CONSUMER INSIGHTS

October 2019

IMPORTANCE OF SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS

Seasonal celebrations and events represent important and lucrative times of the year for retail and foodservice channels. Some result in strong uplifts in sales, high levels of advertising spend and an influx of new product launches.

Christmas is the pinnacle celebration in many people's calendars, with the end of the year being a time for family, gifting and overindulgence of food and drink. The importance is recognised with a deluge of innovation and offers hitting the market weeks before the actual event. However, this makes it difficult to stand out from the crowd. This report examines recent trends for Christmas and other celebrations such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Halloween, highlighting their importance and opportunities for AHDB sector products, both in retail and foodservice.

KEY FACTS AND INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITIES

- **Uplifts in grocery spend are seen around all seasonal celebrations and events. Christmas is worth the most seeing a seasonal uplift in sales of +22%, followed by Easter at +7% and Halloween at +4%**
- **Brits love an excuse for a party, so even ad-hoc events provide an opportunity to boost sales, particularly sporting events and royal weddings**
- **Consumers spend 48% more on 'special' meals, highlighting opportunities for trade-up. Ensure tiering systems are clear and utilise seasonal new product development to drive people into stores**
- **Consumers spend more time preparing 'special' meals and scratch cooking is increasing. Provide meal inspiration, focusing on indulgence and tradition with a twist**
- **Convenience remains key for 31% of people, so ensure shortcut products have strong visibility**
- **The foodservice market is highly seasonal, with consumers eating out more in the warmer months. Support summer events as well as Christmas**
- **Capitalise on events through activation in store and innovation, as well as providing the consumer with simple solutions and value for money**

AHDB SECTOR SUMMARY

The importance of AHDB sectors differs by event. It is important to understand when there is demand and provide support as needed. The table below provides a summary of the cuts and formats that offer big wins and some key opportunities. These are discussed in more detail throughout the report.

	Pork	Lamb	Beef	Potatoes	Dairy
Christmas	Gammon Sausages Bacon Roasting joints		Roasting joints	Roast potatoes Pre-prepared potatoes	Cheese Butter Cream
Bonfire Night & Halloween	Sausages Ribs Roasting joints Pulled pork		Mince Stewing	Chips Wedges Jacket potatoes	Milk Butter
Mother's Day		Roasting joints			Yogurt
Easter		Roasting joints		Roast potatoes Pre-prepared potatoes	Cream Butter
Valentine's Day			Steak Mince Marinades	Pre-prepared potatoes	
Father's Day			Burgers Steak		
Pancake Day					Milk

Figure 1. Cuts/formats that currently see strong seasonal uplifts per event

Opportunities for AHDB sectors

- Opportunities exist to further push all AHDB sectors at various events, from family meals to parties. The rise in scratch cooking should also be utilised
- Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day provide good opportunities for sausages and bacon, as well as some dairy products, such as yogurt, for breakfast in bed
- Father's Day meals are becoming more dish-based, especially when the weather is cooler; inspire meals that include various meat cuts, such as mince, stewing, frying and grilling, with accompanying potato dishes. Whatever the weather, barbecue products are key because these can be cooked indoors as well as outdoors
- Gatherings around Christmas time provide an opportunity to inspire 'winter warming' shareable meals and party dishes
- Heatwaves can change plans. Make sure barbecue products are available, as well as traditional roasting joints, at all events across the summer months
- Make sure AHDB sector products feature in meal deals, particularly around Valentine's Day and party food offerings, particularly at Christmas
- Convenience options should have high visibility at all events

VALUE OF SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS TO THE FOOD AND DRINK RETAIL MARKET

In retail, seasonal celebrations and events offer huge consumer exposure opportunities to in-store activations. According to Kantar, 99% of the population buys groceries at every key event. Grocery spend is highest at Christmas and, in 2018, spend levels reached £5.4bn two weeks before the big event - +22% more than during an average two weeks of the year. Other celebrations seeing spend increases are Easter with seasonal uplifts of +7% and Halloween +4%, highlighting the increased footfall at these times.

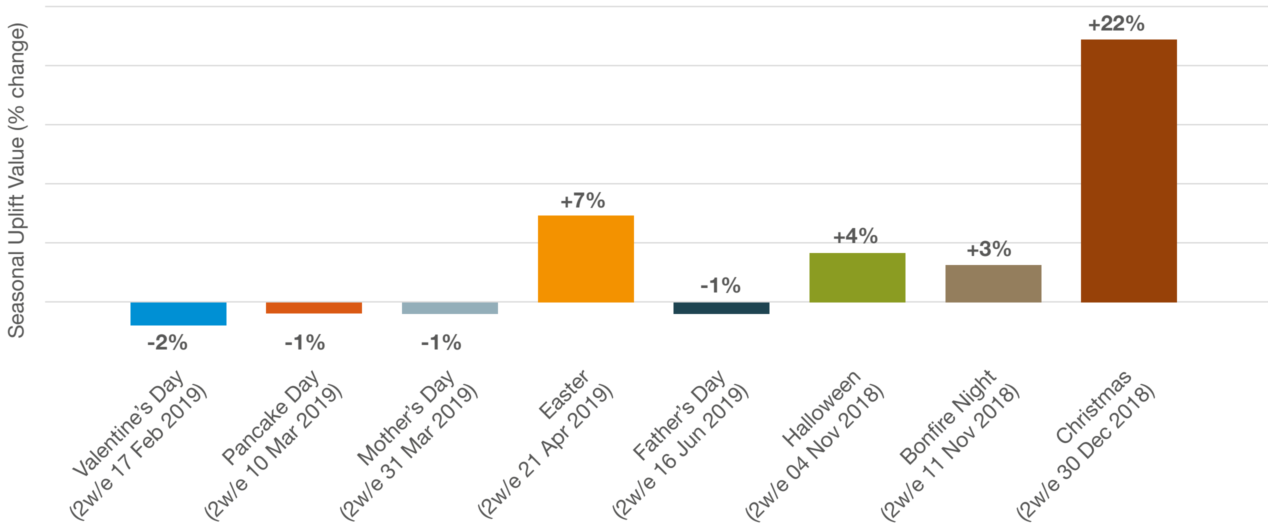


Figure 2. Grocery spend uplift (% change) vs. an average 2 weeks of the year

Source: Kantar Total Grocery

Despite all celebrations incurring a greater spend, the only event that has a significant increase in basket size, and therefore more food items being purchased, is Christmas. For other events, basket size remains consistent, so the higher spend comes from consumers trading up to premium products or retailers.

