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The needs of your customers are changing. Are you ready?

We are all experiencing unprecedented times where the scale of change has been phenomenal. With so many restrictions and the inability to eat out, consumers have had to rethink what to buy and where to shop. There has been an explosion in home cooking from scratch like never before. The good news is, research suggests that this is set to continue as lockdown unwinds. Research also tells us that social distancing and travel restrictions will mean that many people will continue to shop locally. This is potentially a game changer for independent retailers.

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EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the June issue of *Speciality Food*. As I write this, Britain is over two months into lockdown and we are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel – at least in terms of personal freedoms – but the industry is still facing major disruption.

The artisan cheese world has suffered great losses, and the wider sector and consumers wasted no time in stepping up to the plate to support this much-loved slice of our industry.

This supportive attitude has long been prevalent within the fine food and drink sector, and it is gratifying to see the rest of the UK recognise its workers for what they are: passionate, innovative, hardworking and creative. 'Food heroes' indeed.

This issue, we've made sure to fill every page with the intel you need to know now, from home baking and drinks trends to the exclusive industry news, views and insight that we're known for.

Summer 2020 will undoubtedly be a challenging one, but let's endeavour to come out stronger.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR
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With social distancing measures still in place, reopening certainly isn't a case of returning to pre-coronavirus operation. While the future is still somewhat unknown in terms of what long-term measures could mean for the industry, more imminently, businesses are preparing to resume operation whilst adhering to Government measures, unsure of how long they may remain in place.

So what can food outlets and retailers do now to ensure their business thrives in the future? To find out, we spoke with Elliot Rich, managing director of The Alternative Board.

Follow Government guidelines

Most importantly, stick to Government measures and avoid jumping the gun on opening dates, Elliot tells us.

Various restrictions have been put in place to ensure the safety of both staff and customers, including restocking outside of store opening hours and limiting the number of customers at any one time. Companies should be considering how to implement these, and in what way they may affect the business.

Be confident

There's a lot of uncertainty around reopening, but the key to thriving is confidence. "If you're confident, then there's a strong possibility

How To Approach Reopening During Covid-19

Following weeks of reduced operating hours and closures across the industry, many food retailers, cafés and restaurants are now preparing to reopen in early June

your business will do well when you open your doors again," Elliot says. "There are so many business owners that don't have confidence in their business; they don't believe that they'll see a spike or that customers will come back, so wonder if it's worth the effort. It's all about mindset."

It's not only about having confidence in your business, but about ensuring your customers and staff have the same confidence in you and your company. According to Elliot, people will want to know that you've done everything you can to provide them a safe and pleasant experience.

"One of the biggest mistakes businesses are making is not doing a proper risk assessment of what it looks like to enter their premises; they haven't physically walked the customer experience," Elliot says. "Look for touch points and areas where customers will be most nervous, from driving and parking, to

entering the first door and bumping into people.

"You can't tell people enough about what you're planning to do. People will come back if they feel it's safe enough to come back. People will Google you to see if you're open – does your website say: 'We're open' or 'We've taken every measure to ensure it's safe for you to come visit us again'? Use social media or even shoot a personal video from the owner of the business, and share it on your platforms.

Consider your strategy

Throughout lockdown, many retailers have set up new services, discovered new routes to market and found other ways of adjusting to the shift in supply and demand. But reopening doesn't mean you have to revert to operating exactly as you did pre-lockdown. In fact, it's more about moving forward, particularly when it comes to weaknesses in the business.

"People who've pivoted to create an online presence will have a new income stream – it may not be as high as during lockdown, but it's inevitable that this lockdown isn't a one-off," Elliot says. "If you have invested, having that online presence gives you the opportunity to keep money coming in. You may see that your walk-in business won't achieve the levels this year as it did before, but that with online services for people who are staying at home, you've created two income streams.

Elliot continues, "Now is a chance to think of what you want to achieve as a business. Perhaps limitations are to do with talent and structure of employees, so you might rethink your team, restructure, or elevate individuals who've performed particularly well during these difficult times. It's also an opportunity to think about whether your business model worked in the past, and to rethink your vision, keeping in mind what the 'new norm'

for your sector will look like."

You may also want to consider gaining an outside perspective from an expert such as a business advisor, or other part-time individuals who can support your ideas and growth as and when you need them.

Keep up communications

Many retailers and outlets will have worked hard to maintain their customer base and welcome new customers during lockdown, so it's important to maintain this sense of loyalty from customers. Much of this will come from communications within your team, as well as marketing-style communications outside of it.

"Marketing has always been important, but some people haven't understood the power of a brand. Marketing should be the number one area you're budgeting for right now and doing it yourself isn't necessarily the best way. For a small cost you can get someone else to do it for you to raise your profile and get more footfall. If you don't have surplus to invest, consider the grant money you've got; others are using business interruption loans to assign money to marketing activities because they know by increasing their brand profile while competitors are sitting on their hands, they'll be the ones in the spotlight. Even if your budget is £5,000, that should yield many times more business, customers and spend."

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“Very little in today's retailing world is clear”



**JOHN SHEPHERD
PARTRIDGES**

In my last article we at Partridges had arrived at the end of March expressing the hope that things would soon one day get back to normal following the chaos of the preceding few weeks. What happened next?

Since the beginning of April the dust has been slowly settling and sales have been returning to normal, albeit with fewer customers. Panic buying, besides from that of my wife, is basically now over. We are well stocked with eggs and pasta and essentials and several members of staff have emerged Robinson Crusoe-like from exile, with a few Man Fridays in tow asking for employment opportunities.

However, things are definitely not as they were before the lockdown. Our hopes for “normality soon” have altered to “normality eventually.” Our customer count has reduced significantly due to social distancing measures and after having reduced considerably the number of customers that are allowed in the shop at any one time.

Seeing a long queue patiently waiting to be allowed through the front door is heartbreakingly counterintuitive for mature speciality food shopkeepers! Customer service is now frequently carried out through a perspex screen or muffled through a mask and there is a yawning gap in the shop where our café used to be. There are also a few yawning café staff who want to get back as soon as possible to serving coffees to customers who are keen to acquire them.

Very little in today's retailing world is clear, but for the foreseeable future cafés will not be returning to normal service with tables and chairs squeezed in as tightly as possible.

Under these circumstances some sort of decisive action is required. We are not necessarily experts in the field of decisive action but at least acknowledge there is a golden opportunity to rethink various aspects of the shop starting with a blank piece of paper. If customers are not able to come to the shop we will have to go to the customers more than ever before, and currently are working on a few initiatives to help make this happen.

For example, we are trialling a takeaway hot food section in the old café space. It will be served by a chef to start off with – subject to a positive response from customers. We are relocating a take away coffee and cake counter to the front of the shop utilising a previously unopened front door.

Customers can queue externally and use click and collect as well if required. We have obtained a self service coffee machine which has been surprisingly successful and easy to use. We are embracing several delivery platforms, click and collect and investing in a beautiful ice cream cart for external selling purposes – local authorities permitting of course.

So in different ways the shop is moving inside out. But if none of the above initiatives work in the long term? So what? It is only a trial in trying times. The goal will be to introduce these new approaches without diminishing the traditional strengths and core business of the speciality food shop such as the deli counter, the wine department, high customer service standards and retaining the loyalty of our most supportive customer base.

In terms of customers and with regard to the old question of ‘your place or mine’ the answer is shifting over to ‘your place’.



Cotswold Fayre invests in new foodhall and kitchen

The fine food distributor has announced that it is to become a partner in the new venture, which is based at Glenavon Farm, Saltford, near Bath.

The project will see the current derelict farm buildings and cow sheds overhauled into a purpose-built retail and café space.

As a B Corp, a certification that recognises companies that use the power of business to solve social and environmental problems, Cotswold Fayre has exciting plans for the new venture.

Expected to open in Spring 2021, it will give the company the opportunity to experiment with new fixtures and displays to reduce plastic packaging, as well as the chance to offer customer taste test sessions in an effort to gather feedback on potential new products.

Speaking about the new venture, Paul Hargreaves, chief executive at Cotswold Fayre, said: “The landowner and Bath District Farmers had been planning to open a retail and kitchen outlet for some time.

“I was delighted when approached to become part of the team to turn the idea into a reality, as it wholeheartedly complements our core business.”

Business partner and managing director for the foodhall and kitchen, Paul Castle, added: “I am thrilled to see work start on the exciting new venture. We plan to stock plenty of products supplied by local farmers and producers, and create in the region of 40 local jobs, which is very exciting.”

Paul Hargreaves continued, “We started planning the new foodhall and kitchen a long time ago so no pandemics were on the horizon then, but we are glad we are launching in 2021 and not within the past eight weeks. Over 21 years I have seen some brilliant examples of great retailing and can't wait to take the best of these and put them into practice. In addition it will be great to have a retail outlet where we can test potential new products and see if they sell in an independent retail environment before we roll them out to our retail customers.

“We aim for the new venture to be as environmentally and socially responsible as possible in order to fit in with our B Corp ethos. Advances in packaging are moving quickly, so we would hope to be able to be plastic-free at launch. We will also aim to employ a percentage of disadvantaged people from the local community, and enable the farm shop to be an active contributor in benefitting the local community.

“An example of some of our plans, there will be a generous number of free electric car charging points for customers to use while they are on site, and incentives will also be given to those arriving by bicycle or public transport. Any food waste will be collected by our partners at City Harvest who deliver this to the homeless and other projects, which not only eliminates waste but reduces the carbon footprint of this food going to land-fill. The café and food hall will be carbon neutral using sustainable energy and any carbon generated will be offset, and of course Cotswold Fayre will consolidate supply of much of the chilled and ambient produce thereby reducing carbon in supply chain.”



ONLY **9%** OF CONSUMERS WANT THINGS TO RETURN TO ‘NORMAL’ ONCE THE OUTBREAK IS OVER



33% OF SHOPPERS ARE SPENDING MORE TIME COOKING OR BAKING



58% OF CONSUMERS ARE SNACKING MORE THAN THEY WERE PRE-LOCKDOWN



38% OF THOSE WORKING FROM HOME ARE COOKING MORE NEW RECIPES

SOURCES: YOUNG FOR FOOD, FARMING AND AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION; MAGNETIC MEDIA REPORT FOR HEARST REPORT LOCKDOWN KITCHEN: COOKING AND EATING DURING CORONAVIRUS

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“The future is murky”



CHARLES CAMPION

Few UK governments have ever been under such intense scrutiny. Battalions of PR operatives and special advisors are kept busy preparing charts and of those who watch the daily press briefings some can even claim to understand what they mean.

Commendably, this daily briefing comes with a dollop of transparency along with plenty of charts. For once there seems to be less of the parliamentary bickering that afflicts PM's questions and a bit more of the consensus that gets things done.

What's more, we get to see a bit more of our elected representatives. For MPs, merely working hard to reserve a safe seat in the countryside is no longer good enough.

The nation's habits have changed – proud parents used to put the toddlers to bed and then open an afternoon bottle of “mummy juice” in front of the telly. Now the domination of the virus press briefing means an earlier start, crisps are essential, and Prosecco gives way to chilled Pinot Grigio.

For anybody who had, has or will have a business venture that centres around buying and selling fine food and drink, the future is murky. Those of us who can look back six or seven months

or so have an advantage but are dragged back from the brink of optimism by the resilience of the virus. There may not be a silver bullet, but there is a free resource that will fit with any circumstance. We are talking ideas... and some of the best ideas are free. Ideas can cope with changes of direction.

Home baking is doing undeniably well. The rise in demand has seen more than one retailer forced to buy specialised flours by the sack full before re-packaging in store into kilo sized bags. Flour millers must be wondering whether “One swallow might not make a summer” after all.

Considering the torrent of TV coverage over the last couple of years it would be strange if there was no peak on the domestic home baking graph, which poses the question – will the golden glow continue when things edge towards normality? Or will bakers everywhere set a new agenda for the flour millers that sees specialist flours becoming the norm rather than the exception?

Despite the rise and rise of home delivery, and the indignities of lockdown, there are still cooks out there whose perverse mission is to recreate the iconic dishes of fast food in the comfort of their own homes. Welcome to the land of the ‘fakeaway’. If you fancy a burger with a sauce that tastes just like that of the High Street giants, then John Torode is the man to Google. Meanwhile, Slimming World offers a “KFC-style” Fakeaway recipe, so that you can set about cooking your fast food favourites and still save calories.

September 2020 trade shows cancelled

Speciality & Fine Food Fair, Farm Shop & Deli Show, Food & Drink Expo and National Convenience Show were set to run in September of this year but have been postponed to 2021.

Farm Shop & Deli Show, Food & Drink Expo and National Convenience Show were due to be held at NEC Birmingham in April of this year, and the organisers had already postponed the events until September before setting the events back to 2021.

The events will now be held at NEC, Birmingham on 12th-14th April 2021. Andrew Reed, managing director of events and exhibitions said, “It is only a few short weeks ago that I wrote to you to postpone the UK Food Shows from April to September but as you are aware there is still no certainty about how we will emerge from the current lockdown.

“So following much discussion with our partners and picking up on the sentiment in the markets and communities we serve I now feel that it is in the best interests of all to further postpone Food & Drink Expo, Farm Shop & Deli Show and National

Convenience Show until 12th-14th April 2021 when we can again reunite at the NEC to deliver the UK's biggest and best attended trade show.

“I am hopeful this will also be a clear rallying point for the food and drink sectors to get together after this disastrous and challenging time where we can share inspiration, learning and demonstrate some of the amazing innovation that continues to be the bedrock of the sector.

“By acting now, we aim to remove the uncertainty and allow you to plan as effectively as possible whilst minimising your associated costs. We would like to thank our exhibitors, visitors, speakers, partners and suppliers for their continued support and patience during this challenging time.”

Speciality & Fine Food Fair will

now be held at Olympia, London on 6th-7th September 2021.

Philippa Christer, event manager said, “As the home of the UK's artisan food & drink community, we know that postponing Speciality & Fine Food Fair will come as an enormous disappointment for the industry. It was an incredibly tough decision to take, however given the current climate and enormous global uncertainty, we felt it was the right thing to do. We took this decision now to give the industry, both buyers and suppliers alike, enough advance notice to adjust their plans accordingly.

“While the event is postponed until next year, we are already in discussions with a number of partners to create a series of new initiatives to help our community stay inspired, supported and connected during these turbulent times. We look forward to sharing those plans in due course. In the meantime, please join our weekly webinars – which continue to tackle the pressing topics for our community.”

