

Sweet taste from Cyprus

Cyprus' expanding manufactured food export industry is an exciting source of supply for UK retailers

Over the past decade, foods from Cyprus have made an indelible mark on the international export map. With the runaway success of Halloumi cheese, which has quickly become a summer staple in British households, other food manufacturers from the sun-kissed island have followed suit. Savoury biscuits, crisprolls and crisp cakes,

crotons, wheat toasts and rusks are in high demand. Also products with a Cypriot twist, such as Cheese and Halloumi Pies, Stormatini with Sesame Seeds and Crissini with Olives combine very well with other Mediterranean finger foods and dips and have a year-round appeal for British consumers looking for something different.

Thanks to a concerted drive by the Cyprus Trade Centre in London,

which supports Cypriot exporters with participation in trade exhibitions as well as facilitating the liaison between UK importers and Cypriot exporters, manufactured food products are now becoming increasingly available to British retailers. From exclusive chocolates to traditional ice cream in an exciting range of exotic flavours, the range of quality products is broad and Cypriot manufacturers pride themselves on offering great value and high standards of product and service.

Biscuits

The Cypriots are just as partial to a biscuit or two with their morning coffee as the British and they produce a wide range of tempting snacks, which not only constitute the bulk of biscuit products sold in grocery outlets on the island but are also exported far and wide. The biscuits, often based on traditional recipes, are manufactured in technologically-advanced factories with HACCP, ISO and BIOCERT certification – proof of the companies' dedication to quality in the workplace as well as their products.

Cypriot producers are experienced in adapting to the ever-changing demands of customers and are constantly coming up with new novelty and niche biscuit products.

They also manufacture many popular European favourites, from digestives, petit beures and cream-filled wafers to chocolate, orange and hazelnut creams, which are excellent value for money and exported worldwide via the superb network of shipping and airline connections. One biscuit manufacturer has invested in new state-of-the-art equipment to ensure smooth operation and high standards of quality: "Our HAAS ovens, installed for both biscuit and wafer manufacture, have significantly increased our production capacity and provided flexibility and higher product quality standards. Due to high market demand for our key brands – Morning Coffee, crackers and chocolate-coated cream filled biscuits – the company has invested in high speed automated packing systems made by Bosch/Sig and Cavana, which have considerably improved our manufacturing efficiency. Our new factory is designed with high standards of hygiene and HACCP requirements, which is extremely important as they help to detect and minimise 'problematic' products and unsatisfied consumers."

Perhaps of special interest to specialist British fine food retailers and delicatessen buyers are delicious and very traditional Cypriot biscuits – loved by the island's native population and gastronomic tourists, but not quite so well known to the average UK consumer. Typically, these varieties are based on traditional recipes and flavoured with ingredients synonymous with Cyprus, such as aniseed, tahini, sesame seeds, olive oil, cinnamon, almonds and raisins. Perfect for export to retailers of speciality food, they are attractively packaged and offer a truly tempting and exotic alternative to our more familiar British staples.

Reduced sugar and low-fat biscuits are also manufactured in Cyprus to satisfy a strong market demand: one manufacturer produces traditional cookies sweetened with grape juice rather than refined sugar, appealing directly to health-conscious consumers who are

looking to cut down on their sugar intake.

Cypriot biscuits are produced in purpose-built, modern factories, which are equipped with the latest technology and production methods based on European standards. There is great emphasis placed on flexibility in production to suit specific customers' special requirements and many Cypriot exporters are well equipped to deal with both small and large orders quickly and efficiently.

Ice cream

With its balmy Mediterranean climate, shady tavernas and sun-drenched beaches, luxury ice cream is a summer staple in Cyprus, enjoyed by both tourists and locals. Not surprisingly, island producers are experienced in producing delicious ice cream and lollies using high quality ingredients and modern equipment – and

maintain the highest standards of food safety and quality in accordance with the ISO 22000, HACCP food safety system, the ISO 9001 quality management system and the International Ice Cream Association.

Many Cypriot ice creams and related frozen products are ideal for export to the UK, although many have yet to do so. One Cypriot manufacturer with 63 years of experience in producing impulse, family pack and bulk ice cream is ready to start exporting to the UK as of this winter: "We are targeting people who have knowledge of the ice cream market in the UK and are willing to work closely with us in

entering the market together. We specialise in offering – amongst other things – ice cream products with no added sugar, which are suitable for diabetics. In particular, we feel that a low-fat, no-sugar choc ice bar is a good item to start establishing our entry into the UK market."

Chocolate

Chocolates produced on the island of Cyprus are internationally renowned for their outstanding quality. The country is home to a handful of specialist producers, lauded for their unique and highly regarded products.

One well-known Cypriot producer exports its own hand-crafted, luxury chocolates all over the world, in particular to the Middle East, Russia and the UK. The exclusive chocolate cups, filled with unique flavours of Cyprus, are formally registered with the EU and eaten by the British Royals.