According to Kantar Usage, when we eat 'special' meals, we spend 48% more on the plate – and this is increasing year-on-year. Christmas, unsurprisingly, has the highest average plate cost at £3.50 compared with a standard meal at £1.30. Meals on Father's Day typically cost a bit more than meals on Mother's Day, being £1.75 and £1.51 respectively. The cheapest event is Halloween, when the focus on children seems to drive down the average plate cost.

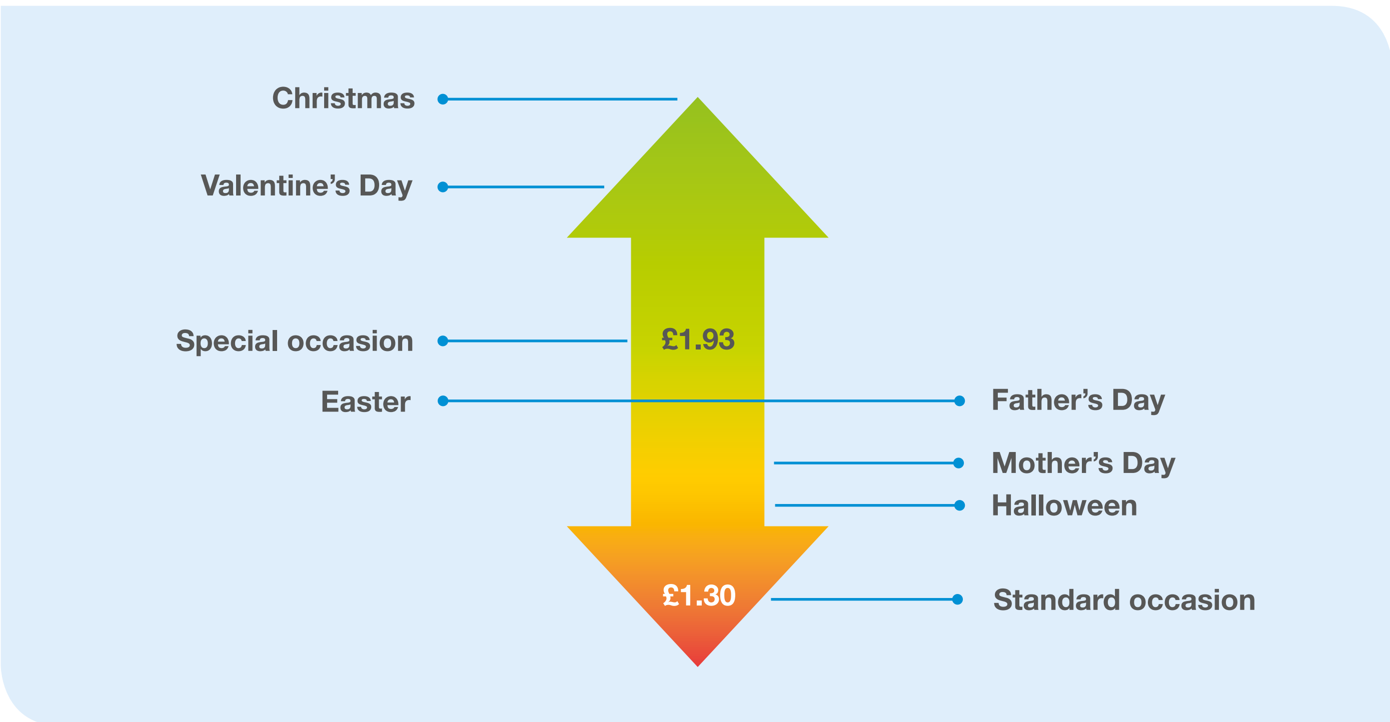


Figure 3. Average spend per plate

Source: Kantar Usage, 4 w/e data for special occasion

WHAT CONSUMERS WANT FROM CELEBRATORY MEALS IN THE HOME

As consumers spend more, their requirements for a ‘special’ meal become more demanding. According to Mintel, the top three factors people look for when buying food for seasonal occasions are tradition, indulgence and something different to what they normally buy. This highlights the need for correct messaging on pack and at point of purchase to help drive sales (Mintel Seasonal Celebration Foods Report, UK, May 2019). Despite tradition being a priority, unpredictable weather can shift people away from tradition during certain seasonal celebrations, as seen during Easter in 2019, when the hot weather led to barbecues making an appearance. Therefore, retailers must plan for all eventualities.

Celebratory meals typically entail more effort. Consumers are more likely to scratch-cook on special occasions. In the UK, the average time taken to prepare a meal is 23 minutes; however, at Christmas, this figure almost doubles. It also appears that meals on Father’s Day take longer than Mother’s Day – 44 minutes compared with just 28 minutes (Kantar Usage, 4 w/e data for special occasion).

Celebrations usually involve family, friends and balancing time between the kitchen and guests. Although people are willing to spend more time preparing celebratory meals, there is still a need for convenience with 31% of people who buy food for seasonal occasions claiming this is important for the food they choose for these events (Mintel Seasonal Celebration Foods Report, UK, May 2019). Shortcuts, such as ready-to-cook and pre-prepared elements, are therefore vital for some people to complete a meal.