“ This was an incredibly tough decision to take, however given the current climate and enormous global uncertainty, we felt [postponing the event] was the right thing to do ”

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Opportunity arises for independent shops as public support for major supermarkets declines

Support for major supermarkets has declined back towards normal levels as the national mood shifts and consumers become disillusioned with lockdown exit plans, according to a recent poll from research consultancy Populus Group.

Populus Group's weekly Covid-19 tracker, which was carried out online 7th-10th May, found that Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Asda, Iceland, Ocado and Marks & Spencer all fell in public approval ratings. This could potentially open the door to small, independent retailers to gain support.

Sainsbury's, Iceland, Tesco, Asda and Morrisons all saw significant 7% declines in their respective approval ratings this week, while Tesco fell from its all-time high rating of 71% approval last week to

64%, its second-lowest rating.

Despite these figures, food retailers maintained their place at the top of the poll for their performance in response to the coronavirus pandemic compared with other sectors including the government, airlines, energy firms, telecommunications groups and non-food retailers.

"We are moving into a new phase of the Coronavirus crisis, and with this comes increased uncertainty and a spike in public anxiety," said Manfred Abraham, CEO of BrandCap, part of the Populus Group. "Whilst lockdown is far from enjoyable it had become the status quo, and moving away from this pseudo-security will be hard.

"As shown by our tracker, supermarkets need to once again consider their position and be

led by their values to continue to successfully navigate the shifting sands," Manfred adds.

According to the poll, the public was losing its appetite for updates from organisations on how they are handling the crisis. "Only 55% agree that they want brands to tell them how they have helped, down from a high of 65% in week three."

As the UK's lockdown measures are relaxed, supermarkets are returning to their normal place in consumers' lives. But with shoppers growing ambivalent, farm shops and independent stores that can offer something different to the major chains may stand to benefit.

By using this moment to reassess and to leverage their unique positions in their communities, speciality retailers can make the most of this opportunity.

Industry pushes for 'Green Brexit'

The Soil Association continues to push for amendments on agroecology and trade in the Agriculture Bill. "A truly 'Green Brexit' will be one with agroecology and organic at its heart, where trade policy ensures high environmental and animal welfare standards, and where food and farming policy enhance public health," the group said.

Two amendments laid before Parliament would have strengthened the bill by supporting farmers to adopt agroecological and organic farming.

Speaking to the House, Kerry McCarthy MP said, "Agroecology is a cause whose time has come. This pandemic has brought home to many people how dysfunctional our relationship with the natural world has become, with overconsumption, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, a food system that is broken, and birds and wildlife disappearing from our countryside and gardens."

Caroline Lucas MP echoed these sentiments, highlighting that if the UK Government is to deliver on its promise of a 'Green Brexit', then the UK must go beyond best practice in Europe.

The Soil Association was signatory of a letter to George Eustice, Secretary of State, saying, "The Bill should ensure that agri-food imports are produced to at least equivalent environmental, animal welfare, and food safety standards as those required of producers in the UK."

Business rates revaluation for 2021 postponed

In an effort to help companies that are struggling during lockdown, the UK Government recently announced that the proposed business rate revaluation in England won't take place next year.

Legislation had previously been introduced in the House of Lords that moved the revaluation forward by a year from 2022 to 2021, however the decision was made to postpone the revaluation in order to help reduce uncertainty for businesses that have been impacted by Coronavirus.

The postponement comes after calls from businesses that said the

revaluation would be "disastrous", as it would have been based on pre-Coronavirus rates.

It's not clear when the revaluation will now take place, however it's likely to resume in 2022 as originally planned. The Government has said it will continue to review the business rate regime with a plan to publish evidence for the review in the coming months.

In its support for local businesses, the UK Government has already pledged £10bn in business rates relief, and has granted one-year business rates holiday to

businesses in the hospitality and leisure industries.

However, the industry is still seeking further support, with retailers and landlords warning that businesses are at risk of collapse. The British Retail Consortium and British Property Federation have renewed their appeal for the government to pay some of the rent due during lockdown. The call for help comes at a time when businesses fear they won't be able to continue employing furloughed staff, and existing bailout loan schemes will leave businesses with unsustainable debts.

Government shares updated guidance for retailers

Following Prime Minister Boris Johnson's televised speech regarding the steps to be taken as the UK eases out of lockdown, shadow cabinet minister Michael Gove and business secretary Alok Sharma have shared seven documents detailing how different types of workplaces can resume business.

A number of measures have been put in place to ensure the safety of both staff and customers within retail establishments. These are:

- Limit the number of customers at any one time - having defined the number of people (following two-

metre distancing regulations) that would fit within available floorspace

- Encourage customers to shop alone
- Suspend any services which do not comply with social distancing guidelines
- Update customer traffic and queue management plans, using outside areas for queuing where necessary
- Make clear to customers accompanied by children that they are responsible for supervising them throughout their time in the store
- Keep cafes/restaurants closed unless selling hot or cold food to-go
- Restock outside of store opening hours
- Provide guidance to customers when they arrive on the premises





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“Food predictions post Covid-19”



SUE NELSON

I never quite believed that our shopping habits and retail environment could radically change, but in just a few short weeks everything is different. There is now a real appreciation of the independent sector and its role in the local community, and the majority of consumers understand that worker safety is a justifiable priority. Farm shops, delis and small independent specialist food shops have implemented employee protection initiatives while continuing to produce and sell safe, quality food. How will things change in the longer term when social distancing and other measures will be relaxed?

With restaurants and takeaways either closed or offering limited services, households have been forced to cook more often at home and from scratch. This shift has led to the increasing popularity of online cooking videos as consumers have rediscovered the pleasure of making meals in their own kitchens using locally sourced ingredients. This will only increase as more people work from home even when the pandemic is past. It is likely that we will place greater stock in the pleasure of dining in with family and friends. Independents can offer tasty and easy-to-prepare meal solutions or devise nutritious menus, helping shoppers looking for guidance as they attempt more adventurous cooking with interesting ingredients.

With the importance of strict hygiene and food safety becoming a real consumer concern, better visibility and transparency on product sourcing

and manufacturing is needed. Consumers will want reassurance that their food has been produced and shipped safely - we will all be examining food labels much more intensely with provenance a key selling point. Shoppers will also be on the lookout for in-store cleanliness and retail practices that demonstrate high levels of hygiene.

Research has shown that the public believe that animal products are the root cause of the virus. In China in particular consumers have become wary of fresh meat and fish. With the COVID-19 outbreak reputedly stemming from 'wet markets' this may further undermine our trust in meat, accelerating the demand for plant-based proteins and vegetarian meals. It could also lead to a renewed interest in buying British products from British farms.

While younger consumers have generally been used to online food ordering, more elderly shoppers have been ambivalent towards using the internet for their shopping. Having been forced to order a myriad of products for home delivery, a new generation have mastered online ordering and will be continuing to purchase through their computers, tablets and phones when it is convenient. Many independent retailers have started offering local delivery and click and collect, and this will surely become a new popular service with a wider range of consumers.

Finally, Google search data has revealed how the nation's online behaviours have changed since lockdown. The absence of flour on supermarket shelves can be explained by the explosion of making homemade bread. Searches for sourdough recipes have increased 700%, scones 650%, flatbread 400% and soda bread 350%. Home baking is surely here to stay.

Sue Nelson presents the FoodTalk Show with Holly Shackleton foodtalk.co.uk

Coronavirus leads to sharp decline in cash

From contactless to Apple Pay, many retailers will already have witnessed a rise in digital transactions over the years. But following Coronavirus, we could see an even more rapid decline in the use of cash.

According to research conducted by YouGov for ATM network Link, the UK's cash withdrawals have fallen by 60% during lockdown, as over half of Brits actively avoid using cash in favour of other payment methods.

The decline is the result of contamination fears as it was revealed that COVID-19 can temporarily live on surfaces such as bank notes. As such, many retailers have refused to accept cash payments in order to limit the risk of transfer. But even after lockdown lifts and social distancing measures are eased, we could see the trend for digital methods continue.

The same survey showed that 76% of people think the Coronavirus crisis will affect their future use of

cash over the next six months, with many preferring to use contactless or mobile payments, do more online shopping or simply use ATMs less frequently.

That said, bank notes and coins aren't about to become history quite yet. Link data shows that there are still 11 million withdrawals a week, totalling £1 billion. And whilst the number of transactions has decreased, the amount per transaction has increased, with many people saving their cash for emergencies.

Retailers will no doubt have adapted to the change in behaviour during lockdown; some retailers have begun offering the option of card payment for the first time, whilst others are being very vocal about the fact that they do accept cash, knowing people may prefer the quicker payment option if it's managed in a safe way.

Looking to the future, many

customers who may have been apprehensive about digital transactions in the past, have perhaps become more comfortable with shopping online or paying by card, and may continue to do so in the future. However, when concerns over traces of the virus on surfaces eases, the convenience of using cash may set back in.

As with any behaviour trend that has emerged during lockdown, it remains to be seen how habits will shift or continue once businesses reopen and restrictions ease.

**CASH
WITHDRAWALS
HAVE FALLEN
BY 60% DURING
LOCKDOWN**

SOURCE: RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY
YOUNGOV FOR ATM NETWORK LINK

Veg box sales rocket by 111% in six weeks as Covid-19 drives demand

As shoppers look to reduce their trips out of the house amid the coronavirus outbreak, weekly sales of veg boxes in the UK have more than doubled. According to new data from the Food Foundation gathered through surveys of 101 UK veg box schemes, sales increased by 111% in the six weeks from the end of February to mid-April.

With about 500 schemes operating in the UK, a total of 3.5 million boxes were delivered to households over the last six weeks, the Food Foundation estimates. But producers of veg boxes are struggling to cope with the rising demand, with 82% of those surveyed putting waiting lists in place and turning away orders. The average waiting list numbered 160 people, while the largest box scheme surveyed had turned away 6,700 customers.

If these waiting lists could be met and the customers being turned away were supplied instead, an estimated 5.3 million veg boxes could be supplied over the next six weeks, the Food Foundation found.

Veg box businesses are calling for government support in the form of small grants so they can scale up to meet demand. "Like many farms selling into local markets we have seen some of our wholesale markets collapse overnight and demand rocket for veg boxes and deliveries. To deal with this we have had to invest rapidly in additional infrastructure, labour and equipment without any security that this demand will stay," says Adam Payne from the Landworkers' Alliance and Southern Roots Growers.

"We need government grants

for the essential infrastructure to make sure that we can transition our business, supply people who need produce and remain afloat ourselves." Investment could help with staffing and supplies as well as necessary infrastructure, such as polytunnels, delivery vehicles, cold stores and packing houses.

"In a time of national crisis, fruit and veg producers running box schemes have provided a critical service to their customers and communities: we must ensure our agriculture policy, now and in the future, helps them get the investment they need as they play a vital role in supporting access to healthy produce as part of a sustainable food and farming system," says Anna Taylor, executive director of the Food Foundation.

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Take stock with our new food and drink round-up

Manfood releases themed gift boxes

Cambridgeshire-based producer Manfood has expanded its range to include a new range of gift packs, ideally for upcoming occasions such as Father's Day and Christmas.

Each gift pack contains three jars and a unique theme, including Barbecue Trio, Cheese Lover's Trio, Gin Trio and Christmas Ham Essentials.

The Barbecue Trio pack contains Korean Barbecue Sauce, Buffalo Sauce and Beer Barbecue Sauce; the Cheese Lover's Trio contains Beer Jelly, Pear & Fig Chutney and Ale Chutney; the Gin Trio contains Gin Mayonnaise, Gin & Tonic Jelly and Gin Pickle; and the Christmas Ham Essentials contains Orange & Ginger Ham Glaze, Chipotle Honey Mustard

and Cumberland Sauce.

Selected gift boxes will be available from Diverse Fine Foods, Cress Co Marketplace and The Gorgeous Food Company.

Andre Dang, founder of Manfood said, "Manfood continues to develop new and exciting condiments and

sauces that are ideal for farm shops and delis to cross sell with their offerings of cheese, meat or fish. We've taken into account various trends and occasions: barbecue season is now in full swing, while the UK's love of global flavours is probably equal to its obsession with gin! These products have also been bundled together as ideal gifts which can be used for any occasion, including Father's Day, Secret Santa, Host gifts, Impulse treats and of course, Christmas." welovemanfood.com



Dr Will's unveils bold new look

Dr Will's, creator of a range of better-for-you table sauces, has announced a vibrant brand refresh, incorporating a bold exclamation mark to bring attention to the hidden sugars that are widespread in the market.

Founded in 2016 by a doctor and restaurateur team, it took a year to develop the range of healthy alternatives to popular table sauces which contain only naturally occurring sugars without compromising on flavour.

Every item in the Dr Will's range has been created as an alternative to the sugar-laden alternatives found elsewhere in the sector.

The range consists of Tomato Ketchup, Beetroot Ketchup, BBQ Sauce, Classic Mayonnaise, Spicy Mayonnaise, Avocado Mayonnaise and a vegan-friendly Classic Mayonnaise.

Dr. Will Breakey, co-founder said, "Grabbing the attention of the discerning everyday foodie with our playful new exclamation mark, we are calling out for change in a category traditionally dominated by mainstream players, giving rise to a new and what we hope to be growing new subsection of 'mainstream premium'. We aim to challenge habitual behaviour by providing higher quality, tastier and better-for-you sauces."

dr-wills.com



Skoulikas expands range of fine olives



Olive specialists Sunita have added a new Mediterranean Olive Mix to their range of speciality and organic olives.

Inspired by the sunny Mediterranean, the mix contains a flavourful blend of plump green and Kalamon olives, peppers and garlic marinated in a herb-infused oil.

The Mediterranean Olive Mix is supplied in a resealable clear container which is ideal for reducing spillages, and is ideal within a display and for decanting into smaller servings.

Jan Orrett, sales & marketing manager at Sunita said, "We are excited by the launch of this new product. This is the first of many new lines from Sunita this Summer; we offer a wide range of speciality olives, all our olives are grown and harvested the traditional way, carefully selected for ripeness, plucked at just the right moment."

skoulikasbedford.co.uk

Vegan-friendly barley drinks launch in UK

Bright Barley has released a range of three vegan-friendly dairy alternative drinks to the British market, as part of its mission to bring barley – which it calls 'the original supergrain' – back into the diet of the modern consumer.

