

SILVER FORK

SLEAFORD QUALITY FOODS



SPECIAL EDITION 2 (2019/20)

SPECIAL EDITION - CHRISTMAS 2019 REVIEW

WHAT'S COOKING IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY?

OVERVIEW



WHAT'S NEW THIS EDITION:

- Reason for the Season
- International Cuisine Influences
- Dreaming of a Green Christmas



INTRODUCTION - THE MAIN SLICE

The decorations have been put away for another year and Christmas 2019 is already a distant memory, but preparations for Christmas 2020 are already beginning! Prior to looking ahead to the next festive season, it's time to review what was hot during Christmas 2019 and the foundations to be built upon this coming year.

Christmas 2019 was marked by some key consumer trends; the desire to be green, modest consumer spending, inclusivity and understatement and doing things differently by mixing the traditional with the new were all the order of the day.

It was a bit of a tug of war between the normal luxury expected of Christmas, whilst attempting to spend less, and celebrate with an air of nostalgia and crafting from scratch. The ideal of hygge still rules supreme at this time of year - the idea of inexpensive cosiness and closeness with family and friends seems to be appealing to more and more consumers wanting to capture the spirit of Christmas past without the modern stresses and pressures.

The tastes of the season appear to be getting a little healthier too, with fruity flavours the favourite at the dinner table. Clementine's and cranberries continue to be popular, although new and colourful fruits such as pomegranates, figs, plums and cherries are now demanding attention from many a sweet tooth too! Moreover, lesser known fruits like persimmon and quince are helping to bridge the gap between autumn and winter, in both flavour and colours.

STEPPING INTO CHRISTMAS - FLAVOURS OF THE SEASON

Classic flavours are joined this year by a few new arrivals - consumer interest in new, untapped cuisines such as Middle Eastern, Caribbean and Korean food and flavours has led to new recipe ideas and inspiration that will make any Christmas party the talk of the town. Summery and fruity tastes also come to the fore - we all want a little bit of summer sun whilst in the grip of winter!

- **Sweet** - chocolate (white, milk and dark), salted caramel, toffee, honey, vanilla, marshmallow, mince pie, candy cane, peppermint, cookie dough, snicker-doodle, gingerbread
- **Fresh** - cheese (white Stilton, Camembert, halloumi, brie, Gorgonzola, mozzarella), buttermilk, butter, cream (whipped, double, clotted)
- **Fruity** - cranberry, figs, clementine, orange, cherry, plum, apple, blueberry, pomegranate, dried fruit, coconut, mango, passionfruit
- **Vegetables** - mushroom, aubergine, squash, Jerusalem artichoke, horseradish, lemongrass, rosemary
- **Earthy and floral** - nuts (hazelnuts, pistachio, almond, walnut, pecan, chestnut), green tea, truffle, saffron, hibiscus, violet, rose, elderflower
- **Heat** - mixed spice, ginger, cinnamon, za'atar, chilli
- **Alcohol** - mulled wine, mulled cider, mulled fruits, martini, amaretto, sloe gin, gin, champagne, brandy, cognac, vodka, hot toddy, sangria



WHAT'S COOKING? TODAY'S TRENDS

DREAMING OF A GREEN CHRISTMAS

The desire to make a difference in the face of the climate crisis continued apace throughout 2019 - and Christmas was no exception.

One big bugbear for the industry has been the looming spectre of plastic - especially as Christmas is a big time of the year for single use plastic, a lot of which is used for food packaging. Iceland have pledged to launch plastic free packaging, but other brands have been thinking outside the box - including Park Plaza's eco-friendly crackers and Pierre Herme's chocolate logs being packaged in lace paper.

Tackling food waste is also of paramount importance this year, as the abundance of Christmas food can lead to indiscriminate waste. The leftovers tend to rule the roost after Christmas dinner, and consumers are getting ever-creative! Gone are the typical turkey curries and sarnies, enter turkey kedgeree and mixed veg gratins to keep you going through January! Consumers now also have access to food calculators (with one offered by Olive Magazine), which help consumers to not overspend on food that will go to waste.

A greener Christmas also means more emphasis on a plant-based diet - veganism has become mainstream, and can only grow in popularity and availability throughout 2020. Growing beyond the infamous nut roast, veggie Christmas dinners have included a baked butternut squash stuffed with fruit and nuts (Piece of Plate, Netherlands), and a vegan turkey roulade with red wine gravy (Sova Food Vegan Butcher, Ireland) - a very grown up, convenient and flavoursome affair for flexitarians, vegetarians and vegans alike.



WHAT'S COOKING? TODAY'S TRENDS

SEASON FOR SPARKLE

Christmas has always been a time where a touch of luxury in food and drink - ingredients such as truffle and caviar are always certain to see a boost at this time of year, as consumers look for opulence and a taste of the different; whilst gold and sparkle are never far away from our decorations, both on the tree and on our food.

