

ONE TO WATCH

ECCLEFECHAN: WILL IT BE THE NEW MINCE PIE?

Intriguing name, intriguing prospect. Named after the Scottish Borders town where the traditional recipe comes from, Ecclefechan tarts are similar to mince pies – but are made with a rich filling of sultanas, currants, glacé cherry and chopped almonds.

Less sweet, more buttery yet with a distinctive almondy taste,

they could even prove a popular alternative to their Christmas-oriented rivals, while not being limited to seasonal sales.

Walkers, which launched the tarts in February, reckons the old favourite will rekindle fond memories among older consumers, as well as tempting a younger market.

James Walker, joint managing director, says the tarts have been well received in higher end independent stores – their target channel. “They are a genuine, authentic Scottish product with a lot of heritage,” he adds.

The tarts won gold at this year’s Guild of Fine Food Great Taste Awards.



“We wanted to make sure that, even when times are hard, consumers can still afford to buy our good-quality products,” says MD Gary Frank. The company has also been clearing its portfolio of artificial ingredients and hydrogenated fats to tap into the health trend.

Only four of the 13 cake sub-sectors experienced a decline in sales – small tarts, small pies, cake bars and muffins, which were down by 4.5%, 0.4%, 1.3% and 2.4% respectively [TNS] as consumers opted for newer formats and sponge products rather than pastry options.

Mintel nevertheless predicts the cake market as a whole will likely continue to grow thanks to two key factors. “The growing number of older consumers, who are the most frequent traditional cake eaters and less susceptible to changing consumption trends, is set to boost sales,” says Foster. “On top of this, manufacturers are likely to continue innovation and NPD targeted at the younger end of the market, giving the category plenty of opportunity to grow sales further.”

Biscuits

Biscuits have fared even better than cakes in the past year. They are a fundamental part of the British way of life. The sector is almost as embedded in our culture as the ‘cuppa’, which is perhaps one of the reasons the market appears to be almost recession-proof.

Last year sales were up 7% in value and 2% in volume [TNS] despite the increasing financial pressures on UK households.

“Brits look at biscuits as an inexpensive treat and we see the economic situation as a potential opportunity, given that people are more likely to stay in and treat themselves,” says Mark Sugden, director of customer marketing at UBUK.

Sugden predicts the category will



ORGANIC CAKE WORKS LIKE A TREAT FOR HONEYROSE

“Sticking to quality ‘relentlessly and uncompromisingly’ is the mantra of organic wholesale business Honeyrose Bakery, which has just moved into new London premises to increase its capacity fourfold.

With a turnover close to £3m, and a 40-strong workforce, the company is aiming to become a middle-sized manufacturer.

One of the points of difference it aims to bring to the cakes and biscuits category is exceptional ingredients. “It can take us dozen of samples to find the right blueberry,” says founder Lise Madsen, who set up the company eight years ago.

The business is also careful with costs “to achieve prices that even non-organic equivalents find hard to achieve”.

Madsen is a pastry chef by profession and trained in Paris and Germany. Honeyrose Bakery was born when she quit her job in food management to plug a gap in the market for what she describes as organic cakes that taste sinful.

To get things rolling, Madsen locked herself in the kitchen until she had the perfect recipes and re-mortgaged her flat and sold her car to finance the venture, helped by a small amount from minority investors.

“As a consumer of organics, all the cakes I could find at the time were dry and boring,” she says. “I have never sold a product I could not be proud of. It is a lot more fun to have principles and you sleep better at night.”

Products from the bakery, which include muffins, brownies, cookies and cakes, can be found in Waitrose, Fresh & Wild and Harrods. They all come with a premium stamp and are aimed at organic consumers who don’t want to pay over the odds for their food.

“Our theory is that people will allow themselves an organic treat if it is well priced,” says Madsen.