Unsurprisingly, health is lower on the agenda when celebrating special occasions. Health is typically a driver of food choice for 33% of in-home meals, but this drops to 26% for meals around Mother’s Day and as low as 21% at Christmas (Kantar Usage, 4 w/e data for special occasion). The most health-conscious events are Father’s Day and Easter, with the latter indicating parents are more inclined to provide healthier dinners at Easter to compensate for their children’s high intake of chocolate. However, as health becomes more prevalent in society – with 58% of shoppers who buy food for seasonal occasions currently claiming they would like to see more healthy foods with a seasonal twist (Mintel Seasonal Celebration Foods Report, UK, May 2019) – is there an opportunity to be had?

Figure 4. Average preparation time

Source: Kantar Usage, 4 w/e data for special occasion

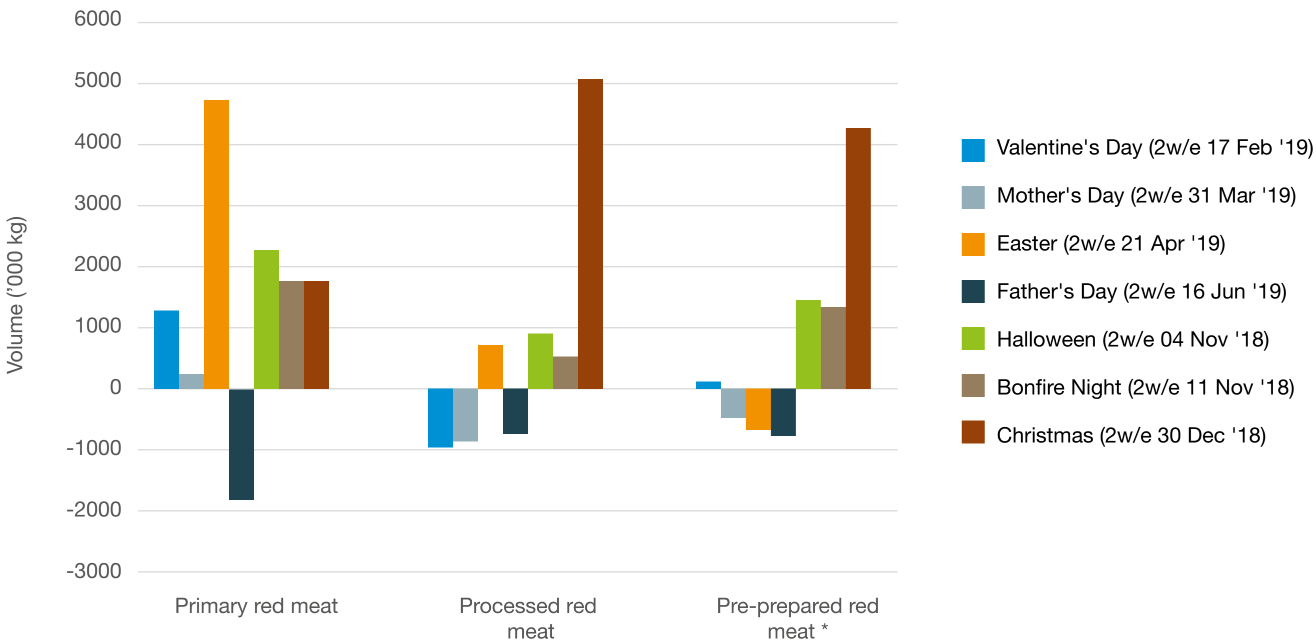


Figure 5. Volume (000s kg) uplift vs typical fortnight excluding Christmas – primary red meat and processed red meat

*Includes ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat meals, chilled main meal accompaniments, pastry products and other added value products

Source: Kantar

THE IMPORTANCE OF AHDB SECTOR PRODUCTS AT THESE IN-HOME EVENTS

AHDB sector products feature prominently on 'special' plates: meat and potatoes in main dishes and dairy in desserts. Christmas, as mentioned, is the biggest event in the grocery calendar, but is it the biggest event for meat, dairy and potatoes? Does the presence of certain proteins, formats and cuts differ by event? Understanding category differences will allow industry to better plan for demand and play on opportunities.

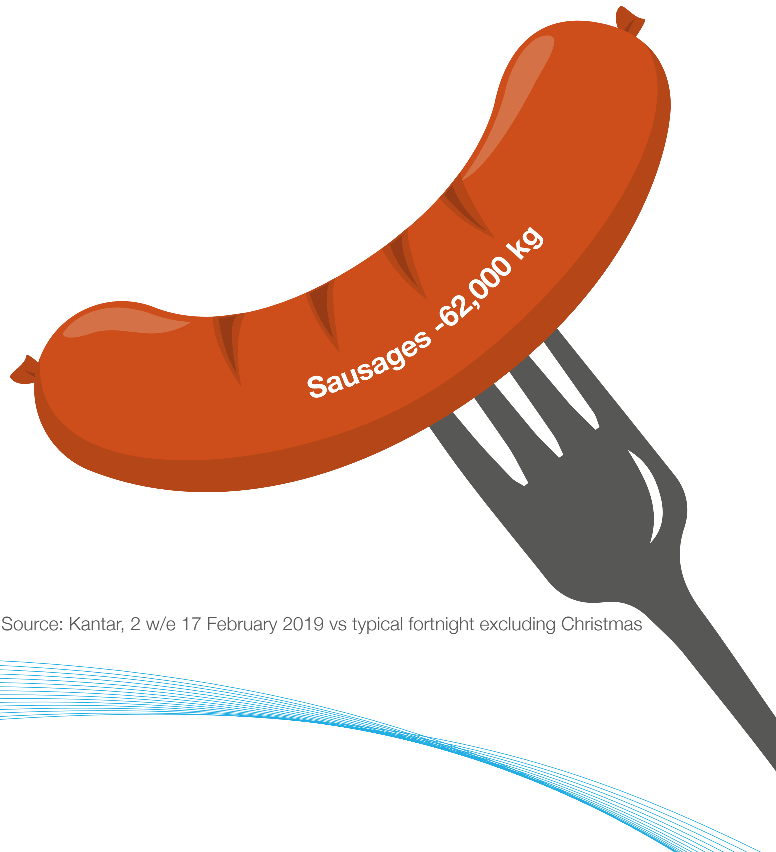
Red meat

Compared with total grocery, primary red meat exhibits some seasonal differences. Despite Christmas being the biggest seasonal event for retail, it's Easter that produces the biggest uplift in primary red meat sales, followed by Halloween and then Christmas. For processed red meat, Christmas remains the most important event, followed by Halloween and Easter. This highlights the importance of dominant shelf space for meat at key events.

