

Walk on the wild side

*It does not take too big a stretch of the imagination to find uses for cheddar and cream cheese in baking, but it pays to go beyond the blindingly obvious, says **Andrew Don***



Cheese is one of life's great pleasures and you can never have too much of a good thing – so why restrict your use of varieties? While not all cheeses would work in bakery, it is worth experimenting because, with a little know-how, cheese provides endless opportunities for bakers.

Owen Davies, category manager of national distributor of cheese and gourmet foods Cheese Cellar, has noted “a huge surge” in the popularity and variety of artisanal cheeses from the UK over the past few years. He says: “People’s appetite for new tastes has advanced so much. Bakers are perfectly placed to embrace this new adventurous spirit and cook up some sensational recipes.”

The usual Continental cheeses, such as parmesan and gruyère continue to be highly popular with bakers, Davies says, but there are so many more types to be explored. The more daring have identified merit in “going off piste”, using the likes of Beppino Ocelli’s cheeses flavoured with Barolo or fresh black summer truffles, and Italian verzin, cheese similar to gorgonzola but “more creamy and luxurious”.

Davies reports big growth in the use of paneer, often a star ingredient in south Asian cuisine, with the likes of Subway featuring paneer fillings and toppings. “The Cambridge Muffin Company produces gluten-free Amazing Muffs including walnut and

blue cheese and a cheese and sun-dried tomato,” he says.

He also divulges that goat’s cheese is on the rise, with bakers spreading it on to or piping it into savoury tarts, quiches and pastry items.

Mary Quicke, managing director of Quicke’s Traditional dairy farm, says one of cheese’s great “beauties” is its endless variety, from smooth and tangy to nutty and crumbly. “These characteristics can be paired with other ingredients to magical effect.”

However, even the decadence of cheese cannot hide from the overwhelming trend for health – and it isn’t the easiest of products to promote on those terms. The Cheese Warehouse now has high-protein, lower-fat and reduced-salt cheese options available and, in more exciting innovation, it has embraced the trend for US-style smoky, barbecue flavours with naturally

wood-smoked cheeses. Unusual woods, such as cherry and hickory, are now used on cheeses including provolone and gruyère.

Richard Thorpe, development director of supplier The Cheese Warehouse, also says his firm is increasingly asked to provide cheese for bakery applications that go beyond slices to a full range of different grates, diced, shavings, cubetti, ribbons, batons and more.

Sandra Bell, marketing manager of manufacturer Wensleydale Creamery, recommends her firm’s cheeses for Yorkshire Wensleydale & Ginger cheesecake, cheese scones and a host of soufflés and baked puddings, because Yorkshire Wensleydale “is creamy and full of flavour, but not overpowering”. Likewise, a growing number of bakers use Yorkshire Wensleydale Blue for savoury tarts.

So experiment within the brave new world of cheeses, but heed two words of warning. Hugh Evans, marketing manager of Synergy, manufacturer of flavourings, extracts and essences, cautions that block cheese can typically lose a lot of its flavour when heated. The company has a range of flavour products that it claims offer higher levels of heat and processing stability.

And as Billy Kevan, dairy manager of cheese-maker Colston Bassett, notes, the best-quality ingredients available will have an impact on the baking process and the end taste.

