

Britain's favourite fresh produce magazine since 1895



By Carl Collen

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## Salad stories

Hazel Clark of Florette UK talks about the company's plans for 2020 and how the Covid-19 outbreak has affected the market



**H**as Florette launched any new products this year?

**Hazel Clark:** At Florette, we have launched our latest NPD, including the new Classic Crispy resealable pack – a convenient way to help maintain the freshness of your leaves. We also have our two brand-new salad mixes – the Crispy Mediterranean Inspired and Crispy Asian Inspired which are all about inspiring consumers to create cuisine led dishes at home, using micro herbs such chilli cress and fragrant micro coriander which pack a punch when it comes to flavour.

Then there's the relaunch of our much-loved Superfood Salad Mixes. This range included Superfood Original and Superfood Vitality, but following extensive consumer research into changing trends it has been re-launched as Power of Plants – which includes three varieties, a Spinach and Baby Kale Mix, a Wild Rocket and Baby Kale Mix and a Watercress and Red Kale Mix. We are also continuing to put marketing support behind some of our best-selling products, such as our fresh steamed and ready to eat beetroot.

How has Florette reacted to the coronavirus pandemic?

**HC:** Inevitably the impacts of the coronavirus have been far reaching but Florette has done well to minimise the effects and ensure our products are delivered to retailers with no disruption to supply. Social distancing has been successfully employed across our factories, while the volumes of orders have been very changeable at times. Sales patterns are becoming more predictable now and we have seen an upturn in buying behaviour within retail and also the convenience channel. The strength of our relationships with our retail customers has allowed us to be flexible which is what they've needed, and to help them to plan for the longer-term by keeping supply stable.

Now in our peak summer period, the majority of Florette product is farmed in the UK, at our site in Essex putting us in a strong position when it comes to managing supply chain continuity, with a mixture of loyal and local workforce to the farm, that are coping well with the new social distancing measures.

While these are unprecedented times in the sector, as the leading salad brand in the UK, Florette's commitment to providing consumers with appetising and appealing salads and vegetables remains unchanged. We will continue to invest in new products, backed up with extensive market research to ensure we are able to respond and adapt to changing tastes as demands dictate.

Has the pandemic had a notable impact on product sales or the category in general?

**HC:** One of the areas we have seen hugely positive impact on sales has been convenience sales. The convenience retail sector has largely benefitted through the recent restrictive measures as consumers have sought out alternatives to visiting larger busy supermarkets amid health concerns.

During a four-week period during lockdown, Florette witnessed nearly £10m of spend on fresh produce and prepared salads switch from main estate locations to convenience stores, as shoppers took advantage of shopping locally for the fresh products on offer.

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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In addition, through the lockdown timescale, we have seen 15 per cent more shoppers purchasing prepared salads through convenience stores, resulting in a 9 per cent sales increase for prepared salad when compared to the same period a year ago, equating to 1.5m more packs.

Indeed, our Classic Crispy 115g really stands out – it is our number 1 SKU in the convenience channel, now selling over 4.6m bags annually, compared to 1.7m per annum last year.

#### **Looking ahead, what does the rest of 2020 hold for Florette?**

**HC:** Our ambitions going forward are to continue to develop new and innovative products that appeal to modern day consumer habits, such as our Classic Crispy resealable pack. We introduced this new packaging format to our number one selling mix this year, to help consumers lock in the freshness. We also introduced our Freshness Guarantee or your money back initiative on all of our ranges, further demonstrating our commitment to freshness and quality to consumers.

With shoppers now diversifying their options by choosing more adventurous meal choices, and with health still very much on customer's minds as we start to emerge from lockdown, sales of fresh produce and health foods are predicted to continue to grow. At Florette we will aim to continue to grow our market share and attract new consumers to the brand.

#### **How is Florette looking to become more sustainable, particularly in the area of packaging?**

**HC:** There has been a project underway for a number of months that is looking at the key issues we face regarding our plastic packaging:

- Reduction of food waste
- Recyclable packaging

We would obviously like to be able to tackle both of the above in the most sustainable way but unfortunately there is not a packaging solution that will solve both at the moment. We are undergoing trials to ascertain what will work best for our product. Initial findings suggest

that we should be able to move to recyclable packaging in the near future subject to product quality trials. Quality and freshness are our most important priorities and we have to be satisfied that the new format will meet our consumers' needs in terms of shelf-life and taste.

Our business focuses on the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle principle and we have implemented a number of measures to reduce the amount of plastic packaging consumed within our factories. We are running multiple projects which will reduce our plastic packaging consumption by 40 tonnes per annum – a considerable amount. Additionally, we have a designated team working to find better solutions for our packaging to make all our products more sustainable.

We are committed to making the right choices for the planet but we need the technology and waste streams to catch up with the tide of consumer feeling.