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Editor's Message



Welcome to another action-packed issue of Market Times. After a quarter that was marked by shortages of product on supermarket shelves and the ongoing energy crisis, we'll all be glad to see the weather beginning to turn for so many reasons.

The media furore surrounding shortages of certain salad and vegetable lines once more highlighted the importance of wholesale markets to British industry and the consumer. Our market and others around the country continued to service their customers when several high-profile retailers chose to leave shelves empty rather than pay the market value for product that was short because of highly unusual weather conditions in key growing regions. With weather patterns becoming consistently less predictable – parts of Spain are enduring record high April temperatures as I write this – the chances are that situations like this will occur more regularly. The ability to trade through the ups and downs in as sustainable and fair a manner as possible is crucial, as is expertise, resilience and reliability in difficult circumstances.

It has been an incredibly sad few months, with three prominent market figures passing away. Peter Fowler MBE was a true giant of the fruit and vegetable market, a friend and mentor to many of the leading lights in the market today and of course father of Damian, who runs Gilgrove. Ex-Marine Steve Doe established Evergreen Exterior Services (EES) as a force to be reckoned with in the Flower Market and forged a reputation for integrity, honest advice and kindness. And Pam Alexander OBE was Chair of CGMA for six years in the 2010s and believed passionately in the role of the market in her home city. All three certainly made their mark and will be sadly missed.

In this issue, we feature The Menu Partners, the largest firm in the market and interview Co-founder Jason Tanner, who outlines the ambitions of the nationwide distributor and its long-term commitment to its Nine Elms base. At a time when recruitment and retention are never far from people's minds, we also talk to Arasu Panchalingam of EA Williams, who illustrates the firm's belief in supporting staff as they look to enhance their careers. Paul Fairhead of EES gives us the state of play as the plant specialist moves into peak season and details family's links with Covent Garden that go back more than a century. Food Exchange tenant FUEL10K markets a nutritious breakfast range and has built its business on a deep social conscience. It has recently gained B Corp status and its founders tell us about the ethos that drives their existence.

Find out too about the thinking behind the revamped market café – Market Club, the credentials of Mission Produce, a global avocado giant that is supplying the market from its new UK base, and why Iain Furness and Marcus Rowleson travelled more than 20,000 miles on a four-day return ticket.

Enjoy the read!.

Tommy

Tommy Leighton, Market Press Officer



Market pays tribute to one of its true greats

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Peter Fowler, MBE, who died on Saturday 4 March, 2023. He was 78.

Peter was undoubtedly one of New Covent Garden Market's most influential people of the last 50 years and had acted as Honorary President of the Covent Garden Tenants Association (CGTA) since his retirement in 2012.

Known in the Market as the 'Godfather of Fruit', Peter was the former owner of wholesale business C&C Fruit, and received an MBE in the 2013 New Year's Honours list for a lifetime of service to the industry and New Covent Garden Market.

CGTA Chairman Gary Marshall said the Market community had lost 'simply a true legend' who will be greatly missed by all. "We all have our own memories of the great man," said Gary. "He was an honest adviser, a true friend and supporter. I send my love to all Peter's family at this extremely difficult time and may he rest in peace. He will be sadly missed but, I'm sure, never forgotten."

A stalwart of the fresh produce industry, Peter enjoyed a successful half century in the trade, culminating in 26 years as the head of the C&C group. Starting his career in the old Covent Garden Market, Peter joined the Henry Solomons business, where he cut his teeth boiling beetroot in the 1960s. From there, he moved to Covent Garden Supply, a pioneer in catering distribution. His final move before the relocation to Nine Elms in 1974 was to EC Dean, before the firm changed its name to Lyons & Dean.

In 1986, Peter saw an opportunity to branch out on his own: market character Lenny Cooper was retiring from C&C and sold Peter the firm. Speaking of the deal many years later, Peter recalled: "Lenny took a blank sheet of paper and wrote - 'If at any time, you fail to pay me my money by mid-morning every Saturday, the company reverts to my name'. I must have been mad, but I signed it."

Peter's acumen came to the fore and the deal saw C&C go from strength to strength. It established a reputation as an exotic fruit specialist, as Peter moved the business away from its focus on traditional fruit, set up at New Spitalfields in 1991 and added a stand at Borough Market, where his son Lawrence and daughter Kelly ran Elsey & Bent for several years.

"I am very sad at the news of Peter's passing," said Jo Breare, General Manager of Covent Garden Market Authority. "Peter was a legendary figure and a true gentleman who did so much for our market, making a

lasting impression on everyone he met. I always valued Peter's honest opinion and know he was very respected within the New Covent Garden Market community as well as in the wider industry, as his MBE proved. Gilgrove Ltd, run by Peter's son Damian, will continue the strong family connections to our market."

Our thoughts and condolences go out to Peter's wife Chrissie and the rest of the family at this sad time.

The New Covent Garden Market community paid tribute to Peter at his funeral on March 28th and also in their comments following his passing. Here is a small selection:

"This is extremely sad news, he was the Godfather to us all." Jason Tanner, The Menu Partners

"A master salesman, a master businessman, a master good bloke, MBE, say no more." Bruce White, Bruce White Ltd

"Peter helped me immensely when I needed it – a great man, one of the best." Danny Murphy, Yes Chef

"Peter will be missed by all, a great gentleman, a true friend, legend to us all." Rick Harris, IA Harris.

"A gentleman who was admired throughout this industry and beyond. This is a very sad day for all of us that had the pleasure to know him." Eddie Barrett, HG Walker

"My mentor, my tutor, my work dad. RIP guv." Mick

Pictured: Left, Peter with wife Chrissie and son Damian; and right, Peter receives his MBE from HM Queen Elizabeth II, in 2013

Flower firms donate roses to record GOSH fundraiser



Four businesses at New Covent Garden Flower Market teamed up with Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children to support a record-breaking fundraising event for the famous London charity.

Bloomfield Wholesale Florist Ltd, R French & Sons Ltd, Green & Bloom and DG Wholesale Flowers donated 300 single stem roses (100 each in red, white and pink), which decorated the tables at a fundraising event, held at one of the capital's newest venues, The Londoner hotel, on

Leicester Square.

Known by the acronym GOSH, Great Ormond Street Hospital hosts an annual fundraiser called 'Love GOSH', a gala dinner with a luxury raffle. This year, the event raised an incredible £712,000 for vital cancer care at GOSH. The beautiful roses The roses looked beautiful in the venue and really added to the romantic Valentine's theme of the evening. Most importantly, they helped raise £8,760 in the raffle.

“ The 300 roses raised an incredible £8,760 for Great Ormond Street Hospital in the raffle

“Thank you so much for this amazing donation,” says Lilly O'Brien, Event Manager at Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity. “We really appreciate your generosity and this amazing support of GOSH.”

Michelle Hardcastle of Bloomfields said the quartet of firms were delighted to play their part: “It's a wonderful organisation and we're really happy to support such a great charity,” said. Pictured are Michelle's son Sam and his colleague Justin, just prior to the roses being boxed up for delivery.

Brand new look for MOMO Kombucha

Railway-arch tenant MOMO Kombucha has a fresh new MOMO Kombucha | B Corp™ look. If you drink the firm's kombucha, brewed in the Market, then you might have already spotted the new logo on the limited-edition bottles of rhubarb kombucha MOMO launched in February, and now it is rolling the brand out across the entire business.