Available in Salted Caramel, Chocolate and Coffee flavours, the drinks are presented in individual serving-sized Tetrapacks which are resealable for easy on-the-go consumption, and can be ambiently stored but are best served chilled.

Bright Barley state that the drinks are high in fibre and low in fat, and contain added calcium and vitamins D and B12.

Jiali Jiang, founder of Bright Barley said, "Developing a delicious drink was paramount, but maximising health and sustainability claims was also



central; so discovering organic, UK-farmed barley was the final piece of the puzzle. Disrupting the booming alt-milk category with a trailblazing product, forgotten ingredient and bold branding is an added bonus!" brightbarley.com



SNACK BUYER MAGAZINE



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PR account executive, Dan, 31, is a typical quarantine bread maker. He's on a WhatsApp group with three male friends, sharing photos of his sourdough bakes and says: "It's turned into a competition. I always bought sourdough before lockdown and I thought: 'How hard can it be?'"

Food consultant Ruth Watson puts the sourdough obsession down to more than just a lockdown yeast shortage. "At a time when the human race has lost any semblance of control over its environment, the act of making bread is a primitive form of assertion that, come what may, we can still feed ourselves. And sourdough is the lodestone of all breads."

BUT SOURDOUGH WAS DOING WELL BEFORE LOCKDOWN, WASN'T IT?

Correct. Searches for sourdough on Waitrose.com were up 65% in January, year on year, sales over 30% higher than in 2017.

AM I RIGHT THAT THE GENUINE ARTICLE CONTAINS JUST FLOUR, WATER AND SALT I.E. NO BAKER'S YEAST?

Yes, to make the loaf rise, the baker creates a 'starter' – also called a levain or mother – of flour (preferably stoneground) and water (preferably chlorine-free). Each day, they discard a little and feed with more flour and water. It takes about six days – some say two weeks – for



SOURDOUGH

Original slow food or hipster cliché? Sally-Jayne Wright investigates lockdown's trendiest bake

the wild yeasts present in flour and in the atmosphere to ferment and bubble up.

WHAT'S CALIFORNIAN OR SAN FRANCISCO SOURDOUGH?

There's no legal definition. Vanessa Kimbell, owner of The Sourdough School suggests the acidic tang associated with Californian comes from retarding dough in the fridge for 20 hours minimum. Sourdough baker, Elaine Boddy adds: "You can enhance sourness by using whole grain, ancient wheats like Khorasan, or rye in the starter or dough and allowing your starter to get hungry a few times."

WHY DO PEOPLE RAVE ABOUT SOURDOUGH?

Because it tastes better. One writer rhapsodised about "the slightly acidic, fermented tang; the crunchy crust that yields a treacly nuttiness as you chew it; the heft that sates the appetite..." It also keeps better and is more nutritious and digestible than your average crusty white.

IS IT MORE DIGESTIBLE BECAUSE IT DOESN'T CONTAIN ADDITIVES LIKE FLOUR IMPROVERS TO WHICH SOME PEOPLE ARE SENSITIVE?

Yes, and long slow fermentation has benefits. It breaks down the phytic acid in bran which can cause wind. It makes vitamins and minerals such as calcium more accessible. There's some evidence it is digested more slowly, causing less of a spike in blood sugar levels.

“After lockdown, we suspect home bakers will make bread a little less often. They'll respect bakers more and appreciate quality”

WHAT'S CONTROVERSIAL ABOUT SOURDOUGH?

It sells for a premium so everyone's making it. You find three types: breads that contain dried sourdough powder or chemical flavouring; semi-fermented loaves where the level of fermentation has been fixed in a factory and the real deal with long, slow, 100% live fermentation.

CAN A LAYMAN IDENTIFY THE REAL MCCOY?

Not easily. Bakers can mimic sourdough's characteristics such as big holes and crackling crust, and use vinegar, yoghurt or baker's yeast to speed the process.

DOES IT MATTER?

It may if you suffer from IBS and have paid £5-£6 for something you thought you could eat. Members of the Real Bread Campaign believe sourfaux hoodwinks the public and are lobbying for a legal definition of sourdough for packaging. Other trade bodies – including some bakers and restaurateurs – want to be allowed

up to 0.2% of bakers' yeast and certain flour treatment agents. It would help, says Vanessa Kimbell, if there was agreement on how long is meant by 'long fermentation'.

NEVER MIND DEFINITIONS. A CUSTOMER RETURNED A LOAF SO HOLEY SHE COULDN'T BUTTER IT!

Large holes are known as 'tunnels'. Talk to your supplier about adjusting the process.

WHOSE SOURDOUGH DO YOU LIKE?

We are massive fans of the Bread Bread Bakery in southeast London. Co-founder Bridget Hugo introduced the 24 hour-fermented, sourdough pizza served at Franco Manca restaurant, opened in 2008. Her loaves are baked in wood-fired ovens hence the characterful caramelised crust. Bread Bread's sourdough Vollkorn rye is so moist, complex and satisfying, it doesn't need butter.

HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF THIS TREND?

Check out your competition – including Polish stores – and if there's enough of a market, sell the best sourdough you can find. Offer tasters.

Tap into the home-baking mania. Copy the Bon Gout Deli in Exeter or the Corto Italian Deli, Twickenham and carry organic, stoneground wholemeal and unbleached white flour.

Consider selling baking accessories such as dough scrapers and even sourdough starter.

ANY OTHER IDEAS?

Ring the changes with sweet sourdough goods. Bakers traditionally used the discard from their starter to add a tang to scones, cakes, doughnuts, panettone, pretzels and challah. How about banana sourdough block cakes, or poppy seed babka as made at the Margot bakery in London's East Finchley?

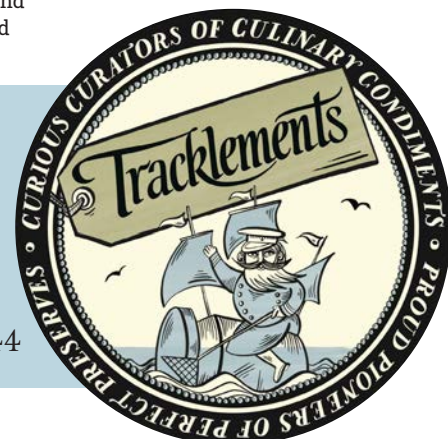
HERE TO STAY OR PASSING FAD?

After lockdown, we suspect home bakers like Dan will make bread a little less often. They'll respect bakers more and appreciate quality. And when they come to you for their flour or loaf, they can develop new passions for what goes on top, like smelly cheese, charcuterie and delicious honeys.



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RISING TO THE OCCASION

Home baking ingredients have seen rocketing sales during the coronavirus outbreak, as the nation turns to experimenting in the kitchen

While the food industry across the UK has experienced rapid change as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, there have been a few breakthrough sectors – most notably the home baking industry. Sales have risen as a result of both consumers having difficulties sourcing their

usual pre-baked loaves and having more time at home, leading to more scratch-cooking and an increased interest in home baking; from simple loaves of bread (the most searched-for recipe, over and above the ubiquitous banana bread, according to digital marketing agency Impression) to more time consuming, gourmet

endeavours such as sourdough and extravagant bakes. Consumers' gourmet creativity has even extended to using homemade focaccia as a canvas for edible meadow scenes (don't believe us? Check out #focacciagarden on Instagram).

While such creations may be the preserve of confident home bakers, that's not to say that beginners to home baking have been left out in the cold. Baking kits have been a roaring success over the past couple of months, as Nikki Castley, buyer at Cress Co explains: "With most of the country sheltering at home, scratch cooking and home baking is seeing another huge surge in popularity. The demand for flour has been unprecedented as many of the mills struggle to keep up with demand and yeast has sold out nearly everywhere, so many have switched over to baking kits, which include all those

“There's an awful lot of trying out and upskilling with home baking right now. It's got to be easy to follow”

LEANNE CROWTHER, CO-FOUNDER OF FLOWER & WHITE

ingredients that are proving difficult to buy.” Not only that, but they are “the perfect way of getting kids into the kitchen and introduced to baking, kits are simple and easy to use with usually a foolproof result that's bound to pass the ‘Hollywood’ test!”

Already well-known for their popular meringue range, Flower & White were able to mobilise quickly to answer the consumer demand for baking ingredients. They swiftly launched their brand new range of #BakeOn home baking mixes, which includes bread flour, mixes and yeast, and mixes for brownies, flapjacks, pizza dough, and sponges and muffins. Leanne Crowther, co-founder of Flower & White explains, “We are always looking around us at what's going on, especially overseas, so we knew this was coming a good couple of weeks before it hit. We'd polled our customers about what they were going to fill their time with during lockdown, and we wanted to be part of the solution during this crisis. We assessed what we could do within our four walls and quickly kicked into action and mobilised some of key suppliers in branding, ingredients etc overnight to turn this around in a heartbeat. It was due to quick thinking, great customer feedback and a lot of amazing support, and playing to our strengths in manufacturing.”

It's not only conventional baking ingredients such as flour, butter and eggs that have witnessed a surge in popularity. “We've seen a rapid increase in sales across the board, with baking products being of note, growing by just over 160%,” says Al Shariat, director at Coconut Merchant. “While the growth has been influenced by an increased interest in vegan products, it's also been strongly affected by a greater understanding and awareness for coconut baking products like coconut sugar and coconut flour, as well as the versatility of coconut oil in baking recipes.”

The better the ingredients, the better the bake

As ever, shoppers are looking to *Speciality Food* readers for quality alternatives to the products widely available on supermarket shelves.

The role our sector plays here is in educating consumers on the value of these often more expensive products; having them understand why ingredients which are cheap elsewhere are well worth a touch more investment.

When it comes to chocolate, more quality equals more enjoyment as Mandy Bobrowski, Divine Chocolate's interim marketing director explains: “Cheaper cooking chocolate is usually laden with sugar, contains palm oil and has a low cocoa content. But high quality chocolate like Divine is made with natural ingredients, has a high cocoa content, lower sugar content and is palm oil-free.”

“It all comes down to butterfat percentage and how it's made,” says Mary Quicke of Quicke's butter products. “The quality of the feed the animal has in turn goes into the milk/cream/butter, giving a higher fat percentage and better flavour. We control what the cows eat and how they are bred from start to finish, which gives a particular flavour to our products. Quality butter will make your pastry and cakes taste better; better quality produce always produces better cooking.”

RETAILER INSIGHT

Geoffrey Bligh, co-owner of Hanks Deli, Ipswich

WHY'S BAKING SO HUGE RIGHT NOW?

I think in such an uncertain time, being able to make food for your family and those you care about brings happiness to the person making it and those that get to enjoy it. So many things right now are out of people's control but this is something you can take charge of.

WHAT ARE CONSUMERS BUYING?

Flour. So much flour! We did some quick calculations and figure we have probably sold close to 500kg of yeast – and at about 7 grams of yeast per loaf, that works out to a lot of bread!

HAS THE DEMAND FOR VEGAN BAKING PRODUCTS GROWN?

I would have to say yes. Previously we didn't stock a lot of the vegan basics because our customers who regularly used these products already knew where to get them; we always focused on the harder to find products. Now we see a lot of people coming in with that look of ‘I'm about to ask if you stock something I've never used before...’ and of course we get asked for advice on how to use ingredients all the time.



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“As people have taken to doing more baking and cooking at home we have definitely seen our sales of home baking ingredients increase. Rose water, vanilla extract, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda are our top baking products at the moment”

SOPHIE STEENBERG, CO-FOUNDER OF STEENBERGS

TRAVEL-INSPIRED TASTES

As lockdown rumbles on, shoppers are opting for convenient ways to explore international cuisines



GAROFALO

While the lockdown in Britain continues, consumers are finding themselves cooking at home more than ever before. With many missing their favourite dining-out options, from Italian classics to an Indian, Thai or even Japanese curry, the spotlight is now firmly set on the ready-made sauces market. While some shoppers are relishing the opportunity to slow-cook ragus and create curry pastes and spice mixes from scratch thanks to their extended time at home, that's not the case for all; indeed, even seasoned home cooks appreciate a well-made shortcut to help them enjoy their favourite dishes at home.

Culinary exploration

While shoppers are unable to travel to far flung destinations to experience the authentic sights, sounds and tastes from around the world they're opting to recreate these flavours at home. Therefore, it makes sense to stock a range of international options. It could be that Mexican food didn't quite take off when you tried it in 2019, but with the altered situation that we

all find ourselves in this year, and the hunger for travel not satisfied physically, it could well be worth another try. We rate Capsicana for their bold, vibrant range of Latin American cooking sauces, sides and seasonings.

Many restaurants are now offering takeaways, but for shoppers who aren't confident in consuming food and drink cooked by other hands there's a wide range of options available. Nikki Castley, buyer at Cress Co, has found that Indian dishes are doing particularly well for them: "Curry is extremely popular and generally features on most restaurant menus or is the takeaway of choice. So it's no surprise that curry is also favoured by home cooks looking to enjoy restaurant quality curry from the comfort of their own home, especially now more than ever!" As ever, it's important to cater to free-from customers, and "The Curry Sauce Co, Punjaban and Previn's feature regularly on our customers' orders. Both Curry Sauce Co & Punjaban are gluten-free so cater for those with additional dietary requirements," Nikki suggests.

Italian favourites

Early on in the lockdown, headlines were shouting about the panic buying of pasta; according to Kantar, sales were up 55% YOY. No surprises there, as gourmands and beginner cooks alike can appreciate its versatility and ease of use. Sally Assinder, marketing manager at Pasta Garofalo is an expert in the options available, and urges independent retailers to be experimental when it comes to

“As consumers become more familiar with global flavours, they are beginning to demand more to excite their taste buds”

curating their range of pasta shapes. "It is estimated there are over 350 durum wheat pasta shapes to pick from, all made from the same two ingredients," she explains. "How then, do you choose shapes to ensure you have a pasta range that works well for your customers?"

"Thinking like an Italian and dividing the shapes into shortcuts, long cuts, soup cuts and special cuts, the task becomes more manageable and shapes can be chosen in each area to create choice and interest." As a basis for your range, "It would be wise to stock the nation's favourites," she says. "For short cuts it is Fusilli, long cuts Spaghetti and special cuts Lasagne sheets.

"Specific shapes for the range can then be built up in each area," Sally advises. "For short cuts there are other popular shapes such as Farfalle as well as the more unusual like Radiatori. In long cuts Linguine is always popular, whereas Bucatini, a less well-known shape, adds interest for customers. Special shapes vary greatly and include both short and long cuts like Orecchiette and Spaghetti Alla Chitarra. Lumachine and Farfalline are both soup cuts and give interest and value to a pasta range; the size of these shapes makes them perfect for babies as well as soup."

