



Return of the expo

The food and drink shows are back after a two-year hiatus, with speakers including Henry Dimbleby, Lisa Hogan and Mark White

Jimmy Nicholls

Food and drink has always played a role in bringing people together: around the dinner table, in front of a barbecue or on the sofa for a relaxing night in. Then the pandemic came along. While food and drink sales in retail shot to record highs, the social aspect of eating and drinking was curtailed.

So too were industry exhibitions, conferences and other face-to-face opportunities for the best minds in grocery to meet, talk, learn and plan for the future, amid a host of consumer and technology trends.

As a result, the William Reed UK Food & Drink Shows were put on hold for two years. But this week, the four shows – the National Convenience Show (NCS), The Forecourt Show, Farm Shop & Deli and Food & Drink Expo 2022 – will return in full.

Big brands, industry heavyweights and category experts will meet at the NEC, Birmingham on 25 to 27 April to discuss the evolving challenges and opportunities across the food and drink industry.

“Trade shows have never been so important and in 2022 we’re delighted to be able to bring back the UK Food & Drink Shows to the NEC,” says Andrew Reed, MD for wine and exhibitions at William Reed.

“Each individual show will be tailored to its respective audience, tackling sector-specific

“Trade shows have never been so important, so we’re delighted to be able to be back”

issues, whilst across the event the biggest trends, challenges and opportunities facing our industry in the coming years will be debated and discussed.”

So what will this year’s William Reed shows involve? And who will be leading the speaker lineup?

As always, networking will be at the heart of the show. The bustling show floor will feature hundreds of innovative exhibitors, while on the awards side, the brand-new Farm Shop & Deli Product Awards will sit alongside the well-established Farm Shop & Deli Retailer Awards.

At the same time, there will be plenty of opportunity to hear from industry leaders on key issues at the live stands: The Grocer Talking Shop Live, the NCS Retailer Hub and the Dragons’ Pantry Workshops, focusing on the many upheavals hitting the food and drink sector in the wake of Covid. ➔



Farm Shop & Deli Show

The Farm Shop & Deli Show showcases the UK's best-quality local and regional produce – as well as the latest in equipment, labelling and packaging – from hundreds of outstanding suppliers.

Specialist retailers and local stores looking to tempt

shoppers with new, distinctive offerings will be able to sample premium and artisanal products comprising the best of British regional food and drink.

Show highlights include an insider view from Lisa Hogan on running the Diddly Squat Farm Shop with Jeremy

Clarkson, as well as a live pitching session with fearsomely experienced industry 'dragons'.

Attendees can also get up to speed on free-from, organic, vegan, veggie and nutrition brands. Other sessions cover sustainable and cost-neutral ways to reduce waste, as

well as how retailers can optimise their customer offer.

Meanwhile, the exhibition floor will feature various new launches from high-profile exhibitors including Ahmad Tea, Cook, Delice de France, Hawkshead Relish, Innocent, Cawston Press and Cotswold Fayre.



Food & Drink Expo 2022

The Food & Drink Expo attracts buyers across the breadth of grocery, wholesale and manufacturing, through to retail and foodservice. This year's event will look at sustainable future-proofing, innovative ways of handling surplus food, and the latest product launches.

Among the event highlights will be a session with National Food Strategy independent lead Henry Dimbleby, in which he will outline what to expect from his wide-ranging proposals to shape technology, health and food security.

Later, BBC journalist Louise

Minchin will ask industry heads for insights on the issues and key trends across food and drink, while forecasting experts will explore top tools and products that retailers can use to find their next shelf superstars.

Attendees will also want to see The Grocer editor-in-

chief Adam Leyland quizzing Mark White, Adjudicator for the Groceries Supply Code of Practice. They will examine what the code means in practice, as well as range reviews, delistings, the impact of inflation and retailer handling of supplier requests for cost price increases.

“The government’s food tsar will outline the feedback from the National Food Strategy”

One of the major changes is the upcoming clampdown on high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) foods due in October – which forms part of the government's wider strategy to tackle obesity. And no one is better placed to talk on this topic than Henry Dimbleby.

Having published his recommendations for the National Food Strategy last year, the Leon founder will take to the stage at Food & Drink Expo 2022 in an interview with Adam Leyland, The Grocer's editor-in-chief. The government's food tsar will outline the feedback he's received on the proposals – which include a tax on sugar and salt and mandatory reporting on HFSS sales by large companies – and reveal what to expect from the government response due later this year.

Obesity is also likely to be an integral part of our wider panel discussion on the same day, looking at the most pressing issues facing the industry. Journalist Louise Minchin will quiz the likes of FDF CEO Karen Betts and Gavin Partington, director general of the British Soft Drinks Association, on what to expect over the course of 2022.

