, gives people flexibility and choice so you can plan ahead and cater for last-minute changes, without having to worry about lots of waste." Fieldfare also offers individually portioned products catering for specific diets, such as its Goats Cheese Tart, which will be new for Christmas.

"Consumers are looking for new ways in which to shop more sustainably and are discovering the various benefits of frozen foods, which is evident in the 19.7% rise in sales of frozen foods the UK has seen" Whelan emphasises. As sales have risen in 2021 and consumer needs continue to evolve, fine brands like Fieldfare are looking for ways to support farm shops, garden centres, delis, butchers and retailers in the run up to Christmas.

Here's to a festive season full of nostalgic products and luxuriously fine gifts adorning the offline and, increasingly, online shelves.

STOCK CHECK



JOE & SEPHS POPCORN ADVENT CALENDAR
Featuring 19 unique flavours including Brandy Butter, Apple & Custard and Gingerbread popcorn.
joeandsephs.co.uk



GORDON RHODES FESTIVE GLUTEN-FREE GOURMET ROAST CHESTNUT AND SPICED CRANBERRY STUFFING MIX
Delicately blended to enhance both meat and vegetable dishes.
gordonrhodes.co.uk



FINDERS THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PUDDING RUM
Oak-aged rum spiced with cinnamon, orange and muscovado.
finders-spirits.com



THE BAY TREE BOOZY MINCEMEAT
Deliciously indulgent and contains no suet.
thebaytree.co.uk



BATH SOFT CHEESE MERRY WYFE
A cider-washed cheese with a distinctive pungent orange (edible) rind and a rich, creamy texture.
parkfarm.co.uk



DIVINE SALTED CARAMEL HOT CHOCOLATE
A luxurious hot chocolate with creamy caramel and a dash of salt.
divinechocolate.com



COMMENTATORS



DEBBIE KING
JK FOODS



BECKY VALE
TRACKLEMENTS



PAM DIGVA
SAUCE SHOP



VICKY MCTAGGART
STOKES SAUCES



DESIREE PARKER
THE FORAGING FOX



MEGAN LOVE
MR ORGANIC

HOW TO STOCK **CONDIMENTS**

Condiments and table sauces are a staple for any good retailer. To maximise profits, shops must find the right mix between tried and tested favourites and modern concoctions

Independent retailers are treasure troves of condiments and table sauces. Stocked full to bursting with jars and bottles of classic stalwarts, modern reimaginings of British favourites, must-have showstoppers and innovative new brands, they are a cornucopia of boundary-pushing and much-loved flavoursome finds sure to delight customers.

Condiments saw their sales fly last year. The working from home revolution plus a surge in home cooking and barbecues ignited a boom in products that are able to elevate everyday meals into something extraordinary and quickly transform an evening at home into an occasion worth celebrating.

As delis and farm shops are havens for condiments, shoppers come to their doors to find the next best thing for their cupboards. Yet for buyers tasked with selecting products to stock, there is a huge variety available, and tradition and innovation both have something to bring to the table.



TRADITIONAL FAVOURITES

From ketchup and mayo to horseradish and mint sauce, traditional condiments are must-haves in any household, and the combination of the pandemic and Brexit caused an even greater upswing in demand for these traditional flavours

"Post-Brexit Britain is witnessing a resurgence in the old favourites such as ketchup, mustard and mayonnaise, with consumers spending an extra £120m over the last 12 months on an extra 68.5 million packs of table sauces and condiments," explains Debbie King, sales and marketing director at JK Foods, the UK's leading importer and distributor of East Asian foods and owner of the Chippa sauces brand.

"In 2021, people are behaving much as they do in a recession and reverting to comfort foods and meals with a nostalgic appeal," adds Becky Vale, marketing director at Tracklements. Bangers and mash, traditional roasts, and fish and chips are all getting a new lease of life – as are the condiments that go with them. "Consequently, traditional condiments are enjoying very buoyant sales," Becky says. Best-in-class Tracklements products experienced a 60% increase in sales in the year to date.

