

# Five steps to a top-quality food offer

The horsemeat scandal has put the food supply chain in the spotlight. HospitalityGEM looks at the key ways to build good relationships with your suppliers and let customers know about it

**R**ecent events have sent quite a few shockwaves, and aftershocks, through the hospitality industry. We're still not entirely certain of the extent of the problem of 'mis-selling' meat products, but one thing is for sure, it has definitely changed how people think about the food on their plate.

With this in mind, this month HospitalityGEM looks at the importance of the relationship with your food suppliers. Whether you offer good pub grub or a full à la carte menu, there are five key words we recommend you keep in mind: traceability, sustainability, reciprocity, quality, and seasonality.

## Traceability

The horse meat scandal has had far-reaching implications for many businesses including pubs. Although the majority of eateries have not been directly affected, many publicans are now facing more questions from customers regarding the origins of the ingredients on their menu.

As with the BSE crisis 20 years ago, this story isn't something that will go away soon, and customers will be looking for reassurance that pubs know exactly what's in their beef stew or lasagne. Traceability is the



buzz word, so it's worth brushing up on your knowledge of the supply chain, particularly when it comes to red meat products, so you can offer up the information that will ultimately reassure your customers.

## Sustainability

Sustainability can breed sustainability with regards to your supply chain. Sustaining a good relationship with your suppliers, means you can be assured of quality as well as value (the better your supplier knows you, the more likely he is to give you a deal). The knock-on effect of sourcing sustainably produced, quality



local food is the appeal this will hold for your customers, contributing to the sustainability of your business.

## Reciprocity

Your relationship with your suppliers is a two-way street, and by forming and maintaining close reciprocal partnerships you will both reap the business benefits.

From advertising your suppliers on your menu to selling their produce to your customers, and even naming signature dishes after them, there is a plethora of ways in which both you and your suppliers can work together successfully to develop your brands.

Use your suppliers to your advantage. If they've got award-winning products, or useful credentials such as being organic or sustainable, make sure you're getting the message across loud and clear to your pub customers.

## Quality

Ten years ago 'local produce' were the words on everyone's lips.

Campaigns spearheaded by celebrity chefs such as Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Gordon Ramsay made people in the UK start to think about the origins of their food, and attentions turned to helping to

reduce food miles and supporting local suppliers.

But if there has ever been a time to shout about using prime cuts of meat from your local butcher it's now. Since the first story broke of horse meat being sold as beef, people have lost a lot of faith in the supply chain as a whole.

It's not quite as simple as finding a local supplier, though. Just because they're on your doorstep it doesn't mean that their produce is the best. Localism is great, but don't let it cloud your vision when it comes to your own business.

Work out your pricing structure and source the best suppliers that fit your specific budget. Remember, closer is better, but your customers won't care about how much local produce you use if they're not getting a good quality feed!

## Seasonality

By speaking frequently with your suppliers you will be much better equipped to plan ahead. You should be asking your suppliers now about your options for the summer, and planning your menus around fresh, in-season ingredients. Celebrity chefs are really pushing the use of seasonal British food at the moment, so customers will like this touch.

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## Supplier knowledge is the key to a sustainable business

Steven Pike, director, HospitalityGEM



Knowledge: staff will be able to talk enthusiastically about the menu

Suppliers are the lifeblood of any pub. Without a reliable source of quality food and drink, your customers won't be returning to you, no matter how nice your establishment is.

But it runs a lot deeper than simply finding a good purveyor of fresh produce.

Knowing your supplier will help you in all manner of ways, particularly when it comes to customer service.

Being able to confidently answer all questions about the origins of your menu ingredients or the food miles involved will certainly impress your customers, and, more importantly, give them the confidence that you are thinking very carefully about your choice of food supplier, rather than simply going to the cheapest, nearest or most convenient.

Chatting to suppliers on a regular basis, and visiting their operations

will help you to gain a thorough understanding of how they work, and could provide you with the opportunity to negotiate some good deals.

Ultimately, knowing from start to finish where every item on a plate has originated will help you and your staff to talk enthusiastically about the dishes on your menu when asked.

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## From scratch and batch

Whether you make your own or buy them in, here are some top ideas for the perfect burger



### From scratch

**Tim Blake, licensee of Benson Blakes Bar & Grill, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk**

"We serve a lot of burgers as sliders on our buffet menu and also do burgers of the month. These have included a St George's Day burger – the Dragonslayer – with Suffolk Gold cheese, black bacon, chilli jam and English mustard on beef. For the best burgers we use great-quality products. Source your meat properly and talk to your butcher for advice on what you need. We use onion, salt and pepper, dried oregano, fresh parsley, and eggs to bind the patties.

"For the bun we use a local baker and a mix of sour and white dough for strength and softness that will hold together under the weight of sauce, but isn't too heavy. If you can, make your own chutneys to match them to the rest of the burger. Salads should be used for texture and flavour. Use accompaniments such as sweet potato chips, onion rings and spicy coleslaw with a barbecue-style burger."

### From batch

**Brakes**  
There are 100% Aberdeen Angus burgers and Healthier Choice reduced fat and salt burgers available, such as the American Style Special Seasoned Beefburger; Homestyle Beefburgers with coarse minced beef, salt and pepper; and Select Half Pound Aberdeen Angus Beefburgers.

The supplier recommends increasing spend per head by urging consumers to customise burgers with extra toppings such as different types of cheese, chutney or chilli.

[www.brakes.co.uk](http://www.brakes.co.uk)



### Big Al's

Pre-cooked over an open flame, Big Al's burgers are supplied frozen and can be cooked in under two minutes, so are perfect for outlets with limited time and equipment. The firm recommends a gourmet burger bun or a



seeded bun to house the beef. Burger combos suggested are Iceberg lettuce with a Big Eat burger, Cheddar, tomatoes, gherkins and tomato relish in a

gourmet burger bun.  
[bigalsflamecooked.co.uk](http://bigalsflamecooked.co.uk)

### 3663 Foodservice

Simple yet delicious is 3663's motto. It suggests local sourcing of meat and offering toppings such as free-range eggs. Avoiding lean mince and using different cuts of beef, such as skirt, chuck mince and brisket can lower costs. 3663 cautions hosts not to overcook burgers, and season well.

[www.3663.co.uk](http://www.3663.co.uk)



### EBLEX

Using Quality Standard Mark Scheme-approved suppliers is essential for the perfect burger, according to EBLEX. The minimum content of beef in the burger should be 70%, with no other meats used. EBLEX urges hosts to quote meat origins on menus to reassure customers,



particularly since the horsemeat scandal. Add a premium touch by using a rump cut mixed with herbs and spices, chargrilled, and served with chips, salad, cheeses, salsa and sauces.

[www.eblextrade.co.uk](http://www.eblextrade.co.uk)