

The lockdown has redefined the way we shop for food and our eating habits, much of it for the better. Here are some ways we can continue the positive changes.  
By Rachel Walker

**T**here's a strange sense of nostalgia as Britain emerges from lockdown. In March shortages meant families started batch cooking and cherishing, not chucking, leftovers. Furloughed office workers made their own lunches and parents introduced baking into homeschool curricula. Allotments were replanted, pizza ovens built and, in the absence of televised sport, banana bread became a national pastime. Habits formed over years — a morning Starbucks, a daily Pret sandwich — were dropped overnight, and not all Brits are ready to go back. A YouGov survey in April showed that only 9% of adults wanted everything to return to how it was.

Experts cite 66 as the magic number of days it takes for new food habits to stick. With lockdown far surpassing that amount, their findings are being put to the test. Will our tastes revert to how they were — or have they changed for good? Perhaps months of delicious dark-crusted bread and juicy bone-in chops means we'll struggle to go back to supermarket sliced loaves and vac-pac meat. Perhaps community kitchens will continue to form a social hub and we will place more value on local, sustainable produce.

Lockdown may have stripped supermarket shelves bare and temporarily brought the hospitality industry to its knees, but there are glimmers of hope. If we can stick to some of those good habits, spring/summer 2020 might not be seen as singularly bleak, but as a time of positive change.

Illustrations by BloodBros



**It's not too late to sow edible crops such as lamb's lettuce, mustard leaf, mibuna and mizuna — all of which work well in late-summer salads and will grow happily in a window box as well as on an allotment.**