With the spotlight on traditional flavours, indie retailers can champion their most indulgent artisan condiments with help from the 'trading up' trend, which sees shoppers who saved money during the pandemic keen to maximise their meals by upgrading certain elements. When compared with a high-quality bottle of wine or a prime cut of meat, speciality sauces are affordable, yet they offer a big impact on meals, and "satisfy consumers' desire for everyday treats," Becky says.

The difference between big brands and artisan condiments is telling – so much so that once consumers make the switch they may not want to go back. "One of the key differences between mass-produced and speciality products is the cooking method," says Pam Digva, co-founder and brand director of Sauce Shop. "Often, large manufacturers are working to produce huge quantities within time constraints, meeting tight margins. In speciality food production, sauces are often cooked off for long periods of time in an open vessel. This extra time and care results in a richer product that really adds something to a dish," Pam says. Vicky McTaggart, marketing and personnel manager at Stokes Sauces, says sourcing the best possible ingredients makes all the difference in gourmet products, and retailers need not pay too much attention to the latest fads and gimmicks. "Traditional condiments such as horseradish sauce and mint sauce should be made of the best ingredients and taste fantastic; they do not need 'added value' or 'twists', they simply need to be the perfect accompaniment to the traditional Sunday roast or weekday grill," she explains.

Buying British

As well as boosting the profile of traditional foods, Covid-19 also disrupted conventional home cooking, with more families eating together, cooking meals from scratch and utilising their local farm shops or butchers. These newfound habits are playing into a simpler way of living and eating, which many consumers – especially younger ones – have rediscovered during the pandemic. "The latest generation are incredibly conscious of where their food comes from and are going back to our grandparents' generation in their thoughts of a traditional, simpler way of eating," Vicky says. What's more, there is a growing focus on British-made products, Becky adds. "The love of classic condiments has been reignited, as has the demand for buying British brands which are able to demonstrate strong environmental and sustainable credentials. We have seen a swell in popularity for food brands with genuine integrity – a move to conscious consumption which we hope will continue to grow," she says.

A versatile product

For traditional condiments, showcasing versatility can be key to securing sales from customers who may be trading up to artisan products after years of purchasing standard supermarket condiments. "What one person puts in a sandwich, another puts on a cheeseboard or in a soup, or uses to top off a salmon fillet," Becky says. By educating consumers about their many uses, retailers can boost the value of condiments. These pairing ideas can be played up with in-store displays, as Becky explains, "Condiments are perfect for selling from different locations around the store. Merchandising in different areas can inspire shoppers, stimulate trial, give an opportunity for retailers to show their creativity and, ultimately, result in increased sales."

STOCKING TIPS FOR TRADITIONAL CONDIMENTS

- Offer meal suggestions. "Horseradish sauce with chopped, fresh gooseberries or apple with smoked mackerel; mint sauce mixed with mayonnaise or yoghurt as a dip for samosas, bhajis and vegetable crudités; tartare sauce with a little hot sauce added is great with fried chicken. The possibilities are vast," Vicky says.
- Focus on displays. "Display condiments on the butchery counter, the fishmonger counter and the deli – hide them away and the customer may miss them," Vicky warns. "If the customer has bought their piece of pork, they will need an apple sauce, but if the apple sauce is not there the consumer may miss the association."
- Offer tastings (when it's safe to do so). "Tastings, when allowed, are essential to introduce potential customers to new ideas and previously unknown flavours," Vicky adds.





TREND-LED INNOVATIONS

Next-generation condiments are influenced by the latest trends and buzzwords making waves in the food sector. While every good fine food retailer should be well stocked with the classics, trending products offer a way to pique customer curiosity and spark shoppers' imaginations

"Consumers are leading the charge when it comes to wanting more from what they see on the retailers' shelves," says Desiree Parker, CEO and co-founder of all-natural condiment brand The Foraging Fox. "There's been a dramatic shift in consumers' diet preferences, whether that's vegan, flexitarian, vegetarian, calorie-restricted, keto or paleo, and these lifestyle choices are informing their purchasing habits," she says. "The big brands offer one thing, and I think challenger brands operating in the fine food space offer another: exotic flavours, provenance, and a stance on health and the environment. More and more, food is becoming tribal, and consumers are aligning themselves with one of a number of these movements," Desiree adds.

