

FOOD

A lot on my plate: a year of eating Britishly

How hard is it to only consume produce made, reared or grown here? **Clare Hargreaves** finds out

Spaghetti bolognese is one of Britain's favourite dishes. But this year I fear I won't be eating it, as few of its ingredients are actually from here. For 2021 I've set myself the challenge of eating only British foods, so although mince and onions might get the thumbs up, pasta, tomatoes (until the summer, at least) and Parmesan cheese sadly won't.

So why, as a food writer, am I deliberately depriving myself of the flavoursome delights of not only spag bol and other pasta dishes, but of avocados, bananas, lemons, coffee, too? How do I get myself out of bed in the mornings without a cup of Clipper Earl Grey? Can a woman survive an entire year without brownies?

Over three lockdowns I've had time to think. During the first, when it felt risky to visit shops, I switched to shopping at farmers' markets, subscribed to a weekly organic veg box from a local farm, and foraged for ingredients. I bought online from small cheese producers whose business had nosedived when restaurants closed their doors. With more time on my hands, planning, cooking and eating meals took centre stage. I started to wonder if it was time we valued ourselves, and our food, a little more.

Earlier this week, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer gave a speech at the National Farmers' Union (NFU) annual conference, saying he wanted to see a shift towards shoppers buying more British, local and healthy food, and the pandemic and Brexit have made us reflect on where our food comes from, and demonstrated how vulnerable to disruption our "just-in-time" food delivery systems are. We produce less than two-thirds of what we eat. Does that give us the resilience we need?

As we emerge from Covid and reshape our trading relationships, we face two far greater threats: climate warming and biodiversity loss. The global food system is responsible for more than a quarter of total greenhouse gas emissions. Would it help to import less, which would reduce transport emissions, particularly those from perishable air-freighted foods? And could buying from small regenerative

UK farms help the biodiversity of our soils and landscapes?

Two months in, how easy has it been to only eat British? First, I've been amazed at the response. A gardener friend was so appalled by the idea of a year without ginger, she offered to grow me some. Lemon growers in Essex alerted me to their existence, while a Cotswold farmer sent me barleycup, created from his home-grown barley, as a coffee substitute, together with a bottle of Gosnells sparkling mead made from East London honey.

Nevertheless, it's been a learning curve. On day one, I examined the ingredients of my breakfast cereal. They included rice flour and cane sugar, both imported. I switched to porridge, then remembered maple syrup was out. After some searching, I unearthed a syrup made from Dorset apples by a company called Liberty Fields. My journey was turning up some interesting finds.

I eat meat rarely, but I imagined



that when I did, sourcing high-welfare British meat would be straightforward. Then I looked into what the animals eat. In the case of pigs and chickens, it's predominantly imported soya, much of it grown on cleared South American rainforest. In the case of sheep and cattle, it's mainly grain, often imported. Happily, there was a solution: hardy breeds of cattle and sheep that can survive purely on pasture. So I've enjoyed hearty stews of both.

Fish is a minefield, as so much of the fish we eat is imported. King prawns, for instance, come from the Indian Ocean, while we export our larger ones, langoustines, to the Continent. I've discovered the best way to eat British seafood is to



Clare Hargreaves has become more inventive with finding ingredients
SHELLEY HUTCHEON

Homegrown UK treats

Look out in greengrocers and farm shops this summer for British-grown kiwis, melons, apricots and figs. And soon we're likely to see British-grown lemons and olives.

UK wines are winning international awards and in Cornwall, tea is being grown on the Tregothnan Estate (tregothnan.co.uk)

For Asian style, the UK now has a well-stocked larder of everything from wasabi, grown by The Wasabi Company (thewasabicompany.co.uk), to daikons, chillies and yuzus, grown at NamaYasai (namayasai.co.uk) nursery in Sussex, which runs a vegetable-box scheme. You can buy Kent-grown kaffir-time leaves in

some UK supermarkets and online, too, such as at Watts Farm (shop.wattsfarms.co.uk)

Need miso? No problem. East Anglia-based Hodmedod's (hodmedods.co.uk) produces a fermented fava bean paste that does the job brilliantly. If you're willing to grow your own, many UK nurseries now sell lemongrass as a pot plant. If you're after a Camembert-style cheese, grab a Tunworth, made by Charlotte Spruce on the Herriard Park Estate in Hampshire (available in all good cheese mongers) and for a Brie-style cheese stock up on Fen Farm Dairy's Baron Bigod (fenfarmdairy.co.uk).

grown in Britain when it is the season. Less than 2.5 per cent of our croppable land is used to grow fruit and vegetables – a shockingly low figure when, to curb climate change and obesity, we're being advised to eat more plant-based foods and less grain-fed meat.

On the upside, I've found a matured Cornish Gouda which knocks the socks off Parmesan. And this week I discovered three enterprises making pasta from home-grown heritage grains: Sharpham Park, Fresh Flour and Carleschi. So once Britain's tomatoes ripen, I may be eating spag bol after all.

Follow Clare's Eat British journey on Instagram @larderloutUK

HOSPITALITY

And if cooking sounds too much like hard work...

...book a sustainable supper at a green Michelin star winner. By **Josh Barrie**

In a year that has seen more changes hit the hospitality business than anyone could have foreseen, one, at least, is positive. For the first time in its history, Michelin not only bestowed its traditional, highly coveted stars, but green ones too. The new distinction is to celebrate those championing progressive ethical and environmental standards, going well beyond what has become normal in modern Britain.

