Focus On: Free From

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FEATURE #1 Is the free from sector set for big price hikes?
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Last October, Asda announced it was investing £6m on cutting prices of its free from goods to ensure customers needn't pay more "for food they love if they have an intolerance". The scale of the cuts was staggering, with the price of products such as gluten-free flour slashed by four fifths and pasta halved. What impact did this move have on the wider market? Have other retailers followed suit? How are such price cuts even possible? And – with warnings of price pressures caused by a perfect storm of Covid-19, Brexit and spiralling freight costs mounting – can these prices be maintained?

Price pressures
Warnings of a global rice flour shortage are mounting as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to hamper production in India and the coup in Myanmar impacts exports. Brexit is also causing headaches for importers. Meanwhile, demand in the UK is soaring. Are retail prices set to start rising? How can price increases be mitigated? Can producers switch to alternative ingredients?

UK capacity
What's the situation in terms of free from production capacity in the UK? What challenges does the fact that some free from products must be produced in segregated facilities present during times of high demand; presumably it's more difficult to outsource production? How have producers responded during the pandemic? How reliant is the UK on imports of free from products produced in Europe and what challenges has Brexit thrown up?

Innovation and NPD
How has the free-from market developed in terms of NPD over the past year? This feature will also explore the latest trends in free from food & drink, profiling some of the most interesting and innovative new launches in a separate panel. Brands should supply a high resolution and product details of new launches including launch date, rsp and stockists.

Innovations: We identify four new products or product ranges that have ideally not appeared in The Grocer before including launch date, rsp and an image of each.

FEATURE #2 How green is dairy-free and do consumers really care?
Author: George Nott George.Nott@thegrocer.co.uk

Increasingly, plant-based milks are they're being sold on their environmental benefits. So what claims are producers making about their products and how significant a motivation is sustainability for shoppers who buy dairy alternatives? Do the claims being made hold water? And what about the environmental credentials of the growing range of dairy-free cheese, yoghurt and ice cream alternatives?

Consumer awareness
This feature will explore the key motivations of shoppers who buy dairy alternatives and how they are changing. Of particular interest will be understanding of issues including products' carbon footprints and water use, health credentials and how much of a barrier price is for shoppers when it comes to dairy alternatives.

Brands
We will also be exploring the performance of this market's biggest brands and challengers and how their marketing approaches differ. For example, in 2018 some brands have been communicating the carbon footprint of its products on pack. Has anyone else followed suit?

Retailers
This feature will also explore in detail how different retailers' approaches to the ranging and merchandising of dairy-free products is evolving. Which retailers have carved out the greatest share of the market relative to their overall share of grocery? How are they marketing and merchandising dairy-free? And are we likely to see own label take greater share in future?

Innovation and NPD
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