A healthy venture

One of the key areas of focus in innovative condiments is the health trend. The Covid-19 virus shined a light on health, and many consumers did not like what they saw. While plenty of shoppers won't want to hit the health food shop for supplements and tinctures, they will be willing to try simple food swaps that promote a healthier diet. "Health credentials are incredibly important today and will continue to be going forward," Desiree says. "Consumers don't want to see a high sugar content or the use of refined sugars. They are looking for lower sugar, natural and organic alternatives offering flavours that take them on a journey," she explains.

Many new trends in this space are diet-led, with vegan mayonnaise being a popular example, "but more generally we've also seen a rise in superfoods as core ingredients and functional food," Debbie says.

One superfood ripe for opportunity in the condiments market? Fermented food. "The process of fermenting foods is under the spotlight for the potential associated health benefits, but it is the multitude of flavours that are produced as a result that excites us at Sauce Shop," Pam says. "There is very little you can't ferment, and the flavours that result are often so complex and interesting. We ferment all of our chillies in house and now have a team dedicated to caring for the ferments or 'mash'. We love the variety of flavours you get from true lacto-fermentation and currently have some very special experiments going on behind the scenes."

As well as health, sustainability is at the heart of many of today's most popular food trends. Megan Love, sales and marketing manager of Mr Organic says that for consumers, finding brands that align with their environmentally friendly worldview is key. This has influenced brands' sustainability efforts, from sourcing to production to packaging. "We don't use air travel, the majority of our packaging is recyclable, and we are leaders in sustainability, using organic farming methods at our farm in Italy to protect nature," Megan says.

"If I think about what I've been prioritising in the product development stages from the perspective of The Foraging Fox," Desiree concludes, "it has been this: how can we make the category offering more exciting, delicious and healthier? And that means thinking even harder about our ingredients and where we source them from."

Adventurous, yet authentic

In addition to diet and health trends, there is also a growing appetite for "food adventure and exploration," Becky says. "Overall we're witnessing a more adventurous approach to eating – seen in the way Tracklements' consumers embrace world cuisine, meatless alternatives, and flexitarian eating." This has generated interest in the brand's new Special Editions, which launched this year, focusing on different condiment customs from around the world, "allowing people to explore different culinary adventures in their own homes," Becky says.

Desiree also believes that travel restrictions offer an opportunity for adventurous sauces to fly off the shelves. "Consumers have been looking at ways to bring something different to the table. Condiments are an excellent way to do that," she says. "I think of it as bringing the flavours of the world to your plate – when everything has been so restricted it's nice to know that we can bring a little bit of adventure to what we eat."

Yet while consumers are keen to explore the "gateway to new cuisines and flavours" that Debbie says today's trending sauces and condiments are opening, they are also drawn to simplicity when it comes to ingredients. "The demand for all-natural products free from artificial ingredients is increasing," Becky says.

While innovation and experimentation are important, shoppers will always be looking for authenticity, and this is where retailers can strike a balance between their trend-led product range and their traditional favourites. "Customers will always be looking for what is new," Vicky says. "It's human nature and how we expect retail marketing to sell to us, so we will always need to innovate. However, change for the sake of it is not always wise or needed, so we need to retain those tried and trusted products."

> "Health credentials are incredibly important today and will continue to be going forward"

STOCK CHECK



TRACKLEMENTS FRESH CHILLI JAM

This addictive, sticky-sweet chilli jam smoulders with a gentle heat from fistfuls of fresh red chillies. Incredibly versatile.

