



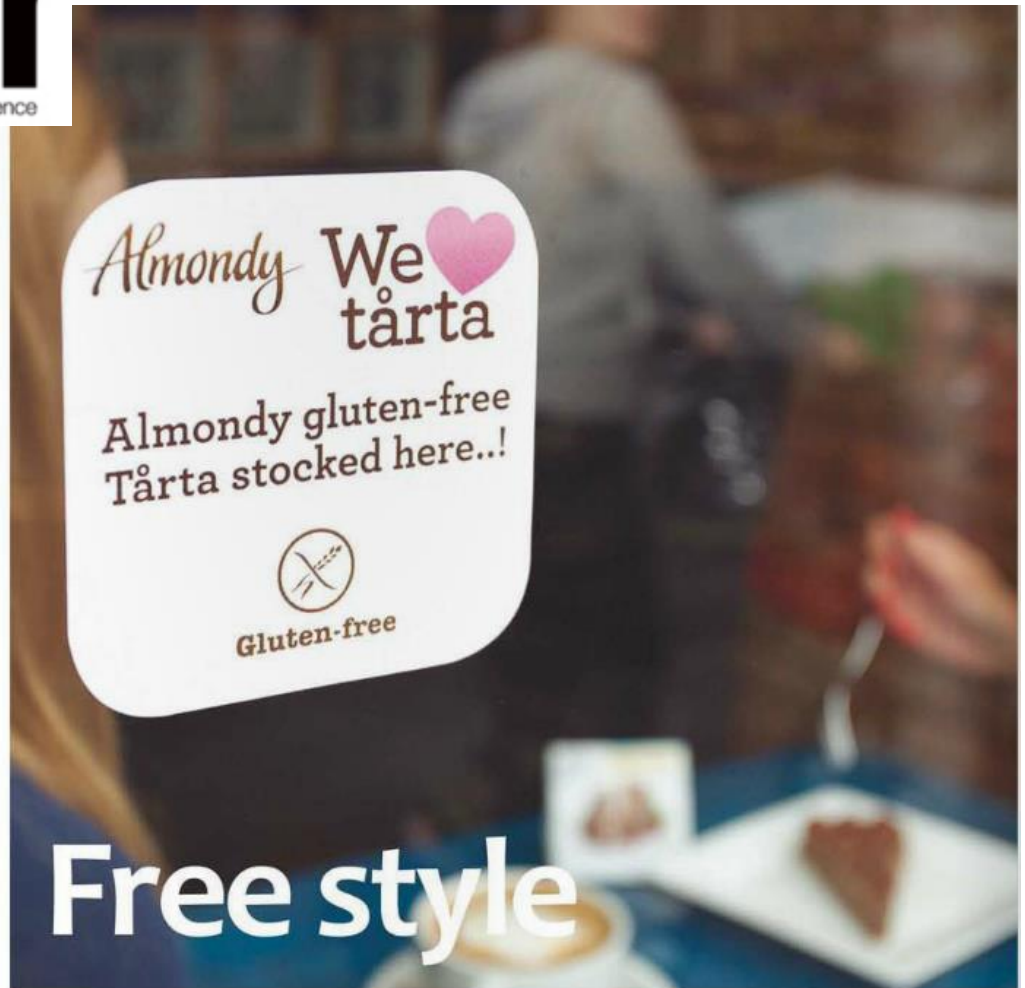
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Free style

MARK LUDMON LOOKS AT THE INCREASING OPTIONS FOR ALLERGEN-FREE FOOD

Twelve months on from the introduction of food regulations on allergens, 89% of consumers now feel that availability of “free from” products has improved. Research from HospitalityGEM, a specialist in guest experience management tools, found that 58% felt ingredients were clearly communicated in bars, pubs and restaurants although 30% felt staff were not properly trained in allergens in dishes. It highlights the need for more work to comply with the EU regulations that require operators to provide details of 14 “allergens” contained in food and drink to their customers on request. “It’s clear many operators are doing what they can to make consumers more confident when eating out through clearer communications about ingredients and a greater range of ‘free from’ dishes,” says HospitalityGEM managing director Steven Pike. “However, the identification of staff training as an area in need of improvement should encourage the operator to look hard at their sites and how team members are briefed on this important aspect of food service. It should be part of any induction and also revisited regularly as menus and teams change.”

Foodservice suppliers are not only expanding the range of “free from” products available but helping operators with compliance. Chris Beckley,

managing director of leading supplier KFF, points out: “As a business, we have trained our sales teams to help bar operators understand the obligations required under the current allergen legislation and to highlight products that are safe for specific allergies, or offer alternatives.” KFF has also developed a downloadable guide to outline what operators need to know about the legislation, with downloadable record sheets to help collate allergen information from product labels. KFF has built up a wide range of gluten-free products, from gravy granules, pasta and bread to pizza bases, fish goujons and pork sausages.

New menu management system Kafoodle has been designed to help operators to comply with allergen rules. The cloud-based hospitality software solution supports communication between kitchen and front of house about ingredients and feeds into an app that consumers can use to find bars, pubs and restaurants that cater to their allergies or intolerances. It is used at Brakspear’s The Bowler Pub & Kitchen in Clerkenwell in London, where the app has helped to attract new customers, says licensee Lee Curtis. “The system allows us to print off latest allergen sheets which we can show to our customers.”

Almondy, the specialist gluten-free bakery, redesigned all its packaging to make sure catering



Gluten free from Prime Fresh Foods

staff would be fully informed about ingredients in its range of frozen desserts and cakes. However, managing director Andrew Ely points out: "It's not enough for caterers simply to serve free-from options. They must also understand how that food needs to be prepared and served."

Prime Fresh Foods has seen a "vast" increase in demand for gluten-free products since it started listing them in its portfolio of desserts two years ago. There are now 30 including chocolate brownies, sticky toffee pudding and raspberry bakewell tart. "Feedback on all the range is that you would not know they are gluten free by either flavour or texture," says managing director James Bullmore.

Farm Frites, a specialist in frozen and chilled potato products, has now made 90% of its range allergen-free. Its latest addition is an oval gluten-free hash brown, made with potato and onion, which can be used as a substitute for a wheat roll in buns. Funnybones Foodservice now offers gluten-free, allergen-free brioche-style burger buns and hot dog rolls, tapping into the all-American food trend, as well as its newly added gluten-free Alabama Fudge Cake.

While many people give up gluten as a lifestyle choice, around one in 800 Britons are coeliacs whose bodies cannot tolerate gluten. According to Coeliac UK, caterers are missing out on around £100m each year by not providing enough gluten-free products. At February's Casual Dining show in London, AAK Foodservice is introducing a range of menu cards featuring gluten-free dishes for its Lion brand of sauces and dressings to help caterers tap into this opportunity. "Outlets are crying out for more gluten-free products and easy menu ideas," explains Lion brand ambassador and chef Ben Bartlett.

Yumsh Snacks describes its Ten Acre premium crisps and popcorn as "Free From Plus", meaning they are not only gluten, dairy and MSG free, vegan, halal and kosher but also "tantalisingly tasty", says Tony Goodman, CEO of Yumsh Snacks. "The 'Free From' category is enjoying a rapid period of growth, particularly the gluten free sector, which is booming. But the category is notorious for lacking taste, so we have created our own category."



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