The rhubarb kombucha is a collaboration in the truest sense of the word, as MOMO joined forces with Natoora and Robert Tomlinson, a fourth generation forced rhubarb farmer based in Pudsey, West Yorkshire.

“We were so excited to launch this hyper-seasonal limited edition,” said MOMO's co-founder Josh Puddle. “It's a little bit sweet, a little bit tart, and totally delicious – kombucha and rhubarb are the perfect combination.

“[My wife] Lisa and I had the pleasure of visiting Robert earlier this year, learning about the process of forcing rhubarb and picking our own in the low-ceilinged sheds. This visit was one of our absolute highlights since starting MOMO,” added Josh.



“Our team, with some support from our neighbours on the Market, juiced around 350kg of rhubarb. Special mention to our head brewer Matt for trialling so many different recipes, resulting in us brewing a more delicate kombucha using only green tea to bring out the complexity of the rhubarb.”

Natoora and MOMO are natural partners, Josh explained. Twenty pence from each bottle sold will be donated to Natoora's Farm Fund, which supports young farmers who are committed to agroecological methods and helps them get a foot on the farming ladder. Not content with a new logo, MOMO has also redesigned its bottles. “We loved our rip cap lids, but so many people told us they wanted to be able to reseal the bottle, and we listened,” Josh said. “We're also now sourcing our bottles from the UK and are pleased to be cutting down on food miles.”

Relocated HG Walker gets a new perspective

After 32 years working out of Units 28-30 on D Row in the Fruit & Vegetable Market, HG Walker moved to a new home in the first week of February.

And while the casual observer might be excused for thinking that one end of Buyer's Walk is similar to the other, the firm's Managing Director Eddie Barrett tells us he's noticed a real difference since the relocation to D63-64.



“We're actually finding out that we're in a 'different' market here,” said Eddie, pictured with son Michael. “The footfall is completely different to what we had further up Buyer's Walk. All of our customers have stayed loyal to us – they soon find you when you move, but we're definitely seeing new people here and some of our old accounts have become live again.”

HG Walker continues to offer the same service, having specialised in providing and supplying predominantly English produce for around 140 years. Renowned for sourcing top-notch apples, pears and soft fruit from Kent, it also sells a vast selection of seasonal produce, including the finest Yorkshire rhubarb and English asparagus. Alongside its English produce, the firm has relationships with suppliers across the globe and the wide range of homegrown and imported produce means that its supplies remain seasonal and fresh throughout the year.

Eddie has been in the Market for more than four decades and Michael has been here for a dozen years. The relocation hasn't changed the core business, but it has sharpened the mind of the team, added Eddie. “So far, we've carried on doing pretty much the same as we were doing before. In time, I think we might be able to do a few different lines being here though. We have a slightly smaller space, which suits us, but it's really nice to be in a new environment and have a new challenge to focus on.”

Sending vegetables to Covent Garden

From March 22nd to April 16th, Rushton's The Chef's Greengrocer supplied the fresh produce that brought back memories of the Covent Garden of old.

The firm donated some of the fresh produce (most importantly, the carrots!) that adorned the route of The Peter Rabbit™ Easter Adventure! a live, immersive outdoor experience that provided the perfect day out for kids to enjoy over the Easter holidays at the historic location.

Children were invited to embark on a magical live and immersive journey with Beatrix Potter and explore a Covent Garden once more awash with fresh flowers, fruit, and vegetables to help Beatrix in her search for presents and a mission to rescue Jemima Puddle-Duck from Mr. McGregor by searching for secret notes, maps, and other clues.

Adam McKenzie Wylie, the CEO of Histrionic Productions, said: “It happens in modern London but we take audiences back to yesteryear and to Covent Garden as a functioning fruit and vegetable market.”





B2 First Steel



B2 One Week



B2 Two Weeks



B2 Three Weeks

Redevelopment continues apace

The last three months have seen more significant and very visible progress in the Market’s redevelopment programme, according to Tony O’Reilly, CGMA’s Project Director.

“The weather during February was cold, but dry and that allowed groundwork in preparation for the build of section B2 to continue apace and finish in time for the first steels to go up in mid-March,” said Tony. “Winds on March 13th put that momentous occasion back by a day, but as evidenced by the series of photos, the construction work moved on very quickly from that date on, despite March being the wettest on record.”

The new section, comprising of 24 units, will be completed early next year and become the new home for four wholesalers, Gilgrove, French Garden, Supreme Salads and Premier Fruits. The new block will feature the first part of the new buyers’ walk, measuring 6.5 metres in width.

Tony added: “Conversations about consultation with wholesale tenants have begun for phase 4 of the build,

which is effectively the middle section of the same block – to link sections B1 and B2. The consultation period will finish in February 2024, by which time each wholesaler will know where they are moving to and the size of their units when that section is completed in February 2025.”

Another milestone in the last quarter saw the opening of the new Southern Access Road, on March 27th. The route is now the secondary exit from New Covent Garden Market, replacing the route previously in place alongside the railway line, and will allow entry for construction vehicles (only) into the Apex 1 plot; the northernmost plot at the tip of the Apex Site. All other vehicles will still enter the Market via Nine Elms Lane.

“Our emphasis has been on the safety aspect of the road and particularly the pedestrian crossing,” said Tony. “We have put two speed bumps in to regulate speeds and we have another one that could be installed should the need arise.”

Yee haw! Hold on to your hats at B&D

Alongside their ever-changing range of seasonal cut flowers, prepared hand-tied bouquets and bespoke floral designs, Bob and Denise Palmer at The B&D Flower Company have an additional point of interest on their stand in the Flower Market.

Pop along to unit B15 and be inspired by the array of brilliant Sequin Souls London hats, created by the couple’s daughter Charlie. Whether you’re looking for a fabulous personalised Cowboy Hat, that special item to top off your Drag Queen outfit, something fancy for a festival, or you want to glam-up your hen-do or wedding, Charlie’s bespoke designs are just the ticket.

“She’s been doing this for two years now,” said Denise, “and we thought it would be a bit of fun to collaborate and show off some of the hats in the Market. We’re not selling them, just giving them a showcase – Charlie sells through Etsy, Not on the High Street and her own website, so we’re pointing people in that direction.”

Sequin Souls London has made a real splash and tapped in nicely to the trend for rhinestone and sequin heavy cowboy styles



that the likes of Beyonce have driven in recent times. “It all started during lockdown, when Charlie did a cowboy themed party for six people, for my birthday,” Denise added. “She makes them all herself. Now, she’s selling a lot in the USA and she’s had several very high-profile clients already, which is great for publicity on social media.

“Whether people just want their name in sequins on a cowboy hat, or they want a top hat, feather boa or 70s visors, she creates something special for everyone.”

The hats are also serving another purpose in the Market. Denise said. “More than one client has stopped to say that the hats have cheered them up and put a smile on their face.”

Obituary

Pam Alexander OBE

Pam Alexander OBE, who served two terms as Chair of Covent Garden Market Authority in the 2010s, has died.



Born in April 1954, Pam was a businesswoman and senior civil servant specialising in housing and economic regeneration in England. Her career took in roles at the Department of the Environment (now part of DEFRA), the Housing Corporation, English Heritage and the South East England Development Agency, before she joined the Board at CGMA in 2012.

Her time at CGMA saw her preside over the early stages of the redevelopment programme, including most notably the construction and opening of the Interim Flower Market and the Food Exchange, as well as the first phase of the work on the Fruit & Vegetable Market.