Once your selection of dry pasta is in order, it's time to consider what your customers will be serving it

with. "Pasta with sauce remains a firm favourite dish in the UK," explains Sally, "but not many of us have the time to source all the ingredients to make a pesto or to reduce tomatoes for a rich full flavoured sauce. It is by far the norm now to keep jars of pesto and pasta sauces in the cupboard for a 'quick' and satisfying pasta dish."

As with further flung destinations, travel and familiarity with flavours from Italy play a big part in its popularity with UK shoppers. "Consumers travel to Italy and eat at Italian restaurants to taste fresh pasta sauces made with tomatoes slowly reduced for an intense flavour, or Pesto Alla Genovese made to the original recipe with extra virgin olive oil, pine nuts and Parmigiano Reggiano," says Sally. Naturally, "they also want the jar in their cupboard to deliver these fresh and authentic flavours, just as they have experienced them. There are jars that can deliver this and jars that fall short. A quick look at the ingredients on the side of some pesto and you'll find olive oil substituted with sunflower oil, or the addition of cashew flour, ingredients not found in the original recipe.

As independent retailers focused on quality and the very best flavour, it's important that *Speciality Food* readers do their homework and seek out the finest options available. "As pesto and pasta sauces are

staple food items in most kitchen cupboards, it's essential for the fine food sector to search out the brands and products that use premium ingredients," says Sally. "So take a read of the ingredients list. Question the variety and source of the tomatoes in a pasta sauce, and ask yourself: is a pesto that uses sunflower oil instead of olive oil and contains no Parmigiano Reggiano of real quality?"

By keeping a close eye on the changing trends around international foods, consumer needs around convenience and ease of use, and a focus on maintaining a point of difference from supermarkets in terms of quality and range, independent fine food retailers can make the most of the evolving market during this challenging time.

INTERNATIONAL INSPIRATION

"Travel and social media continue to shrink the world which has increased the demand from many home-cooks to recreate those international flavours and cuisine synonymous with their travels. As consumers become more familiar with global flavours, they are beginning to demand more to excite their taste buds, while beef bourguignon and chilli con carne were once considered exotic, now we see regular orders for Moroccan Tagine, Teriyaki and Piri Piri," says Nikki Castley, buyer at Cress Co.

SALES OF DRY PASTA JUMPED 55% YOY AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 PANIC BUYING, ACCORDING TO KANTAR

MEET THE PRODUCER

15

It's a rare business that exhibits every one of the cornerstones of the ultimate fine food, but Dr Trouble – purveyor of 'Africa's finest chilli sauce' – does just that

The renowned Dr Trouble sauces have an intriguing history at their heart. The great grandfather of the founder of the business, Robert Fletcher, was a Scottish surveyor who travelled to Zimbabwe in 1892 to create the first surveyed maps of Southern Zimbabwe. He kept a diary during his time on the continent, and the original recipe for the now-famous Dr Trouble sauce was found within its pages. The recipe for the sauce was evolved by five generations of the family, until five years ago, when Robert Fletcher was persuaded by his friends to produce the sauce on a larger scale. "When I decided to do this, I was determined to be faithful to the principles of keeping it completely natural," explains Robert. "No artificial preservatives, no chemicals or colours. And faithful to the original recipe, which is a slow process."

A slow process indeed; each batch of organic and vegan-friendly sauce is slow-fermented in the African sun for between 60 to 100 days. It takes 100-120 days to produce each bottle. Honesty and transparency is key



“What could be better than cooking in the savannah plains of Africa, surrounded by wild animals and hearing from people around the world who like what we do?”



to Dr Trouble products. Using only pure fresh lemon juice, squeezed from wild-grown lemons nurtured on tribal lands, chillies grown and hand-graded by the Dr Trouble team to Global Gap standards, plus spices and chunky salt from the Kgalagadi salt pans in neighbouring Botswana (which Robert describes as "earthy in a way that sea salt is lacking"), just 30 litres of sauce is produced per batch. No sugar, vinegar, colourants or emulsifiers are added. Due to the meticulous use of these ingredients and methods, only around 230,000 125ml bottles are produced each year – with the harsh climate meaning that adverse weather can affect production numbers dramatically.

'The 18 year old single malt of chilli sauce'

Referred to by its fans as 'the sauce of the safari', it's no wonder that Dr Trouble has become popular within the luxury market. As an exclusive



product positioned at the very top end of the chilli sauce market, this is no supermarket Peri Peri or mass-produced Sriracha, but the '18 year old single malt of chilli sauce,' according to regular customers.

As opposed to a lot of chilli sauces



which boast a blow-your-head-off heat, the Dr Trouble range aims to complement meals rather than overpower, with a lemon juice-based infusion of spices and chillies. "I believe that a great hot sauce should never burn the mouth or affect the palate," explains Robert. Two variations are in the range: the evolved original recipe, Double Oak Smoked, for which chillies are smoked twice over oak chips, and Lemon Chilli, a slightly hotter option made using fire roasted chillies. The chillies used in the sauces are carefully chosen for a well-balanced finished product and include Cayenne, Red Demon, Serenade and African Birds Eye.

'It's important to me personally, before my brand, to take part in the community'

The business not only sources from the community, it also runs

a number of community projects; "It's not possible to live amongst the poorest and most marginalised people in the world and not help," exclaims Robert. The Little Peppers Project is one such endeavour, by which Dr Trouble pays school fees for 150 disadvantaged children as well as supplying stationery and books. The team also runs and sponsors an anti-poaching team and wildlife conservation project, with zebras, giraffes and multiple species of antelope under protection. The current Covid-19 crisis has inspired more charitable efforts: a Covid isolation ward and maternity ward have been built at the local clinic, and funds are being raised to provide electricity.

"Our situation is unique," says Robert. "We are without doubt the producer most isolated from the beaten track in the world, and as far from the global markets as a producer can be. We live in a rural and timeless community and it's impossible to live here without your community. In Africa there is a word called Ubuntu; it's an idea or a philosophy which translates as "I am because we are" and so it is important to me personally, before my brand, to take part in the community."

Robert's connection with the local community and landscape feeds the exclusivity of the Dr Trouble's range. "I am a farmer and a conservationist," he explains, "I have little interest in my product being mass-produced, and I am comfortable with the fact that it cannot be mass-produced without sacrificing the unique and time consuming way we make our sauce. My product is a result of 120 years of family history in Africa, and I am happy to share that history. What could be better than cooking in the savannah plains of Africa, surrounded by wild animals and hearing from people around the world who like what we do?"



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4 BANHOEK CHILLI OIL

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5 EDINBURGH GIN RHUBARB & GINGER

Created by macerating spring-crop rhubarb and Oriental ginger and infusing it with our classic Edinburgh Gin, this sweet, fruity liqueur is balanced by a delicate warmth and spicy finish. Enjoy it perfectly mixed with this fiery, aromatic ginger ale. edinburghgin.com

6 DROGHERIA & ALIMENTARI SEASONINGS

Drogheria & Alimentari was founded in 1880 in Florence, Italy. Specialising in herbs and spices, the extensive range of grinders and oils boast intense flavour and aroma. Packaged in convenient and attractive glass jars, these are must-stock products for the culinary connoisseur. rhamar.com

7 POTTS' PARTNERSHIP MAYONNAISE

Potts' Partnership's new mayonnaises are the ideal accompaniment to your summer BBQ or garden party. With new and unique flavours like Honey Chipotle and Miso Mayonnaise, they are sure to be the only condiment you reach for. pottspartnerhip.co.uk



THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

Through clear and honest packaging, brands can not only provide vital information to customers but also promote their genuine credentials



Fine food makers work incredibly hard to develop new and exciting products, from farmhouses cheeses to speciality beverages. But the work of bringing a new product to market isn't finished until a final important hurdle is jumped: the packaging.

For those whose true passion is their product, packaging may come as an afterthought, but there are countless reasons why it should be a significant priority. First, for conveying your brand's message to customers, there is no better

tool. "Packaging is how brands communicate to consumers," says Karen Yates-Hill, commercial director at coffee manufacturer Lincoln and York. "It shows the brand's personality and its key values through the use of colour, texture and wording."

Additionally, there are the obvious benefits – protecting food and prolonging shelf life as well as providing vital information on allergens and ingredients for customers with health concerns – and the less apparent aspects, such

as playing a role in a company's corporate social responsibility strategy. Used effectively, packaging can be a tool to both attract and inform customers.

A matter of life and death

With the rise of the conscious consumer, transparency in package labelling is more important than ever. A 2019 report by tech solutions provider Brother explains: "Controversies around food safety lapses combined with a trend for healthier, more informed eating is

driving the need for clarity on the ingredients, allergens and nutritional value in food products."

In many cases, the information provided on a food label can be a matter of life and death. In 2016, 15-year-old Natasha Ednan-Laperouse went into cardiac arrest on a flight after eating a sandwich from Pret a Manger. The sandwich contained sesame, which Natasha was allergic to, but the ingredient was not listed on the packaging. Food regulations at the time did not require fresh, pre-packaged food made on the premises where it was sold to be individually labelled with allergen or ingredient information.

The high-profile case helped to usher in "Natasha's Law", a new requirement for food businesses to include full ingredients labelling on all pre-packaged food, and it goes to show just how crucial it is for food makers to get package labelling right.

When it comes into effect in 2021, Natasha's Law will be the latest in a long list of conditions that food producers are required to follow. "The legal requirements relating to food product labels and packaging are extensive," says Sarah Howarth, of Howarth Food Safety. "There is a core of mandatory requirements which all products must follow based on The Food Information Regulations 2014, with further compulsory legislation for certain groups and types of products."

The core requirements generally include information such as the use-by date, the place of origin, allergens, ingredients, nutritional value, storage conditions and cooking instructions if relevant. In the UK, there are 14 key allergens that must be declared, some of which include cereals containing gluten, milk and nuts. According to the World Allergy Organisation, the UK has some of the highest prevalence rates of allergic conditions in the world, with over 20% of the population affected by one or more allergic disorders.

Incorrect labelling is one of the leading causes of product recalls. Failure to comply with the requirements could result

in a company being served an improvement notice or a criminal prosecution being brought against the business. "If mislabelling is done deliberately it is fraud, whether it poses a food safety threat or not," a Food Standards Agency spokesperson says. "Falsely describing, advertising or presenting food is an offence and there are many laws that help protect consumers against dishonest labelling and misleading descriptions."

Building trust

Of course, when a brand is scrutinising their product labelling, it is not only allergy sufferers they should have in mind. Increasingly, consumers are considering their health concerns and ethical beliefs when purchasing food products, and including relevant information can help to build trust between brands and customers.

For example, meat-free diets are on the rise across Europe, and consumers now expect the food industry to label vegetarian and vegan food so they can make an informed decision. Elsewhere, consumers with eating restrictions due to a religion or diet also benefit from being given as much nutritional detail as possible.

However, when it comes to descriptive phrases, brands can run into problems. Emotive but effectively meaningless words such as natural, fresh, pure and authentic can be classed as misleading when used incorrectly. "Products must be as described on the label and not misrepresented. This includes wording, trademarks and brand names, pictures and symbols on pack," says Sarah. "If a product name states or implies a health or nutrition claim, it must be accompanied by a relevant authorised health or nutrition claim." The use of this language is monitored, and complaints can be made to the Advertising Standards Authority as well as Local Trading Standards offices.

Further examples of unacceptable labelling include the use of images



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that do not realistically represent the environment in which an animal was reared, or wording or imagery that suggests food comes from a particular place when it does not, such as 'farmhouse'.

"Consumers should look out for claims that aren't backed up or given a point of reference. Also be wary of packs that claim something like 'bigger pack' or 'better value' – this isn't always the case," adds Karen.

While product descriptions can be a thorny area, they also present opportunities for brands to promote their genuine credentials. When used correctly, these claims can quickly communicate the key features of a product to busy shoppers in the supermarket aisle, explains YES! snack bars' Lizzie Hendon, assistant brand manager; Alison Bramfitt, group packaging manager; and Sarah Dowding, regulatory and scientific affairs manager.

"It is important to be clear and honest with the claims information provided, much of which adheres to strict legal criteria, to ensure that consumers trust brands and do not feel misled. A 'source of protein' is just one of the claims that we call out on our YES! nut bars packaging to help consumers easily understand a key product benefit."

Packaging trends

Another clear way of communicating a brand's ethos without using misleading language is through the

type of packaging used, from the colour and feel of the branding to how sustainable the physical packaging is.

In fact, sustainable packaging is one of the most significant trends impacting the food and beverage industry today. In 2016, the World Economic Forum and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation gave the world a stark warning: by 2050 there will be more plastic waste in the sea than fish. A year later, *Blue Planet II* once again highlighted the toll of single-use plastics on the environment.

and biodegradable options and using certain food waste for plastic alternatives through biomaterial development.

Government intervention has also pushed the industry towards greener options. For example, a tax to be introduced in April 2022 will charge companies that use packaging that contains less than 30% recycled content.

Brands both big and small have started making commitments to using more sustainable packaging. Nestlé, which makes YES! bars, says

towards being more sustainable – this appears to be more towards recyclable rather than compostable, as there is still a lot of confusion about what compostable means," Karen says. "There is also an ongoing desire to try and reduce waste as much as possible and remove packaging that isn't required and look to be as efficient as possible with packaging used."

This zero-waste trend can also be seen in the retail market with a number of shops introducing refill schemes. Waitrose, Marks & Spencer

Covid-19 outbreak has seen UK businesses and consumers having to choose between health and the environment and re-examining the role of plastics and single-use plastics specifically, and if there are reasons to permanently reintroduce plastic carrier bags in UK supermarkets."

While sustainability is certainly the dominant trend in the packaging industry, it is not the only one. Paul says innovations are also happening with technology such as near-field communication and disruptive print techniques and pack finishes. Here, clarity is still key. "Strong packaging is able to communicate clearly to consumers what the product is in as few messages as possible," says the YES! bar team.

"As shoppers only spend a limited amount of time at the shelf, they are unlikely to spend time looking at the specific details of a pack, so it is important to have clear, short and simple key messages. A logo for brand awareness, strapline or call to action for brand affinity and product description for product recognition, will communicate to consumers what they need to know about a product if executed effectively," they say.

From label information to packaging design, it is clear that straightforward and honest messaging is the most effective way to both meet legal requirements and excite and entice customers. Considering all of these aspects together, brands can achieve the complete package.