However, consumers are tightening their belts even with Christmas in mind - it was forecast by IGD that consumers would spend £2 less per person on Christmas lunch. Increased awareness of the impact of our spending choices on the planet, as well as continuing budgeting for many families, make understated and occasional luxury the name of the game this year. Finishing touches such as honey, crystallised ginger, edible gold decorations, truffle (including Fortnum and Mason's truffle mayonnaise), caviar (with Waitrose's Elsinore Black Lumpfish caviar costing a measly £2.29/50g), oysters, and personalising recipes with a favourite tippie will help make Christmas a more mindfully luxurious time of year.



WHAT'S COOKING? TODAY'S TRENDS

COUNTING DOWN THE MINUTES

Whilst snacking and brunch have enjoyed growing popularity as alternatives to the traditional three meal structure, Christmas is no exception - whilst the traditional Christmas Day dinner always looms large on every consumer mind, alternative meal occasions are also being sought out.

Consumers aren't just waiting for the big day to get into the Christmas spirit foodwise either. The need for a tasty midweek meal does not abate around Christmas - in fact, one of the biggest uplifts in sales for Dominoes Pizza is the Friday before Christmas (Dominoes 2019)! With this in mind, retailers and restaurants have been thinking outside the box to tempt consumers for midweek meals, including Zizzi's festive lasagna with turkey confit and pigs in blankets; Harrods' smoked aubergine topped with pomegranate; and Tesco's broccoli stuffing gratin.

Brunch also continues its reign as a modern meal occasion, and as Christmas is a time to slow down and enjoy time with friends and family, it's the perfect time for a cozy brunch meet up! And the menu choices are pretty tempting - Christmas breakfast cereal from Dominique Ansel; mini breakfast panettones from Harrods; and a festive breakfast chorizo wreath from Grimus Food (Canada).

And it wouldn't be Christmas without our advent calendars ticking off the days until December 25th! From specialist advent calendars (including gin and tonic calendars and calendars including tech surprises behind every door) to Fortnum and Masons projecting an advent calendar onto its flagship Piccadilly store, advent calendars are an integral and increasingly luxurious part of the run up to Christmas.



WHAT'S COOKING? TODAY'S TRENDS

OUT RUNNING RUDOLPH

There's one thing that every one seemed to be low on throughout 2019 - time! Convenience has really upped it's game this year in the food and drink market, and with it consumer expectations for easier, more convenient event food - including, of course, Christmas!

Ready prepared food is, for many, the go to for time stretched kitchens, especially in the rise of the subscription meal kit - food that requires nothing more than the oven and some seasoning, so the family chef can relax with the rest of the family instead of slaving over a hot stove for hours on end. Cook UK offered a ready prepared complete Christmas dinner for 12 people; Harrods stocked a pre-prepared Kellybronze turkey that just requires oven time; and Booths brought out a ready prepared Christmas vegetable selection for 8 people - dinner time before you know it!

For the more creative consumers, simple steps for festive food preparation are absolutely key when buying their food - a middle ground between making a masterpiece from scratch and buying something pre-made, where consumers can feel involved in the finished dishes their friends and families eat. Examples include IKEA's ready made gingerbread dough; Smart Scholl House's strawberry Santas filled with whipped cream; and the myriad of no bake recipes out there for seasonal desserts - all of which help to keep artistic flair alive in individual kitchens, all whilst offering time saving convenience.



WHAT'S COOKING? TODAY'S TRENDS

BEGINNING TO TASTE A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS

It wouldn't be Christmas without the distinct flavours of the season - that first mince pie, after all, is always the best! As nostalgia is key to Christmas trends and buying habits, classic flavours remain popular - although these flavours are being reinvented into new formats.

So how are retailers thinking outside the box? Sprouts have seen a little bit of love thrown their way - including being used as a sauce (Sauce Shop) and as a battered snack (The Fisherman's Kitchen, Southsea)! Another savoury addition has seen a lot of love recently, the ever popular pig in blanket! With 59% of UK households reportedly opting for pigs in blankets as part of their Christmas spread (Kantar 2019), it's no wonder we're seeing more decadent takes on pigs in blankets, such as pigs cheeks in blankets with Olstead apple butter (Roots, Yorkshire) and Aldi's 2 metre long pigs in blankets wheel - seconds for everyone!

And our collective sweet tooth did not go unnoticed - especially when it came to taking mince pie recipes out of the bakery aisle. From mince pie liqueur (Asda) and mince pie flavoured yoghurt (Muller Light), to eccles mince pie, clotted cream ice cream and Gran Marnier custard (Chez Bruce, London) - mince pies and their flavours are officially taking over!

This is all about combining new traditions with old; although some newer recipes are also starting to take the limelight away from traditional Christmas fare. For instance, instead of the traditional Christmas Pudding, younger consumers are now seeking out chocolate and panettone alternatives, with panettone experiencing a +11% growth around the Christmas period (John Lewis, 2019). Some festive panettone offerings this year included Italian Salted Caramel Panettone (Selfridges), Gin Panettone (John Lewis), and panettone bread and butter pudding (The Hardware Club, Melbourne) - so modern twists on this European recipe are sure to keep younger consumers coming back for more!



