



Have we got news for you

The main food and beverage news stories of 2016

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Have we got news for you – the main food and beverage stories of 2016

Love them or hate them, journalists matter. What they say filters down to the consumer and can influence what they put in their baskets. In this white paper, Anne Stanton from the Leatherhead Food News team discusses the 10 most popular food and beverage topics which have been preoccupying the media in 2016 and considers what might get journalists talking in 2017.

You only need to glance at a newspaper or news website to see that food and drink is a pet topic of journalists. This is partly because it is a subject that they can safely assume will be relevant to their entire audience – we all need to eat and drink!

We might not like to admit it, but what journalists say matters. While hard to quantify, the arguments and viewpoints filling up column inches and creating online traffic do trickle down to consumers and have an influence on their behaviour.

Listening to the voice of key opinion formers, and understanding how the food and beverage industry is being portrayed in the media is important for companies to safeguard their reputation and to help predict some of the consumer trends which may be coming down the line.

Every day, the Leatherhead Food News team summarises all the latest news that is relevant to the food and drinks industry from both the UK and around the world. The team collate this into your daily Leatherhead Food News email which hits your inbox before lunch.

Contact membership@leatherheadfood.com to make sure you are receiving your copy.

The News team have analysed and quantified the range of food and beverage topics appearing in the media from September 2015 to August 2016. This white paper discusses the 10 topics which have featured most frequently.

10. Superfoods

With consumers becoming more health conscious and searching out healthier foods, the interest in products with functional benefits continues to rise. This is often discussed in the media under the name 'superfoods', of which there is no official definition, but which is generally taken to mean foods with added health benefits.

It seems an age ago that the term 'superfood' first came into common parlance extolling the health benefits of the mere blueberry or the likes of the broccoli floret. The foods which are given the label today, are at least a little more exotic. During the last year, mushrooms, kelp, kimchi, Moringa tea, green beans from Africa and Asia, a fava-bean product from Finland

and chokeberries have all been hailed superfoods. Unsurprisingly, articles on superfoods peaked in January 2016, to coincide with consumers' New Year's resolutions to eat more healthily.

While 'superfoods' can seem a consumer-friendly term, health claims attached to so-called superfoods may be unsupported by scientific evidence. The EU has banned health claims on packaging unless supported by scientific evidence.

There is a danger here too that the media can focus on the health benefits of a foodstuff without also highlighting the role the food has to play in the context of an individual's whole diet and without discussing the negative effects of over-consumption.

9. Gut bacteria

Over the year many articles have discussed the importance of maintaining 'good' gut bacteria from the early stages of life, as evidence suggests that a poor gut microbiome (the collection of bacteria found in our guts) can lead to developing autoimmune diseases, cancer, diabetes, mental health, mood-related health problems and obesity.

One of the keys to a diverse biome is a wide variety of food in our diet; but with a source at the FAO recently commenting that 75% of global food calories are derived from only 6 animals and 12 plants, it looks like variety is not easy to achieve.

8. GM foods

In the last 12 months, widespread consumer scepticism continues to be reported in genetically modified (GM) foods. The media have also featured stories about scientists who

have challenged the claims of biotech companies and the UK Government that GM food is safe for human consumption and will be needed in the future to provide food security.

A report published by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine examined 900 studies and found no evidence of health risks from eating GM products and limited impact on crop yields, which have been reported previously to be improved.

Much discussion on the legislation for GM foods has been reported, with the EU Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety discussing whether to allow EU countries to restrict or prohibit the use of authorised GM feed and food in their territory. There has also been coverage of US legislation to create national standards for the labelling of GM foods.

And of course there is the current debate about the latest methods of genetic modification, so-called gene editing, and how crops and foodstuffs derived from this method should be classified and labelled. This debate is tied up with a wider discussion about the differences between breeding methods. Is editing a genome in a laboratory any different to crossing plants and causing the formation of new genes? It is widely recognised that genetic engineering and conventional breeding are becoming increasingly blurred and the distinction between the two is not the core issue.

The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine highlighted in their report that all technologies for improving plant genetics (whether GM or conventional) can

have benefits, as well as raise safety considerations. It concludes that it is the product and not the process that should be regulated.

7. Vitamin D

During the course of the year, studies have featured in the media investigating the impact of vitamin D deficiency on obesity, heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, bone development in children, depression and schizophrenia.

Studies with toddlers and women have also investigated more broadly the effect of the sun, which causes the body to produce vitamin D, on health; they reported that toddlers who spent more time outside were less likely to become overweight and sunbathing women were likely to live longer.

The British Heart Foundation has called for more research into the relationship between vitamin D supplementation and heart disease before fully endorsing it.