“Falsely describing, advertising or presenting food is an offence and there are many laws that help protect consumers against dishonest labelling and misleading descriptions”

Paul Jenkins, founder and managing director of packaging innovation consultancy The Pack Hub, said *Blue Planet II* was part of a "perfect storm" of events that changed the industry forever. "Consumers started questioning what was going on. Retailers and brands needed to act – to change how they were doing things."

Of the total number of innovations happening in packaging today, around 70% are focused on sustainability, Paul estimates, up from 30% before 2017. These include making packaging more recyclable, creating compostable

all packaging will be either recyclable or reusable by 2025. "Our YES! snack bars are packaged in a recyclable paper wrapper. This was an industry first – marking the first time that paper had been used successfully on a high-speed 'flow wrap cold seal' packaging line, which had previously only been used for more durable plastic films and laminates," the team says.

Meanwhile, Lincoln and York has committed to using 100% recyclable packaging by 2024. The brand launched its recyclable film last year. "Food and drink packaging within the [out of home] market is moving

and Asda are just some of the major retailers that have trialled such programmes. In the US, the company Loop has launched an initiative to help retailers provide products in refillable packaging.

Despite the evident desire for sustainable packaging, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis may hinder efforts to shift the food industry towards a more environmentally friendly future. "The UK government has dropped the 5p plastic bag charge for online deliveries to speed up food distribution during the pandemic," explains David Luttenberger, global packaging director at Mintel. "The

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A COMFORTING CRUNCH

We explore the cornerstones of the great British biscuit; a storecupboard must-have for every shopper

There's no doubt that biscuits – both sweet and savoury – are a mainstay of the independent food retailer's arsenal, but with so many options on the market it can be difficult to choose which to stock. *Speciality Food* has caught up with some of the industry's biggest biscuit makers to find out what shoppers are after in 2020, and what they're offering to satisfy demand.

Traditional tastes

While there are a number of new brands on the block, it's worth stocking a heritage range or two alongside. Not only have their recipes been perfected over the years, sometimes generations in fact, but they carry with them a loyal customer base who appreciate the time, skill and traditions that have gone into making their biscuits of choice. "We have been supplying the independent retail market with our gingerbread biscuits since 1987, firstly with our hand decorated gingerbread novelties and more recently with our heritage brand – Billingtons Gingerbread," says Sarah Hopcroft, director of Image On Food. The business soon found that consumers enjoyed learning about the history of the product, "from



the secret recipe locked in a Market Drayton vault to the links to the ancient spice routes." The team

has found independent retailers a perfect route to market as they invest time in the story of Billingtons Gingerbread, sharing this knowledge with intrigued shoppers.

Not only do these biscuits provide ample provenance, but it's a uniquely versatile option according to Sarah. "Billingtons Gingerbread has had a unique position as an enjoyable artisan 'grown-up' biscuit that consumers can enjoy on its own, with cheeseboards, or dunked in a delectable glass of port." This versatility across sweet and savoury "lends itself to being marketed within independent stores as a supplement product alongside cheeses, alcohol and teas, coffees and hot chocolates," she continues.



It's not only traditional biscuit makers originating from the UK that hold value for British shoppers.

Peter's Yard, while launched only a handful of years ago, offer discerning consumers a traditional taste of Sweden through satisfyingly versatile crispbreads as speciality manager Adam Tynan explains: "The traditional Swedish crispbread recipe that inspired Peter's Yard was arguably designed purely with simplicity and versatility in mind. Made as it would keep well through cold, dark, Scandinavian winters, crispbread was supposed to be an easy to make staple that could accompany almost any meal.



"There's an ever-growing array of wonderful cheese both in this country and beyond – from soft and creamy to hard and boldly flavoured with all manner of combinations in between. We're aware that the role of a good cracker is to be the best supporting act it can be to each and every one and so versatility is vital.

"Our sourdough starter, 45 years old this year and fermented for 16 hours before each bake, adds depth to the subtle flavour. This, combined with the unique thinness and crunchiness we get from following traditional Swedish baking techniques, really seems to make it the perfect vehicle for good cheese.

"In developing recipes beyond our Original we've considered flavours,

colours and textures that, rather than overpower, hero the qualities of different styles of cheese. The gentle sweetness of the fig in our Spelt & Fig plays with the saltiness in a good Blue, whilst the ashen black colour of our Charcoal & Rye gives the white of a Goats even more brilliance."


Modern treats


While tradition is undoubtedly a good tool for independent retailers to utilise, it's important to add a little colour to your range, too. Enter Original Biscuit Bakers' decorated gingerbread biscuits, a popular gifting item and a unique treat for shoppers and their friends and family. "We have designed our ranges to be highly eye-catching


and have quickly adapted to changing consumer trends from the traditional gingerbread men to pop culture favourites such as our unicorn and dinosaur biscuit ranges," says Sarah of Image On Food. The wide variety of designs available will tempt each and every customer during every season, offering independent retailers "a great opportunity to add a touch of theatre to their displays with seasonal products."

Provenance

As every independent fine food retailer will attest, provenance is an invaluable selling tool across all sectors. In the savoury biscuit arena, Stag Bakeries demonstrates







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it with aplomb. The family-run bakery based on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland specialises in savoury biscuits.

"Traditional recipes and time-honoured methods remain at the heart of the business," explains Daniel Smith, sales and marketing manager, "and with a heritage dating

back to 1885, Stag's team of skilled craft bakers have much experience to draw from. We are proud to represent the Outer Hebrides and provenance is very important to us."

The business's signature product is the Stormaway Water Biscuit, made using a recipe passed down the generations and a versatile carrier for cheese, meats, fish and pâté, while their Seaweed Water Biscuits are award-winning. "The product pairs Stag's classic water biscuit recipe with seaweed sourced locally to provide a truly unique flavour that is full of flavour," explains Daniel, "and they offer a great platform for fantastic snacking combinations. Also in the range are traditional Scottish oatcakes, cocktail-sized and available in four flavours – Traditional, Smoked Butter, Honey & Seed and Seaweed – for those looking for something a little different.

Caring for the community

In this difficult time, shoppers are leaning on comforting foods – like hot tea and a biscuit – to offer respite. Farmhouse Biscuits is offering further support through the recent launch of its NHS Thank You Biscuit – a redesign of one of the business's best-selling products, Mild Ginger, to serve as a thank you to the NHS. 10p from the sale of each pack will be donated to the NHS by Farmhouse Biscuits, and the team is hoping to get the packs on-shelf in June through their usual stockists.



Louisa Mayor, sales and new product development manager at

Farmhouse Biscuits explains that, "As a result of the Stay At Home message we have all come to appreciate the simple things in life: our homes, our families and the security that gives us. Many of us have fallen back in love with cooking and baking as we have had time to spend in the kitchen and have also turned into a family affair." With this in mind, Farmhouse Biscuits have chosen to go back to basics with their flavours, choosing simple, classic options that have stood the test of time. "For us," she says, "the core range which the business was founded on over 55 years ago still continues to sell extremely well. Their traditional recipes have remained unchanged for years and are still household favourites, from Oat Flips to Milk Ginger, Honey & Oat and Cottage Crunch."

Of course, it's important to cater to shoppers and their family members who might have intolerances, too, which is why Farmhouse Biscuits offer a range of six gluten-free biscuits and four sugar-free varieties. "We don't want anyone to feel that they are missing out on that teatime treat, from oats to fruit to chocolate, and so there's an option for everyone."

Eco-friendly

The majority of us are making efforts to be environmentally-conscious, and this is as true of shoppers as it is the businesses selling to them. There are a number of companies in the fine food sphere catering this demand. Island Bakery, a biscuit producer long respected for its environmental efforts, has recently gone one step further as director Dawn Reade explains: "The Island Bakery range has recently been

re-packaged, dispensing with the plastic tray and replacing it with beautifully illustrated paper boats. There are five different boats, each named after small islands lying off Mull's coast and decorated with drawings of some of the local sea life," she explains. As well as the aesthetic improvement, this change has allowed the business to reduce their plastic packaging to the absolute minimum required to keep the biscuits fresh.

"In keeping with our ethos, where we do our best to have the lowest environmental impact, we did a lot of research into the material options available for sealing our biscuits, including compostable films," she says. "At the present time, we feel that the huge amount of energy used in producing such films, combined with uneven provision of facilities for collecting and processing compostable plastic across the country, does not make them a viable or honest choice. These films do not break down unless they are properly composted, therefore posing a greater risk to wildlife if they are disposed of inappropriately in the mistaken belief that they will biodegrade. Also, the availability of compostable films that perform adequately in terms of keeping a good airtight seal for the 6+ months shelf life we require, is limited."

Two new biscuit launches accompany this environmental update. The Island Bakery team has created a sister product to its best-selling Lemon Melts: Orange Melts; and produced their interpretation of the coffee biscuit, Blonde Chocaccinos: a combination of coffee and cinnamon in a light all-butter biscuit, half-dipped in organic Belgian white chocolate.



RETAILER INSIGHT

Mark Kacary, co-owner of The Norfolk Deli

WHAT ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS LOOKING FOR WHEN BUYING BISCUITS?

Norfolk Deli customers tend to be of an older age range and because we're in a small town shared with three mid-sized supermarkets people will generally go elsewhere for biscuits. We've tried indulgent and healthy brands but sales are so low for these that we end up discounting them in our sale basket. What does sell however are The Norfolk Cookie Company biscuits. The recipes are similar to brands like Teoni, but the key difference is that they are made locally which is enough to attract people to buy.

HOW IMPORTANT IS PROVENANCE AND A 'STORY' WHEN IT COMES TO BISCUITS?

For us provenance is the difference between biscuits selling and not selling.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP-SELLING SAVOURY BISCUITS?

The range of savoury from The Fine Cheese Company and Peter's Yard. They both sell well.

AND SWEET?

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Fast forward to Christmas 2020, and it's difficult not to imagine a busy end to a pivotal year for many local food retailers, who stepped up to serve their communities when lockdown was implemented in March. Farm shops that worked long hours to provide a safe and reliable service, delis that switched overnight to providing home delivery, and independent cafe and restaurant owners who used initiative to provide takeaway services have now found an additional route to market, attracted new customers and captured the loyalty of their communities, not to mention helping local food producers to stay afloat.

There is already much speculation about what a post-pandemic food revolution might look like. The table was already set for change prior to Covid-19, with rising customer concerns over the environmental impact of production practices, import and supermarket waste and fears over food standards following Brexit. As parliament has been debating the Trade Bill in the Commons through May, British producers and NGOs have pressed the government to focus on food security and to recognise the importance of British homegrown and home-produced food. In a letter addressed to DEFRA secretary George Eustice, the National Beef Association called for "vital strong frameworks to be put in place to protect Britain's producers," while highlighting that mid-pandemic food shortages were still being experienced due to high dependency of imports. The future for many British food producers hangs in the balance.

Support for independents

There is much cause for optimism, however. The pandemic itself has brought about an overwhelming sense of community and for the British food and drinks industry, this could translate into greater demand for locally-sourced products, benefitting small businesses in the months ahead. It has certainly revealed the fragility of our over-extended supply chains, which are sensitive to short-term shocks. Half of the UK's food now comes from abroad, including up to 90% of our fruit and vegetables. But panic-buying, which spread like wildfire

Are We On The Brink Of A BRITISH FOOD REVOLUTION?

A post-Covid landscape can offer a beacon of light for British independents and producers, but this will depend on their continued collaboration, innovation and adaptability

WORDS BY CHARLOTTE SMITH, GREAT BRITISH FOOD MAGAZINE

across the developed world in March, reflected consumers' concerns about the vulnerability of supplies as the virus hit food production regions around the world, and supermarkets struggled to cope with the sudden, massive rise in trade.

In many ways, the pandemic exposed the limitations of supermarkets while highlighting the positives of localism. Despite the lockdown driving a massive growth in unique visitors to supermarket websites (Ocado.com +237%; Morrisons.com +250%; Similarweb), the key retailers could not meet this demand. Customers had to wait weeks for a home delivery slot - if they could even secure one - and Ocado was forced to suspend its app. With many popular pandemic items running out of stock and government warnings to stay indoors, disillusioned shoppers turned to local independents and farm shops, which stepped up to the challenge in a matter of days, offering a safe, personalised service, online shopping, home delivery options, simple click-and-collect systems and drive-thrus.

This agile response to the crisis has resulted in continued trade and ultimately, won over new, enthusiastic fans for many independents. "Customers never forget a business that took care of them and supported them at a time when they needed it most, which is why great customer experience is key to business survival," points out Ian Kelsall, customer experience director with insight6, who has been supporting members of The Farm

Retail Association through recent trading challenges.

Rapid response

Many local farm shops and independents have reacted quickly and personally to customers' needs, linking up with local producers and offering more convenient and less complex options than grappling with an impersonal website to get a delivery slot, or joining long queues outside a supermarket only to find essentials out of stock. For Scottish deli Bowhouse in Fife, the forced cancellation of their popular Market Weekends, which used to draw crowds of 4,500, meant a drastic rethink. Rosie Jack, marketing and events manager explains: "From the outset, Bowhouse had been created as a way of reworking local supply chains. We'd been so busy with the thriving markets that we had never found time to prioritise a local distribution route beyond this. By early April (around the time our next market would have taken place), we'd set up Bowhouse Link. We chose the Open Food Network because it was a not-for-profit channel that feeds profits back into the development of the site.

"We were keen to start off on a small scale so we could be sure the system worked," she continues. "Our first week's trading we picked up 34 orders: all delivered. This rose to 75 in the second week and in our sixth week we have processed over 370 orders and enabled 18 small producers to continue to reach their customers. Going forward we'll expand this, working with

producers to develop mini hubs for collection/delivery to broaden our geographic reach."

And consumer attitudes are shifting: according to a YouGov report for the Food, Farming and Agricultural Commission, only 9% of British consumers want things to return back to normal after the outbreak is over. Over half (54%) hope they will make some changes to their own life and for the country as a whole to learn from the crisis. The rise in home working and home cooking, a heightened concern over health and a desire to maintain some of the positive environmental effects of lockdown on the planet are all areas which play into the hands of enlightened independents and local producers.

Adapting for the future

The next step for many small businesses, post-pandemic, will be to retain and improve new systems so they can continue to serve customers who have been engaged by a more user-friendly service and environmentally sound way of shopping.