CGMA Interim Chair John Lelliott commented: “During the two terms Pam was Chair at CGMA the redevelopment of the Market moved forward and her experience and expertise were appreciated during that time. She believed passionately in the continuing relevance of the role of New Covent Garden Market. The news of her passing is very sad for all of us who worked with her here at CGMA.”

Pam was made OBE in 2012 for her services to urban regeneration in the South East. She was married, to Roger, and had four stepchildren.

Steve Doe

Customers, friends, colleagues, and family numbering several hundred recently said farewell at a moving service with full military honours to Steve Doe, who died suddenly in February, aged 61.



From his successful career with the Royal Marines, Steve - along with his brother Tony and business partner Peter - started the firm of Evergreen Exterior Services (EES) in the mid ‘80s from a small yard in Thornton Heath and at New Covent Garden Flower Market. EES then established a thriving nursery and wholesale distribution centre in Banstead, from which the company has grown to be the largest import and supply service in the South of England.

“Steve was well known and well-loved part of our Flower Market for many years and he will be missed by a great deal of people,” said Jo Breare, General Manager, CGMA. “We’ll all remember Steve for all the success and business he brought to New Covent Garden Market.”

Steve’s dedication to the industry, encouragement to his staff and business colleagues and trusted integrity made him one of the most respected suppliers within the Flower Market. Always available to provide advice, source the seemingly impossible and ensure premium quality, Steve made EES the ‘go to supplier’ for shrubs, trees and annual plants.

Steve stepped back from the day-to-day management of EES five years ago to focus on his other passions of rugby, golf, fishing, walking his dogs, and spending time with wife Lorraine and their three daughters: Natalie, Emily and Gemma. He retained an active interest in the ongoing success of EES, New Covent Garden Flower Market and his many friends in the industry

Donations in Steve’s memory can be forwarded to Jo Breare at CGMA, made payable to The Royal Marine Charity.

WestKing project educates our future customers

The students at Westminster Kingsway College's School of Culinary Arts and Hospitality (WestKing) are learning about different seasonal fruit and vegetables each month this year thanks to traders at the Market



The award-winning college, in Victoria, is responsible for training many of the capital's top chefs just a mile away from the Market. The students create exquisite menus for WestKing's four restaurants, including the top-rated Vincent Rooms, and already, the vast majority of the fruit and veg was sourced from New Covent Garden Market.

This year though, the collaboration has been stepped up, as NCGM provides selected products each month for students to study and focus on, along with a monthly fact sheet with information on the product, the grower and its supply chain. To kick it off in January, the main product was January King, a hardy cabbage variety that grows well in even the harshest conditions and has distinct, densely packed leaves and an intense flavour profile.

"As well as teaching them how to create great dishes, we like our students to learn about the different foods they

are cooking with," said José Souto, Senior Chef Lecturer in Culinary Arts at WestKing. "We have always had an interactive relationship with New Covent Garden and this initiative will shine a light on how and where the products are grown, their nutritional value and the way the supply chain works. Every top chef in London will work with a trader at the market, so to get them engaged at this stage of their development is really important."

Paul Grimshaw, Managing Director of NCGM distributor D.D.P Ltd, is working with wholesalers across the market to supply the selected products each month. He said: "We've devised a schedule for the year, which gives the student chefs opportunities to work with a diverse range of fruit and vegetables from a variety of sources. There is a big focus on seasonality and sustainability and a lot of the product will be British, but we'll also be including imported product, for example pomegranates in January, to let them know about how the supply chain works more broadly."

As well as cabbage and pomegranate, the fact sheets have so far also covered mooli, rhubarb, salsify, Bramley apples, Chippie's Choice potatoes and limes. "I think it's our duty to

equip these chefs-in-training with this type of knowledge," said Paul. "If they become star chefs at some time in the future, or even chefs at various restaurants or contract caterers, their understanding and appreciation of what's in season should make their jobs all the more easy. The tutors at the college are extremely knowledgeable, not just about fruit and vegetables, but also meat, game and seafood – we're all passionate about produce and this is about passing on that passion to the next generation."

José added: "It's key that young chefs understand the seasons and WestKing tutors continually work with our suppliers to find innovative ways to educate our students about the availability and origin of the products they cook with. We encourage the students to do their own research too and NCGM will be supporting them in doing that throughout this year."

Jason underlines The Menu Partners commitment to Market

Jason Tanner, Co-Founder of The Menu Partners, tells Market Times that New Covent Garden is central to the nationwide group's ambitious expansion plans

A well-established name was officially 'retired' from the Market in April, when Sheringhams was fully integrated into The Menu Partners group as it moved into its new units. The relocation and completion of the integration process are the latest step forward for The Menu Partners (TMP), the largest firm operating out of New Covent Garden Market.

"When we originally acquired the business in January 2022, the plan was for Sheringhams to remain as a standalone entity, however due to increasing cost pressures in every sector of our business we made the decision to amalgamate the operation into the wider TMP group in order to drive efficiencies," explains Jason. "The first three months of the year are a quieter period for that part of the business, so we used that time in 2023 to ensure we'd dealt with all the finer details and successfully communicated to customers, suppliers and staff the transition and what it meant to them."

"We've kept the core people in the business and also the better suited customers. We have restructured the way we do business, reflecting the challenges we continue to face with the rising costs of energy, fuel, salary etc..."

"It took a while for everyone to catch up after the pandemic, but I think we have all now recognised that our actual costs have risen significantly," added Jason. "For us the only sensible thing to do was to look at our model and make it more efficient. It really isn't commercially viable to be making small deliveries any more, so we have put a small surcharge on any order below £100. Around 40-50% of the Sheringhams business was based in the education sector, but that's now down to around 20% as we continually streamline things."

TMP, including the now fully integrated Sheringhams, will be moving into 11 units in the new A Block of the Fruit & Vegetable Market. That gives the group around 25,000 square feet of ground floor capacity, which it will double with a further 25,000 sq ft of mezzanine. Around two-fifths of the ground floor space will be used for picking and lining up orders and a lift will take product up to the first floor, where splits will be packed. At the rear of the 11 units is a 5,500 sq ft freezer, which is home to the Koffmann, Marco Pierre White frozen brands as well as TMP's range of frozen products that has been fully operational since January 2023. The units have been a hive of activity from day one and Jason says that whilst the seven-month build has been all-consuming, the very worthwhile task sets the entire group up for future success. It has also included significant investments to the groups' Prepared and Primeur businesses to upgrade their facilities. In early 2024, Premier Foods Wholesale will move too, followed in 2025 by European Speciality Foods.

“New Covent Garden is the best place by far from which to serve London



Jason's journey

Jason started in New Covent Garden working for Louis Reece 34 years ago and opened Premier Fruits, with then business partners Roger Garber and Pat Wearne, 10 years later. Things have changed considerably since then. Now Premier Foods Wholesale, run by Jason's brother Justin with Managing Director Richard Hickson, as well as Primeur and Premier Prepared are all now owned by TMP, and under the same banner as other businesses that have been brought into the fold, including European Speciality Foods.

Jason's wife Olive manages the financing of the cash element of the business and their two sons also work in the business – Sean (25) is running the Koffmann & Marco Pierre White Frozen businesses and Ryan (23) is in the marketing team. "I'm very lucky to be working with my sons every day," says Jason. "There doesn't seem to be as many of the next generation coming through as the Market would like. They don't seem to like the hours or the 7-days a week operation we have to work within. But that's the hospitality industry – we're open every day of the year, when you're serving customers such as airline groups or a variety of restaurants, they expect that level of service."

