

Fresh Produce

Fresh produce may once have cynically been dismissed as the Cinderella of hospitality menus, served on the side or as an afterthought to the main ingredient in a dish. However, with an increasing number of consumers actively seeking out plant based food choices, both for lifestyle and sustainability reasons, the growing profile of fresh produce has seen it become a star player in its own right in an increasing number of dishes.

This trend has been boosted by the spotlight that chefs such as Ottolenghi and Gaz Oakley have put on using fresh produce in dishes. The demographics are definitely moving in the right direction for Oliver Kay and the many artisan suppliers of fresh and seasonal vegetables, fruit and herbs that the specialist hospitality greengrocer works with.

The specialist skills of Oliver Kay's greengrocers support chefs across the hospitality sector as they face the challenge of taking their menus beyond the traditional simple piece of protein into new areas.

Consumer trends analyst Mintel reports that interest in plant-based diets has driven a wave of innovation in plant-based meat and dairy alternatives in the UK and Europe. Enjoying plant-based foods is now a lifestyle choice, rather than just a fad. While some embrace vegan diets, the flexitarian consumer is of far more relevance to chefs and operators when planning menus, as customers focus on consuming more plants and reducing, rather than eliminating, their intake of animal ingredients.

Even consumers who don't automatically identify with the plant-based movement are, in many cases, looking for healthier choices when eating out, but also expect chefs to add some wow factor to meals at a time when domestic budgets are tight. Showing that fresh produce can be indulgent as well as healthy is an increasingly important factor in menu planning.

Reducing waste: At a time when inflation is still rising and consumer spend is under pressure, chefs have to make every penny they spend work hard. Despite not having a nose or tail, fresh fruit and veg plays an essential part in the overall nose-to-tail, no waste approach that sets out to maximise the benefits of hospitality budgets, as well as to reduce food waste and drive sustainability efforts. Using broccoli stems for home-made slaw, roasting cauliflower leaves, and using carrot tops in pesto are just a few of the ways that chefs can make more of their buying power.

Seasonality: Seasonality has strong appeal to customers who want to enjoy locally produced food at its best, and working with the seasons is key when it comes to fresh



produce. As well as keeping chefs up to date with the latest seasonal information, Oliver Kay provides support and inspiration, including details of produce in season, new products, recipe suggestions, food trends information and industry news.

Added value: Extra side dishes made with seasonal produce allow customers to tailor their meal to their own tastes, adding a healthy choice such as spring greens or a more indulgent side such as potatoes dauphinoise, according to their mood and the occasion. Upselling side dishes offers additional customer choice as well as increasing revenue for operators.

Specialist producers: Consumers increasingly want to show their support for small and local food producers, while chefs and hospitality operators appreciate the point of difference that can be delivered by spotlighting growers on menus. Oliver Kay's established relationships with growers and suppliers from the UK and all over the world offers a wide and innovative product range delivered directly to the customer, as well as enabling chefs to offer produce customers won't find anywhere else.