Rosie Jack is firmly in favour of sticking with her company's new initiative. "The Bowhouse Link is something we'll continue to expand beyond lockdown, adding new producers as we would at the Market Weekends. I really think that by demonstrating the quality of local produce, we'll be able to change people's buying habits so that they continue to shop in this way. Whereas our customers at the markets were a mixture of

people, some of whom were coming along for the 'day out' aspect of it, our Bowhouse Link customers are undoubtedly those who are prioritising the quality of produce and looking for raw ingredients to cook with."

As lockdown restrictions are relaxed incrementally around the UK, some consumers will undoubtedly return to shopping at supermarkets. But many others, who appreciated superior produce and service from their local independents during lockdown, are likely to remain loyal, especially if some of the new initiatives such as online purchasing and home delivery remain in place. Farm shops and independent stores offering something different - and, crucially, better - will stand to benefit from the lessons learned during Covid-19. By using this moment to leverage their unique position in their communities, speciality retailers can make the most of this opportunity and thrive.

FREE ONLINE MEDIA REPORT

As retailers have to adapt fast to the challenges presented by Covid-19, *Speciality Food's* Ultimate Guide to Online Retail looks at ways you can make the most of online sales opportunities in this difficult climate. The free intel report includes a wealth of information, expertise and tips. Download it at specialityfoodmagazine.com/issuedownload



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PETER'S YARD



there is a fine balance between what's needed and what's affordable."

FINALLY, PERFECTING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

While it's likely that shoppers purchasing cheese from a specialist retailer will know a thing or two about at-home cheese care, it's sensible – not to mention great customer service – to offer some care recommendations and pairing suggestions to make sure they enjoy your cheese as much as possible. Homage2Fromage's Nick sends "some complimentary chutneys and jellies that we think will go well with the cheeses ordered," but don't go so far as to prescribe specific beverages to consume with their cheese: "we tell them to drink what they enjoy," he says.

"Generally speaking, apart from specific cheese boxes, it's almost impossible to create tasting notes for each package that is sent out," explains Mark. Instead, The Norfolk Deli's website is well-stocked with tasting notes and descriptions of the cheeses they sell, so customers are directed to the site for any such specific questions. "When you're two people running a business which has to do more than just sell cheese (as we need to) then we rely on the fact that people will have read the details on the website, and of course can return to it later if needed."

When it comes to the perfect accompaniments to partner with the cheeses they sell, Mark utilises his knowledge to maximise his customers' experience – and his bottom line. "We have an accompaniments section and as best we can we provide suggestions that a particular bottle of wine and/or chutney etc would go well with the cheese." It's a popular offering: "more often than not we find people adding chutney, crackers and often wine. It's a good way to increase the size of the order."

HOME DELIVERY

With online sales for fine cheese on the rise, it's important to make sure that customers receive their orders in perfect condition

Britain may be edging its way out of lockdown, but that's not stopping foodies from indulging in one of their favourite indulgences: fine cheese. When they're purchasing items from the other side of the counter, it's relatively easy to be confident that they leave your establishment with a cheese they enjoy, that's in perfect condition, and with the knowledge that will allow them to care for the cheese at home in order to serve it at its best. When they're buying from you from the other side of a computer screen or phone call, however, it gets a little more complicated. How do you ensure that the product reaches its destination in optimum condition? How much insider information should you arm

your customers with to ensure they enjoy the perfect cheese experience, all thanks to your business? Here's what you need to know.

FIRST, SOURCING THE CHEESE

Nick Copland of Homage2Fromage, a cheese events business which launched deliveries last month, works closely with his cheesemonger with the aim to get cheese to people in optimum condition, while Mark Kacary, owner of The Norfolk Deli, sources his cheeses directly from wholesalers "which means there is usually a few days added to the date they were ready to leave the dairy." This method "gives us approximately two weeks of shelf life (sometimes more, depends on the cheese) so when

a customer buys it it's just about perfect." As it's hard to guarantee anything, let alone postal timescales and the weather, Mark has developed a one-size-fits-all approach: "We have to assume that the cheese will be travelling for 24 hours, and depending on the weather we will add ice packs to maintain it as close as possible to what it is like when it leaves us," he explains.

NEXT, DELIVERY

If your cheese is being delivered by courier or Royal Mail, it's difficult – if not impossible – to guarantee the conditions and timescales your products will be travelling in. Therefore, it's important to prepare the package as well as you can to ensure that your cheese

reaches your customer in optimum condition. "All the cheese is sufficiently vacuum packed, then placed within a cushioned insulated pouch with sufficient coolant to maintain temperature for 48 hours," Nick explains.

Using the correct packing materials is vital for The Norfolk Deli's delivery service too, says Mark. "Cheeses are wrapped in wax paper, the box is sturdy and we use the soft 'wotsit' type of packing which allows us to put an ice pack in. They soak up any moisture and help to protect the cheese." While it could be tempting to invest a lot of time and money in a failsafe guarantee, that isn't always practical, he explains: "One could go major on how to pack the cheeses, but at the same time

“ One could go major on how to pack the cheeses, but at the same time there is a fine balance between what's needed and what's affordable ”




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New retail perspectives from industry experts

INDUSTRY VOICES



“The very core of our countryside, from its dry-stone walls to copses of hazel, is shaped by our culture of farming. It is not, however, a glamorous or easy life, especially if you have a dairy herd. And maybe in the last month or so, as we have had time to think of what is important in life, while still enjoying the fruits of the soil, we’ve also realised just how important food producers really are.”

Juliet Harbutt

“Farmers still need to farm – you can’t simply ‘mothball a farm’: feed needs to be made for the winter, the land managed, animals looked after and milked. Farm cheese keeps money and jobs in rural communities, and is part of our social history and food culture. During rationing in the 40s and 50s, many farm cheeses completely died out: we went from 146 unpasteurised Wensleydale farm makers to one; from 202 Lancashire farm cheesemakers to seven... We don’t want to lose that knowledge again!”

Andy Swinscoe,
The Courtyard Dairy

“We recognise the part we can play in sustaining the cheese industry that we love. It’s vitally important that we support the flow of cheese along the supply chain from farms to cheese lovers. We’re working with a number of local producers who have ripe and delicious cheese that needs to reach customers.”

Clare Jackson, Slate

Belton Farm’s Red Fox to be showcased on TV

Independent family-run cheesemaker Belton Farm has announced the first TV appearance of its popular cheese Red Fox, as part of its There’s More To Cheese Than Cheddar campaign.

The aged Red Leicester, known for its unique sweet and savoury notes and an ‘cunningly unexpected crunch’, has become an increasingly popular cheese across the UK since its launch three years ago.

Sales increased by 28.8% over the last 12 months (Kantar Data), and the Belton Farm team believe that its presence on television will boost sales even further, encouraging consumers to ‘look beyond the obvious’ and try something new on their cheeseboards and within their home cooked recipes.

Justin Beckett, managing director

at Belton Farm said, “It’s taken years of dedication and skill to achieve the complex blend of sweet and savoury flavours along with cunningly expected crunch that is bespoke to Red Fox. However, what people might not be aware of is its diverse usage. Due to its firm body and unique taste, Red Fox lends itself so nicely to adding that special touch to dishes – to make any occasion that extra bit special.

“With this campaign, we wanted to highlight the diversity of our flagship product and we are confident this will drive sales and awareness of Belton Farm and all our award-winning Great British Cheese.”

The There’s More To Cheese Than Cheddar campaign airs on Channel 4 on Thursday 4th June and runs for four weeks.

Government launches hardship fund for dairy farms

Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced a new scheme that aims to help the industry weather the coronavirus storm. The fund will provide vital support to English dairy farmers, who can apply for up to £10,000 in cash payments.

Under the new scheme, producers could receive 70% of their income back to allow them to continue operating and sustain their production without impacting animal welfare. However, to access the funding, farmers will have to prove that they’ve lost more than one-quarter of their income in April

and May.

Shortly after the Government announcement, Wales’ Rural Affairs Minister, Lesley Griffiths, revealed the same funding for Welsh dairy farmers as part of efforts to “support those farms hardest hit by a situation which is primarily outside of their control”.

“This announcement is great news and much needed for dairy farmers who have been left to struggle, in an extremely vulnerable position, because of the impact of COVID-19 on the marketplace,” Richard Corbett, partner with land and estate agent Roger Parry & Partners, said. Updates will be issued in due course.

Rowcliffe relaunches its exclusive private label artisan cheese brand Clemency Hall

Speciality cheese company Rowcliffe has relaunched its exclusive private label Clemency Hall with refreshed branding and a newly curated range, including a collection of cheeses, wax truckle cheeses and accompanying antipasti from artisanal cheesemakers and growers.

“Clemency Hall has been a Rowcliffe brand for several years, but we have decided to bring it to the fore and further develop it. The label is solely dedicated to the

Independent sector, delivering a much-needed point of difference,” says Sunit Mehta, Managing Director. “Clemency Hall has always brought together the artisanal producers with the expertise of the independents. This is still the rationale but with a bolder range with more length and depth.”

Clemency Hall’s new range will offer a cheese board concept sourced by the tasting panel from Europe and locally from the UK, including some of Rowcliffe’s own cheeses from Italy, as well as

authentic, hand-crafted olives and antipasti from the Mediterranean.

The refreshed brand, strapline and logo sit within Rowcliffe’s brand architecture with the dark blue representing quality and understated authoritative expertise. The “earthy, authentic and focused feel” of the new dark blue logo reflects the provenance in the range, while the addition of metallic bronze denotes the premium, hand-selected nature of the products, the company says.

The brand’s cheeses are wrapped in biodegradable, compostable, recyclable parchment paper made from sustainable and managed forests with a design of hand-drawn cheeses that creates an urban farmhouse pattern.

Sunit added that Clemency Hall “will launch with product support, media support, POS and in-store momentum driven by our product expert sales team. This is exciting for the business, the producers and our stores!”



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Shepherds Purse supports industry with new cheese launch

Artisan cheese company Shepherds Purse is working to support sheep milk producers through the coronavirus crisis with the launch of a new feta-style cheese called Fettle.

After speaking to farmers at the start of the outbreak, the company learned that the sheep milk industry was being disproportionately affected by the closure of the hospitality industry. Over the course of just a few days, their farmers had lost 20 out of their 22 processors.

Recognising the knock-on effects that this would have on the wider supply chain, Shepherds Purse has taken the bold step of supporting their farmers by increasing the amount of milk ordered weekly by 75%. As a result, the company brought forward the launch of its new format Fettle to 4th May.

"We're determined to support our sheep milk farmers, and we're really proud to have been able to bring this product to market in such a short time thanks to our team and our amazing partners," says Caroline Bell, MD of Shepherds Purse. "The feedback has been great so far and we can't wait to get it on to people's plates."

The company's investment in its sheep milk farmers was an essential step in ensuring the supply chain survives the coronavirus crisis. "The whole chain is so important to the survival of British producers, and where we are asking retailers



to support us, we must support our primary producers, too. Fettle has been one way that we have been able to do that."

To ensure the success of this project, Caroline called on retailers and consumers for their support in getting Fettle onto customers' plates. "The extent to which we can continue to buy extra milk from the farmers to help to ensure their survival through this crisis, will depend on how much of this new Fettle, and our other cheeses, customers can buy and enjoy."

Simon Stott of Sheep Milk UK said the new product had been a lifeline for sheep milk producers: "Any help we can get at the moment is vital and this new Fettle product is a big lifeline for us. Some of our farmers have already had to dry off due to the massive drop in demand, so the future of the British sheep milk is still far from secure."

Future of British cheesemakers at risk as Stilton sales drop 30%

Sales of Britain's first protected cheese have plunged during the UK's lockdown, the Stilton Cheese Makers' Association says.

Stilton cheesemakers are at risk of going out of business as sales plunge by 30%, an industry trade body has warned. The Stilton Cheese Maker's Association said the closure of the hospitality and events industry as well as the closure of export markets following the outbreak of Covid-19 has hampered cheese producers and the dairy farmers that supply them.

Dairy farmers have been hit particularly hard by the UK's lockdown, with some forced to throw away perfectly good milk due to a lack of demand. The SCMA said the decline in Stilton sales is impacting 70 British dairy farms, some of which go back five generations.

Stilton was the first British cheese to be awarded European protected designation of origin status, meaning cheese can only be labelled as Stilton if it is made in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire using traditional recipes.

The SCMA, which fears that some producers will go out of business due to the drop in sales, urged consumers to support British dairy farmers. The group also warned that the current situation could discourage the next generation of cheesemakers. Businesses are now looking into alternative ways to sell their Stilton directly to customers.

Robin Skailes, Chairman of the SCMA and director of Cropwell Bishop Creamery, said: "Like many British food producers, Stilton sales have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. "We hope that the British public will support us by buying Stilton instead of imported blue cheeses which, in turn, will support British dairy farmers."

"Celebrating truly splendid British cheeses"

The graph was tracking upwards for weeks, but as lockdown started, it began falling. But then – a sudden spike. Yes, the British Cheese Weekender had an immediate effect on my weight. The bonus from weeks of extra exercise and long sunny dog walks vanished over the course of just three days. My supposedly 'intelligent' scales no longer recognised me.

The crisis facing artisan cheese makers isn't going to go away until hospitality outlets re-open with full capacity. Many smaller producers haven't relied solely on retail cheesemongers to sell their wares – a strong focus had been on supplying restaurants and pubs, together with sales at food festivals and farmers' markets. All of which went dark in late March.

British Cheese Weekender has been a great fillip for us all. Its media reach was superb, speaking to an audience numbed by virus statistics – desperate for an 'and finally' story of hope, personal interest and fun. Juliet Harbutt ran a British Cheese Week for a number of years, in tandem with the announcement of the winners of the British Cheese Awards, but that Week hasn't happened in five years or so. The Weekender was just the perfect length of time to capture punters' imaginations and for a programme of classes and events online – a medium that has truly come into its own in the past three months. Huge kudos to all involved.

Particular credit should be given to the cheesemakers who embraced the opportunity, creating collaborative efforts with their neighbours to create



JUSTIN TUNSTALL

one-stop hampers – I enjoyed a fine Devon cheeseboard from Sharpham (with Quicques and Devon Blue) and a Dorset selection from Book & Bucket. Others have bitten the bullet and sold off stock to consumers at near wholesale prices – both Cornish Blue and James's Cheese had a mountain to shift. Hopefully very little of our fine British cheeses will have ended being wasted and in landfill.