The move into the new units is extremely positive news for TMP he says. "The fact that we've been able to spend time planning and putting everything exactly where we need it to be is going to make a huge difference to our efficiency and effectiveness. It's been a bit more expensive than we initially thought because of the timing, but it puts us in a great position moving forward."

"The market is vital to what we do," he adds. "The reason we have invested so heavily in New Covent Garden Market is that this is the best place by far from which to serve London."



The recent shortages on supermarket shelves once again proved the continued relevance and power of wholesale markets, says Jason. "It affected us positively because we were prepared to pay for the product our customers needed and therefore we didn't run short. It showed how important the wholesale sector is to the country and suppliers – I can't see supermarkets stopping their tactics of beating up growers and suppliers any time soon and several of our suppliers are telling us they are pulling programmes away from the supermarkets to build stronger relationships with the wholesale markets, as there is less risk involved."

"As we grow, our orders are becoming more consistent and that gives growers more confidence."

The Menu Partners was created to be a consolidator of food; a one-stop-shop to help the hospitality industry bring down the costs of deliveries into restaurants. "I set it up with Nigel Harris in September 2020 and if it hadn't been for lockdown, we may never have merged our two businesses," recalls Jason. "We'd been talking about it, but we'd never had the time to actually do what was necessary to make it work. Covid was bad on so many levels, but it did give us six months to put this 50:50 joint venture together."

As well as its facilities at New Covent Garden Market, there are other TMP sites in Brighton, Bicester, and Middleton, near Liverpool. "We'll always have those facilities," says Jason, "but we may end up with more."

Nationwide reach, personal touch

The personal touch that comes with a market background is in TMP's favour right now though, he adds. "We think a lot of the independent restaurant operators are turning their backs on the likes of Brakes, Bidfood, Fresh Direct and Reynolds. They are fed up with the big corporates, especially their approach and tactics to business. We work



hand-in-hand with our customers, developing their menus with them. It was a big part of the reason for bringing our businesses together, to combine all our skills and assets to create a true nationwide offering with the personal touch," says Jason.

"We have a 30,000 sq ft production kitchen in Bicester that is constantly working on recipes and ingredients for partners such as Young's, Fullers, Gordon Ramsay restaurants and Soho House. Cheese sauces, gravies, rotisserie chickens, lamb shanks – you name it, we develop the products in a manner that fits with the needs of their menus."

Also within the group, event catering business Absolute Taste has just landed a global LIV Golf contract, to add to a glittering client list that includes Manchester City, The Open Golf Championship, Queen's Tennis, The Shard and a host of other high-profile events. Each element of the group can bounce off the strengths of the others, creating a hugely varied and dynamic product and service offer.

Jason adds that the NCGM part of the group has a far broader remit than it did before TMP was born. "We're also always looking for more add-ons for our market businesses – we're far from just a fresh produce firm these days, that accounts for roughly 35-40% of our business. We sell increasing volumes of meat, fish, dry goods, dairy and frozen.

The frozen side of the Premier Food Wholesale business is expanding quickly, having incorporated Zero Degrees, another company that was within the group. "A lot of our catering and hospitality customers are looking more towards frozen produce," says Jason. "Over the last five to six years, frozen products have got much better as the specs have improved and more suppliers pack better quality product. The prices are also far more consistent, which is clearly attractive to some customers."

The frozen side of the business has successfully introduced new fruit and vegetable products into the group alongside the high-profile Koffmann and Marco Pierre White frozen ranges. The products, which have been signed off by Pierre Koffmann and Marco Pierre White themselves, have quickly risen to be the chef's choice worldwide and Jason says the brands' success has been made possible by the ongoing efforts of Simon Martin and sister Claire who are at the forefront of the marketing and development of the range.

Premier Foods Wholesale is the exclusive nationwide distributor of the frozen ranges, meaning that all products supplied to the hospitality sector pass through Premier. "We've been working with Koffmann's fresh and frozen products for three years now. The frozen product has been distributed into the catering industry predominantly, while the fresh product has been sold to catering and also secondary wholesalers across the country. The Koffmann family is a massive part of the Premier business and has helped to drive its growth in the last three years," says Jason. Initially, the Frozen and Fresh ranges predominantly included potatoes, carrots and parsnips, but new lines are being added on a regular basis – frozen Yorkshire peas and fresh English asparagus, for instance. "It doesn't change anything in the way that our customers work with us; it just gives them a far wider range to choose from," Jason says.

"Before Covid, Premier's turnover was

in the region of £50 million, it had three articulated lorries and two 26-tonnes vehicles. In the latest financial year, its turnover hit £88m and its vehicle fleet had grown exponentially – now with 11 artic's, for example. "The main reason for the growth is that we now deliver all over the country, seven days a week," Jason says.

The Menu Partners group is the only organisation working nationwide to this scale in the market right now, but that's not to say others won't follow. "When New Covent Garden Market is redeveloped I have total confidence that it will be full and thrive," Jason says. "What we're doing is only going to make the whole Market busier and stronger, all the while enhancing the financial figures on a year-to-year basis.

"We're around a £250m business already and our aim is to make The Menu Partners a billion-pound business eventually."

Opposite page, left: Sean and Jason Tanner
This page, top left: The Menu Partners team in Buyers Walk

Above: Justin and Jason Tanner

Arasu steps up for EA Williams

Arasu Panchalingam has recently taken on responsibility for buying vegetables along Buyer's Walk for foodservice supplier EA Williams. For the firm's Managing Director Andrew Sole, Arasu's progress is another step on the road to stability after a difficult period when recruitment and retention of staff was a concern for everyone in the Market

"We talk about product and prices a lot of the time, but too often we forget about the people – the individuals without whom we'd be lost," says Andrew. "I know when we came out of Covid, my number one concern wasn't the money we'd lost, but who we were going to find to work for us."

"We have an experienced team here now and all of us had our challenges during the pandemic. We didn't let anyone go, but a couple did leave and we have replaced them and now I really do believe this is the A team."

"We're not big enough to keep turning staff over, so if anyone comes to us with issues, we're all ears and want to support them because we see their career long term as being with us."

Arasu joined EA Williams just before the pandemic hit. A Tamil from northern Sri Lanka, when he arrived in the UK in 2019, he was introduced to the company by fellow Sri Lankan Muthukumar Rajan, who has worked there for 15 years and is now Commercial Manager. Arasu is now one of four Sri Lankans in the team. Having been a driver in his homeland, he has worked in the warehouse for 90% of his time with EA Williams and gradually built towards a managerial role. Over the last three and a half years, he has built a solid knowledge base of both the product mix and the requirements of EA Williams customer network and taken on greater responsibility with time. Since February, he has been a buyer, scouring Buyer's Walk in the Market each night for good value, high quality vegetables.

"I am still doing the same hours, but I spend a few hours each night now buying the full range of vegetables that our customers have ordered from firms all along Buyer's Walk," says Arasu. "I've not started at an easy time, as everyone has seen that the prices are high and some products are short, but I know a lot of the people here and we have good relationships. With some products, I will go straight to certain firms, but for the rest I shop around. People know I am new to this role and have been very helpful to me and shared their knowledge to

“ People know I am new to the role and have been very helpful and shared knowledge



Pictured above: Andrew Sole, right, with his team of four Sri Lankans, left to right, Arasu Panchalingam, Thanenthiran Kowtham, Kaneshalingam Satheeskanth and Kumar Raja

make sure I get exactly what I need.