Let's look at the key events in more detail.

Valentine's Day is the first key event of the year, always falling on 14 February, so it is the first seasonal uplift for the red meat category. The good news for protein is that it features in 65% of romantic main meals in February and is 10% more likely to be served during this month than at any other time in the year (Kantar Usage). Romance seems to mean beef – specifically steaks. People are 14 times more likely to have a steak dinner in February than at any other time of the year. This highlights the importance of prime positioning in store. Sales of mince and stewing cuts also increase in February, given the association between Italian dishes and romance.

Valentine's Day could also provide opportunities for processed pork products, especially when the event falls on a weekend. This year, when Valentine's Day was a Thursday, sales of sausages experienced a seasonal downturn as people rushed to work in the morning. However, 24% of shoppers would prefer to have breakfast in bed on Valentine's Day, but only 8% currently do (Kantar Usage LinkQ, February 2019). Hot breakfast inspiration could therefore entice shoppers in to the category.



Source: Kantar, 2 w/e 17 February 2019 vs typical fortnight excluding Christmas

Mother's Day has the lowest seasonal uplift for primary red meat and sales of processed red meat actually experience a downturn (Kantar, 2 w/e 31 March 2019). Falling so close to Easter, always 3 weeks before, roasting joints drive the primary uplifts, with lamb having the highest seasonal gains. However, the low uplift of Mother's Day compared to other events highlights an opportunity to push the infamous roast dinner more.

Another opportunity lies in breakfast. Only 7% of mothers were made breakfast in bed this year (Kantar LinkQ, April 2019) and morning goods, such as croissants, demonstrated strong seasonal uplifts. Once again, opportunities exist for the processed category to market hot breakfast items for Mother's Day.

The association between **Easter** and lamb means that Easter is the most important celebration for primary red meat. Sixteen per cent of all primary lamb roasting joints were sold over the Easter period in 2019 (Kantar, 2 w/e 21 April 2019), This was despite the later holiday hitting an early summer heatwave and turning some people away from protein roasting joints (–732K kg during Easter week 2019 vs Easter week 2018) towards barbecues with burgers (+691K kg during Easter week 2019 vs Easter week 2018). However, the defiant year-on-year uplift of +4.9% for lamb roasting not only showed the importance of the traditional sit-down meal, whatever the weather, but also the need for retailers to plan for all eventualities. In 2019, burger demand increased because of the warmer weather. This might not be repeated in 2020 because Easter falls earlier during April when temperatures are likely to be cooler.

Father's Day has the most potential to push red meat further through a variety of cuts. In 2019, there was decreased demand for both primary red meat and processed red meat (driven by pork) during the 2 weeks before Father's Day (Kantar, 2 w/e 16 June 2019). Given that more money and time is spent on Father's Day meals, why does this not translate to an increase in red meat sales? This year saw a shift towards more dish-based cuisines, such as homemade Italian, Indian and Mexican meals that didn't necessarily feature red meat. Instead, the poultry and fish categories seemed to benefit. Therefore, providing red meat meal inspiration using mince, stewing, strips etc. and focusing on a variety of dishes that 'dad will love' would be beneficial.

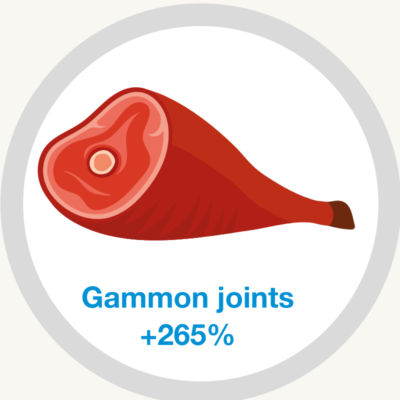
When the sun is out, barbecues provide a big opportunity to push red meat further. While 2019 was a bit gloomy, there were still some slight seasonal uplifts for burgers, marinades and steaks. According to Kantar Usage, despite the cooler weather, people were five times more likely to barbecue these items on Father's Day than at any other time of the year. However, the cooler temperatures did mean that oven cooking was the main cooking method in 2019. These cuts have experienced much stronger seasonal uplifts in warmer years (such as in 2017). Therefore, barbecue options are key in all weathers (with communication when relevant about cooking in home), as well as other dish-based cuisines.

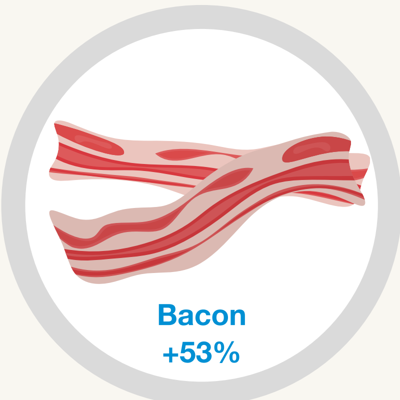
Halloween and Bonfire Night fall very close together, but are both events that typically involve parties. Both cause substantial seasonal uplifts for primary and processed red meat and, despite traditionally being seen as events for kids, the number of adult parties being held is increasing. According to Kantar, 73% of Halloween grocery sales in 2018 came from households with no children, with the greatest spend uplift coming from under-28s (2 w/e 4 November 2018).