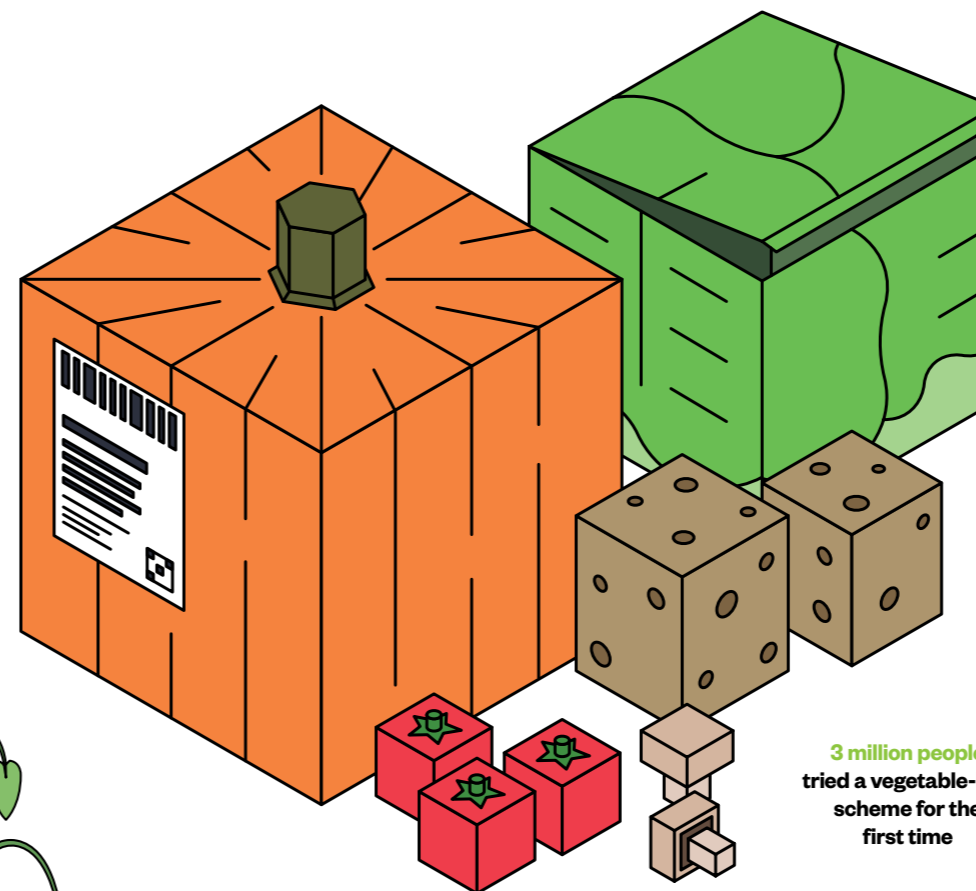
# THE WAY WE EAT NOW

## GROW YOUR OWN

Shortages highlighted the fragility of UK supply chains. Galvanised by the empty supermarket shelves, thousands of Brits thrust on a pair of wellies and took matters into their own hands. Sales of vegetable seeds soared throughout spring — seed specialist Suttons says it had a record 150,000 new customers from March to May — and there

were waiting lists for hens and coops as hobby farming took hold. David Walston, founder of CoVeg — a scheme that turned two fields on his family farm in Cambridge into a community veg patch — senses the pursuit of The Good Life will continue after lockdown: "As long as there's an appetite, then we'll keep the scheme going."

**Growing fruit and vegetables in just 10 per cent of a city's gardens and other urban green spaces could provide 15 per cent of the local population with their five a day**



**3 million people tried a vegetable-box scheme for the first time**

## USE BETTER INGREDIENTS

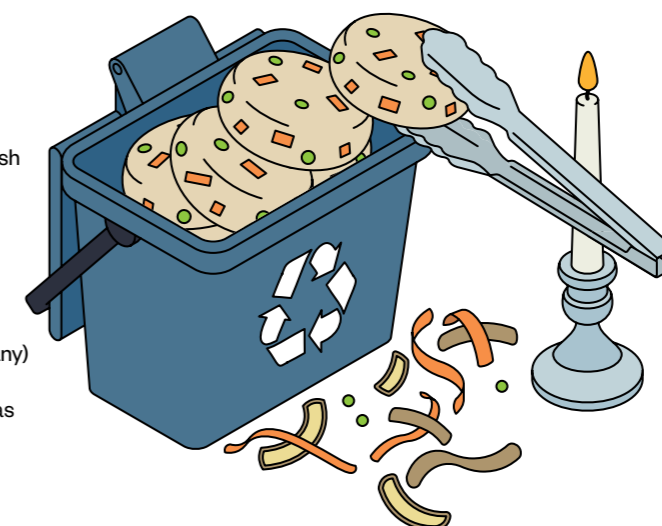
Home cooks have been able to get their hands on some of Britain's best produce — usually the preserve of top chefs. On March 20 when restaurants shut overnight, canny suppliers "pivoted" their businesses and shifted from wholesale-only to selling direct to consumers. One such

supplier was Fred Price, manager of Gotherney Farm, Somerset. Pre-lockdown, 70 per cent of his prized Tamworth pork was sold to two London restaurants (Kiln and Smoking Goat), but when both closed their doors, he was forced to find new outlets. Price launched a meat-box

scheme as well as sending surplus to butchers and bakeries, which, he says, have been "super resilient, agile and supportive" throughout the crisis, diversifying their offering and shop-fronting milk, butter and bacon. The experience has left him feeling optimistic about a diversified future.

## Support your local businesses

- **Pesky Fish**  
Seafood bought directly from British fishermen (peskyfish.co.uk)
- **Gotherney Farm**  
Meat boxes from the farm (gothelneyfarmer.co.uk)
- **The Fine Cider Co**  
Cider served at L'Enclume and The Fat Duck (thefinecider.company)
- **The Estate Dairy**  
Milk usually sent straight to baristas (theestatedairy.com)