"I really enjoy it; it's a quieter time at the moment, but the atmosphere generally is great and it's good to be more visible, to talk to people more and also meet new people."

The new role has coincided with Arasu's wife – who he married in 2022, joining him in the UK, so life looks very positive right now. "The company has been very good to me," he says. "I consider myself lucky to have such a nice job and they look after us."

Andrew believes that it's extremely important that the people who work for the business can see a route to progress. "We're very proud of him," he says. "On a practical level, we've seen him through his Visa acceptance, but on a personal level, we've also seen him get married and it's been lovely to experience that with him."

"From a career perspective, the main thing for Arasu is that during the pandemic, he had to work very closely with suppliers as things changed so much. We went from having suppliers who knew what were able to supply us with pretty much everything, to them not knowing how they were going to cope or whether they would be able to supply us. Arasu had to put a foot in their camp."

"When you can order aggressively, suppliers are far happier, but we went from regular programmes to having to be careful and being driven by daily pressures of what we needed, at what time, often in small volumes while still ensuring the right price and quality. Of course, that was driven itself by the changing needs of our customers; the last three years have been very difficult for everyone and we're not out of the woods yet, but hopefully we're getting closer to where we were and we can start to move forward again."

EA Williams continues to try to deliver a foodservice solution that fully focuses on quality and value, he adds. "The next step is for us to up the volumes we are buying so that we can take advantage of economies of scale. We want to be buying more full pallets of product rather than boxes in ones and twos and that's where Arasu can really progress his



career with us now," says Andrew.

"The team here knows the customers backwards and that helps us manage the ups and downs for them. Arasu will continue to work with our customers to improve their use of e-commerce platforms and help them to optimise their ordering processes. If he can consistently buy bigger quantities and keep prices at levels where our customers can hold the prices on their menus, people will be able to eat out more. That's what we all want in the end."

Planes, river taxis and automobiles



“I’ve got a silly idea,” announced French Garden’s Managing Director Iain Furness on the drive back from Rungis Market one morning in mid-January. Neither Marcus Rowlerson, his counterpart at Le Marché, or colleague Nathan Humphries said anything until a few miles further along the autoroute, when they asked Iain to elaborate. “No, it’s just a silly idea,” he said. When Iain did finally spill the beans, his “silly idea” led to a 20,500 mile four-day round-trip to the other side of the planet for him and Marcus, to honour their great friend, Grenville Snowdon, owner of French Garden. Here’s how it transpired

“I was walking out of Rungis and got a message from Grenville,” recounts Iain. “I’d asked him how his 70th birthday had been and he said it was excellent and that he was having a party on February 11th. I thought was ‘I reckon I can go to that’ and within 10 minutes, I’d checked out flights, hotels and my diary.”

At this point, it’s best to point out that Grenville’s party was to take place at Noosa Yacht Club, in Noosa Heads on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast, in Australia – not the most inaccessible place on the planet, but certainly a long way from home for a party that is just over three weeks away.

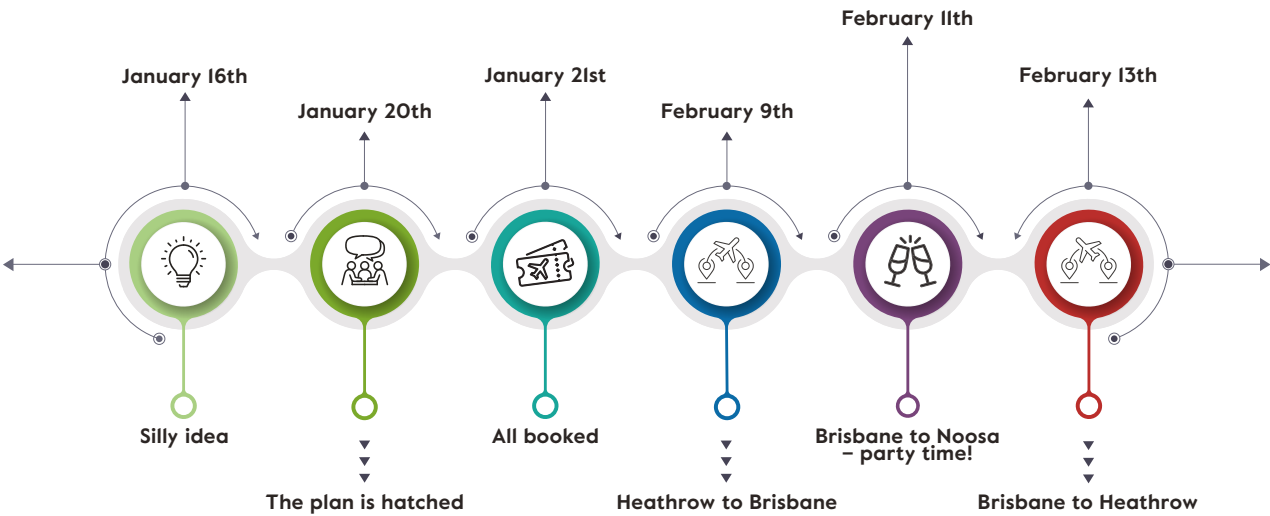
“I bought Grenville presents for his 60th and 65th, but there was nothing I could buy him for his 70th,” says Iain. “I decided the gesture of flying halfway round the world to celebrate with him would be the nicest thing I could do!”

Cut back to the car en route from Paris to London and both Marcus and Nathan disagreed that it was a silly idea – Marcus in fact thought it was a great idea, but neither felt they would be able to go at such short notice. “A week or so later, I had a beer with my wife and told her what Iain was doing,” says Marcus. “We were due to be going away, but she said, ‘why aren’t you going too, this is a once in a lifetime thing?’”

That evening Marcus informed Iain he would have a companion on the trip and a couple of weeks later, on a frosty Thursday February 9th, they left Heathrow on the first leg of their epic journey. Iain, who made a surreptitious phone call to Grenville from the airport to make sure there was no suspicion, recalls: “Literally no-one in Australia knew we were coming; it was really important that it stayed that way so we didn’t ruin the whole thing. We got to Brisbane on Friday evening – we’d decided not to go straight to Noosa in case we bumped into anyone. We took a taxi to Noosa the next morning and checked into our hotel and went for lunch.”

Marcus continues: “We had to get a river taxi to the yacht club and the last one was at 4.30pm – the party started at 5, so we got off the stop before and walked to the back of the yacht club, where a member of staff was just finishing his shift. We explained to him why we were and he got his manager involved and took over the filming duties for Instagram!”

As Grenville approached the bar, Iain and Marcus were ready – Iain behind the bar ready to serve him his next



cocktail and Marcus waltzing in behind to join the birthday boy at the bar. As anyone who has watched the footage on Le Marché’s Instagram feed will know, their presence certainly had the desired effect. As Commodore of the Yacht Club, Grenville is careful to mind his Ps and Qs, but even after 17 years of relative peace in Queensland, let’s just say you can take the man out of New Covent Garden...

“It was a brilliant night,” says Iain. “There were 100+ people there and as Grenville said as he referred to us as ‘typical Poms’ in his speech, we knew we had to be there because he was buying the drinks. We spent Sunday with Grenville and his family too and then it was back to the airport on Monday morning to fly home.”

Marcus says: “We’ve both known Grenville for more than 30 years. He has been a major part in both of our lives, I’ve known him since I worked here while I was at school.” And Iain adds: “He used to come back regularly before the pandemic stopped all that, but he’s still very much involved and calls us at least once every week. He quite often knows

what’s happening in the Market before we do, which can be a bit disconcerting!”