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THE FORAGING FOX SMOKED JALAPEÑO MAYO

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foragingfox.com



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A superb hot horseradish combined with wholegrain mustard and a little chilli for some extra bite.

pottspartnership.co.uk





MIXING IT UP

After a home mixology explosion during lockdown, retailers can keep spirits sales flowing by stocking innovative, premium products

COMMENTATORS



RUSSELL EVANS
BULLARDS SPIRITS



PLATO MOYSIADIS
CABAL



INDY ANAND
SKYLARK SPIRITS



DIMA DEINEGA
DIMA'S VODKA



LEON PULLIN
CAMBRIDGE DISTILLERY



TALULA WHITE
SEKFORDE DRINKS

The reopening of hospitality this summer was extremely welcome news from the British drinks industry. However, producers had not been resting on their laurels for the past 18 months. After the closure of restaurants, bars and pubs caused on-trade sales to disappear overnight, drinks businesses sought out ways to bolster off-trade sales through the medium of retailers.

Fine food shops stepped up to the plate, and consumers were more than willing to raise a glass to a homemade post-work cocktail or a tipple with friends over Zoom. In fact, according to research by Craft Gin Club, 65% of respondents said they were making cocktails more in 2020 than they did previously.

While the opening of the economy has been good news for drinks companies and foodservice operators, it won't signal an exodus from the spirits aisles of retailers, as Craft Gin Club's research found: a whopping 90% of those surveyed plan to continue creating cocktails at home. "We're very pleased that bars and restaurants are opening again, but as restrictions ease, we believe that our customers will want to experience all the fun of mixology at the bar in their home environment, too," says Russell Evans, founder of Bullards Spirits. This will only be enhanced by this year's staycation trend. "The summer season is the perfect time to enjoy cocktails al fresco with guests," he added. "The theatre of cocktail making adds extra enjoyment to occasions."

An eye for quality

Plato Moysiadis, brand ambassador for Cabal rum, says the pandemic unlocked consumers' creativity for experimenting with food and drink. "I believe that creativity is good for the soul and that people who caught the creativity bug will keep it," Plato said. But after the reopening of restaurants won't consumers be happy to let bartenders do all of the work? Plato doesn't think so. Instead, those who are returning to their favourite drinking establishments will take inspiration from the latest cocktail menus. "No doubt, they will be taking some of those ideas away to experiment and take their home bars to the next level," he said.

Indy Anand, director of Skylark Spirits, agrees that the home drinking trend will evolve to be more focused on quality cocktails. "This is because lockdown has awoken a customer who is paying more attention to what they drink. The days of having the cheapest spirit in cocktails are slowly moving away as these customers become more savvy and premium products become the norm," he says. Today's consumer has become "increasingly discerning with their at-home alcohol choices," adds Dima Deinega, founder of Dima's Vodka, and the home cocktail hour is now a key occasion that retailers should consider with their offering and marketing.

Education and elevation

For Leon Pullin, retail and e-commerce channel manager at Cambridge Distillery, today's home cocktail trends are all about "education and elevation". He says, "Consumers will continue to educate themselves on the best-in-class ingredients, on-trade techniques, the history behind each serve, and why a bartender created it." Retailers can therefore lean into education by helping customers discover more about cocktails and stocking products with key points of difference from what can be found at supermarkets. "Diversifying lines stocked away from the mainstream and grocery lines will lead to higher cash margins for the retailer," says Indy, and also help give customers "fresh and enticing" products to enjoy.

Thankfully, there are numerous brands today for retailers to choose from. "The pandemic has opened doors to new incumbents, a reflection of the consumer demand for smaller, independent and interesting brands that have a unique and authentic story to tell," Dima says. "Without the ability to travel, consumers have been particularly inspired and captivated by niche brands that offer a sense of escapism and provide insights into new cultures."

Stocking unique and eye-catching products is a surefire way to capture the imagination of today's consumer. "Here at Skylark Spirits, we have found that there has been an increase in consumers who are seeking out brands with a discernible point of difference to the general everyday selection, to try something unique," Indy said. "Whether this is in regards to flavour profiles, production types, different countries or ethical practices, the general consumer is paying more attention to what they eat and drink. This will, and already has, started to lead consumers away from the entry level of the category into the more premium offerings."