Several articles have discussed the fortification of products, such as bread, with the vitamin. Sweden is proposing mandatory vitamin D fortification.

6. Meat and dairy substitutes

With the challenges of feeding the world's increasing population, as well as fundamental changes in consumers' eating habits, with plant- and vegetable-based meals becoming the fashionable, healthy and ethical choice, the topic of protein has become popular in the media.

A wide range of protein-based alternatives to meat are in development, as are vegan and

dairy replacements, using chai seeds, kale, quinoa, tempeh and nuts. To read more about protein trends, download our white paper: [What's New in the World of Proteins?](#)

There have also been reports of 'lab grown' or 'cultured meat' being developed, which have provoked strong customer reaction. One article focussed on efforts to make a vegetable burger look as realistic as possible to the meat version by 'bleeding' beetroot juice.

A new EC funded project, called PROteINSECT, to investigate insect protein for animal feed has also been reported. Protein derived from insects more broadly is a popular topic for the media, complete with unappetising pictures of cricket kebabs. The question of when insect protein might become a more common occurrence on our shelves in the EU is tied up with their novel food status. EU legislation which comes into effect from January 2018 is likely to speed up the review of novel products derived from edible insects in Europe, so from 2018 therefore, we expect to see an acceleration in insect product innovation.

5. Food waste

Social awareness of the issue of food waste is growing and there is pressure on producers, supermarkets, consumers and the foodservice sector to reduce it.

Technology has a role to play in the prevention of waste with the introduction of food-sharing apps and the use of nanotechnology in packaging to increase the shelf life of foods.

Commitments have been made by WRAP, the Women's Institute, Nestle and the Cool Chain

Association amongst others to reduce food waste.

With WRAP reporting that an average family could save £700 a year simply by throwing away less food, consumer awareness of the issue is increasing. Opportunities for the safe use of food waste have been the feature of some 'good news' stories – 18.3 million meals, for example, were served by charities, according to FareShare.

4. Food fraud

Articles from around the world have covered fraudulent olive oil, vodka, weight-loss pills, fish, lamb takeaways, spices, honey and more.

According to the FSA's National Food Crime unit, food fraud is a growing issue in Britain and costs consumers as much as £1.17bn a year, with UK hotspots being Manchester, Birmingham and Newham.

In the US, according to Oceana Group, 59% of fish were mislabelled in 21 states. An organisation representing honey producers in New Zealand states that although only 1,700 tons of manuka honey are produced, 10,000 tons are sold.

Many articles have reported that authorities are clamping down on food fraud worldwide.

3. Gluten-free diets

The incidence of coeliac disease has increased over the last 60 years and media coverage has discussed the rise in the number of people choosing to exclude gluten from their diet, and the flourishing gluten-free market place as a result. The most active gluten-free categories are breakfast cereals, cereal bars and snacks.

Many consumers who have not been diagnosed with coeliac disease are choosing to follow a gluten-free diet. Articles have featured in the media discussing the health risks of a gluten-free diet for non-coeliacs, such as deficiency of vital minerals and vitamins. The nutritional content of gluten-free products has also been under scrutiny in the media, with gluten-free products reportedly having higher fat and sugar content to standard products.

Research commissioned by Grana, the company which makes Barleycup, has shown that 50% of consumers are confused about the type of products that contain gluten.

New products, such as gluten-free beer, gluten-free fish fingers and ingredients, such as an enzyme that may allow coeliac suffers to eat gluten, continue to come onto the market, and manufacturers are investing in larger production plants to meet consumer demand.

2. Food labelling

There has been extensive media coverage in both trade and consumer press relating to the food labelling requirements and obligations across a number of issues, including stories about:

- The traffic light nutritional labelling system
- A visual presentation of teaspoons of sugar and salt
- Adding dietary guidelines to boost healthy eating
- Showing the activity required to burn off calories
- The presence of GM ingredients
- Product impact on the environment and wildlife

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- Best before and use by dates
 - Expanded storage and freezing advice to reduce food waste.

Reports highlight that consumers remain confused despite different global approaches to nutrition and storage labelling, which is impacting on public health and food waste.

Technology is likely to offer solutions in this area. One such solution is a pre-programmed intelligent fridge to help shoppers keep track of what is in their fridge and which products need to be replenished.

1. Cancer and diet

Cancer and diet-related media stories featured more in the media over the last 12 months than any other topic.

According to Cancer Research UK, 4 in 10 cancers are preventable. Leatherhead Food News reported evidence from 18 different academic studies that support a relationship between diet and cancer, including red meat, salt and high-fat diets increasing the cancer risk, while oily fish, olive oil, fruit and vegetables (which are high in fibre) and compounds in beer and wine reducing the risk.

