

Better with buttermilk

Television chefs and bakers have been driving a trend to use buttermilk in everything from scones to cakes, says Andrew Don

Buttermilk has moved on leaps and bounds from the days when it was primarily a drink for acne-ridden teenagers or, more palatably, a digestive.

Today, it is a must-use bakery dairy ingredient that balances sourness and richness in products from breads, desserts and other dishes, says Robin Hancock, commercial manager of Meadow Foods. He labels it: "The brilliance of buttermilk."

Catherine Taylor, director of Taylors Traditional Bakers in Bruton, Somerset, says TV chefs and bakers, as well as the move towards baking from premixes, have driven the buttermilk trend, although Taylors has been ahead of the curve for more than 12 years, she adds.

The company uses buttermilk in scones and soda bread, but others use it in pancakes, muffins, waffles and cupcakes, as well as biscuits, pastries and cake. Taylor agrees it could be used as a substitute for milk in most products, but believes it most suits those using baking powder or soda as a raising agent. And it comes with an impressive set of credentials.

Geoff Bowles, who runs Ivyhouse Farm Dairy, says: "Buttermilk is a complete food, due to high levels of phosphorous and riboflavin, and it is also rich in calcium, B12 and potassium. It contains a probiotic, which helps digestion, boosts your immunity and protects against cardiovascular disease."

Taylor adds that the benefits for baked goods, whether used in liquid or powder form, are a more airy product and an improved taste,

Genesis Crafty pancakes and, below, a buttermilk scone from Taylors



especially in savoury goods. It also lends good shelf-life to products and means they can be frozen. Hancock says: "Buttermilk can be used as a lower-cost replacement for more expensive cultured dairy products, such as soured cream and crème fraîche. It adds a tangy lactic taste to puddings and baking."

Even better, it is easy to use as it simply replaces the milk quota in a recipe. Taylor says: "The acidity of the buttermilk reacts with the alkalinity of the baking soda, producing carbon dioxide to help products rise and improve the texture."

She believes the demand from bakers for buttermilk will only grow as more artisan products keep hitting the market, as well as the rise of scratch or traditional baking.

It is worth spending time to evaluate buttermilk as part of new bakery developments, bearing in mind that it is particularly useful

when developing low- or reduced-fat products – which are bang on trend.

Meanwhile, John McErlain, managing director of Genesis Crafty, a family bakery owned and run by six brothers, says buttermilk has always been traditionally used in Northern Ireland, where the bakery is located – more so than in England or the wider UK. The company uses buttermilk in plain, blueberry, lemon and raisin, and chocolate chip pancakes; wheaten products, including scones; farls, round sodas; and in plain and fruit scones – a list that demonstrates its versatility.

McErlain says buttermilk could also be used in cake, giving a softer crumb. While it does bring a slight sourness to products, that can contrast well with sweeter notes.

For those with a foodservice element to their business, buttermilk can also be used in salad dressings, dips, soups and desserts," McErlain says. Others add ice creams, custards, sauces and even soufflé to the mix.

Last year *British Baker* reported on Starbucks' development of a hybrid product, the Duffin – a cross between a doughnut and a muffin – made in partnership with Rich Products, and containing buttermilk. So buttermilk undoubtedly lends itself to new product development and, with the trend for its use growing, the trade is sure to see more novel ideas come to the fore. Scuffins, anyone?

