

Market Update Introduction

UK KEY MARKET MOVERS (CPI)

Percentage change over 12 months

Sugar, jam and syrups	9.4%
Chocolate and confectionery	9.4%
Vegetables	8.9%
Bread and cereals	8.1%
Oils and fats	8.0%
Fruit	7.1%
Meat	6.6%
Milk, cheese and eggs	2.7%
Fish	1.5%

The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) is a key measure of inflation in the UK. Movements in CPI give a high level overview of the key categories experiencing inflation. Below is a monthly snapshot of the top food commodity price inflation movements impacting the UK.

UK Inflation Indices

Latest Inflation Figures as of March 2024*	
Foodservice Price Index (FPI) Dec	13.8%
Food Price Inflation (CPI)	6.9%
Retail Price Index (RPI)	4.9%
Consumer Prices Index (CPI)	4.0%
Producer Price Index (PPI)	0.5%

* Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Sustainable switches

Fish:

When Salmon prices increase, we recommend chefs switch to Chalk Stream Trout, which generally doesn't see the same volatility in price.

Chalk Stream Trout is rated 'Best Choice' by the MCS as a sustainable alternative to Salmon due to the farms being fully segregated systems, minimising the impact on the environment and main rivers.

New season Mackerel is also a great local and competitively priced fish this month to put on specials menus!

Black olives:

Olives continue to be affected by a volatile season, due to crop damage leading to a significant reduction in availability.

Spain have limited supply to carry over from the previous season due to the poor harvest caused by adverse weather conditions. Additionally, poor crop growth in other regions is leading to further pressure on supply.

We recommend looking at alternative Antipasti options to reduce the use of Olives on menus. Where possible, consider the use of Capers, Roasted Red Peppers, Sundried Tomatoes and Pickles for a similar salty and tangy taste.

Dates for your Diary

- 17 Mar: St. Patrick's Day
- 18 Mar: Global Recycling Day
- 20 Mar: First Day of Spring
- 20 Mar: International Macaron Day
- 22 Mar: World Water Day
- 25 Mar: International Waffle Day
- 29 Mar: Good Friday
- 31 Mar: Easter Sunday
- 31 Mar: National Taco Day



Inflation Outlook

Despite continuing to soften month on month, we are still seeing food inflation at +6.9% versus last year. Additionally, with continuing geopolitical issues, such as the attacks in the Suez Canal, farmer protests in the EU and the new UK border checks, there remains a potential risk to supply which may drive prices further up in the coming months.

That said, to date our suppliers have been doing a great job so far in mitigating availability problems, and are continuing to monitor the market and pricing to ensure we are consistently sourcing and buying as competitively as we can.

EU Farmer Protests and UK Border Checks

Farmers across France, Spain, Italy and Belgium are staging protests, related to 'cheap farming', falling incomes and rising bureaucracy, causing severe disruption on major traffic routes.

France is the major through route for fresh produce on its journey to the UK, meaning there is a high risk of these products being delayed.

Additionally, new UK border checks began on 31st January, meaning there are now more checks being conducted on food and animal products imported from the EU.

With so much produce at this time of year being imported via the English Channel from France, we are expecting short-notice availability issues across various products including Cucumbers, Lettuce, Onions, Peppers and Citrus Fruits over the coming weeks due to the traffic jams and additional controls put in place at the border.

Whilst our suppliers face the challenge of being unable to stockpile goods due to short shelf life, they are working hard to re-route vehicles where possible and to date have not felt much of an impact on their supply chain, with products successfully clearing the border in a timely manner.

Fresh Produce

Cabbage

Some of the more specialist cabbage varieties continue to be heavily affected by the wet weather, which has seen gaps in supply as fields cannot be harvested and the product written off.

We are working with growers to try to identify additional supplies of Savoy, Kale and Cavolo Nero where we can, as we work to try to minimise the impact of the shortages.

Avocados

The market for avocados continues to be very short as we enter the pinch point of the season, ahead of the larger growing regions in Peru and South Africa reaching full production.

We have been working closely with our suppliers, utilising produce from a number of origins as we try to mitigate the problems that we have seen over the past few weeks. As a result, we do currently have supplies in stock and are balancing supply and demand well.

Berries

There is currently an issue with fruit coming from Morocco as we transition from the Agadir region to the more central Moulay Idriss Zerhoun area, where the temperatures are very low for the time of year. The overnight cold, which is seeing lows of around 4 degrees, is impacting the growth of the crop and its ripening.