**67%** of UK independent shops welcomed new customers

**50%** increase in sales at high street butchers

**41%** say they will carry on using their local corner shop

**13%** plan to keep on buying from their local farm shop

**11%** of new customers for local fruit and vegetable box schemes plan to continue with them

**9%** say they wish to carry on getting a milk delivery

**In March, shortages meant families started batch cooking and cherishing — rather than chucking — their leftovers**

## SHOP LOCAL

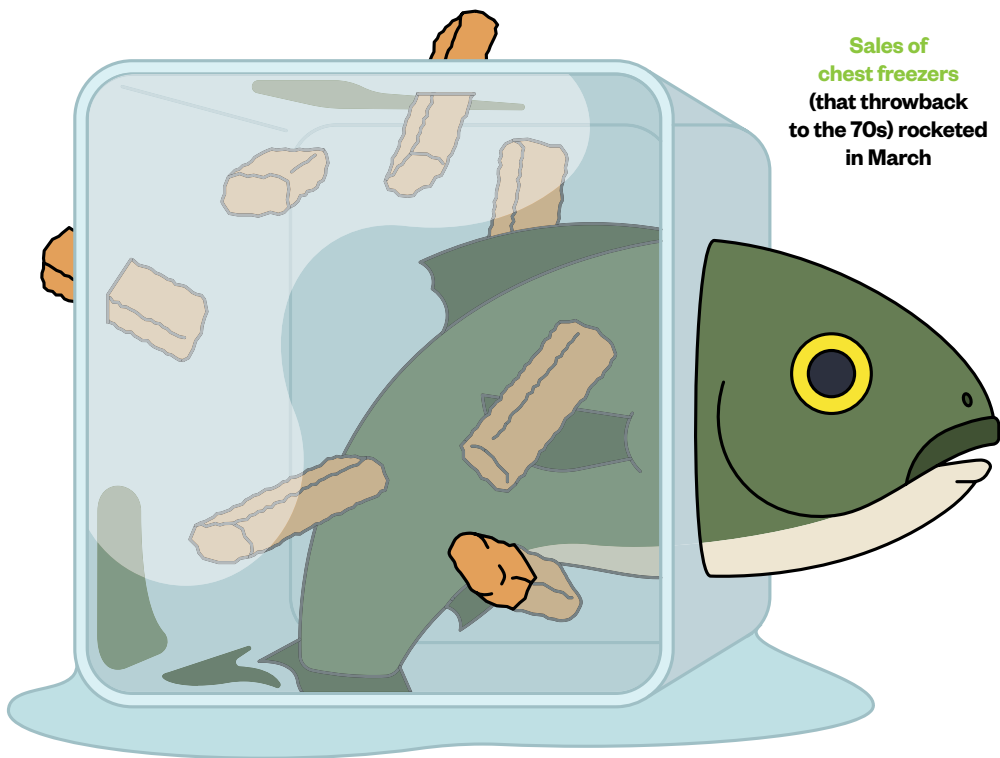
There's a newfound loyalty towards the small shops that showed such resilience throughout lockdown. Two in three independents welcomed new customers, there was a 50 per cent increase in sales at high street butchers and 3 million people tried a vegetable box scheme or shopped from a local farm for the first time. Having formed new relationships with independents and connected with local supply chains, many customers say they will prioritise loyalty over convenience once restrictions are lifted: 89 per cent plan to stick with at least one supermarket alternative.

## ORDER IN

Despite lockdown easing, six in ten Brits still don't feel comfortable eating indoors. Luckily, creative chefs have captured that restaurant experience and "ordering in" has never been more exciting. Michelin-starred chef Tommy Banks was quick to diversify by adapting his signature fine dining into a nationwide box scheme. Since launching Made in Oldstead in early April, he has sent out more than 500 deliveries each week. What started as a way to retain staff has become a new arm of the business, which he plans to continue even after his restaurants are running at full-capacity again.

## Grab a delivery

- **Sabor en Casa**  
The cult Spanish restaurant is offering a choice of two sell-out boxes: the Counter Box (£58) or the Asador Box (£70). Orders go live at 9am on Mondays (saborrestaurant.slerp.com).
- **Hawksmoor**  
The highly regarded group of steak restaurants has a huge hit with its Hawksmoor at Home box, £120, which includes a huge porterhouse steak, wine, beer, martinis and its cookbook (thehawksmoor.com).
- **SpiceBox**  
The progressive London curry house is offering nationwide delivery on its Family Curry Night Boxes, which generously feed 4-6, for £39.75. Packed with fresh produce and excellent spicing, they're vegan too (spiceboxathome.eatspicebox.co.uk).