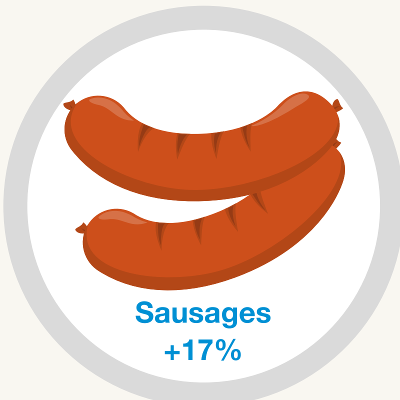
These two celebrations benefit primary roasting joints, mince and stewing, with hearty, warming, sharing meals being prominent at these times. Sausages and ambient frankfurters are a favourite on Bonfire Night and pork ribs at Halloween (Kantar, 2 w/e to seasonal event). Pizza also spikes at this time of year because it is good for sharing. This not only provides an opportunity for pre-prepared pizzas, but also build-your-own options in store or at home. Providing inspiration for perfect crowd-pleasers is therefore key.

Christmas is the biggest event for total meat, fish and poultry sales, driven largely by turkey, our festive favourite. It is also the biggest event for processed red meat sales, driven by gammon, with 23% of all gammon sales taking place in December last year (Kantar, 4 w/e 30 December 2018). Strong shelf space, as well as clear cooking and serving guidance, is therefore key around Christmas. Also in the spotlight are sausages and bacon for those all-important pigs in blankets.

Despite a +9% seasonal uplift driven by roasting joints (Kantar, 2 w/e 30 December 2018), Christmas is only the third biggest event for primary red meat, with beef and pork suffering the most. The continued domination of the roast means that there is less demand for cuts such as steaks, mince and diced meat. Given that the weekends around Christmas become more important for holding gatherings, could a festive twist on dishes involving these meat cuts drive sales further?







Source: Kantar, 2 w/e 30 December 2018 vs typical fortnight excluding Christmas

Other areas for the red meat category to consider are:

The importance of the Islamic festivals **Ramadan, Eid-al-Adha and Eid-al-Fitr**. Ramadan is a period of fasting, but the daily breaking of the fast, iftar, is a time for large family meals, which often feature heavily meat, particularly sheep meat. Some Muslim households begin bulk meat shopping for Ramadan a few days before the month-long event, while others prefer to spread their shopping trips throughout the period of fasting. This provides an opportunity for retailers to attract Muslim shoppers for an extended period of up to 5 weeks. Eid-al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, while Eid-al-Adha takes place approximately 70 days later. During Eid-al-Adha, sheep are sacrificed as an offering to God, with specific requirements for mature animals that are fit, healthy and lean. There is often a small uplift in prices for lambs meeting these requirements in the run up to the festive period.

Meal deals drive significant sales and can encourage ‘everyday events’. For seasonal celebrations, they are extremely important. This year, on Valentine’s Day, 7.5% of the UK population indulged in a meal deal featuring meat. These typically include a meat-based component, which is usually a cut that is quick and easy to cook, such as steak, or added value options like ready-to-cook or marinades. Meat needs accompaniments, so this also provides an opportunity for potatoes through indulgent convenient options, such as chilled, pre-prepared potatoes and desserts involving cream or ice cream. While meal deals experienced a seasonal uplift around Valentine’s Day 2019, year-on-year sales declined. Therefore, a task lies in maintaining their appeal and relevance among consumers. An opportunity also lies in tapping into other celebratory family occasions, thus widening the appeal of meal deals beyond couples. For example, in a 2019 Father’s Day promotion, Iceland offered shoppers a free bottle of beer when they purchased two large pizzas, providing a convenient family dine-in solution, with a treat for dad.

Sales of meat-based **party food** peaks over the Christmas period. These festive spikes have become more pronounced over the past 5 years, highlighting increased popularity. Is there an opportunity to push party food further at other celebratory events, particularly Halloween and Bonfire Night, when party food currently experiences a seasonal downturn?

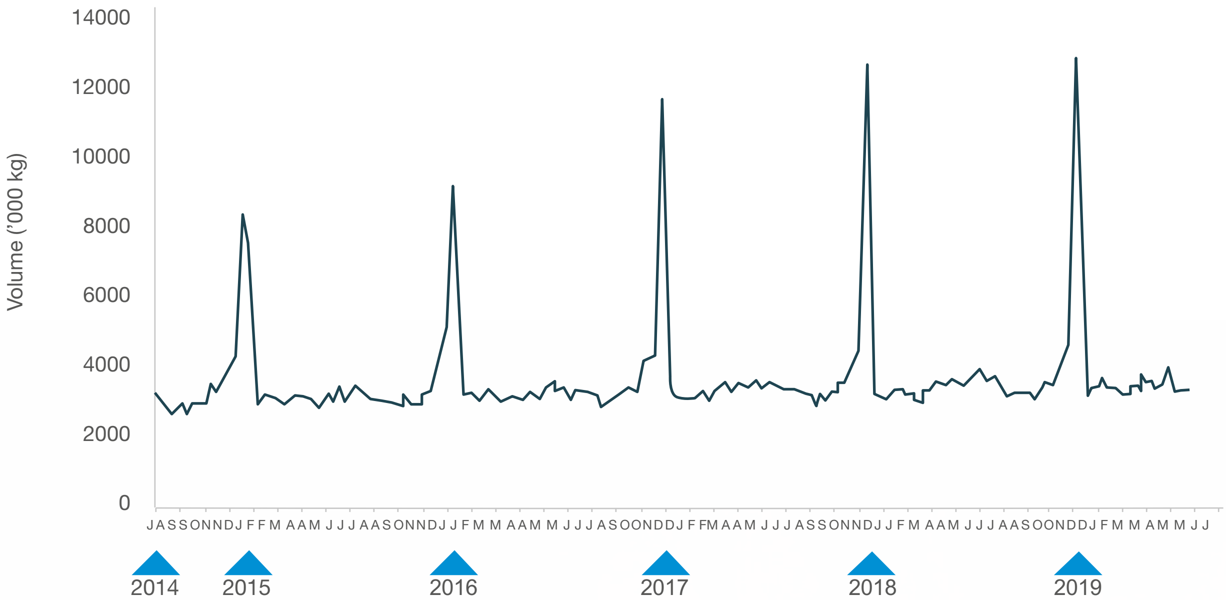


Figure 6. Volume trend (‘000 kg) of meat-based party food

Source: Kantar

Potatoes

The performance of fresh potato sales is linked with events involving roast dinners. According to Kantar, the highest seasonal uplifts are therefore at **Christmas and Easter**, with these combined events driving increased sales of 29m kg of fresh potatoes during the 2 weeks prior. **Halloween and Bonfire Night** are also important and drive significant volume sales. This is more likely to be through party-based options, such as handmade chips and wedges, as well as warming jacket potatoes. Inspiring a variety of potato-based sharing dishes would push the category further at these events.