The time difference meant the pair arrived back in London on the Tuesday night and much to the despair of their wives, both were back working in the Market the following morning. “It’s amazing that everything fell into place as it did. One thing going wrong with the journey would have scuppered it,” says Marcus. “We can’t thank everyone who helped us enough – mostly though, my wife was spot on, it really was a once in a lifetime experience.”

Pictured: Left, Marcus and Iain enjoy a rare moment of relaxation on their marathon trip and right, once the initial surprise had worn off, Grenville posed with the intrepid pair for this happy photo at the yacht club!



Paul puts down new roots at Evergreen

After a traditionally quieter period in the first three months of the year, Evergreen Exterior Services Ltd generally springs back to life in mid-to-late March and once the momentum kicks in, it's full steam ahead for the rest of the year. Market Times talks to Manager Paul Fairhead about the firm's fortunes and his family's long history at Covent Gardens old and New

When we catch up with Paul, it's a busy Wednesday morning in late March and during our conversation, he helps trade and non-trade customers with all sorts of queries. It's the time of year when the plant game re-awakens. "We are always very busy in the run-up to Christmas, with Christmas trees, foliage, cyclamen etc...", Paul says, "but the second half of winter is our quietest time. It doesn't stop, of course, during that period, people are generally tidying up and topping up what they bought before Christmas for their window boxes and gardens – when it snowed in early March for instance, a lot of customers came in to regenerate things before Spring arrived."

The tipping point that normally sees winter trade move into spring bedding tends to arrive in mid-March, but snow in mid-December did a lot of damage and necessitated replanting in January, then that March cold snap further set a season that will last until the end of June back a

fortnight or so. By March 28th, 2022, we'd sold 40 trolleys of geraniums," Paul says as an example. "This year, we'd only sold two by that date and things were still slow. We know we'll catch up, but it definitely condenses trade into a shorter season, which makes it a bit trickier for both us and our customers."

All the jobs are still there for the gardeners and landscapers to get on with when the weather allows, but they are starting later too and the concertina effect was about to lead to a very busy April window. "We all know how it goes and they're in exactly the same situation as us, so we all work together to get through it," says Paul.

Particularly hot in early spring were *Osteospermum*, Dahlias and Sennetti, before popular lines such as Lobelia, Felicia and Bacopa take over, then Begonias and the more delicate New Guinea Impatiens start to become available. "One thing we definitely don't want is for anything delicate to come too early, as

any frost can wipe it out," Paul says.

Other than the occasional herb, the larger unit of Evergreen Exterior Services Ltd doesn't wholesale anything from its Banstead nursery at the Flower Market. The business has a smaller unit that is well stocked with plants from the nursery site in Banstead as well as holding nursery orders for customers.

"We do all our own buying from our own network of suppliers," says Paul. "Our customer profile is pretty steady, but we do see new customers coming in pretty regularly, perhaps a new landscape company opened up by someone who's gone out on their own. For the trade to be sustainable long-term, it's vital that we see the youngsters moving on and staying in the industry and I'm pleased to say that it does appear to be happening."

Paul himself has worked in the flower market for five years, progressing from salesman to manager in that time. His family has a long and distinguished history



Pictured l-r: Evergreen Exterior Services Ltd Manager Paul Fairhead; Cuckoocress; Osteospermum; Flaming Katy Kalanchoe
Pictured below l-r: Osteospermum; Geranium



at the market, which can be traced at least as far back as far as 1912, when great great grandfather Harry moved the family nursery from Leytonstone to Loughton and as a result had to purchase a mechanical vehicle as the horse and cart couldn't transport product from Essex into the old Covent Garden. H Fairhead Ltd and three generations up to Paul's father Lesley were a Covent Garden fixture until a few years after the Market moved to Nine Elms in the late 1970s. Lesley then sub-let the unit to a firm called Vinplants, which sold products from his nursery. When Paul began working at H Fairhead Ltd, he delivered up to the Market up to five times a week until Vinplants stopped trading in the late 80s and H Fairhead bowed to the pressure of new sources coming into the Market and transformed itself into a wholesale nursery. Lesley retired around 10 years ago and Paul ran the company until he came to work for Evergreen Exterior Services Ltd, as the

fourth generation of Fairhead to work at Covent Garden. The connections had always remained – Evergreen was founded in 1988 by two former Vinplants men, Steve Doe (who very sadly passed away in February) and Steve Vincent, who were later joined by Steve's brother, Tony Doe. Steve Vincent left the company after a short while and Peter Gibbs then joined as a partner. Evergreen began its journey operating from a small unit at New Covent Garden Flower Market and a corner shop in London. The initial aim was to retain its position at New Covent Garden, and its owners therefore moved to a larger unit while also progressively expanding Evergreen's horizons as a company. Evergreen started sourcing commercially grown plants from annuals to mature specimen trees from the UK and across Europe. This new direction was so successful that it opened its current headquarters at Banstead, Surrey, where it has grown to

become one of the leading independent plant nurseries in the UK. Still in Loughton, Paul's brother now runs H Fairhead Ltd, which does not deal with New Covent Garden these days, but sells a wide range of hardy trees, hedging plants, shrubs and perennials and has added a successful retail arm to its wholesale roots following a transitional period during the pandemic. Paul loves Market life and says the change to Market hours wasn't such a hardship. "I got used to delivering to the Market at 4-4.30am and then continuing with my day job for the rest of the day and although I now get up at 20 to 2 to get to work, at least I only have to do one job," he smiles. "They wouldn't suit everyone, but the hours suit me very well – I have two sons who work now and a daughter at school and I can get home and have the house to myself for a few hours, then sleep for a while before my wife gets home with my daughter after school."

“ Paul is the fourth generation of his family to work at Covent Garden Market

Martin's long-term vision for Market Club

When Martin Dykes of Nature's Choice bought the Market Café in June 2022, he had a long-term plan in mind. He tells Market Times how the first few months have gone and why he believes the newly named Market Club has huge potential



Martin and business partner Glyn bought the café in A Block of the fruit and vegetable market from Mehmet Yilmaz, who had run it for more than 20 years. The premises were given a thorough deep clean and a complete refurb before the Market Club was ready to open in August.

"We ripped pretty much everything out and threw it away and invested more money than we expected in cleaning and new equipment," says Martin. "Our biggest challenge though was recruitment. It was so hard to get staff, but we've got two great chefs now – Paul Smith and George Futch – who both have loads of experience in high-end West End restaurants." Paul works the early shift and George comes in from 6am to take over and their expertise is being complemented by a growing band of friendly and, importantly, reliable staff."

The short-term objective was to establish the Market Club and its offer within the Market, but Martin thought from the outset that the business would need to widen its horizons to be a successful proposition further down the line. "We've got about a year left in this premises before this block gets demolished," he says. "We knew that when we bought the business and we're not sure yet where we'll end up being in the redeveloped Market.

"First and foremost, I wanted to buy it for the people in the Market and we will always focus on caring for them. The menu has been slimmed down from the previous ownership's offer, but it still has the Market

community at its heart, Martin says. "You have got to reflect your core clientele," he adds.

"But I was always looking at the long term. I see this becoming a hub for the Market and the local community, not just for the fruit and vegetable traders. But they are still the primary focus. The whole area around the Market is changing massively and I believe that the new Market will create a good environment for people to come into and we'll be able to attract new customers from outside the Market, as well as the customers who work here.