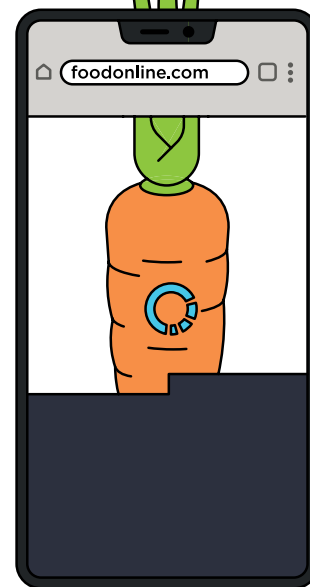
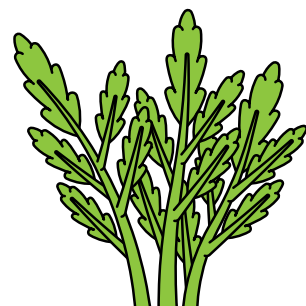


Sales of chest freezers (that throwback to the 70s) rocketed in March

## NEW NATIVES

■ Squeezed supermarket aisles and queues that snaked round the car park meant that Brits took their grocery shopping online — many for the first time. The surge in new customers saw forecasted growth of the online grocery sector increase to 25.5 per cent (triple that anticipated).

Smaller online grocers have benefited from the shift too. In late March, when despairing shoppers found themselves 10,000th in the delivery queue at one of the big four supermarkets, they went elsewhere.



## BE KIND

■ With record numbers using food banks and up to 7.7 million adults reducing or missing meals since the pandemic hit, there's never been more urgency to find a way to give back. Pip & Nut has launched a "one from you, one from us" initiative. Donald Russell has teamed up with FareShare to launch a charity meat box pledging £5 from each one sold to help families in need, and Reach Foods has donated £1 from every order throughout lockdown.

## FROZEN FOOD

■ It was not just food shortages that made us look at our freezers with fresh eyes — working from home meant unusual "office" hours and, for many, grown-up kids back at home. So batch cooking and quick-fix frozen ingredients became a huge help. According to Nielsen research, sales of chest freezers (that throwback to the 70s) rocketed in March. In the 12 weeks to May 16, 2020, frozen food sales also soared by 27.6 per cent.

**62%** of us are more likely to buy from a company with ethical credentials

**38%** of Brits are cooking more from scratch

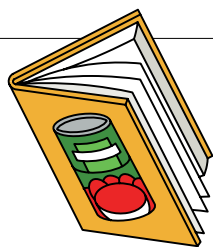
**27.6%** increase in sales of frozen food in lockdown

**25.5%** increase in online grocery sector



## BOOK SMART

■ Families rediscovered the joy of home cooking during lockdown, with 38 per cent of Brits cooking more from scratch, according to a YouGov poll, and a fifth broadening their culinary repertoire (Tesco survey). It's no surprise then that cookbook sales remain strong. "It's one of the categories which is really thriving," says Stephanie Jackson, publishing director at Octopus. "If anything,



Covid has reinforced underlying trends: a drive towards healthy eating as well as recipes which are interesting and quick.

"There is an emerging trend for flavour — tackling it in a more theoretical way," Jackson adds. The weeks of shortages saw a temporary shift away from prescriptive recipes, as cooks substituted ingredients and worked with what they had in the pantry.

### Look beyond the "Big Four"

● **Farmdrop** These ethical online grocers in London represent a huge range of artisanal producers from small farmers and cheese-makers to preservers and foragers.

● **Donald Russell** Scottish butcher that stocks an excellent selection of wild game and seafood (langoustine tails, skate cheeks, wild turbot) alongside their grass-fed meat.

● **Marks & Spencer** The only major retailer to make the list of top 10 ethical supermarkets compiled by *Ethical Consumer* magazine.