While the market is very tight, we are not currently anticipating major shortages. Raspberries are the worst affected, followed by strawberries and blackberries. There is better news on blueberries, which are currently being sourced from South America and are in very good supply.

Grapes

There is good news on the grape front as supply has returned to normal following the recent shipping delays. However, as some grapes are currently coming from India, there could be some further ad-hoc delays with the wellreported problems in the Red Sea.

We are also monitoring the situation with Chilean grapes carefully as there have been some delays to the start of the season. This has the potential to manifest itself as shortages in mid-April.

Limes

There has been significant rainfall in Brazil, which has the potential to impact the quality of limes in the coming weeks. We are working with our suppliers to monitor the situation.

Melons

There is good news on melons as the vessels that were delayed en route from Central and South America have started to dock in the UK.

As we move into the Central American season, the product availability looks to be satisfactory, with the notable exception of Galia, where yields are reported to be lower than expected.

This could have an impact as we get further into the season. We currently have a size concession on watermelons as they are slightly smaller than usual.

Parsnips

The persistent wet weather and flooded fields have led to some serious issues with the parsnip crop, leading to the product rotting in the ground and diseases such as canker. This will mean an imminent and early finish to the UK season. With imported product not likely to be ready until around the start of May, the UK is facing around a month or so of limited availability.

We will work with suppliers to try to identify additional stocks, but as this is a market-wide issue impacting retail and foodservice, it is likely that the next few weeks will be very challenging.

Peppers

We have seen some intermittent issues with the quality of Class 2 peppers. We are working with suppliers and technical teams to try to minimise this, including picking the produce at a slightly more backward stage, albeit that could also lead to some additional colour break.

The next couple of weeks will start to see older peppers phased out and the newer ones coming in across Spain, soon to be followed by Dutch. This is much earlier than normal for the Dutch season, which has been driven by the mild winter.

Potatoes

While there is no change in the situation with potatoes, we are continuing to include it in the crop report as a reminder that we are expecting both quality and availability of potatoes to be problematic, and potentially deteriorate, over the coming months as we get further into stored product.

Pricing is soaring due to these issues and as we've also previously highlighted, the quality problems are impacting processed potatoes, with lower quality raw material causing issues for manufacturers.

With quality and availability not expected to improve, the issues will continue to deteriorate throughout the season.

Spring Greens

The recent inclement weather has caused some issues for Spring Greens. The situation has continued to deteriorate and most of the current crop is being written off as it cannot be harvested.

This is leading to gaps as the next fields are currently two to three weeks away from being ready, even under concession. We are working with suppliers to try to identify additional stock, but as this is a widespread problem, it is unlikely to be resolved until the new fields are harvested in a few weeks' time.

Tomatoes

With Ramadan having started, we are in close contact with our Moroccan suppliers so that we can react quickly in the event of a repeat of the export ban that was imposed across the state last year.

We are already in a much stronger position, having increased the number of origins for our tomatoes, reducing our reliance on Morocco at this time of year from around 45% to around 15%.

On round tomatoes, we have seen some quality issues due to the warm weather in Southern Europe/North Africa causing fruit to colour up more quickly on the plant before it reaches the right size, but we've widened our specification to allow smaller fruit which is delivering better quality.

Plum and Intense tomatoes are also seeing some ongoing quality issues with the product breaking down as it struggles to maintain sufficient shelf-life. On both these and round tomatoes, we are working with growers to strip plants of overripe fruit and picking the remaining crops at an earlier stage. We have also introduced additional checks at all stages of supply chain from the farm to the depot, which has reduced the number of rejections.

On beef tomatoes, we have diverted much of our requirement to Egypt, which has helped to raise the quality and availability of the produce as we approach the end of the Moroccan season.

Meat and Poultry

Beef

The price of cattle is increasing due to less availability coming onto the market since Christmas.

Production is expected to stay stable this year which should help to keep cost prices like those of last year, the Irish beef market is forecasted to have less availability for 2024 who usually supply most of their production to the UK so prices may firm up a little

Products that are still excellent value as we move towards spring are cuts like Chuck, Brisket, Braising Steak, Beef Daube, and the good old favourite mince beef! these are so versatile for chefs to use and offer value for money when menu planning.