Other potato formats experience uplifts at all events apart from **Mother's Day and Father's Day**. Pre-prepared chilled potatoes over-index at Christmas, with consumers looking to cut corners. Meal deals help to drive sales around **Valentine's Day.** Creamy potato gratin was particularly popular in 2019. Crisps actually under-index at all events apart from Halloween, Bonfire Night and Christmas. Crisps are easy to serve at parties, so the premium tiering of crisps is a good tactical potato product to push at all events.

There are opportunities to push all potato formats more around **Mother's Day and Father's Day** because they currently show little or no uplift around these events. Communication and in-store activation is key to making sure that fresh potatoes are part of the celebratory dish at these times. Inspiring use of different varieties will also communicate the versatility of the spud. For other potato formats, such as pre-prepared, make sure the convenience and quality of these products is made clear, given the special nature of the meals.

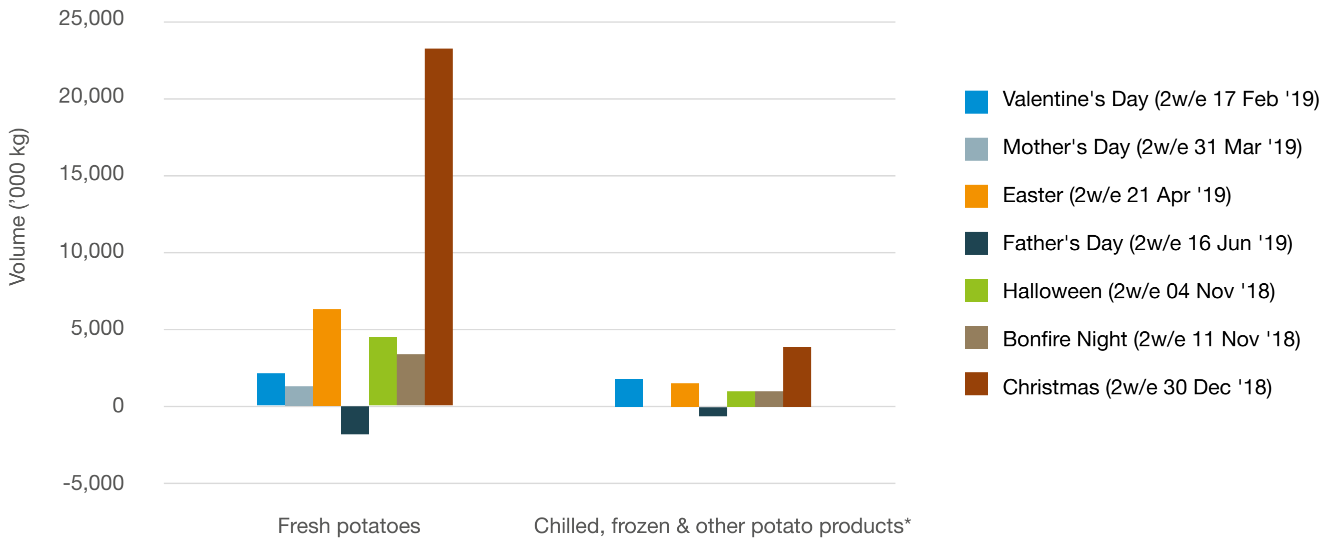


Figure 7. Volume ('000 kg) uplift vs typical fortnight excluding Christmas

*Other includes crisps and snacks

Source: Kantar

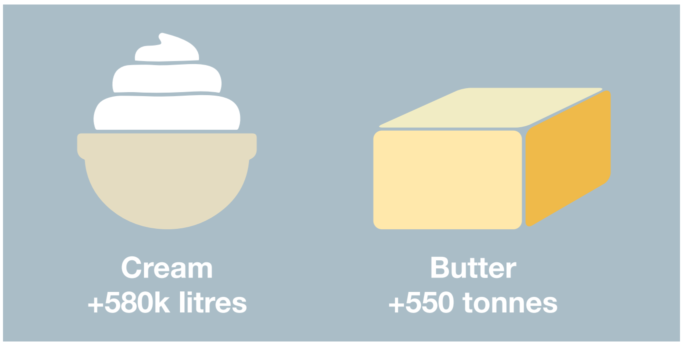
Dairy

Although it is a staple category, dairy is still very reliant on events to increase sales. The indulgence of dairy, as well as its use in scratch cooking, makes it extremely important for all events – but this does not mean it cannot be pushed further by encouraging more home baking and scratch cooking, or by promoting dairy-based desserts as treats.

When analysing dairy, we need to consider that changes in demand for some dairy products (e.g. peaks during certain celebrations) affect overall demand for the source: raw milk. Therefore, we have taken individual category data and converted this into raw milk volumes* to assess the overall impact. The result of this is uplifts in dairy sales at all seasonal events. The figure below highlights when certain categories need on-shelf prominence.

Christmas is the most important event for increasing raw milk demand. Normal behaviour is disrupted and shoppers buy less milk at Christmas than they do in a normal two-week period (–1.7% volume). Sales of yogurt, which is often associated with healthy eating, also drop sharply (–41.2% volume) (Kantar, 2 w/e 30 December 2018). However, these declines are outweighed by increased demand for cheese, butter and cream, as consumers seek indulgence. In fact, according to Kantar, 11% of cream is sold in the 2 weeks leading up to Christmas – a seasonal uplift of 202%. The top three varieties of cheese at Christmas (apart from cheddar) are Wensleydale, brie and stilton, while camembert sales also enjoy a strong seasonal uplift. These products require much more raw milk per unit produced and therefore outweigh the reduced demand for liquid milk and yogurt. This also means that, at Christmas, demand is mostly for milk fat rather than protein. In fact, most key events drive up demand for milk fat more than protein.