New favourites and classic flavours

With so much variety to choose from, which spirits are must-stock products for retailers? The Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) crowned rum the "drink of lockdown" as it saw the biggest growth across all spirits during April to June 2020, 38% more than the same period in 2019.

"Rum is a mainstay in the cocktail world. It has always been incredibly diverse and used to enhance a variety of cocktails," says Indy. "Whatever your palate prefers, from tiki to tart, or sweet to fruity, the rum category has an amazing product to help create your perfect tipple."

Plato agrees that the rum sector is an exciting space. "The incredible variety that exists in the rum world makes it a spirit that is accessible to everyone. There is definitely a much bigger market now for rums that are made with respect for the end consumer, and rum drinkers are rewarding producers who are transparent about the way they make and market their liquids," he says.

Yet the mainstay of the British spirits scene over recent years has been gin. Over 2020, the WSTA said combined sales of gin and flavoured gin in shops, supermarkets and online rose by 22% in value, breaking the billion-pound-mark for the first time by reaching £1.2bn. Thanks to lockdown, Brits bought more than 10 million extra bottles of gin from UK retailers in 2020. "Gin is so versatile, which makes it a consumer favourite," says Bullards' Russell. "Bullards Spirits' gins are classic with a contemporary twist – Norfolk honey in our Old Tom, samphire in our Coastal gin."

According to Leon, "It is the complexity and diversity of flavours that make people come back to gin." Flavour, he says, is at the heart of what Cambridge Distillery does. Indeed, its flavours have gone where few others have ventured – from insects to truffles – winning it the title of World's Most Innovative Distillery. Wild and unique innovations certainly have a place on the shelves of retailers, but the classics still have plenty to give – especially when they are revived

> "Lockdown has awoken a customer who is paying more attention to what they drink. The days of having the cheapest spirit in cocktails are slowly moving away as these customers become more savvy and premium products become the norm"

with a touch of something different. "There's a trend of reinventing simple classics – evoking the nostalgia of traditional cocktails in new contemporary formats," Dima says.

The finishing touches

Another way to liven up a tried and tested spirit offering? Mixers. Dima says retailers can elevate basic offerings with a larger selection of mixers, garnishes and bitters. "Retailers can also adapt by showcasing more of the information that the consumer now appreciates, and hence supporting the category-wide education drive – sharing details of the origins and provenance of the spirits sold, as well as tasting notes, signature serves and an explanation of how to drink it and what to pair it with," he says. Talula White, founder of Sekforde Drinks agrees that in-store displays, which feature all the ingredients needed to make a certain cocktail, can be very effective. Leon believes education should be at the heart of the spirits industry. "We are firm believers that through consumer education we can work with retailers to lift the category, and in turn increase their customers' understanding of how to assess spirits."

IN **2020**, BRITS **BOUGHT** MORE THAN **10 MILLION EXTRA** BOTTLES OF **GIN**

Sekforde mixers take a unique approach to education, as they are designed with specific pairings in mind, and suggested combinations are indicated right on the label. "I believe our specific recommendations work brilliantly at guiding consumers and inspiring them to try something different," Talula says. "People tell us Sekforde's tailoring to specific spirits makes everything clear and encourages them to try something that usually wouldn't have occurred to them, or that they wouldn't have felt confident enough to try," she says.

"Mixers are critical to creating delicious and simple drinks at home. The G&T has taught everyone that," Talula adds. "Now it's time to mix it up, and everyone wants to try something different." By stocking a careful mix of unique flavours and traditional favourites, bolstered by educational displays and tailored content, retailers will keep the home mixology trend alive in the months and years to come.

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS

How a product is made and packaged can be as compelling to customers as unique flavours

Bullards Spirits last year unveiled an Eco-Refill Pouch, and these now account for almost 60% of all its gin sales. "Customers love the concept and we're happy to be doing what we can to reduce our carbon footprint as a business," Russell says. "The pouches were developed so that we can offer a more sustainable solution to buying our gin." Elsewhere, spirits brands are making waves with their ingredient and flavouring choices, from eco-distiller Wildjac's use of locally sourced and seasonal ingredients, to Discarded Spirits Co's use of waste-products recovered from the winemaking process.