Restaurants given a Michelin Green Star go to great lengths not just to avoid food waste, but to stitch sustainability into the very fabric of the restaurant. They work closely with local suppliers and producers, and look to source ingredients such as beef farmed using regenerative methods.

Across the UK and Ireland, 23 restaurants were awarded green stars, with a further 46 identified as taking "positive steps" towards working in a "greener way". Outright winners included Silo, which received national attention thanks to its zero-waste ethos when it opened in Brighton in 2014 (it's now located in east London); Coombeshead Farm in Cornwall; and L'Enclume, in Cartmel in the Lake District.

Tommy Banks added a green star to his already one-star Yorkshire pub-restaurant The Black Swan, at Oldstead, and says that had Covid not dominated conversation for the past 12 months, climate change would be front and centre.

"Obviously 2020 was all about coronavirus," he tells I. "But it has meant so much has become disposable again, so it's been damaging in so many ways. Coming out of this, climate change must be the big talking point – we've got to focus on the bigger picture. The two are entwined anyway. Clearly, we're doing something wrong to the planet."

At The Black Swan, Banks uses vegetables grown on the restaurant's farm and buys meat only from nearby butchers. "I think it's really important Michelin is recognising the environmental issues restaurants face. It's up to those at the top to set a standard. I hope in five years' time, the bar is raised, and there won't be a need for green stars, because we've all got to be focusing on this."

Palé Hall on the fringes of Snowdonia in north Wales, is

Being sustainable is the only way to run a business. It's cost-effective in the long run and it's common sense



Tommy Banks uses vegetables grown at The Black Swan's own farm

currently the country's only green-star establishment. There, a new turbine provides the hotel and restaurant with nearly all of its electricity, and owners Angela and Alan Harper last year spent nearly £500,000 "fighting through coronavirus" – ensuring no member of the staff lost their job.

"It's been a terrible time for hospitality," Angela says. "The green star means so much to us and the staff, to our young team. It makes all our hard work worth it. We were so thrilled. We sat there in tears when we were told because honestly, this really could make such a difference."

"We have worked so hard to get Palé Hall up to speed. We have Gareth, our head chef, who's just 30 – his generation sees sustainability not as a novel thing but as the set standard. We all need to be more green and efficient and we've invested in that."

"We feel a huge responsibility to our staff – 51 people rely on us to pay their mortgages. We spent more than £500,000 to keep going and we think it's so worth it."

Jess Murphy, who owns Kai, in Galway, West Ireland, says if nothing more, being green is a matter of common sense. She hopes that dining habits reflect that post-lockdown.

At Kai, every supplier used is listed, from Green Earth Organic veg grown just eight miles from the city, to Gannet Fishmongers, an award-winning fish producer based in Galway's market.

"It's amazing to be recognised even though we've been doing this a long time," she says. "I think being sustainable is the only way to run a business. It's cost-effective in the long-run and it's just common sense, surely?"

One thing you don't have to miss during lockdown.

OFFER ENDS 28th FEBRUARY

Vaccine doses overhaul to tackle unfair roll-out in UK

i Digital Edition just £2 per month.

Never miss out by getting **i** & **i**weekend with interactive puzzles delivered to your device. Read a full replica of this newspaper delivered to your phone, tablet or PC by 6am each day.

Subscribe today at [inews.co.uk/subscribe](https://www.inews.co.uk/subscribe) or call 0800 082 0628.



Scan for offer

Terms & Conditions. i Digital Edition £2/month for 3 months then £4.99 thereafter. Direct debit only. Other offers available. Offer closes 28th February 2021. Phone lines open 9-5:30 Mon-Fri.

PSYCHOLOGY

Hanging up on anxiety about answering the phone

Many people hate the idea of using their phone for talking rather than texting, explains **Dr Ilham Sebah**

Staying in touch with loved ones without seeing them in person has become even more important during the pandemic. But for some people, phone anxiety means that making or receiving calls is a stressful experience.

Many people dislike using the phone, but if you delay or avoid making calls, feel extremely nervous and worry what you'll say, you may have "telephobia". Physical symptoms include nausea, increase in heart rate, shortness of breath, dizziness and

muscular tension. A 2019 survey of UK office workers found that 76 per cent of millennials and 40 per cent of baby boomers have anxious thoughts when their phone rings, leading many to avoid calls.

Some people may have felt nervous in the past year when

they began being asked to take part in video calls for the first time, worrying about how they appear. But there are many reasons why a phone call can lead to stress.

It can be daunting when communication is limited to purely speech. In the absence of gestures, body language and eye contact, we can feel self-conscious about our voices and choice of words.

Thanks to other technologies, some people go days or weeks without speaking on the phone.

By eliminating the immediate reaction of others in spoken

conversations, texting can offer social contact while reducing fear of rejection or disapproval. It also allows us to review what we're writing before we hit "send" – a phone conversation can feel impulsive and risky.

Some people may even develop a text personality that contrasts to their more reticent real-life self.

The pressure of being someone else's sole focus on a call can feel overwhelming. In face-to-face conversations, we have distractions like gazing out of the window. On the phone, it can feel like the spotlight is on us – plus you can't see when the other

person is distracted or thinking, making pauses more awkward.

There are several techniques to help, starting by exposing yourself to more phone calls. The more you do it, the less overwhelming it becomes. Make a list of friends or colleagues you need to speak to and reflect on what makes you anxious for each one, such as making a mistake or feeling judged. When the call is over, acknowledging your success will help you stay motivated for the next call. If you think you might benefit from professional help, cognitive behavioural therapy is very effective for social anxiety.

Ilham Sebah is a teaching fellow in psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London. Originally published by TheConversation.com