Beef offal is always substantial value and is much cheaper when looking to save money – things like Ox Tail, Liver & Kidney are very nutritious and low in cholesterol.

The more premium cuts like steaks and joints are affordable and can offer high quality if used for Roast Dinner days and any special occasion menus customers have.

Pork and Gammon

Post Christmas sales remain good, and prices are attractive for buyers and chefs to keep pork and gammon on menus – its still the cheaper protein compared to beef and lamb.

For great value look at using boneless shoulder and belly for roasts and slow cooked meals and the flavours are amazing.

Demand for pork in the home market is stable with good supplies and prices in line with this time of year, manufactured products like sausages and cooked hams have slightly increased since Christmas due to recent demand.

Chicken and Turkey

Chicken sales are still high, and popularity remain strong since the new year as many customers choose a healthier diet.

In the UK chicken fillets are the most popular cut of choice but sales of boneless thigh meat offer more juicer and succulent product. The prices of boneless thigh meat are now more expensive than breast fillets currently which is a turnaround from 5 years ago which shows how the market demand has changed in line with consumer habits.

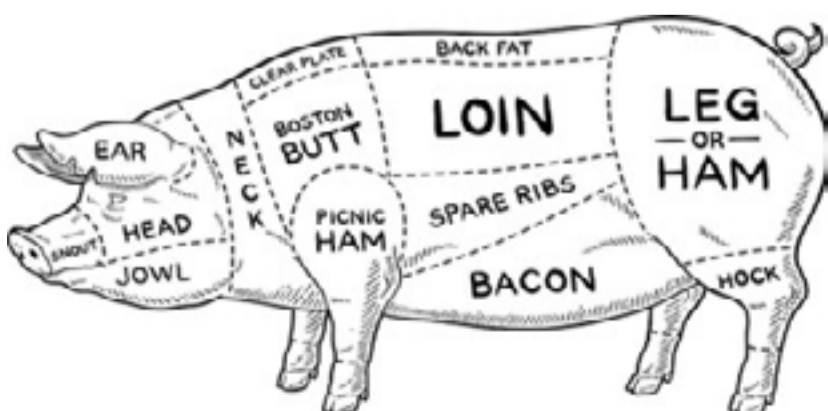
Chicken and Turkey prices are likely to remain about the same as this time last year – hopefully Turkey prices will ease back since the December demand which forced up prices in the UK.

Lamb

UK lamb prices are still a challenge to make affordable meal solutions for chefs and their kitchen team. The price of lamb continues to be expensive due to supply and demand together with large amounts being exported to EU as their consumption is much higher than in UK.

What we are looking at is to offer Mutton as a cheaper alternative to lamb – as mutton comes from older sheep the need to treat it differently by long slow cooking will still deliver a succulent and tender dish of food.

Cuts to try are diced mutton leg, minced mutton and bonelss mutton shoulder – prices are usually signicicantly cheaper than lamb – ideal for casseroles, curries and braised dishes..



Fish and Seafood

You may well be aware of the political unrest in various parts of the world at the moment. Having endured Brexit, a pandemic, and the consequences of the ongoing Ukraine war, we are now witnessing the effects of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Aside from the humanitarian crisis – details of which you have no doubt seen in the media, Houthi rebels are targeting ships transiting the Suez Canal in solidarity with Palestinians. As a result, the world's largest shipping firms are pausing shipments through the Red Sea after attacks along the crucial international trade route. This will have far-reaching effects for many industries, including ours, where there is a reliance on international imports

Salmon

Salmon prices reached extreme highs this month as Norwegian farms held stock in pens for longer than expected, which had knock on effects on availability.

Bass, Bream and Cod

Bass, Bream and Cod prices have risen due to a lack of availability and suppliers scrambling for stock.

Hake

Hake prices have eased this month following the end of the continental market for traditional fish.

Frozen and Seafood

Warmwater prawns are a great option currently. Prices have remained competitive on global over-supply, and we do not expect this situation to change.

Whether you use prawns in their shells marinated in garlic as a starter, or raw peeled prawns in pastas, they are always popular with customers. A great choice for the spring.

Frozen cod and haddock range are also ideal to combat the potential deterioration in quality of the fresh lines as they enter the spawning season.



