



By Mike Knowles

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## Is the baby veg market coming of age?

Growing interest in healthy eating is combining with a buoyant eating-out trend to boost demand for mini vegetables



Clockwise from top left: the Chefs Inspirations range includes baby versions of pattypan, kohlrabi, chiongia beets and carrots

When it comes to the small matter of getting people to eat more vegetables, the big news is that smaller may be better, at least when it comes to dining out. That's good news for companies selling so-called baby vegetables; by no means a new phenomenon (either by nature or design, small-scale veg have been around for a while), the last couple of years have seen the category establish itself as very much a friend of foodservice.

Now, thanks to increased consumer demand for healthy and previously undiscovered foods – and no doubt encouraged by the immediate visual impression made by countless pieces of photographic evidence posted on social media – the popularity of so-called baby vegetables is increasingly rapidly, according to one of Europe's leading suppliers of fresh produce to the foodservice industry.

"Guests in restaurants expect to be surprised, but also expect a healthy dish," says Roy Peters of Sous Fresh, a division of Dutch firm Best Fresh Group that specialises in bringing together suppliers and professional chefs to deliver a huge range of high-quality, fresh fruit, vegetables, herbs and edible flowers to the foodservice arena. Its Chefs Inspiration range, which includes more than 150 individual products, now includes a large range of miniature vegetables sourced mainly from Africa.

For many years, says Peters, the formula was "meat plus a little bit of veg"; now the general trend is for more fruit and vegetables in the kitchen. "Vegetables are being used more and more in the kitchen," he adds.

Sous Fresh has noted rising demand for products and services that make it easier for chefs to impress their clientele every time they sit down to eat. In some cases,

that means offering washed and pre-cut produce that is ready to use right away; in other instances, the emphasis is on providing rare, unusual and eye-catching products. Hence the big buzz around small veg. "The world of foodservice is under pressure to deliver more inspiration and more surprises," Peters explains. "Mini vegetables bring colour to the plate and make it complete. You can use the whole thing, as with little carrots for example, and visually it's very impressive."

Sous Fresh recently secured a new supply line in South Africa for many of the baby vegetable lines it now offers its Chefs Inspiration customers. Mini leeks, carrots and pattypan are the most popular lines, says Peters, while the latest potential additions to the range include baby red cabbage and different coloured baby radishes. These are currently being evaluated for possible inclusion next year. Whatever happens, customers are

kept informed about new products and

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invited to try new lines free of charge.

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