People need their food treats, especially when they can't get them as meals out. Until hospitality reopens, the volume of the artisan cheese market is anyone's guess. Will makers pause production, or adjust their volumes downwards? Can we nurture these routes to the consumer (alongside traditional cheesemongers) to rebuild the market? In what volume will cheeses be available for Christmas, and how will consumers get them? How long will Paxton's famous Jermyn St Christmas queue be, if we are still observing social distancing?

With events such as The British Cheese Weekender (which I hope will become an annual event), the cheese industry will do more than muddle through – it will make the most of the array of truly splendid British cheeses that have blossomed over the last 25 years.

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A CHEESE FOR THE SEASON

Discover what makes cheese evolve throughout the year, and which varieties to stock during these warmer months

Summer brings with it a host of exciting food and drink opportunities as people look forward to al fresco dining, as well as the arrival of seasonal produce like summer berries.

Whilst consumers may be accustomed to seeing large supermarkets stocked with every type of cheese throughout the year, cheese is actually a seasonal product, much like fruits and vegetables.

What's more, the warmer weather often affects our palates. As the seasons change and different foods come into harvest, we tend to crave these seasonal varieties, and eating seasonally is said to be a much more natural and nutritious diet. Plus, it's understandable that in the warmer months, we'd crave lighter, smoother products over heavier ones with a higher fat content.

Effects of the seasons

As cheese is made from milk, it's affected by the diet of the animals that produce it, but the weather also has a part to play.



Ruth Holbrook, head of wholesale at Paxton & Whitfield, explains, "Artisan cheese is a natural product with very few ingredients,

and is intrinsically linked to the countryside, the animals and the milk of the animals from which it is made. Therefore the seasons have a great effect on cheesemaking and the final product.

"One of the most pronounced effects is in spring when we see

heavy rain coupled with more warmth from the sun – this stimulates the pastures to grow after the cold winter. Animals that have been in cover over the winter are let out into these rich green pastures to graze. The richness that the cattle get from this new grass – along with whatever small flowers and herbs might be in there – is reflected in the quality and brightness of the milk produced. Spring and summer fresh goats' cheeses are an especially good example here: you'll taste the richness of the milk in the final products, as well as find an abundance of varieties from May onwards."

Naturally, the diet and habits of cows, goats and sheep differ, which also has a profound impact on their cheeses.

"Cows are traditionally milked year-round, but where they graze and what they eat differs," Ruth explains. "In the winter, they're kept under cover and are fed on a consistent winter diet. In the spring, they feed on the new spring pastures, making the milk they produce rich and flavoured with the aromas of the pasture."

"With sheep, you tend to find that their winter milk has a more stable character as they're given regulated feed. In the spring, it's a slightly different story as the milk produced comes from sheep or goats that have grazed on spring pastures, and the food intake is not as consistent as in winter. The milk produced often varies greatly in colour, texture or flavour, depending on what the animal has eaten outside, so



“With a truly artisan cheese, you are looking for consistency of quality rather than flavour. This is down to the expertise of the cheesemaker and the quality of the milk that the cheesemaker uses, how the cheese is worked on during its production and maturation”

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the cheesemaker needs to use real skill in producing a relatively consistent cheese.

"Also the amount an animal eats outside will vary – if it's horribly wet or extremely hot, the animal might be less inclined to wander about chomping grass – and this will affect milk production."

How do these variations affect the end result?

"Warmer weather means dairy herds are moving around more, so their milk has more 'energy' too," says



Patricia Michelson, founder and director of La Fromagerie. "Goats love to forage and graze, so produce more vivid, hot

flavours to their milk, giving their cheeses a real sense of summer with their sharp, spicy taste and fudgy texture. The harder cheeses have sweetness and the blues have a big, bold appeal. Ewe's milk has a natural lanolin richness that gives a farmy earthiness to cheese, and is always a treat to enjoy in the summer as a young cheese when the sweetness also comes through."

The seasons also apply to aged cheese, as Ruth explains: "Cheesemaking is a way of preserving fresh milk; if you make a cheese at a particular time of year, you are locking in the flavour and character of that day into a product that can be enjoyed later – in much the same way that winemakers will discuss a certain vintage being of particular greatness.

"With a truly artisan cheese, you are looking for consistency of quality

rather than flavour. This is down to the expertise of the cheesemaker and the quality of the milk that the cheesemaker uses, how the cheese is worked on during its production and maturation. Cheesemongers know this, and this difference in flavour is the fun part."

The best cheeses to enjoy in summer

In keeping with many foods we enjoy at this time of year, summer cheeses tend to be fresh and light. Goats' cheese is a firm favourite for its soft, creamy texture. Patricia recommends tangy varieties from West France, or varieties such as Sinodun Hill and Brightwell Ash from Norton & Yarrow near Oxford, which showcase how good English goats' cheeses can be.



Clare Jackson, owner of Slate, adds, "From Innes Cheese in Staffordshire, Bosworth Ash is tasting beautiful at

the moment – its velvety texture coats your mouth with dense creaminess. It has a clean, bright flavour that lengthens with age and a touch of peppery spice from moulds that develop on the rind."

Another remarkable goats' cheese is Norfolk Malder from Fielding Cottage, which Clare notes for its creamy texture and subtle 'goatiness' flavour.

Burrata and Mozzarella, two popular fresh varieties, are also ideal at this time of year. For a blue cheese, try the ewe's milk Pyrenees from Regalis, or the well-balanced Colston Bassett Stilton.

Other summer favourites include Feta – Kupros Dairy's unpasteurised variety is a favourite of Patricia's – and washed rind cheeses. Meanwhile, a cheese such as Crottin de Chavignol or halloumi work beautifully for a summer barbecue, and a classic Cheddar is the perfect centrepiece for a summer ploughman's lunch.

"At the moment, we're loving Pitchfork, Somerset's newest Cheddar made by the Trethowan Brothers, best known for their Gorwydd Caerphilly," Clare says. "Pitchfork was crowned 'Best British Cheese' at the World Cheese Awards in Italy last year, a highly deserved accolade for this succulent cheese with savoury tones and tropical high notes."

Perfecting a summer cheeseboard

Paired well, the complementary flavours of a cheeseboard accompaniment can really make a good cheese sing. So how should summer cheeses be presented?

When assembling a summer cheese board, Patricia recommends including fruit such as crisp apples, pears, figs, cherries and apricots, as well as celery for its salty crispness, radishes in a bowl of iced water for

CARING FOR FRESH CHEESE

When it comes to storing fresh cheese, it's important to consider temperature and humidity. The ideal temperature ranges between 40°F-53°F (4°C-12°C). The fridge is slightly cooler than this, but the refrigerator vegetable drawer is ideal as it's slightly humid yet the temperature is still cool and stable.

The wax paper that most cheeses come in is ideal for keeping it wrapped up, whilst cheese bags work well too – both are porous, allowing the cheese to breathe while also protecting it from exposure to

the air. Avoid clingfilm as this prevents a cheese from being able to breathe, and can result in mould growth if kept on for too long. What's more, as cheese is mostly fat and oil, it can start to take on the flavour of plastic if wrapped in clingfilm for too long. If plastic wrap is your only option, be sure to change it every day. For some blue cheeses, aluminium foil works well too, as this will help stop the blue mould spores from spreading.

Soft and fresh cheeses that can spoil more easily should be kept in their original or sealable containers, changing the water every couple of days.

Naturally, the shelf life of a cheese will vary depending on the type,

with harder cheeses lasting longer. Ideally, cheese should be consumed within a few days, though some can last for up to one month if stored properly.

Before serving, bring cheese back up to room temperature. To cut hard varieties, use a cheese slicer, or a paring knife for creamier ones. When serving, consider a prong knife for medium and hard cheeses, and a wide blade knife for soft cheeses. Try to use a different knife for each variety on your cheeseboard to avoid the flavours from mixing, and most importantly, cheese etiquette deems that we should cut cheese into slivers and place on top of a vessel, rather than spreading.

their slightly bitter crunch, and raw almonds and walnuts for their earthy qualities. And the perfect vessel? A baguette that you can tear pieces off of, as well as thin crisp biscuits – but opt for plain ones over herbed or spicy options.

Of course, no cheeseboard would be complete without an accompanying glass of wine. "Opt for a provençal rosé that is perfectly dry with that hint of familiar rose scent;

crisp white wines like Sancerre, Gavi, Lugana or Soave; and reds like a Californian chilled Pinot, Southern Rhone wines from the north all the way down to the hot south, or a Beaujolais Village – all of which can all be slightly chilled," Patricia says.

For goats' cheeses such as the Norfolk Malder, Clare recommends pairing these with a glass of English fizz: "Sparkling Bacchus from Chapel Down, the UK's leading winemaker

based in Kent, is herbaceous on the nose with flavours of mango and pineapple," she says. "Its gentle bubbles perfectly counterbalance the tanginess of the cheese."

Whether you're partial to a spicy blue, a sharp Cheddar or a creamy goats' cheese, savouring an artisan summer cheese is the ultimate way to appreciate the unique flavours that the season has to offer.



Look beyond the obvious

Why not seek out a cheese with the versatility of cheddar, the rich flavour of Red Leicester with a cunningly unexpected crunch.

For a twist of tradition visit a good cheese wholesalers to buy Red Fox, after all, **there's more to cheese than cheddar.**



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“Goats love to forage and graze, so produce more vivid, hot flavours to their milk, giving their cheeses a real sense of summer with their sharp, spicy taste and fudgy texture”



SPOTLIGHT ON: DRINKS TRENDS

With summer 2020 looking a little different to previous years, we look at the trends now shaping the sector

Weeks after pubs, bars and restaurants closed their doors for an indeterminate amount of time, the drinks category is seeing a shift in what shoppers are looking for when it comes to beverages – both soft and alcoholic.

Understandably, considering the reason behind the impact, health is a top priority of consumers, and trends such as wellness and functionality – previously positioned in the outer echelons of popular usage – are coming to the fore. “Consumers are becoming more health conscious, looking to seek out products that improve their health and wellbeing,” agrees Mike Hughes, head of research and insight at FMCG Gurus.

Also, take note of the trend for at-home creation and consumption of

beverages which would previously have been enjoyed out of doors such as coffee and cocktails. As well as providing ingredients – quality coffee beans and pods, artisanal spirits and well crafted mixers – there are plenty of products which are ready to go, such as canned cocktails and bottles of cold brew coffee.

Trustworthy messaging and quality are key points to be promoted during this unsettled time, while shoppers might be nervous about the stability of their finances. “Worries about a recession mean that consumers are also looking for ways to cut their spending when buying food and drink,” explains Mike, therefore honest messaging around health credentials will “enhance perceptions of value.”

Perhaps now more than ever, it's

important that independent retailers shout about the credentials of the products they sell. Locally-sourced juices and drinks – if you're able to get hold of them – will appeal to the ‘support small businesses’ message currently hugely popular, and promoting the drinks you sell on your online and social media channels will help spread the word.

Functional drinks

While the outbreak of Covid-19 has thrown our health into the spotlight, seeing consumers reset their priorities, “the shift to wellness is not new, and what we're seeing now is really just an acceleration of that shift,” states Rosh Amarasekara, co-founder of Humble Warrior. The jump of interest in ingredients such as turmeric, ginger, and other herbs and spices is in line with the

consumer desire to stay healthy and well – without resorting to pills and potions which aren't as clear-cut (or natural, often). “People are looking for ingredients that help support their body's natural defenses and keep them well,” agrees Rosh. “Since lockdown, we've seen a 500% uplift in online sales at Humble Warrior, with returning customers up 35%. Global searches for the word ‘immunity’ increased by >30% in the month after lockdown from an already high base according to TasteWise, and this trend has continued. Online means people have more information at their disposal than ever before so they're more informed about what food and drink is good and not so good. They're choosing to spend limited cash on what can give them not just taste, but health as well.”

Non-alcoholic options

“With greater emphasis on our health, one of the first things people do is moderate their alcohol consumption,” explains Paddy Cavanagh-Butler, founder of Punchy Drinks. While direct alternatives to alcoholic beverages are no doubt popular – an easy-to-understand foot in the door of the low/no-alcohol movement – discerning non-drinkers are now looking for a step up into something more complex and satisfying. “There's loads of non-alc beers and non-alc wines,” Paddy continues, “but often people don't want a pretender. We saw a big opportunity to create a complex, refreshing, health conscious range of soft drinks to fill this space.” Interestingly, Punchy Drinks offers both alcoholic and non-alcoholic options in its range – a great solution for attracting the (often younger) generation of consumers wanting to moderate their alcohol consumption. “Lots of people are calling Gen Z and Millennials ‘the sober generation’ but the majority of young people are just moderating more.”

Pre-mixed cocktails

While the advent of canned cocktails a few years ago was largely welcomed by consumers looking to enjoy a tipple al fresco – at a picnic, at the beach or at an outdoor events – now that such occasions are temporarily off the menu, they're still a viable stocking option to satisfy shoppers who are missing

their favourite cocktail while bars and pubs are closed.

Now that supermarkets have established pre-mixed cocktail aisles, it's important to offer something a little different in order to keep customers coming back to you for more. “Fine food retailers looking to stock canned cocktails should search for those companies who are working hard to make sure their drinks are full of natural ingredients and a higher alcohol content, ensuring the flavour is as close to a freshly made cocktail as possible,” explains Emily Mummery of Niche Cocktails – a Suffolk-based



DISTRIBUTOR INSIGHT

Nikki Castley, buyer at
Cress Co

“The temporary closure of cafes, bars and restaurants has had a huge effect on the drinks category as a whole and sales out are certainly down on where we would expect them to be at this time of year.

That said, those people who would ordinarily be enjoying a G&T in their local or an ice-cold ginger beer with their lunch are now ‘drinking’ from home so we are still seeing considerable volume going out of mixers especially tonic.

“We have also seen an increase in coffee and tea sales, perhaps a direct result of the many people working from home needing that much needed caffeine hit to get them through their day! Varieties of peppermint and chamomile tea are also high on the shopping list as many people look for some calm amongst all this madness.

“The current situation is of course the biggest factor influencing the buying trends in the drinks category as entertaining moves from the bars, cafes and restaurants back into the home. People are trying to find the best way to cope, whether it's a cup of soothing chamomile tea or a strong G&T, and off-trade ‘to-go’ sales of drinks for home consumption are at the forefront of this category.”

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start-up boasting the first short cocktails in cans including Blood Orange Old Fashioned, Manuka Honey Whisky Sour, and a longer Matcha Mojito. Added value is provided through simple serving instructions, "to ensure the cocktails look as good as they taste."