Glasshouse

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerts / updates
Tomatoes (round)	Mediaz, Pitenza	Morocco, Spain	Amber	Overall volume is not necessarily plentiful, particularly on the best quality as we have seen this to be mixed over the past couple of weeks.
Tomatoes (beef)	Venecia, Maximo	Morocco, Spain	Amber	Quality from the older crops has been mixed and with shorter shelf life. Some new crops are just starting with better quality and larger sizes.
Tomatoes (plum)	Caniles	Morocco, Spain	Green	Volume dropping following high production yield over past weeks, particularly on the 57/67mm size as the percentage of 47/57 remains high. Expect the situation will start improving.
Tomatoes (vine)	Barbarela	Morocco, Spain	Green	Decent volume still available. Overall quality is good.
Cherry (vine)		Morocco, Spain	Green	Decent availability with the quality improving.
Cherry	Genio	Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, Spain	Green	Oversupply situation continues from all winter sources. Overall quality is good from Morocco, Spain whereas Egypt, Senegal slightly mixed quality and uneven colouration.
Heritage / INCA	Various	Spain	Green	Some of the varieties within the mix have been improving in terms of quality and availability.
Baby plum (mixed)	Orange and Red	Morocco	Green	No reported issues.
Marzanino	San Marzanino	Spain	Green	Subject to availability.