At **Easter**, demand for raw milk is boosted by sales of cream and butter; key ingredients for baking and butter for hot cross buns. Together, they increase the demand for milk by 17m litres. Sales of yogurt dipped by 340 tonnes at Easter, replaced by chocolate eggs as the go-to pudding (Kantar, 2 w/e 21 April 2019).



Source: Kantar, 2 w/e 21 April 2019 vs typical fortnight excluding Christmas

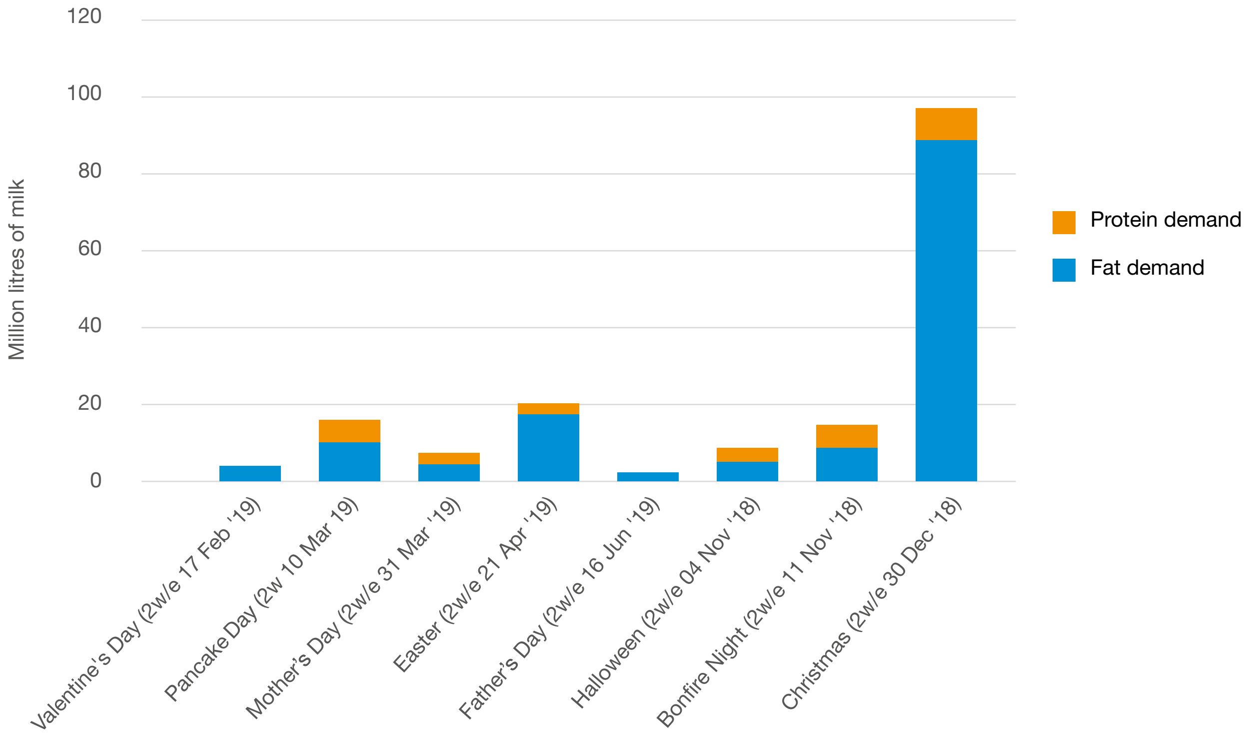


Figure 8. Raw milk volume (million litres) uplift vs typical fortnight excluding Christmas

*Uplift calculated from sales of milk, cheese, yogurt, butter and cream, converted into raw milk volume required per unit. Conversion assumes typical yields for the main product type in the category. For example, cheese sales assume a standard cheddar cheese milk yield.

Source: Kantar/AHDB

Pancake Day is the third most important event for raw milk sales, with a greater proportion of the demand being for protein (although fat still dominates). Raw milk sales are driven by liquid milk, a key ingredient in pancakes; in the two weeks ending 10 March 2019, 5.8m more litres were sold than in a normal two-week period (+2.7%). Demand for cheese and butter also grew, but demand for yogurt and cream was lower (Kantar, 2 w/e 10 March 2019).

Bonfire Night and Halloween both experience increased demand for liquid milk and butter, but sales of other dairy categories are relatively subdued at these events. There is increased demand for warming hot drinks and more home baking for these events, both of which require milk fat (Kantar, 2 w/e for special occasion).

Mother's Day and Father's Day have relatively smaller effects on demand for raw milk, although Mother's Day is the only event associated with a seasonal uplift for yogurt (+3.7% volume compared to a normal two-week period). Yogurt may feature in more breakfast-in-bed occasions around Mother's Day, providing opportunities for luxury products to target treating occasions.

Valentine's Day also has a small impact on raw milk demand, but is unusual because demand is driven by protein, rather than fat. This is because, although there is a small uplift in demand for butter, all other categories except liquid milk fall back. Liquid milk had an uplift of 3.4%, meaning protein demand was greater than fat demand at Valentine's Day (Kantar, 2 w/e 17 February 2019)

Other events

Not all events are traditional or annual – consumers love any excuse for a party! According to Foresight Factory, 57% of consumers claim to have a party or large group gathering at their home at least a few times a year (July 2018). Sporting events and royal weddings provide an opportunity to boost spend.

Wimbledon and the football World Cup in 2018 gained extensive media attention, which translated in store. According to IGD, 9% of shoppers claim to have bought food specifically for a sporting event (IGD ShopperVista, in store events, March 2019). This benefitted certain AHDB sectors; for example, in the 2 weeks leading to Wimbledon, there was a 12% uplift in sales of fresh cream thanks to the association with strawberries (Kantar, 2 w/e 15 July 2018).

