How the European Union's is inspiring food and drink this festive season

Upmarket grocers looking to the Continent for their Christmas ranges

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With its latest marketing campaign, 'More Than Only Food & Drink' the European Union (EU) provides plenty of inspiration for retailers and wholesalers looking to update their festive ranges this year.

Major UK supermarkets have once again looked to European influences for their Christmas food and drink offerings, albeit with a less than traditional twist. Products featuring EU ingredients and influences can be seen across the seasonal product categories and include Seafood and Chorizo Shells, Sweet Spiced Gammon with Citrus Glaze and Panettone Crumb and Golden Limoncello Stollen Bites.

From aperitifs, wine pairings, succulent meats, charcuterie, several thousand cheeses and hundreds of sweet treats, the EU produces a vast range of flavours, textures and tastes. With its Protected Designated Origin (PDO), and Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) quality schemes, authenticity is guaranteed.

For that celebratory toast

Few celebrations are passed without a 'santé, 'salud', 'Prost', and the many iterations of a traditional toast. From a morning glass of Spanish **Cava PDO** to a nightcap of French **Cognac PDO** or **Irish Whiskey PGI** - the EU offers something for all tastes. There is also the added assurance that only ingredients of natural origin are permitted in the production of EU spirits[1].

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[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019R0787

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This year, European liqueurs are also featuring in desserts such as Jewelled Cointreau & Cranberry Christmas pudding and Limoncello Fizz Panettone, made by a family-run bakery in Piedmont.

In 2022, the UK imported 0.7 billion litres of wine from the EU. Outside the Member States, the UK is the number one destination for European wines with 23% of extra-EU exports.[2]

Neil McAndrew, advisor to the EU's 'More Than Only Food & Drink Campaign' and a wine industry professional for over 30 years, expects French, Italian and Spanish wines to be the best performing this Christmas; with Cava, Crémant, Champagne and Prosecco likely to have strong sales. Whilst still relatively small, the growth of natural wines also cannot be underestimated[3]. As such, Petillant Naturel (naturally sparkling wines made using techniques that predate the times of the traditional method) are predicted to be popular this festive season.

According to McAndrew, retailers planning to capitalise on the consumer's desire to 'treat' themselves at Christmas, should stock up on wines in the £15-£20 price bracket but ensure that customers understand the story behind the bottle. Shelf-talkers and imagery highlighting the grape variety, characteristics of the terroir and suggesting food matches can help the shopper to demystify the labels. The classics from Rioja, Bordeaux, Burgundy and Châteauneuf-du-Pape are popular gift choices due to the perceived quality of wines from the regions.

With full traceability from vineyard to bottle, retailers can also be confident of high standards and authenticity, regardless of the size, scale or location of the vineyard.   Furthermore, the majority of EU vines produce wines with geographical indications such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)[4].

Must-haves for sharing platters

The EU produces 14.5 million tonnes of cured meats[5], with hundreds of products to provide a special treat for the festive sharing board. Whilst Spanish Ibérico **Dehesa de Extremadura PDO** and Italian **Prosciutto di Parma PDO** are widely available, those seeking something truly different could look further north and east. Bulgarian **Gornooryahovski sudzhuk PGI**, is a succulent salami made only from the beef of well-fed cattle. Finland's **Aito saunapalvikinkku PGI** has a tender texture thanks to the direct smoking method of production.

The dairy sector is the second largest agricultural sector in the EU, representing more than 12% of output[6]. The EU produces thousands of varieties of cheese encompassing soft, hard, rind-washed and blue and using milk from cows, sheep, goats and buffalo.

Protected traditional and regional dairy products, extend far beyond the likes of Italian **Parmigiano Reggiano PDO**, Spanish **Queso Manchego PDO** and French **Roquefort PDO**.

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[2] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20231116-1
[3] Sources: James Richards, Owner, Vin-Neuf Wines https://www.vinneuf.co.uk/ Peter Prescott, Owner, The Wine Library https://winelibrary.co.uk/
[4] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751399/EPRS_BRI(2023)751399_EN.pdf
[5] IFIP-Eurostat-PRODCOM
[6] https://ieep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/IEEP-report-online-final.pdf

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For a truly continental board with lesser-known cheeses: **Kalathaki Limnou PDO** is a soft creamy brined cheese from Greece, Lithuania's **Lietuviškas varškės sūris PGI** has milky, smoky flavours that pair well with jam and honey. Croatia's **Paški sir PDO** is produced from a unique breed of sheep known for their intensely salty milk, Austrian **Tiroler Bergkäse PDO** is characterised by its powerful, fully aromatic taste, and melting texture. Danish **Danablu PGI** is often referred to as the country's equivalent to Italy's **Gorgonzola PDO** and **Sörmlands Ädel PGI** from Sweden has tangy, salty flavours expected of blue cheese. Perfect for cheese lovers who enjoy seeing out new flavours.

There's more than Christmas Pudding and Mince Pies

Last year, many retailers moved away from the traditional Christmas pudding in order to reflect modern tastes with some neglecting the pudding altogether in favour of **Italy's Panettone**[7].

Stollen is also becoming a Christmas staple on British shelves. For the original and quite possibly the best, Germany's **Dresdner Christstollen PGI** have been carefully baked and perfected for more than 500 years. Lebkuchen are also proving popular amongst British buyers with **Nürnberger Lebkuchen PGI** the most authentic option. Other festive treats include **Vánoční Cukroví** - iced shortbreads from Czechia and Hungary's **Beigli** - sweetened bread rolls filled with walnuts, poppy seeds and a variety of sweet fillings.

Most Christmas celebrations involve chocolate, and the EU produces millions of tonnes of chocolate each year with Germany, Italy and France producing almost two thirds (64 per cent)[8]. Whilst Italy's **Cioccolato di Modica PGI** was the first chocolate to receive the PGI accreditation, the French created praline and the **Bûche de Noël** (Yule log) is also a festive must-have.

For products of exceptional quality and proven heritage, the EU is a rich source of produce to explore.

For any further queries, please <u>visit our website</u> or contact:
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About More Than Only Food & Drink

In 2024, the European Union (EU) launched 'More Than Only Food & Drink', a communication campaign to encourage the imports, use and sales of authentic EU agricultural food and beverage products in the UK.

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[7] https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/dec/04/christmas-pud-ditched-for-panettone
[8] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20200831-1

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The campaign will refresh and strengthen awareness of the key characteristics of EU food and beverages, namely safety, quality, authenticity and sustainability. 'More Than Only Food and Drink' will promote the standards, regulations and tracking in place to protect food safety, food quality, animal welfare and the environment. The campaign will also seek to improve the recognition and understanding of EU food quality labels such as

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and EU Organic.

The wide-ranging campaign encompasses the following categories:

- Processed meat: charcuterie, salami, hams, sausages
- Fresh meat: poultry (including duck/goose) beef, pork, lamb
- Dairy and cheese
- Fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables
- Bakery products and confectionery
- Wine, spirits and beers

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