Top Products

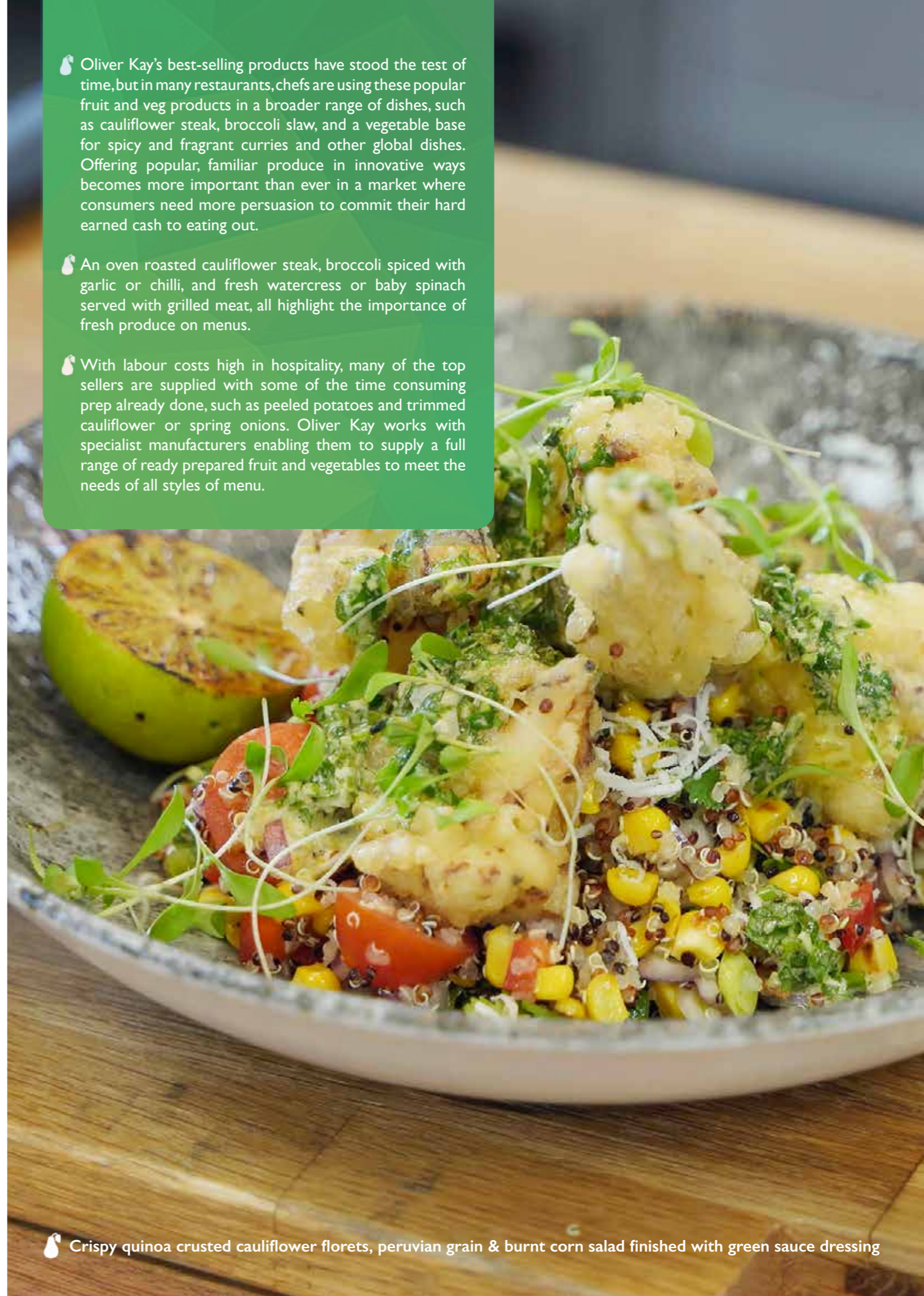
Top best selling products

- Tenderstem Broccoli
- Cucumber
- Little Gem
- Baby Spinach
- Watercress
- Mint
- Spring Onion
- Banana
- Basil
- Onion
- Cherry Tomato
- Coriander
- Iceberg Lettuce
- Cauliflower
- Pineapple
- Potato
- Parsley
- Strawberry

Oliver Kay's best-selling products have stood the test of time, but in many restaurants, chefs are using these popular fruit and veg products in a broader range of dishes, such as cauliflower steak, broccoli slaw, and a vegetable base for spicy and fragrant curries and other global dishes. Offering popular, familiar produce in innovative ways becomes more important than ever in a market where consumers need more persuasion to commit their hard earned cash to eating out.

An oven roasted cauliflower steak, broccoli spiced with garlic or chilli, and fresh watercress or baby spinach served with grilled meat, all highlight the importance of fresh produce on menus.

With labour costs high in hospitality, many of the top sellers are supplied with some of the time consuming prep already done, such as peeled potatoes and trimmed cauliflower or spring onions. Oliver Kay works with specialist manufacturers enabling them to supply a full range of ready prepared fruit and vegetables to meet the needs of all styles of menu.



Crispy quinoa crusted cauliflower florets, peruvian grain & burnt corn salad finished with green sauce dressing

Top selling fruit

Banana | Pineapple | Strawberry | Raspberry | Avocado
Orange | Lemon | Red Grape | Easy Peeler |
Honeydew Melon

- Fresh fruit is in demand right across menus, from a melon and prosciutto starter to berries in a summer pudding, while a wedge of lemon is equally at home served with a pan-fried plaice or in a freshly poured gin & tonic.