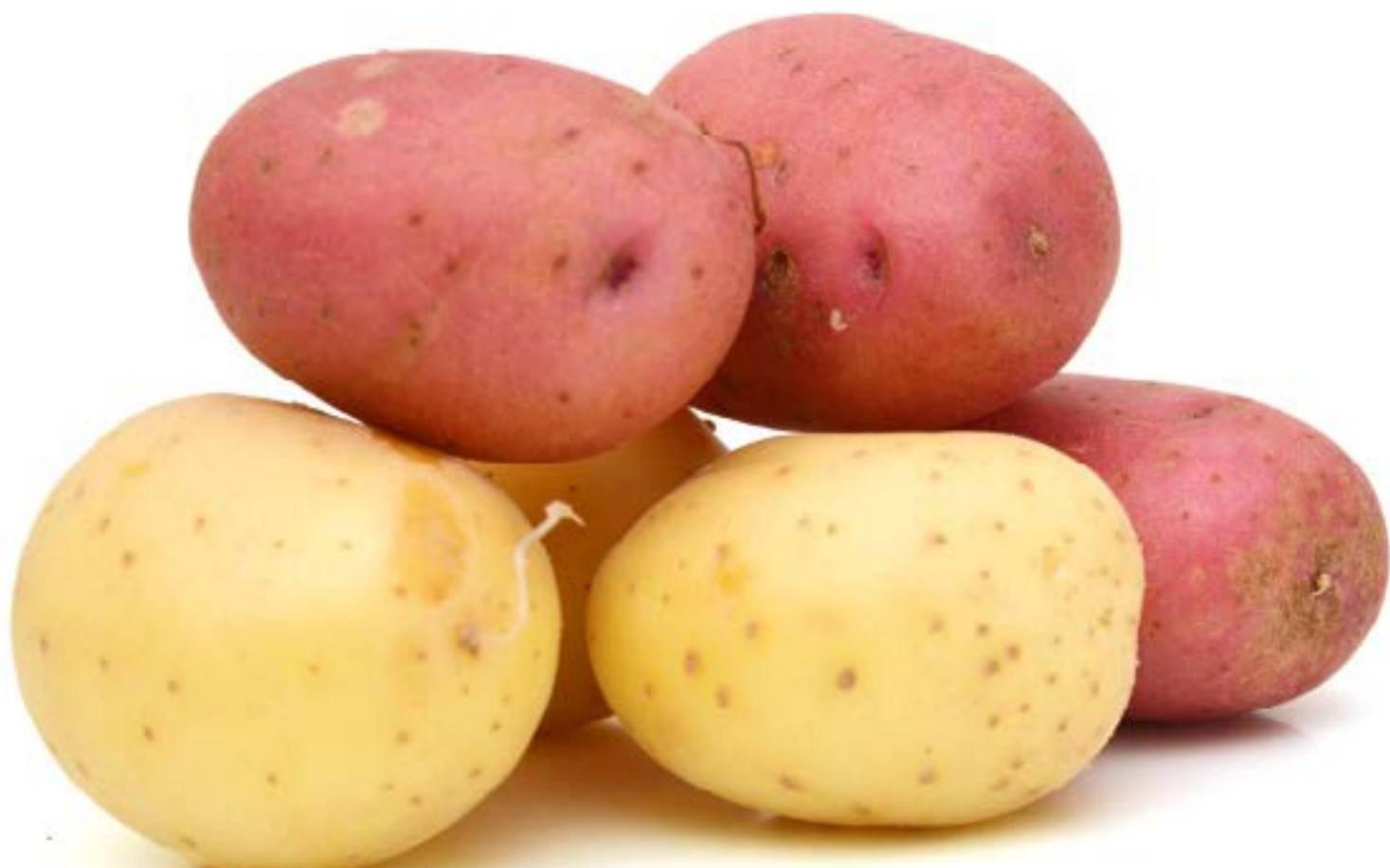
Glasshouse

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerts / updates
Peppers (bell)	Eglantine, Saitama	Spain	Green	Sufficient volume across all sizes, particularly on the larger sizes. Quality is generally good, odd % may have isolated break in colour upon arrival due to the warmer current climate.
Peppers	Padron and Sweet Pointed	Morocco, Spain	Green	Lower volumes due to cooler weather. Quality remains good. Isolated green tinge as growers are having to harvest earlier to meet demand.
Cucumber	Proloog mainly	Morocco, Spain	Green	Older crops finishing, and the quality is beginning to suffer. New crops slowly starting with better quality.
Chillies (green bullet)	Fresno	Kenya	Green	
Sweet pointed peppers		Morocco, Spain	Green	Stable supply, good quality, isolated green tinge.
Chillies (red bullet)	Fresno	Kenya	Amber	Virus issues reducing volume though enough to cover current orders.
Chillies (green birds eye)	Demon	Kenya	Green	
Chilli	Jalapeno	Morocco, Portugal, Spain	Green	
Chilli	Padron	Morocco, Spain	Amber	Limited supply.
Aubergine		Kenya, Spain	Green	Overall quality is generally good, although isolated dry calyx can be evident due to the warm conditions for the time of the year.
Courgette	Tosc, Lagoda	Spain	Green	Older crops coming to an end; new spring crops just about starting as they have been brought forward too by warmer weather.



Potatoes

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerts / updates
Mids.	Nectar, Lanorma, Orchestra, Diva, Melody, Cutra	UK	Amber	Challenges to get growers to load stocks as they worry about enough volume to cover contracts. Spot market for a lot of maincrop for the best material upwards of £500 pt, at least £200 above usual levels. Mids. particularly scarce as lowered sizing by the retail trade has swallowed up most of the 40-45mm mids.
Bakers	Nectar, Lanorma, Alison, Melody, Orchestra, Jelly, Cutra, Diva	UK	Green	All from stores now. Some concern about late lifted material.
Chippers / Roasters	Maris Piper, Markies, Sagitta, Tyson	UK	Green	Piper showing flecks of scab.
Reds	Desree, Mozart	UK	Green	
Salads	Charlotte, Jazzy, Gwenne, La Ratte	UK	Green	No immediate issue with quality.
Sweet	Beauregard	Egypt. USA	Green	



Onions

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerns / updates
Brown		Netherlands, UK	Green	UK: still evaluating store losses on sets. Some internal issues being spotted but nothing at a level to cause concern at this stage.
Red		Netherlands, UK	Green	UK: short term availability is good. Longer term still needs to be assessed now crops are harvested and in store. Quality ok.
Shallot	Banana	France	Green	
Shallot	Round	France	Green	
Spring	White Lisbon	Egypt	Green	Quality remains good. Some challenges with boat arrivals.



Root Vegetables

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerts / updates
Carrot	Nairobi, Norwich, Polydor, Octavo, Eskimo, Norfolk	UK	Amber	Challenges remain and mostly weather driven. Beginning to see real quality concerns for the late season Scottish crops due to recent waves of warmer temperatures. Furthermore, over 700 mm of rainfall since October and early frosts when strawing has created perfect conditions for quality issues and losses.
Celeriac	Prinz	UK	Green	
Swede	Magres, Tweed	UK	Green	
Turnip	Armand, Hammerhead	UK	Amber	Limited availability of the Armand (purple top) variety. Hammerhead (white) variety as a contingency measure.
Mooli		Italy	Green	
Radish		Netherlands, Italy	Green	
Beetroot	Candy, Golden, Red	UK, Netherlands	Green	
Vac Pac Beetroot	Red	Lithuania	Green	
Parsnip	Javelin, Picador, Gladiator, Warrior, Palace, Panorama	UK	Green	Some harvesting challenges following recent storms, saturated ground making it difficult for the heavy lifting equipment to access the fields.