This producer utilises locally-grown ingredients and herbs from the sun-drenched island, such as rose water, walnuts, zivania, lemons, almonds and sweet black cherries, to create a truly Cypriot delicacy. "We have imitators but no one can match our use of Cypriot ingredients quite the way we do, and no one else has the innovative skills that our team consistently demonstrate. Our Master Chocolatier designs and creates the chocolates, our quality control director sources the local ingredients and our team hand make the required chocolates to order."

Currently all international orders and sales are made directly with the purchasers rather than through distribution outlets – the company mainly supplies corporate bodies in the UK, Scandinavia and the Middle East with bespoke handmade chocolates to order, often incorporating their name or logo on the chocolate. However, the company is ready to expand its distribution in the UK and is ready and willing to talk to British sales outlets and retailers with sound business ideas.

As well as royal-appointed filled chocolates, Cyprus is also a producer and exporter of high quality couvertures, chocolate spreads and beautiful foil-wrapped chocolate Christmas and Easter gifts. Some innovative manufacturers have utilised well-known superfoods to create luxury chocolates with health benefits – one uses single cacao beans from South America, which are harvested and stored under carefully controlled hygienic conditions and then processed in a unique, gentle way, without the use of chemicals. This results in a luxurious-tasting, natural and delicious end product, much higher in flavanoids, amino acids and antioxidants than other types of chocolate. The product is further enhanced with the addition of Cyprus royal jelly, which also contains many powerful and essential antioxidants and amino acids with reputed health and beauty-boosting properties.

As well as premium ice cream manufactured in the traditional way using whole milk, fresh cream, fresh eggs, pure sugar, premium natural flavouring and ripe fruits, Cypriot ice cream producers have also tapped into the health-conscious market. Look out for the myriad of products aimed at customers who are looking to reduce their sugar and fat consumption without compromising on flavour. Fat-free ice cream sweetened with stevia, the all-natural sweetener, comes in popular vanilla, chocolate and strawberry flavours,



As one would expect from such reputable companies, chocolates from Cyprus adhere to EU and Cypriot health and hygiene standards and are regularly inspected. One producer says: "This is important as we supply delicacies made from local produce and we must ensure that our chocolates are of the highest standard." The combination for top quality raw materials, experience of the staff and the quality control system implemented (HACCP) guarantee the quality of Cypriot chocolates and their associated products.

Sweets

Traditional sweets from Cyprus are many and varied, but they are typically flavoured with the fragrant plants that grow in the region – sweet fig, rose water, lemons, almonds, carob, bergamot and masticha. The Cypriots are also fond of coconut, aniseed and, of course, chocolate, and these flavours make their way into many popular confectionery recipes as well.

When purchasing confectionery from Cyprus, buyers can be assured that the highest standards of produce, health and safety and service are met. One Cypriot nuts and confectionery manufacturer maintains that it is a dedication to high quality, excellent service and competitive prices which have transformed it into one of the leading companies in its field. Having upgraded its factory and facilities in the 1990s, the firm has also invested in a quality control position to ensure international standards for quality and hygiene are implemented. Today, it operates under a quality management system based on ISO 9001:2000 and HACCP standards and its sales and delivery network covers supermarkets, department stores, grocery stores, bakeries, hotels and restaurants across Cyprus.

Another manufacturer of traditional Cypriot sweets says that the company's aim has always been to satisfy the Cypriot consumer's demand for the finest traditional confectionery, but export is now taking an increasingly important share of the business. "Our company has enlarged and become more

technologically advanced through the years and we are now proud to be able to meet the needs of international customers," he says. "We haven't veered from basing all our products on traditional recipes inspired by the founder of our company, but we now export our products to Greece, Australia and the UK, among others."

Ingredients

As well as manufacturing shop-ready food products, there are a number of factories in Cyprus that supply quality ingredients to food producers, both locally and internationally. One company specialises in the processing of stevia, a all-natural herbal sweetener extracted from a plant closely related to chamomile. The best-tasting part of the stevia leaf is 200 times sweeter than sugar, which means only a minimum amount is sufficient to achieve the desired flavour. In 2012, the EU gave its approval for the use of stevia throughout Europe in products such as beverages, soft drinks, desserts, sauces and yoghurts, and Cypriot producers have been quick to utilise this natural sweetener in food products, satisfying the strong consumer demand for healthier, low-calorie snacks.

The main stevia manufacturer in Cyprus processes the herb in its scientific department and then sells on to the trade for use in various beverages as well as confectionery delicacies. It also produces consumer products in the form of sachets, powders, tablets and liquids, which can be used in replacement of table sugar, added to recipes and baking, used to sweeten drinks or combined with carob to turn milk into nutritious low-calorie milkshakes. All products have been assessed and found to be in conformity with the requirements of the standard CYS EN ISO 22000:2005 and are ideal for export.

Clearly, the island of Cyprus has much to offer British retailers and importers. A wide range of appealing products made to the highest standards, using cutting edge technology and backed by a highly efficient distribution network, ensures that British businesses can bring their customers a welcome taste of the sun.

A comprehensive Directory of Exporters can be found on the Cyprus Trade Centre website: www.cyprustrade.com



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