WHAT'S COOKING? TODAY'S TRENDS

RETHINKING THE TURKEY

So where will the demand for more eco-friendly, healthier food affect Christmas? Whilst most consumers seem to be sticking to the traditional turkey for Christmas dinner, many are choosing to continue their reduced meat consumption through the festive period through choosing either plant-based or fish alternatives. However, for those who want to stick a bit closer to tradition, the slow burning popularity of alternative meats such as game and venison help make Christmas dinner a bit different and just as tasty.

Pescatarianism reportedly increased by 67% during 2019 (Finder, 2019), with many seeing it as a healthy halfway house between their conventional food diet and a plant based lifestyle. Fish as a Christmas centrepiece alternative also tends to complement a lot of traditional Christmas dinner sides - and can be developed to be a more special occasion with the inclusion of seasoned crusts, fillings and butters.

Consumers are also changing things up for the Christmas centrepiece without going too off the beaten track - and are instead using different types of meat, such as duck, the traditional goose, cockerel, grouse, pigeon and partridge.

And who can forget one of the main attractions at any Christmas party - the cheese board! Waitrose reported an increase in online searches for tiered cheese cakes, as well as sales of Christmas cheese growing 100% compared to 2018 (Waitrose & Partners, 2019).

Consumers are clearly after something different that will satiate their craving for cheese over the festive period - which is reflected in the launches of Wensleydale cheese with gingerbread pieces (Sainsburys) and Aldi's cheese advent calendar, just need to find the crackers!



WHAT'S COOKING? TODAY'S TRENDS

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

Christmas has always been a time to give and think of others - and in our ever-connected world, consumers are becoming more involved in charitable initiatives and charitable minded companies, as well as being more aware of those who might be spending Christmas alone, suffering from mental illness, or who need a particular food menu to be included in the normal Christmas feasting.

Charitable giving has seen a 5% increase year on year (Paypal, 2019), with more people donating smaller amounts as opposed to larger donations from fewer donors. And food companies are also stepping up to the plate to be more socially charitable (which is always popular with consumers), including Young Cake (Australia) donating 100% of sales from its Christmas fruit cake to children's charities; M&S donating 5% of sales from its sandwich platter to Shelter; and Pret a Manger offering a gift card of £10 that can be purchased for someone in need to spend in store.

Inclusivity within the food industry is also becoming widespread and mainstream - including many dietary issues such as gluten intolerance, lactose/dairy intolerance and alcohol free lifestyles. Single serve meals have also started to take off this year, with Christmas being no exception - either as a way to watch what we're eating at this time of year, or because of the rise of the single person household, both young and old.

With this increasingly mindful approach to spending amongst consumers, it's important to note that consumers are also continuing to seek out more mindful, conscientious food companies - especially when it comes to the provenance of Christmas meat and ingredients. Transparency is an integral part of the food industry, as seen in the rest of the year - a whopping 77% of consumers are concerned about animal welfare when it comes to food, according to the ASPCA (2018). Free range, transparent supply chains are therefore going to go nowhere in the spending habits of the consumer - especially as great taste is paired up with transparent provenance in many consumers minds and in the spending habits of food manufacturers.



WHAT'S COOKING? TODAY'S TRENDS

A MORE GLOBAL CHRISTMAS

Christmas is steeped in personal and cultural traditions - so much so that every household celebrates the holiday in their own particular way. The number of traditional European themed Christmas markets continue to be very popular in the UK, as well as offering a chance for short holidays to those who want to experience an authentic German Christmas market - a glass of gluhwien always helps with the run up to Christmas after all!

But it isn't just Europe that is proving inspirational in adapting Christmas traditions - after all, American candy canes, decor, and flavours including eggnog, peppermint and red velvet abound at this time of year!

The Middle East, a growing flavour trend throughout the rest of the year, is also finding a home in British Christmases, making our Christmas tables a bit different, and a whole lot more flavoursome! As well as being a cuisine that consumers have been delving into all this year, the geographic connection to the original 'reason for the season' has meant that Middle Eastern flavours from across the region are more authentic than at first glance. And there is so much choice to pick from - including saffron and chocolate fondant (Rovi, London); pomegranate and tamarind slow cooked lamb shanks (Dine with Dina, London); Persian pistachio éclair (Harrods); and za'atar spiced mixed nuts (Fortnum and Masons).



ACHIEVEMENTS NOT ASPIRATIONS - INNOVATION AT SQF

WE LOVE A CHALLENGE - CONTACT US TO
FIND OUT MORE ABOUT WHAT SQF CAN DO
FOR YOU!

FOR ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND TRENDS,
GO TO [SLEAFORDQF.COM/INNOVATION-HUB](https://sleafordqf.com/innovation-hub)

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ALL OUR
LATEST UPDATES!

Tracey Siddy - Head of Innovation

tracey.siddy@sleafordqf.com

+44 (0)1529 404160

**Laura Griffin - Marketing Project
Manager & Trends Analyst**

laura.griffin@sleafordqf.com

+44 (0)1529 404128