Kantar also found that sales of party food and easy oven fare sharing products, such as pizza, were boosted during the World Cup. Sunny weather, coupled with Meghan and Harry's royal wedding, boosted burgers, marinades and pork ribs for the barbecue at this time. Focusing on convenient crowd-pleasing products and dishes during these events means less time in the kitchen and more time spent watching the action.

Personal events, such as birthdays, should not be ignored. While they are less easy to target, they still provide opportunities for guidance. In-store celebration displays, recipe cards and magazine features are simple ways to inspire special meals and offerings.

VALUE OF SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS TO THE FOOD AND DRINK EATING-OUT MARKET

It appears that out-of-home treating is more popular in the warmer months. In 2018, the highest consumer spending on eating out occurred in April, May and August. However, the run-up to Christmas was not as lucrative as we may have expected for foodservice channels. According to MCA, despite retail enjoying a grocery spend uplift of +22% for the 2 weeks before Christmas in 2018, less money was spent on eating out during December compared with the rest-of-year average. When we look at data for the last 3 years, December does not feature in the top 3 months of the year for spending on eating out, despite its high levels of support. Parties may be more drink than food-focused and increasing promotional reliance drives down average spend.

This highlights an opportunity for the eating-out market to focus more on celebrations outside of Christmas, especially in warm weather months when consumers' willingness to eat out increases. This is particularly important for AHDB, when meat categories over-index between September and January, probably because of the warming roast, but under-index in the summer months, when lighter options such as fish and vegetarian dishes over-index (MCA Insight).

WHAT CAN THE INDUSTRY DO TO CAPITALISE ON EVENTS?

The importance of events is evident; therefore, processors, retailers and foodservice channels should capitalise on these sales peaks. Events can be supported in several effective ways.

Activation and displays

In-store support increases product stand-out, provides inspiration and encourages impulse purchasing. In retail, categories for which shoppers spend the most time browsing have the greatest opportunity for engagement at fixture. These categories are fresh produce, chilled products, meat/fish and bakery. Prioritising in-aisle communications and merchandising solutions in these areas will improve returns and the shopper experience (IGD ShopperVista, In-store engagement and influence, April 2019). Additionally, at key events, prominent displays in more disruptive locations encourage incremental purchases. Eye-tracking research from IGD showed that shoppers are more likely to notice products that are located at the front of the store or on the ends of aisles (IGD ShopperVista, In-store, March 2019). These displays could be solution-led; for example, a Mother's Day breakfast or Christmas dinner essentials. For foodservice, this learning could be applied to placement in food-to-go establishments and menu engineering.

Sainsbury's Mother's Day brunch display.
Source: IGD Retail Analysis

Innovation

Creative twists and new innovations, whether in terms of the product or menu, appeal to consumers' experimental natures and creates a talking point around events. Seasonal offerings typically command a price premium and bring a new way to delight consumers, encouraging them to try something different.

Christmas has provided some good examples of new offerings hitting the market. As already mentioned, tradition is important to shoppers and manufacturers have exploited this by adding twists to classics to excite. Some have even become iconic: Pret a Manger's Christmas sandwich has a Twitter alert function to flag its launch to fans! This highlights how social media can be used to build anticipation and footfall.

Morrisons' 2018 three-course Christmas pasty

2018 Costa pigs-in-blankets mac 'n' cheese and Wetherspoons' pigs-in-blankets pizza

Domino's World Cup 'Meatfielder' pizza

Figure 9. Correspondence analysis of the qualities associated with the food offering in supermarkets for seasonal occasions

Source: Mintel Seasonal Celebration Foods Report, UK, May 2019

However, it appears consumers are left wanting more from events beyond Christmas. According to research by Mintel, consumers have a favourable view on Christmas food offerings in retail, many associating them with high quality, luxury and variety (although many also think they are overpriced). But, there are fewer positive perceptions of supermarket offerings for other key events, such as Valentine's Day. A sizeable minority of people who buy food for seasonal occasions think that this event is overpriced and tacky, while the food offering for Halloween is seen by many as being childish (Mintel Seasonal Celebration Foods Report, UK, May 2019).

Halloween is a good example of where there is a void in the market for high quality, sophisticated products, to tap in to the many adult parties that embrace this event. We have also already seen how important Halloween is for AHDB sectors.

Ad-hoc events such as the World Cup highlight some best-in-class innovations during 2018, with retail and foodservice pre-planning limited edition offerings, or even full menus during the event. Think ahead to future events that can be capitalised on and don't miss smaller opportunities. UK consumers love an excuse to party!

2019 retail range previews – Aldi's Wensleydale white chocolate, prosecco and raspberry truckle; Asda's Christmas cracker pigs-in-blankets centrepieces, Asda's 'Elf' ice cream

Solutions

Consumers are time-conscious, so at events, food choices need to be made easy. For meal-centred celebrations there is the opportunity for product bundles, meal kits and meal deals. In Germany, Albert Heijn offers seasonal meal kits with all ingredients and recipes in one place. Their ‘Easter brunch’ offering provides a total meal solution for four people.

Source: Albert Heijn

Value for money

From previous research, we know that price is a top driver of choice when people shop for meat (AHDB, Meat Shopper Journey, September 2018). While people are willing to spend more at events – and this is not expected to change – promotions are still important, especially for meat. According to Kantar, a higher share of meat primary products were bought on promotion last Christmas and Easter compared with a typical two-week period. While standing out is important, a balance must be achieved to ensure that price reductions don’t go too far – especially on essential parts of a traditional meal. However, as retailers compete for shoppers during eventing periods, price reductions remain a vital tactical tool. Providing guidance on astute shopping is another way to help consumers. Tips from retailers on how to keep costs down when food shopping for seasonal occasions would be welcomed by 48% of seasonal food buyers (Mintel Seasonal Celebration Foods Report, UK, May 2019).

Lidl Valentine’s Day bundle

Source: IGD Retail Analysis

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AHDB's Retail and Consumer Insight team actively tracks, monitors and evaluates consumer behaviour, reporting on the latest consumer trends and picking out what they mean for the industry and agriculture.

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