STOCK CHECK



MONTANYA DISTILLERS ORO RUM
Full-bodied, aged for one year in an American White Oak whisky barrel.
skylarkspirits.com



BULLARDS COASTAL GIN
Inspired by the Norfolk coastline with a delicate, salty influence complemented by bright citrus flavours.
bullardsspirits.co.uk



DIMA'S VODKA
Made with three high-quality, organic grains – barley, wheat and rye – to give a deeper flavour profile.
dimasvodka.com



WILDJAC DISTILLERY ENGLISH SUMMER GIN
Fresh and zesty on the nose with citrus bursting through on the palate. Bitter orange with a grapefruit finish.
wildjac.co.uk



CABAL NO.1513 AGED RUM
Finished in Pedro Ximénez casks in Speyside, creating a distinctive, complex, yet smooth taste profile.
cabalrum.com



WIMBLEDON BREWERY'S WIMBLEDON GARDEN GIN
Made in small batches, this premium dry gin features a selection of unique botanicals like gorse and heather.
wimbledonbrewery.com



SEKFORDE RASPBERRY, ROSE & SAGE SODA
Soft sweetness from aromatic raspberry and rose balanced with a silvery hint of sage on the finish.
sekfordedrinks.com



NUISANCE DRINKS WILD BRAMBLE AND ROSEMARY SODA
Brambles give this sparkling mixer a sweet, aromatic and fruity flavour with a hint of rosemary and bay.
nuisancedrinks.co.uk



CLEAN CO CLEAN T NON-ALCOHOLIC TEQUILA
Earthy and fruity, with woody, oak notes, green olive and a peppery rocket and watercress finish.
clean.co



CRAFTED® BY CRACKER DRINKS CO. POSH LIME & SODA
Refreshing and zesty blend of Mexican limes and British soda water.
crafteddrinks.co.uk



FINAL CALL

This summer may not be panning out exactly how we thought it would. After a surge in optimism following the vaccine rollout and the easing of restrictions earlier in the spring and summer, Covid-19 cases are back on the rise in the UK. (Not to mention the fact that the weather has been rather on the grey and drizzly side this summer.)

Unfortunately, the ongoing pandemic has led some event managers to have to make tough calls once again to postpone industry gatherings. The cancellation of this year's Farm Shop & Deli Show, for example, is no doubt a blow to many in the industry. However, the sector has managed to find new ways to continue celebrating a love for all things fine food over the past year and a half. Virtual events were a revelation, offering buyers a chance to discover great new products. Awards shows were also moved to video platforms or were announced to a wider audience than ever before on social media to continue recognising achievements of retailers, producers and other industry players, despite the fact that they could not meet in person.

In June, we announced the winners of The Great Stock Giveaway, a new initiative we created with Woolcool in order to bring a bit of excitement – and some brilliant products – to the fine food retail sector. We heard from our winners that during a year when events were called off and new product news was drowned out by the near-constant announcements and updates from the government, having the chance to test and trial new products with customers was a huge help.

We're happy to play a part, however big or small, in fostering these important connections in the food sector. If Covid has taught us anything, it's that these relationships are vital – they will bring joy in the darkness and lend a helping hand when times are tough. So although we can't predict exactly what will happen next in the ongoing Covid saga, we know these connections will see us through no matter what.

We love hearing from our readers. Do you have a story to share or expertise to pass on? Please get in touch with us via courtney.goldsmith@aceville.co.uk

5 MINUTES WITH

STUART MACDONALD, FOUNDER OF MANILIFE



WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
No idea, but I know I'd probably be single (I met my now wife when I tried to sell her a jar of ManiLife).