And, for a more granular take on the practicalities of HFSS regulations, there will be a separate session at the NCS. Edward Woodall, government relations director at the Association of Convenience Stores, will discuss the implications for smaller, convenience-led stores with representatives from Southern Co-operative, The Food Foundation and Taylor Green's Spar.

The 'new normal'

Convenience stores have, of course, only just recovered from the upheaval of the pandemic. While the entire grocery sector saw unprecedented demand, this effect was particularly pronounced in convenience, as shoppers increasingly turned to their local stores. So it's fitting there is an entire session dedicated to the 'new normal' shopper behaviour at the NCS.

Opening the show will be a session from Lumina giving brand new consumer insights on which habits are here to stay and to what extent shoppers are staying local in the wake of Covid.

This theme of evolving shopper habits will be continued by Lumina Intelligence senior insight manager Flora Zwolinski. She will analyse how the pandemic has prompted the lines between foodservice and retail to

blur at an increasing pace – as evidenced by the likes of Greggs, Nando's and Leon venturing further into retail. Zwolinski will explore what these new foodservice-inspired launches mean within the context of the wider omnichannel evolution.

Catering for this omnichannel customer may require a change in approach on the part of retailers, too – particularly in embracing new technology. This will be the subject of a session run by Convenience Store editor Aidan Fortune and Lumina Intelligence insight director Blonnie Whist. Speaking to retail tech experts, they will discuss how retailers can use technology to supercharge the experience of tech-savvy customers while adding value and boosting the bottom line.

Technology

The topic of technology will be another key area of focus for this year's shows. The pandemic has sped up the use of tech in retail, and particularly in the area of online grocery – where the industry has been ramping up capacity and increasingly eyeing new methods of fulfilment.

Tackling this topic will be Jason Bradbury, former host of The Gadget Show. In a session at the Food & Drink Expo, he'll highlight lessons learned from innovative delivery methods such as drones, how long the tech will take to scale, and whether it can really work in the last mile of delivery.

More immediate technological solutions, such as apps and social media will also be explored throughout the show. One session will look at how FareShare tackles waste by connecting shoppers to food left over at the end of the day through an app.

Other sessions will look at how to use technology to reward loyal customers with exclusive offers and build connections with the local community. Attendees at The Forecourt Show, for example, will learn how to develop meaningful online relationships that lead to a sales uplift, and how Facebook ads can drive promotions.

As all these sessions illustrate, this year's shows include experts from all corners of the industry. And some big names will be making an appearance.

Co-op Food CEO Jo Whitfield will appear alongside former Waitrose MD Lord Mark Price and Ben Taw, The Grocer's Store Manager of the Year, to talk about leadership at and the challenge of steering businesses through Brexit, supply crises and Covid-19.

Another big name taking to the stage is Lisa Hogan, who will reveal all on the challenges of running Diddly Squat Farm Shop with her partner Jeremy Clarkson – and how they made the venture into a thriving business selling local produce.

So one thing is for sure: face-to-face events are well and truly back. ●



National Convenience Show

The National Convenience Show is the place for convenience retailers to catch up on what really matters in the industry and gather fresh ideas to take their businesses forward.

Convenience leaders from the symbol groups will come together to

explain how they've adapted throughout the pandemic, share new opportunities and assess how the channel can return to strength in 2022. Attendees can also expect expert insight into which pandemic consumer habits are here to stay, as well as why shoppers are staying local.

Incoming HFSS rules will also be a topic of debate, as speakers examine what they mean for health and impulse purchases, and the special impact on convenience retail.

On the product side, the event will examine how retailers can premiumise their ranges while still

offering affordable products.

Finally, the show will cover how retailers can use tech to their advantage. That includes how to use social media to secure loyal customers and how to expand delivery sales and boost bottom lines through e-commerce.



The Forecourt Show

The Forecourt Show is packed with exciting ideas and concepts for both forecourt retailers already operating in convenience, and operators looking to expand their offering.

Heading up the conference, Forecourt Trader editor Merrill Boulton will tap industry experts for

the latest insights and developments, covering everything from electric vehicles to car washing. The show will look at how to make more profit through smarter store layouts, up-selling and improved customer service.

With the pandemic ebbing, there will also be a focus on how

forecourts with retail outlets have moved beyond packaged snacks to a broader foodservice offer, and how that can be expanded.

Special guest Marc Priestley, the F1 team manager for McLaren Racing, will also reveal how to inspire people to work together under

pressure, with lessons for forecourt retailers and their teams.

The show floor will also be buzzing with a host of brand-new equipment and service launches – with exhibitors including Adriatech, Dover Fuelling Solutions, Eurotech, Gilbarco Veeder Root, PRA and Volumatic.