Soft Fruit

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerts / updates
Strawberries	Fortuna, Sensation	Morocco, Spain	Amber	The weather in Spain over the past 10/14 days has been far from ideal, with rain and then very humid weather resulting in some challenging growing conditions. The consequence of this is that we have had predominantly Moroccan fruit lately, which although somewhat larger than the Spanish fruit, has yielded more reliable quality. Going forward, we expect to continue with dual Spanish / Morocco supply, continuing initially with Moroccan fruit, then switching to Spanish when the quality is more assured.
Raspberries	Adelita, Nobility, Remotion	Morocco, Spain	Amber	Spain: Volumes low at present due to general decrease in productive capacity in Spain and extreme temperature in the phase of vegetative growth of the current production. Yields currently building.
Redcurrants	Rovada	Netherlands	Green	
Blackberries	Various	Mexico	Amber	Higher degree of red cells present in comparison to other regions, characteristic of the Central American region.
	Tupi	Guatemala	Amber	Higher degree of red cells present in comparison to other regions, characteristic of the Central American region.
	Various	Spain	Amber	Volumes low at present due to extreme temperature in the phase of vegetative growth of the current production. Yields currently building.
Blueberries	Various	Chile	Green	
	Various	South Africa	Green	Good quality coming through. No adverse impact on availability.



Melon

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerts / updates
Cantaloupe	1044, Caribbean Gold, Caribbean Smile, Domador, Don David, DRG 3228, Orange County, SV1044, SV3159ML, Zanaz, Zucard	Brazil	Amber	Issues with availability from source and vessel delays.
Yellow Honeydew	Berlin, Dali, Gold News, Goldex, Jadeal, Manda Chuva	Brazil	Amber	Lower levels of light sporadic tea staining, stalk mould and some scruffiness seen. Issues with availability from source and vessel delays.
Galia	Bossa, DRG 3228, McLaren, NUM 67007, SVM G5224	Brazil	Amber	Light pepper spotting noted. Issues with availability from source and vessel delays.
Watermelon	6411, 8881, 39277, 50044, 50046, 051, ACX 6177, Ana, Arriba, Durlinda, Eclipse, Embassy, Essence, Estona, Excite-50027, Exclamation, Expert, Felipe, Harmonium, Lola, Mielhart, NUN 31810, NUN 32007, NUN 32010, Papagaio, Quetzali, Shoreline, Style, Tri Durlinda, Troubadour, Yellow buttercup	Brazil	Amber	Rots, stalk rots and stem end mould. Issues with availability from source and vessel delays.



Top Fruit

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerts / updates
Apple	Braeburn	France, Italy, Spain	Amber	Variable PSI but eating well with good colour and skin finish. Some isolated puncture which is very common in Braeburn variety.
	Granny Smith	Serbia	Green	
	Pink Lady	France, Italy	Green	Good quality on arrival, eating well with good psi & brix.
	Golden Delicious	Italy	Green	No issues predicted.
	Red Delicious	France, Italy	Green	Minor bruising seen on arrival. Availability has improved and should be maintained.
	Royal Gala	UK	Green	Good eat, sweet, no quality issues as predicted. Availability currently good though this could tighten up in April.
	Bramley	UK	Green	Good quality with strong pressures. Contingency sourcing from Northern Ireland through to June.
Plum	Ruby Sun	South Africa	Green	45 mm+ diameters. 50 mm + diameters already short in South Africa.



Avocado

Product	Variety	Origin	Status	Highlighted concerts / updates
Avocado	Hass	Colombia	Amber	Isolated rot & mixed pressures being seen in raw material - extra measures have been taken to ensure pressures are taken by grower.
		Morocco	Green	
		Mexico	Amber	Odd stem and rot seen.
		Spain	Amber	Less fruit available and smaller sizing due to heat/drought.
		Israel	Green	No quality issues, ripens well with good flavour. Sufficient availability though can substitute with another sourced if needed.




Any questions?

Please contact your Account Manager if you have any questions about this month's news.

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