"Our ethos is to offer good food, good value and to care for every one of our customers. I want to do more things and the menu will continue to evolve with time and once we have relocated and have the right building, we'll definitely rethink things and promote the restaurant more. I'd like to have outside seating if possible and make Market Club a real destination. If you go to Rungis wholesale market (in Paris), they have 20+ top class restaurants, so why shouldn't we have some here?"

The café is located next door to Nature's Choice, which supplies all of its product. So Martin really could not be watching over its development from closer quarters. "I actually thought it would be a bit busier than it has been, but it's steady," he says. "Maybe some people got out of the habit of coming to the café during the night when it was closed for a while. The night-time footfall is slowly building though and we're pretty

“ I see this becoming a hub for the Market and the local community, not just for the fruit and veg traders

Pictured: Martin with chef Paul and one of the café's key staff members, Sherriah

busy during the day, because lots of the people in the Market offices are using us. We haven't been rushing things, but as we've started to promote ourselves a bit more, that's having an impact."

Signs have begun to pop up around the market promoting the rotating daily specials and meal deals that the café is offering and the menu also caters for people with different dietary requirements, which has obvious appeal.

"We're not losing money and I'm convinced it will be very successful eventually," Martin says. "You have to take a gamble in life sometimes. I've certainly taken plenty of chances at Nature's Choice and most of them have paid off!" He cites the decision to become the Market's first major supplier of microherbs as one chance taken that proved very successful for a long period.

What feedback has Market Club been getting from customers so far? "People seem to really like the changes we've made to the menu and the general quality of the offer," says Martin. "I've also asked a couple of my customers who own cafes and restaurants for their thoughts and they definitely see the potential I see, as long as we can tap into what's around and about the Market alongside our existing customer base," Martin says. "It's not vibrant enough yet and obviously the redevelopment is ongoing. But once we have a new Market, I think we'll fly."



Mission in full control

A dynamic California-based avocado and mango company is making its mark in the Market, but Mission Produce is by no means a new kid on the block. Since 1983, Mission has been sourcing, producing and distributing fresh Hass avocados, and as of 2021, fresh mangoes, to retail, wholesale and foodservice customers in more than 25 countries. Market Times asked the company to outline its stand-out characteristics as it establishes its presence in the UK

In March 2023, Mission Produce, a global leader in the worldwide avocado business, opened a state-of-the-art ripening, packing and distribution facility in Dartford, Kent, connecting the UK market to the most advanced avocado network in the world.

Mission is one of the world's largest avocado growers and distributors, with a global distribution network that includes 13 forward distribution centres that are strategically positioned in key markets throughout North America, China, Europe, and now the UK. The company owns and operates four state-of-the-art packing facilities in key growing locations: California, Mexico and Peru. With strong grower relationships around the world,



Mission also sources from Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Brazil, Ecuador, South Africa and more, to provide a year-round supply of premium fruit.

Mission is a publicly traded company, listed on the Nasdaq stock exchange (\$AVO). With vertical integration in key growing regions, Mission is well-positioned to promote reliability of supply for its customers. The company manages 5,500 hectares of avocados across Peru, Colombia, Guatemala, and South Africa. By owning the product, Mission is able to exercise greater control over the supply chain from field to fork.

Mission's UK presence:

Last year, Mission opened a 101,659-square-foot operation at Crossways, Dartford. The state-of-the-art facility has many strategic benefits, enabling the company to serve the UK market in a way that is distinguished by excellent customer service and premium product quality. The company uses the facility to provide the following services:

- Ripening
- Packing
- Bagging
- Distribution
- 3PL services
- Cold storage
- Supply chain & logistics management

The FDC's advanced technology can provide significant benefits when delivering ripe and ready fruit to wholesale market customers. It is Mission's first facility to feature the "Mission Control" exclusive ripening room technology, which involves a specialised atmosphere control process to help create optimal environments for ripening.

By utilising Mission Control technology, the Company has the ability to ripen fruit to customer specification in a manner that is distinctive and advantageous compared to other suppliers in the industry. Testing results found that Mission Control had the ability to accelerate fruit ripening by as much as 20% when compared to a conventional ripening system. Additionally, fruit ripeness throughout the ripening chamber was found to be more consistent when using Mission Control.*

The facility also incorporates grading visibility technology, which can reduce handling times and minimise fruit damage, and testing machinery that can determine stages of ripeness with advanced precision.

It is designed to be one of the most efficient operations of its kind, while enhancing product quality and lengthening shelf-life. It features avocado-specific ripening infrastructure, as well as innovative technology for the grading, testing, and post-ripening processes.



The strategic location and proximity to transportation channels promotes improved transit times, streamlined efficiencies, and reduced costs:

- Close to the Queen Elizabeth Bridge and opposite Thames Port, Mission's UK facility is in a prime location - just 22 miles from Central London
- It facilitates direct access to major ports, airports, channels, freeways, railways, and the UK's national motorway network

The building is sustainability-focused, supporting Mission's commitment to a more sustainable future. It is certified by a BREEAM "excellent" rating and an A+ energy rating with features including solar panel renewable energy, rainwater harvesting & water-saving technology, and smart energy metering.

Steve Barnard, Mission's Chief Executive Officer, said: "As experts in the art of ripening, Mission Produce is entering the UK market by leading innovation in the avocado category. With many strategic advantages, including the reach of our advanced global network, vertical integration, year-round supply, and enhanced ripening capabilities with Mission Control, we are positioned to drive demand and market growth in the UK for ripe avocados and mangos."

*Optimising ripening protocols for consistent high-quality avocados. University of Greenwich Natural Resources Institute, Produce Quality Centre. November 2022.

Email: mpuksales@missionproduce.com
Website: <https://missionproduce.com>



Pictured above left: FUEL10K co-founders Jason Kerr and Barney Mauleverer

Social conscience fuels Food Exchange business

In each issue of Market Times, we highlight the widening range of tenants at New Covent Garden and this time, FUEL10K is in the spotlight



At FUEL10K, which is based in the Food Exchange at New Covent Garden Market, the mission is to “make FUEL for busy people”. Its great-tasting, nutritious breakfast range is designed to be easy to eat wherever you are and whatever you are up to. However you approach breakfast, FUEL10K aims to have it covered. Whether you’re a sit down and savour it, or grab-and-go merchant, the range aims to make your mornings easier, tastier and more nutritious.

FUEL10K’s mission looks beyond that though, as the business has built its foundations on a deep social conscience. Since its launch almost 12 years ago, it has put continuous self-improvement at the top of its agenda, twisting and turning to constantly evolve its products to improve their nutritional value, whilst never compromising on taste. The brand is fully committed too, to reducing its impact on the environment.

A constant thread throughout FUEL10K’s development is to reduce the use of sugar across the range. It wants to use increasingly less plastic too and to source other packaging and ingredients from the most sustainable sources available. Initiatives that drive down and offset carbon emissions are also high on the agenda.

These are fairly easy aspirational targets to have, but to truly live the dream, any business has to be prepared to fully immerse itself in the true meaning of its stated aims. To cement its ethos and values and strive towards the highest possible standards, transparency and accountability of verified social and environmental performance, the company’s founders decided to certify as a B Corporation.

Certified B Corporations™ (B Corps™) are companies that use the power of business to build a more inclusive and sustainable economy. It’s all about using business as a force for good; every B Corp business has met the highest verified standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability. There are about 4,000 B Corp companies worldwide, and 1,200+ in the UK. FUEL10K is proud to now be one of them, achieving a score of 86.8 in its assessment, highlighting the positive impact it is having on the world, its team, and you.