- Despite global demand having pushed up prices over recent years, the growth of brunch style menus as well as Tex-Mex cuisine help make avocados a popular menu item – despite some sections of the media believing that younger consumers' spend on smashed avocado on toast would be better directed elsewhere.

Top selling herbs

Mint | Basil | Coriander | Parsley | Chive | Red Chilli
Rosemary | Thyme | Sage

- The popularity of fresh mint in part reflects the dominance of the mojito on cocktail menus, although the gin boom of recent years sees bars increasingly look to fresh herbs to complement the botanicals in speciality gins, with basil, sage and rosemary among the herbs carving out a second career as a cocktail ingredient.

- UK consumers' palates have gradually become more used to spicy food over time, with popularity of peri-peri cooking and similar cuisines prompting chefs to use fresh red chillies in a broad range of dishes.

Top selling veg

Tenderstem Broccoli | Baby Spinach | Cooking Onion
Cauliflower | Butternut Squash | Carrot | Broccoli
White Cabbage | Asparagus

- Fresh coleslaw is an essential side dish in the casual dining sector, with white cabbage providing the canvas on which chefs can create their own masterpiece by adding a range of ingredients.

- While the British asparagus season is relatively short, its popularity as a starter, simply grilled with butter, or wrapped in charcuterie, makes it a top seller.

- Chefs seeking out plant based ingredient dishes robust enough to meet consumer expectations of a substantial meal, has boosted demand for butternut squash. The fleshy texture takes on other flavours well and can be used to make spicy dishes in the style of a range of international cuisines.

Top selling salad

Cucumber | Little Gem | Watercress | Spring Onion
Cherry Tomato | Iceberg Lettuce | Rocket | Celery

- As consumers look for healthier choices, a deli-style salad bar featuring a choice of fresh salad items which can be simply served in a takeaway bowl, or added to sandwiches and wraps can add a much-needed extra revenue stream for hospitality businesses.

- Rocket is in strong demand, used as a simple way to add some much needed greenery to steak and grill dishes, as well as to spice up salads.

Top product predictions for 2023

- **Cauliflower:** The chunky nature of a cauliflower, as well as its ability to carry a wide range of flavours, makes it a popular choice as the main player in vegetarian and vegan dishes. **Cauliflower steaks** are increasingly seen on menus, and as a home-grown, good value vegetable that can take on the flavours of herbs, spices and sauce, cauliflower is expected to be a firm favourite with chefs in the year ahead.

- **Herbs:** Flavour is key to adding the wow factor that cash-strapped customers expect when deciding to eat out, and fresh herbs, available year round from specialist growers, offer chefs a cost effective way to add flavour to a broad range of dishes. This also helps to increase flavour where less salt is used, for example by using lemon and herbs to lift a dish during cooking rather than the traditional seasoning. Traditional dishes such as roast pork, lamb and chicken can be spiced up with sage and mint, while a fragrant herb such as coriander can be used to bring an international dimension to a broad range of dishes.

- **Seasonal fruit:** As consumers look for healthier menu options when they eat out, demand for fresh, seasonal fruit is growing. Highlights of the UK growing season include strawberries at the start of the summer, followed by raspberries and blackcurrants and moving on to the autumn harvest including apples, pears and plums. Spotlighting seasonal fruit in menu favourites such as crumbles and pies, or simply as part of a fresh fruit salad served with natural yoghurt, helps drive dessert appeal.

- **Tomatoes:** Tomatoes are moving from the side plate to centre stage, with increasing interest in the flavours delivered by using a broader range of varieties as growers offer wider choice, such as heritage tomatoes. At the same time, the continuing popularity of burger menus, Mediterranean dishes, Italian food and growing consumer expectations that menus will include interesting and varied salad choices, will keep tomatoes in demand.

- **Broccoli:** Despite having been a mainstay of the veg offer for many years, chefs are starting to realise that they may only have been scratching the surface when it comes the versatility of broccoli on menus. The texture of broccoli means it can be roasted with herbs and spices to create a plant-based main course that feels substantial, while for consumers looking for healthier choices, broccoli's high vitamin and mineral content also adds to its appeal.



👉 Potato, leek and onion wellington



👉 Rhubarb tart with stem ginger frangipan

Inspiration...

👉 Crispy quinoa crusted cauliflower florets, peruvian grain & burnt corn salad finished with green sauce dressing

👉 Potato, leek and onion wellington

👉 Rhubarb tart with stem ginger frangipan