

Unexpected EU pairings to inspire autumn menus and retail displays

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From cheese and chocolate to aquavit and pork, unexpected combinations can help retailers and hospitality operators bring protected European food and drink products to life this autumn.

Autumn brings a natural shift towards orchard fruits, mature cheeses, cured meats, warming spices and richer dishes and drinks. For retailers and hospitality operators, the change of season offers an opportunity to introduce customers to new flavours while finding fresh ways to present familiar products.

Products carrying EU quality labels, such as **Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)** [1], can provide particularly strong inspiration. Their distinctive characteristics and links to specific EU regions give businesses both a culinary starting point and a provenance story to communicate through menus, displays, shelf-edge information and seasonal promotions.

The EU's 'More Than Only Food & Drink' campaign explores six autumn pairing ideas and how they could be translated into retail and hospitality settings.

Parmigiano Reggiano PDO from Italy and chocolate

Pairing cheese with chocolate may sound unconventional, but it works particularly well with a mature cheese such as **Parmigiano Reggiano PDO** from Italy. Parmigiano Reggiano PDO can only be produced in its designated area of northern Italy, using raw cow's milk and traditional methods, before being matured for at least 12 months. Its savoury, nutty and caramel-like notes can complement chocolate's cocoa and roasted flavours, while the contrast between salt and sweetness makes each element more pronounced.

[1] https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/geographical-indications-and-quality-schemes/geographical-indications-and-quality-schemes-explained_en

For retailers: Bring mature Parmigiano Reggiano PDO and quality European chocolate together in an "unexpectedly good together" display. Smaller formats could be combined in autumn gifting selections, tasting boxes or premium hampers.

For hospitality: Serve small pieces of cheese and chocolate as an alternative petit four, alongside coffee or as part of an after-dinner tasting plate.

Pêra Rocha do Oeste PDO and Prosciutto di Parma PDO

Pear and cured ham is an established sweet-and-savoury combination that gains an even stronger provenance story by bringing together Portugal's **Pêra Rocha do Oeste PDO** and Italy's **Prosciutto di Parma PDO**. Grown in Portugal's Oeste region, the local soil and climate help give the pear its distinctive sweetness, crisp texture and natural juiciness. Prosciutto di Parma PDO is produced in the Parma area of Italy using a traditional curing process, with carefully selected pork legs, sea salt and long maturation contributing to its delicate flavour and texture. This provides a refreshing contrast to the ham's delicate savoury character and silky texture. Lightly roasting the fruit develops a deeper sweetness, making the pairing particularly suitable for autumn menus.

For retailers: Merchandise Pêra Rocha do Oeste PDO alongside Prosciutto di Parma PDO, cheese and speciality bread as an easy autumn lunch or entertaining solution. Recipe cards could suggest crostini, warm salads and seasonal sharing boards.

For hospitality: Serve the pear fresh or lightly roasted with thin slices of Prosciutto di Parma PDO. The combination could be incorporated into a starter, flatbread, seasonal salad, or European sharing board.

Tokaji PDO from Hungary and Roquefort PDO from France

Sweet wine and blue cheese are a well-established pairing, but the combination also offers an opportunity to encourage exploration beyond the most familiar pairings. **Tokaji PDO** wines are produced within Hungary's historic Tokaj wine region using specified grape varieties and production methods associated with the area. **Roquefort PDO** is made from sheep's milk and matured in the natural caves of Roquefort-sur-Soulzon in France, where the specific conditions contribute to its distinctive blue veining, creamy texture and powerful flavour. The sweetness and refreshing acidity of Tokaji PDO wine can balance the saltiness and intensity of Roquefort PDO from France, while their fruit and honeyed characteristics contrast with the cheese's savoury depth.

For retailers: Cross-merchandise the wine and cheese with crackers, fruit and preserves as a ready-made autumn cheeseboard solution. Shelf-edge tasting notes can explain the balance between sweetness, acidity and salt, while also highlighting the PDO status and regional origin of both products.

For hospitality: Offer the pairing as a standalone cheese course, add a recommended serving of Tokaji PDO to the cheeseboard or include both products within a guided European wine-and-cheese flight.

Swedish Aquavit PGI with roast pork and apple

Aquavit is traditionally associated with rich, savoury foods, making **Swedish Aquavit PGI** an interesting partner for roast pork. Swedish Aquavit GI must be produced in Sweden, with caraway and/or dill providing its defining flavour. Its PGI status reflects this link to Swedish production and traditional flavouring practices. This herbal and spice character complements the seasonings commonly used with pork, while apple contributes sweetness and acidity to cut through the meat's richness. Together, the elements create a distinct autumnal combination.

For retailers: Feature aquavit alongside pork, apples, pickles and Nordic-inspired products. Recipe cards or bottle tags can show shoppers how to turn the ingredients into a complete autumn meal.

For hospitality: Pair a small serve with roast pork, pork belly or sausage accompanied by apple and pickled vegetables. It could feature on a Nordic-inspired set menu, tasting flight or seasonal bar-food menu.

Gouda Holland PGI from the Netherlands and coffee

Coffee and cheese share more flavour connections than might initially be expected. The **Gouda Holland PGI** designation requires the cheese to be produced in the Netherlands using milk from Dutch dairy farms and matured naturally within the country. The caramel, nutty and buttery qualities of mature Gouda Holland PGI can complement the roasted notes of coffee, while the cheese's creamy texture helps soften its bitterness. As a PGI product, Gouda Holland reflects a recognised link between the cheese, its Dutch origin and established production tradition. The result provides a simple savoury alternative to the cakes, biscuits, or chocolate usually served with coffee.

For retailers: Position mature Gouda Holland PGI close to premium coffee and autumn brunch products, supported by tasting notes or serving suggestions. The pairing could also be included in breakfast, weekend treats, or gifting promotions.

For hospitality: Cafés can serve a small piece of mature Gouda alongside speciality coffee, while restaurants could offer the combination as an alternative after-dinner course.

Dark České pivo PGI from Czechia and chocolate pudding

Beer can provide an unexpected alternative to wine when pairing drinks with desserts. Darker styles of **České pivo PGI** from Czechia can carry malt, caramel and roasted characteristics that complement the cocoa flavours of a rich chocolate pudding. České pivo PGI is linked to Czech brewing tradition and is characterised by specific production methods, quality ingredients and a balanced taste profile, often with a distinctive bitterness and full-bodied character. The beer's gentle bitterness can balance the sweetness of the dessert, while its carbonation provides contrast to a dense or creamy texture.

For retailers: Merchandise selected dark beers alongside premium chocolate, brownies and desserts as part of weekend or autumn entertaining promotions. Food-pairing notes can help shoppers identify the appropriate beer style.

For hospitality: Add a suggested beer match to chocolate pudding, tart or brownie, or serve smaller portions as part of a beer-and-dessert tasting flight.

For more information please visit our website or contact: morethanfood_UK@agripromotion.eu

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Notes to editors:

In 2024, the European Union launched the 'More Than Only Food and Drink' campaign to promote the EU's incredible range of food & beverages across the UK market.

The campaign aims to promote European food & beverage products to food and drink professionals in the UK, highlighting the key characteristics of the products (safety, quality, authenticity, and sustainability), with a focus on EU quality schemes - Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) - as well as the EU organic label.