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?
I managed one day working as a barman until I finally came clean that I'd lied to them about my age! After that it was waiting tables and pulling pints (legally) at events all over the UK.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
Pretty corny, but it's making people happy. For me, ManiLife has always been far more about the people than it has been about the product. We're pretty fortunate that the two are interlinked.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?
I'm lucky enough that one doesn't really come to mind. I didn't enjoy being an auditor (accountant) that much, but even in that there were lots of parts I did like.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?
Those interactions with consumers where you realise that they are genuinely, absolutely mad for what we're creating.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?
I probably let the stress of it all get to me a bit much if I'm honest.

HOW ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY?
I think the industry could be better integrated with public health. It's a tricky one in practice as intervention often has unintended consequences, but it's mental when you consider the public cost of bad diets.

TEA OR COFFEE?
Definitely coffee. I love how nerdy people have gotten about it over the last 10-20 years. It's a massive inspiration for ManiLife. For me, the links between coffee and peanut butter are so obvious.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?
Gousto's ManiLife PB&J burger.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?
Do less, better. Living by it is a lot harder.

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
A pig's ear. It was absolutely disgusting.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?
Harry Potter (*and the Deathly Hallows* if we're getting specific). Unashamedly. I still listen to Stephen Fry's dulcet tones every night!

SWEET OR SAVOURY?
Six months ago I'd be hands-down savoury, but we've been getting pretty deep into flavour recently developing a peanut butter tasting school, and I'm realising that all my favourite tasting notes are the sweet ones.

SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE

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- Preparing for Christmas
- Speciality & Fine Food Fair Preview
- Lunch! Tradeshow Preview
- Christmas Puddings & Fruit Cake
- Christmas Cheese
- Chutneys & Pickles
- Christmas Drinks

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The final word on fine food

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Plant-based diets are not what they used to be, and nooch, or nutritional yeast, has played a big role in the broadening of vegan and veggie horizons. Nooch is used as a stand-in for cheesy flavour, and as more interest floods the plant-based sector, brands are getting creative with their products. Notorious Nooch offers Smokey Bacon and Cheesy Immature flavours, made by toasting yeast flakes to bring out their natural intensity. It's the ultimate versatile storecupboard hero, as it can be sprinkled on anything from pizzas and pastas to salad, chips or popcorn.

notoriousnooch.co



HIP OAT MILK CHOCOLATE SALTY PRETZEL

As the brainchild of James Cadbury, founder of ethical luxury chocolate brand Love Cocoa and descendant of Cadbury's chocolate, I knew that HiP chocolate would be a winner – and it did not disappoint. As a lover of all things sweet and salty, I was particularly fond of the Salty Pretzel flavour, which has added crunch. As part of the next-gen vegan chocolates hitting the market, you can't do much better. Plus, it's great to see the ethos runs through its plastic-free packaging, too.

hipchocolate.com

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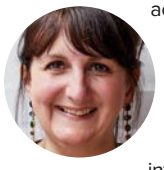


Gut health is firmly in the spotlight today, and while we can opt for health food shop supplements, I much prefer to adjust my diet to cater to health needs when possible. Brands are making this easier than ever. Yoghurt is famed for its gut-loving properties, and Bio&Me's range, which includes Alphonso Mango, Madagascan Vanilla, and a pleasantly tart Original flavour, contains billions of live cultures. Perfect for topping with crunchy granola and fresh fruit.

bioandme.co.uk

THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Gemma Simmonite, chef and co-owner of Gastrono-Me in Bury St Edmunds



I'm a mix of many places. Born and bred in Cardiff, of Greek Cypriot heritage. Every single holiday from school was spent with my grandparents who lived in Spain. As a young teen, I went to theatre school in Hertfordshire, and then carried on my nomadic existence as an adult living my twenties in London, then Surrey, with a Brighton move to raise a family, and finally now in Suffolk. It means that foods and food purveyors that I've fallen in love with in my life have been scattered far and wide.

My first food memories are of Cardiff's iconic Victorian market. As a young child the smells and sounds of this indoor giant used to terrify and thrill me simultaneously. Pungent fish with dull eyes on a theatre set of ice. Unintelligible cries of veg callers. Butcheries with macabre grinning pigs' heads. The sizzle and smell of Welsh cakes. And then, by strange contrast, the yapping and tweeting from pet stalls upstairs. It was a sensory explosion like no other.