Since gaining its status in March 2021 there has been no turning back. “We will balance purpose, quality and pride beyond just profit in everything that we do - and enjoy the journey wherever it may take us,” said co-founder Barney Mauleverer.

In March 2023, to celebrate B Corp Month and two years of being a B Corp, two of FUEL10K’s co-founders Jason Kerr and Barney decided to look back at the application journey, to remind themselves of the reasons that drove their process to certification and acknowledge how the movement has been impacting their business.



Why did you become a B Corp?

Barney: “During lockdown we came across the B Corp movement. On further analysis we realised that we were already acting very much like a B Corp but without the formal structure it could offer. We felt very aligned with the values behind the project and set out on a journey to take on the process of applying for our own certification.

Fellow co-founder **Jason:** I like to think that the B Corp way of working has been part of our DNA ever since the brand began. It felt like a natural progression to sign up and become a fully-fledged B Corp. The immensely positive and entrepreneurial spirit that our business promotes, coupled with a genuine desire to ‘do business’ in the right way is what makes us a great fit for the B Corp community. For us, It really isn’t just about making money but having a purpose too. It’s about being part of a journey that we can all be tremendously proud of.

What was the process like?

Barney: To become a B Corp is no easy feat; there are hundreds of questions, a lot of policies, questionnaires and detail, but crossing the finish line made it entirely worth it. You have to submit an in-depth audit of your company with evidence to back up each point. The idea is that the process is ongoing and centred around improvement. Every three years, you reapply. We’re currently just beginning our re-certification process with the hope to beat our previous score.

What is it that makes FUEL10K a B Corp?

Barney: Intertwined within our makeup is a people-focused culture. Self development, individual expression and the health and wellbeing of our team is a priority. The ways we’ve implemented this include our WFH flexibility (which we had in place pre-pandemic), a ‘gym on our time’ scheme, as well as an annual health and wellbeing allowance.



We’re committed to creating an enjoyable experience for everyone who works with and around us as well as anyone affected by what we do. We’ve also aligned ourselves to five of the UN’s Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) and the way we operate is very much linked to these. For example, aligning with the ‘life on land’ SDG, we work closely with Clunes Farm, supporting their ecology and biodiversity plan. Additionally, we have an ongoing partnership with Fareshare, in which we’ve donated over one million portions of porridge to help provide meals for vulnerable people.

Jason: From September 2021 our best-selling Granola has been 100% recyclable. We turned our attention to becoming a B Corp after wanting to do more to create a thriving planet and prosperous future for everyone. Together with other B Corps, we are on a mission to transform the role of business in society.

How does being a B Corp influence your day-to-day activities?

Barney: FUEL10K has always been committed to improvement and being a force for good. For example, leading the change on the reduction of plastic on porridge pots. We may have just done this and moved on, but becoming a B Corp provided us with a way to structure and measure the systems and processes behind how we action our values.

Jason: Being a B Corp brings much greater clarity to what we do and how we go about our daily business life. Whenever we have decisions to make on products, people or activities, our ‘B Corp’ badge ensures a commitment to make sure that those decisions are being made for the right reasons. I think that sums it up perfectly really. This doesn’t mean we think we’re perfect. It’s a recognition that we’re on a journey. We’re going to keep everyone updated too, both on what we’re doing well and what we need to work on.

Why are you based at the Food Exchange at New Covent Garden Market?

Jason: We chose to move into the Food Exchange because it was a shiny new

“ It really isn't just about making money, but having a purpose too

development and already had a few other food businesses in the building... so it was exciting to be a part of this. When we moved, we were moving into a bigger office so this meant we could hold more stock in the office and have room for the team to grow.

The Food Exchange was also a good location for the team in London and because of the Vauxhall rail and tube link it was relatively handy for our wider team who occasionally commute from Dorset, the Wirral and Inverness via Gatwick. More recently Nine Elms opening and the tunnel to the posh side has really made a difference to accessibility and how much easier it now is for guests to find the office.

To join FUEL10K on this journey, you can find them on social media @FUEL10K or pop them a message at fuel@fuel10k.com

THE FUEL10K VALUES

- CHALLENGE**
Be original. Be pioneers. Push new boundaries. We will explore new routes to lead through innovation and entrepreneurialism.
- IMPROVE**
As the 10K theory states continuous improvement gets us closer to perfect. We will reinvent, stay nimble and inspire others.
- RESPECT**
We will work responsibly, treat everyone with equal value and treat the planet with the utmost respect.
- TOGETHER**
We will promote a dynamic, inclusive and enjoyable culture across all the relationships we come across.

Ruth brings her communications expertise to the Market

Ruth Thornett's father's family were East End fruit and veg traders and via Bolton and latterly Network Rail, she has found her way back into the trade as CGMA's Senior Communications Manager

Before joining CGMA I had a varied communications career. Early on I worked in creative agencies on the account handling side for clients including Ferrero, Sports Direct, Budweiser, Guinness, TfL and the Environment Agency.

My last role was at Network Rail where I managed passenger communications around major upgrade projects. My biggest achievement was managing the London Bridge re-opening celebration, which was attended by Prince William in 2018. Working with the London Transport Museum team, I created an exhibition called 'Untangling The Tracks' that ran for two and a half years at the Transport Museum in Covent Garden, and explained the detail behind the £7 billion Thameslink Programme. I also managed a museum piece at London Bridge station, which celebrated both the redevelopment work and the heritage of London's oldest central London terminus, which first opened in 1836.

Perhaps the most bizarre piece of work I created at Network Rail though was to stage a Johnny Cash tribute band for passengers at Charing Cross station. I'd found a lesser-known track of his which featured the lyric 'Is her destination Victoria station?' which tied in with a campaign to advise passengers that Charing Cross trains would divert to Victoria. It was a lot of fun, and the passengers appreciated the advance warning in a memorable format.

I like to think my experience at Network Rail will be useful at CGMA in that we are working on a major redevelopment and would hope to deliver a world class wholesale market that's fit for the future. Beyond the wholesale market, the opportunities to develop on-site are infinite and although the direction of travel is not fixed, I'm excited about the possibilities and want to be involved in those discussions.

Personal Fact File

Place of Birth

I was born in Bolton (up North), although my dad's family were all Cockney costermongers – so there is an inherited market-connection!

Where do you live?

I've been in London for 30 years now, half the time south of the river, half north. I currently live in Finchley in North London, which is a fairly easy commute to Nine Elms.

How does working at NCGM compare with the rest of your career?

My last job had a work-force of 35k, I much prefer the smaller office environment where everyone is approachable. As soon as I interviewed here I got a warm vibe from the team and the office is an upbeat, friendly place to be.

What family do you have?

My husband is a project manager, I have a teenage son who is home educated (which is what I'm doing when not at CGMA). We have a very pretty dog and an angry cat.

What are your other interests?

I love animals, travel, football (Bolton Wanderers) and musical theatre. I love all kinds of theatre but am happiest when I'm singing. You can often find me propping up the piano at Overtures (a musical theatre singalong bar in Soho), and I'm currently rehearsing a cabaret performance at the Chickenshed Theatre in north London.

Favourite fruit, veg and flowers

My favourite fruit is strawberries – when they're good, they're the best!



I'm not sure I have a favourite flower, but I do have some favourite plants – we have a tiny garden that features an Amelanchier and lots of grass varieties. My indoor stalwart is a money tree, which thrives in every possible position (but hasn't yet brought me the premium bond win I've been hoping for).

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