Home-brewed coffee

Homebound consumers are experimenting with home-brewed coffee, from the perfect cappuccino to social media-led trends like dalgona coffee (instant coffee frothed into stiff peaks with sugar and hot water, then spooned onto a glass of hot or cold milk) – so it's only natural that they'll be looking for quality coffees to help recreate the café-brewed taste at home. Perhaps unsurprisingly sales of coffee machines are up, which needn't be bad news for the environment; check out purveyors of eco-friendly pods Halo Coffee and Blue Goose for options which will attract environmentally-conscious

shoppers who are missing their usual caffeine fix.

Plus, as summer approaches, cold brew and iced coffees are becoming increasingly popular; so much so that start-up Carringtons – led by partners Suzy Wimbourne and Alex Carrington – has launched their products into the market despite current conditions. Described by the brand as "speciality coffee's answer to iced tea," it's a lighter option than others on the market with citrusy notes, a less intensely roasted flavour and a naturally sweet profile.

Hard seltzers

It's been a big trend in America for a while, but while a ripple of the trend was spotted towards the end of 2019, the popularity of hard seltzers is well and truly heating up in the UK as we head into summer 2020. There are plenty of small scale options available, including NATRL – a brand which has hurtled onto the UK scene in the midst of lockdown – and DRTY, but larger,

established businesses are getting in the action too; Scotland-based beer behemoths BrewDog have invested in the emerging hard seltzer market to launch its own Clean & Press brand. As ever, it's the independents' prerogative to seek out the best quality option to delight their customers.

Italian-inspired

We've had a few years of orange-tinted summers thanks to the ubiquitous Aperol spritz, but British drinkers are far from tired of its herbaceous and bitter notes. Fragrant vermouth has been steadily climbing up the ladder thanks to its similarly complex notes, and now the UK can boast its own aperitivo-worthy tipples: Cotswold Distillery's Amaro Liqueur, a well-balanced blend of the brand's single malt whisky, vanilla spice and citrus. As 6pm tipples become an integral part of many home workers' routines, summer 2020 could be the season that aperitivo culture really takes off.

SPOTLIGHT ON GIN

As a trend which shows no sign of waning, we speak to Neil Boyd, UK managing director at Edinburgh Gin to share his insights

Flavoured gin liqueurs are a great stepping-stone for consumers looking to get into the gin category. They cater for every taste, style and occasion, offering drinkers a range of ways to enjoy them.

Our Edinburgh Gin liqueurs can be enjoyed as traditional mixed serves, in cocktails or served with sparkling wine. With an ABV of just 20%, they also tap into consumer demand for lower ABV drinks. Most importantly, our liqueurs allow drinkers to experiment with flavours – and flavour is something that we take very seriously at Edinburgh Gin.

Our pioneering approach to gin-making brought modern flavour to the category for the first time through our range of gin liqueurs – which is why we're the UK and world number one gin liqueur brand in a market that is worth over £88 million in the UK (sources: IRI and Kantar).

Edinburgh Gin always has, and always will, take a sophisticated and considered approach when it comes to flavours, combining our Classic London Dry with premium pairings. We only ever use the finest natural flavours in intriguing combinations, striking a harmony of contrast and balance. Each season sees a different consumer trend,

so our diverse range of gin liqueurs allow us to accommodate every eventuality.

An example of our carefully selected seasonal offering is our Mulled Gin liqueur. This festive tippie tastes like a Christmas Market in a bottle with its warming balance of cinnamon, clove, orange and nutmeg. Add it to red wine and gently warm in a pan for a subtly spiced and aromatic hot drink, or serve with Cointreau and sparkling wine for a delicious Mulled Gin Bellini.

For many, the Rhubarb & Ginger gin liqueur will have been their first exposure to the Edinburgh Gin brand. It's our classic pairing and a great representation of our approach to flavours; the sweet, fruity notes from the spring-crop rhubarb are perfectly balanced by the warmth and subtle spice of Oriental ginger. Our perfect serve is Rhubarb & Ginger mixed with ginger ale over ice and this was so popular that we started to offer the mix as an RTD back in 2018.

Another gin liqueur serve that has been incredibly popular with consumers is our Raspberry Gin Fizz. As a result of this consumer demand and the increased popularity of ready to drink options, we recently introduced the Raspberry Gin Fizz to our RTD range. The sweet and easy to drink cocktail in a can is made by infusing sparkling white wine with our Raspberry gin liqueur and it's perfect for celebrations wherever you are and whatever the occasion.

“As 6pm tipples become an integral part of many home workers' routines, summer 2020 could be the season that aperitivo culture really takes off”

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2020 SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE STOCK CHECK

PUNCHY DRINKS PEACH, GINGER & CHAI
A non-alcoholic blend of juicy peach, hot ginger and fragrant chai.
punchydrinks.com

HUMBLE WARRIOR TURMERIC & MANGO
A tropical fizz with notes of mango, orange marmalade and black pepper.
the-humble-warrior.com

EDINBURGH GIN RASPBERRY GIN FIZZ
Raspberry liqueur perfectly mixed with fizzy white wine.
edinburghgin.com

COTSWOLDS DISTILLERY WHISKY AMARO
A fresh, fruity liqueur with floral notes and a slightly bitter finish.
cotswoldsdistillery.com



TALKING SHOP

For those who work within the fine food and drink industry, the impact the Coronavirus pandemic has had on our sector – among many others – may have come as a shock, but what won't be surprising is the initiative, creativity and spirit of collaboration which have emanated from within our ranks.

The 'unsung heroes' hard at work every day to feed the nation are being appreciated by politicians and consumers around the UK, but the spirit within our sector is something which is at present perhaps only seen by the people who work in it.

I've been buoyed to see collaboration – already a popular endeavour within food and drink – taken to new levels during the past two months. Independent retailers have worked with producers local and not-so-local to produce hampers to celebrate and support the local food ecosystem; websites have been launched within days to allow customers to purchase much-needed resources and to support producers who may have lost their primary route to market; retailers and foodservice businesses have performed impressively swift about-turns, adapting their offering to suit the changing needs of the shopper and industry.

We may be sorely missing one of our most valuable methods of face-to-face communication within our industry, as trade events throughout the year are postponed until safer times, but we have all stepped up to communicate and collaborate nevertheless, and I feel confident that when we are all able to meet in person again we will relish the opportunity more than ever – and have more to catch up on than ever.

Personally, I have seen a number of businesses within my orbit take the decision to close down completely. Some of these decisions were taken just a week or so after the pandemic hit our shores and so I dearly hope that they will be using this time to take stock and rethink their business approach, just as so many others in our industry have done.

It's the patchwork of personalities, passions and creativity that make the fine food and drink industry such a wonderful sphere to work within, and I for one hope that the outbreak of Covid-19 won't put an end to that. I'm sure it won't. In fact, thanks to the creative thinking of individuals and businesses around us we could be soon welcoming a new era of appreciation for what we all do and what makes us great.

Until then, stay safe.

We always want to hear the opinions of our readers – do you have a story to share, expertise to pass on or a comment to make? Please do get in touch with us via holly.shackleton@aceville.co.uk.

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5 MINUTES WITH... NATASHA BOWES, FOUNDER OF BIOTIFUL

WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?

Either running a food tech business or a kids protection focused charity.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?

First proper one – KPMG Corporate Finance in Moscow.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

People who are great at what they do.

WHAT'S THE WORST JOB YOU'VE DONE?

None.

TEA OR COFFEE?

Jasmine tea.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?

Making a great product that people enjoy and that does good for them.

AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?

Every Sunday, catching up on my emails.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR LAST SUPPER?

I would not be thinking about food then!

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?

Balance, and respect others.

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

I am a safe eater.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?

Sapiens by Yuval Noah Harari.

SWEET OR SAVOURY?

Savoury.



SPECIALITY FOOD MAGAZINE

The next issue will include:

- Essential Products for Autumn & Christmas
- The Cheese Report
- Christmas Planning
- Spirits & Mixers
- Condiments
- Jams, Honey & Spreads
- Condiments



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SNACK BUYER MAGAZINE

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TRIED & TESTED



D8 DATE BUTTER

Versatility is as important during lockdown as it ever has been – if not more so – so I was delighted to discover D8's date butters. There's a range on offer, all boasting a number of uses, but it was the classic which really stood out to me. The jar has very

nearly been finished after just a fortnight, as I have used it blended into smoothies and porridge, baked with it, and mixed it into Middle Eastern savoury dishes for a rich yet not overpowering note of sweetness.

d8made.com

COCONUT MERCHANT ORGANIC COCONUT MILK POWDER

Convenience is one of the biggest buzzwords in food right now, and this product delivers it with aplomb. Better value than countless tins of coconut milk and customisable to whatever



consistency you need, just a couple of tablespoons will transform your smoothie, curry, whatever you want into a creamy treat with a flavour of the tropics. Not only that, but it's ambient once opened, 100% natural and organic, too. A storecupboard staple, for sure.

coconut-merchant.com

ZEET ORGANIC OLIVE LEAF WATER

As the warmer months have drawn in I've been looking for refreshing, non-sparkling alternatives to plain old water, and it hasn't always been easy to keep my taste buds satisfied – especially when I've been avoiding sugar and looking for health benefits into the bargain. Thankfully, I came across the new launch Zeet (best known for their range of extra virgin olive oils): an organic olive leaf water, which is reminiscent of iced tea but with no added sugar and plenty of antioxidants.

evozeet.com



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



PASTA: THE LOCKDOWN SAVIOUR

Ambient, versatile and ready in a flash, no wonder pasta sales are up

Throughout the UK lockdown brought about by the outbreak of Covid-19, shoppers have been seeking comfort and convenience. It's only natural, therefore, that sales of pasta have been staggeringly high since the end of March when lockdown began. Thanks to its ease of use and versatility the Italian staple has long been a must-have store cupboard staple for households up and down the UK – but many of the options available to independent fine food retailers offer the quality, provenance and variety needed to go one step beyond standard supermarket fare.

The good news is that there's a huge range of products available for seasoned and new home cooks alike to utilise while they're making their own meals at home. Options such as penne, fusilli and spaghetti are favourites around the world for a reason, but why not branch out and sell options such as orzo, calamari and cappelletti? They may already be familiar to shoppers who dine in Italian restaurants, and orzo in particular is wonderfully versatile – customers can serve it in the style of a risotto or add it to minestrone-style soups, as well as serve it as a salad with finely chopped fresh vegetables.

You should be looking for bronze died pasta – this will hold a sauce

better than the smoother-surfaced, more cheaply made options. Quality lasagne sheets, cannelloni tubes and tagliatelle could inspire your shoppers to make their own slow-cooked ragus now they're spending more time at home, therefore it's a good idea to stock fine quality tinned tomatoes, olive oils, balsamic vinegars and a range of fresh herbs, as well as ready-made sauces for those without much extra time on their hands.

Why not look to offer your customers a wider range of products to serve with their pasta dishes? If you stock Italian breads such as focaccia and ciabatta, promote them as worthy accompaniments to a homemade lasagne – or even suggest they try baking the breads themselves (pointing them in the direction of great olive oils to accompany) when they purchase bread or pasta flour.

Are you passionate about Italian food and drink? Do you have a story, advice or comment on this subject? If so we would love to hear from you, so please get in touch at holly.shackleton@aceville.co.uk.



THE INDEPENDENT SHOPPER

Raz Helatat is the director at The Coal Shed in Brighton



feel very lucky to live in Brighton, as not only do we have an eclectic range of shopping venues but also eateries.

Each one run by dedicated and enthusiastic people wanting to support and uplift the local community and also to help the Brighton economy with one of its best trades: tourism. From the quirky venues to the most refined of establishments it really does have it all. It has taken time for Brighton to reach this stage but I feel that the gastronomy scene is well and truly established now and it really is very exciting. Although there is a place for chain restaurants, the concept of supporting local has never been so paramount. I have lived in Brighton for over 40 years and it has changed a lot and for the better. I now have two restaurants here, The Coal Shed and The Salt Room, and as a restaurateur I believe in working with local independent suppliers and retailers wherever possible.

Being by the sea, we expect the freshest seafood and serve plenty of it in our restaurants. Fish from the supermarket may be convenient, but it lacks the flavour and textures of something freshly caught. My favourite spot to pick it up has to

be BNFS (Brighton & Newhaven Fish Sales). Located by the Hove Lagoon, the shop offers a

huge selection of local fish and shellfish much of which is caught by their own fleet of boats. You really can tell just how fresh it is – even my five-year-old son can tell the difference! The team are also super friendly, and are always on hand to advise on what is best to buy when.

To get the essentials, like meat, cheese and bread, I have a few go-to's. R C Seckers is my local butcher and has a good selection of produce and great quality meat (which trumps the quality of meat at the supermarket). For cheese I tend to use The Cheese Man, they are primarily wholesale but does have his Cheese Hut at his warehouse which is very near BNFS. Tony and his team pride themselves in promoting local cheeses and I always find something special to put on the cheese board.

For the best baked goods and pastries in Brighton, I head to Real Patisserie, there are a few of them here and they offer a brilliant selection of bread (a must try is their Chewy Brown) as well as delicate cakes and tarts. Another place to head if you are looking for something

sweet is Sugardough bakery and café. The kids absolutely love it here, and I take them there for a treat – make sure to try their yo yos!

When I am cooking at home and want to experiment a little more with flavour and spice, the best place to go is Taj the Grocer, it is a brilliant Indian / Arab supermarket which stocks pretty much every Eastern and Asian spice you could ever need. It also has a good selection of fruit, veg, chillies and breads. I walk in and I feel like I am being transported – I find it extremely hard to resist taking something home from their deli section and polishing it off on the way home. A good place to go if you are looking to cook something Thai or Asian would be Unithai Oriental Supermarket and Noodle Bar in Hove. Not only does it have an excellent range of ingredients, but it has a little 20-seater café at the back serving incredibly authentic dishes. They only serve lunch, and there is often a wait, but it is worth it.

For an after-work tippie or wine for a celebration, I have two recommendations – Quaff Wine who have a good selection, many of which are priced very reasonably. There is also always someone on hand to offer advice, which is the best way to learn more about wine. Butlers Wine Cellar is also fantastic and offers some real treasures when it comes to wine – I recommend their mixed cases, it gives you a chance to try wine you may have never have chosen! There is also Fourth & Church who started off as a wine shop & deli and have now opened up their food offering with lots of interesting small plates – they also have a great wine selection to drink in or out.



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