My parents were hoteliers, and it would be a visit to put in food orders or to settle accounts. My treat for accompanying would be a little bag of prawns doused in malt vinegar and white pepper, and a bag of sherbet lemons for later. It was an incredibly early introduction into local produce being used in a local business – seeing it from its beginnings right through to a guest's evening meal. I'm thrilled to say that the market is still going strong, incredibly with most of the same stalls, and with some exciting culturally diverse additions thrown into the mix. Our next stop would be for Kalamata olives housed in massive wooden barrels and Matzo crackers at Wally's, still a Cardiff institution after 40 years and still the best deli I've ever visited far and wide. My second place that I always yearn to visit is the iconic Mercat De L'Olivar in Palma. Indoors it was like a sacred monastery of food where my grandmother Tilly did her weekly worshipping. Parcels of squid and hake; bags of scarlet tomatoes, rippled and rotund; dusty baguettes for me to carry awkwardly and chorizo for me to gnaw on until my mouth was slickly stained orange.

As a food obsessed teen, of course I sought out Neal's Yard Dairy in Covent Garden, London, feeling oh so desperately chic and grown-up tasting and purchasing cheese.

The first business venture my husband and I created was a delicatessen in Suffolk, which isn't really a surprise when you look back at my food obsessed childhood. It was a tough learning experience. Yes of course I was stupidly happy surrounding myself with my version of a top 100 food pop chart and living out my dream inspired by all my food destination memories. But learning that we couldn't sustain buying in the best of everything for a slow trickle of customers was hard. Its struggles, however, ended up leading us towards our restaurant. As with most things, necessity was key, and I was tasked with using up counter produce so as not to lose expensive stock. So salamis and meats would land into fantastically crammed sandwiches and salads, artisan cheeses melted into tarts and soups – it taught me to think creatively on my feet and find my style as a chef. Thankfully, we found that this was in fact our mojo. A decade later as far happier restaurateurs, we still don't regret our brief foray into the deli world. It grew Gastrono-me Restaurants and coincidentally bred another young epicure, our daughter, who at the age of nine behind the cheese counter could confidently share with a customer the fine difference between a Devon Blue and a Stichelton! She doesn't know it yet, of course, but I think the food industry may well be running in her veins, too.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Garofalo

SHARING THE LOVE OF ITALIAN CUISINE

Education is at the heart of Italian food and cooking, and retailers are integral to linking customers with authentic ingredients



This spring saw the opening of Eataly London, the first UK branch of the chain of Italian marketplaces. After being founded in Italy in 2007, the business has launched everywhere from the US to Japan to France and beyond. Complete with a market holding more than 5,000 Italian and local food products, plus around 2,000 varieties of Italian wine, the London site also has takeaway eateries, dining areas and a cookery school. Coming in at 42,000 square feet, it's safe to say that Eataly is a fair bit bigger than many of the delis and food halls already selling the best of Italy's food and drink here in the UK.

The move is a significant one during a time when imports from the Continent have been hit by the dual challenges of Brexit and Covid-19. Creating a space where Brits can not only enjoy eating the finest Italian food but also learn to make it themselves is central to the ethos around Mediterranean family cooking.

From the cosiest delis, packed floor-to-ceiling with exciting, unexplored food and drink, to a sweeping central London behemoth, for any lover of Italian food the joy is in the sharing. Enlightening customers to the finer details of homemade pizza, pasta and everything in between is one of the best bits of independent retail, and passion comes to life easily when surrounded by shelves of authentic products.

During a customer's first foray into fine olive oils all the way through to their trials and errors with Italian home baking, retailers are there to share tried and tested secrets, family tips passed down through the generations and, of course, the best products they can possibly get their hands on.

Are you passionate about Italian food and drink? If so we would love to hear from you – get in touch via courtney.goldsmith@aceville.co.uk.



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