The most consistent finding was unanimous support for a healthy, balanced diet to maintain a healthy weight, with the importance of exercise also discussed.

Predictions for 2017

So what will journalists be talking about next year? These are some of our News team's predictions:

- **Consumer convenience** – this includes developments in home delivery services, meal kits, premium/niche subscriptions

delivered direct from the supplier to your door (e.g. craft gin).

- **Collaboration** – the food and beverage industry is focussing on more open innovation between companies, relevant stakeholders and academia to develop new products, strategies, digital health platforms, and food safety and compliance technology.
- **Contamination** – there has been a spate of recalls related to plastic and rubber in products, which have been blamed on the use of non-compliant, non-EU rubber seals used in manufacturing equipment – are there more to come?
- **Technology** – technology is opening up new routes to the consumer as well as ways to help inform consumers. There will be developments in apps to aid shopping, such as Amazon's dash buttons to order groceries or Carling's beer buttons to order beer from supermarkets, and apps to help make sense of nutritional information in the context of an individual's whole diet. The media will be following the developments in smart, internet-enabled kitchens and devices and developments in automation e.g. robot waiters, delivery by drone, factories of the future.
- **Functional foods** – as we are all living longer there is a greater risk of us developing a range of diseases. There will be a central role for food and diet to provide solutions to prevent or alleviate conditions, such as cancer, dementia and dysphagia. There is growing interest in fortified foods for those consumer who are missing important nutrients from their diets.

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- **Personalised nutrition** – couple the growing consumer interest in individualised products, the leaps in technology and the growing interest in personal DNA profiling and you could have a market where consumers pick and choose the products which meet their specific dietary needs.

As they have been doing for over 30 years, Leatherhead's News team will continue to keep you abreast of all the relevant food and beverage stories which are making the headlines in 2017 – summarised and served up daily in your Leatherhead Food News email.

How Leatherhead can help

Many news services provide just headlines or very selective and brief abstracts, but Leatherhead Food News provides a summary of all the latest news relevant to the food and drinks industry from both the UK and around the world. Distributed daily to thousands of individuals, this exclusive member-only benefit covers areas including food safety, recalls, nutrition, innovation and hot topics. Sourced from the UK's national and international print and electronic media, the news feed provides 50-80 summaries per day with links to some of the original articles. The stories are also uploaded to a fully searchable News database, which currently comprises in excess of 285,000 entries, with 1,500 new records added every month.

Leatherhead Food News can help you: understand the facts behind today's food scares and respond to them; track food issues and product recalls; identify what the press are telling your customers; monitor competitor activity, profits and losses, new products; understand consumer attitudes and buying patterns; follow diet and health trends and monitor advances in innovation and technology.

If you're interested in receiving a copy of Leatherhead Food News direct to your inbox by lunchtime each day, please email membership@leatherheadfood.com

About the author

Anne Stanton is Leatherhead Food News Manager. Having graduated as a pharmacologist she started her career as a veterinary pharmacokineticist with Beechams. Anne joined Leatherhead in 1992 as a scientific abstractor and indexer and since then she has acquired an extensive scientific knowledge of the food industry. She and her team are responsible for producing Leatherhead Food News each morning.

About Leatherhead Food Research

Leatherhead Food Research provides expertise and support to the global food and drink sector with practical solutions that cover all stages of a product's life cycle from consumer insight, ingredient innovation and sensory testing to food safety consultancy and global regulatory advice. Leatherhead operates a membership programme which represents a who's who of the global food and drinks industry. Supporting all members and clients, large or small, Leatherhead provides consultancy and advice, as well as training, market news, published reports and bespoke projects. Alongside the Member support and project work, our world-renowned experts deliver cutting-edge research in areas that drive long term commercial benefit for the food and drink industry.

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About Science Group plc

Leatherhead Research is a Science Group (AIM:SAG) company. Science Group plc offers independent advisory and leading-edge product development services focused on science and technology initiatives. Its specialist companies, Sagentia, Oakland Innovation, OTM Consulting and Leatherhead Food Research, collaborate closely with their clients in key vertical markets to deliver clear returns on technology and R&D investments. Science Group plc is listed on the London AIM stock exchange and has more than 350 employees, comprised of scientists, nutritionists, engineers, mathematicians and market experts.

Originally founded by Professor Gordon Edge as Scientific Generics in 1986, Science Group was one of the founding companies to form the globally recognised Cambridge, UK high technology and engineering cluster. Today Science Group continues to have its headquarters in Cambridge, UK with additional offices in London, Epsom, Boston, Houston and Dubai.

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