



We are all squeezing more into each working hour, more hours into the day, so have we turned into a nation which uses fast food to claim back those hours? It doesn't appear that this is the case, writes Jonathan Doughty FCSI of Coverpoint.

Today's foodservice consumer has been bombarded over recent years with news of contradictory food scares, to such an extent that there is no longer any single food group that is considered 'safe'. Traditional ingredients, salt, fats, sugars and every possible combination of additives and basic staples have come under fire. Even the farming that delivers our products and the conditions that often prevail in these 'food factories', has rarely been out of the headlines.

So what is happening to the food in our industry, the industry itself and what is driving these changes? I suspect it is really quite simple. The consumer wants to know far more about what they are eating than they ever used to. They are more 'health focused' than healthy, more 'food aware' than fussy, and have a much broader food education and ingredient information base to draw on.

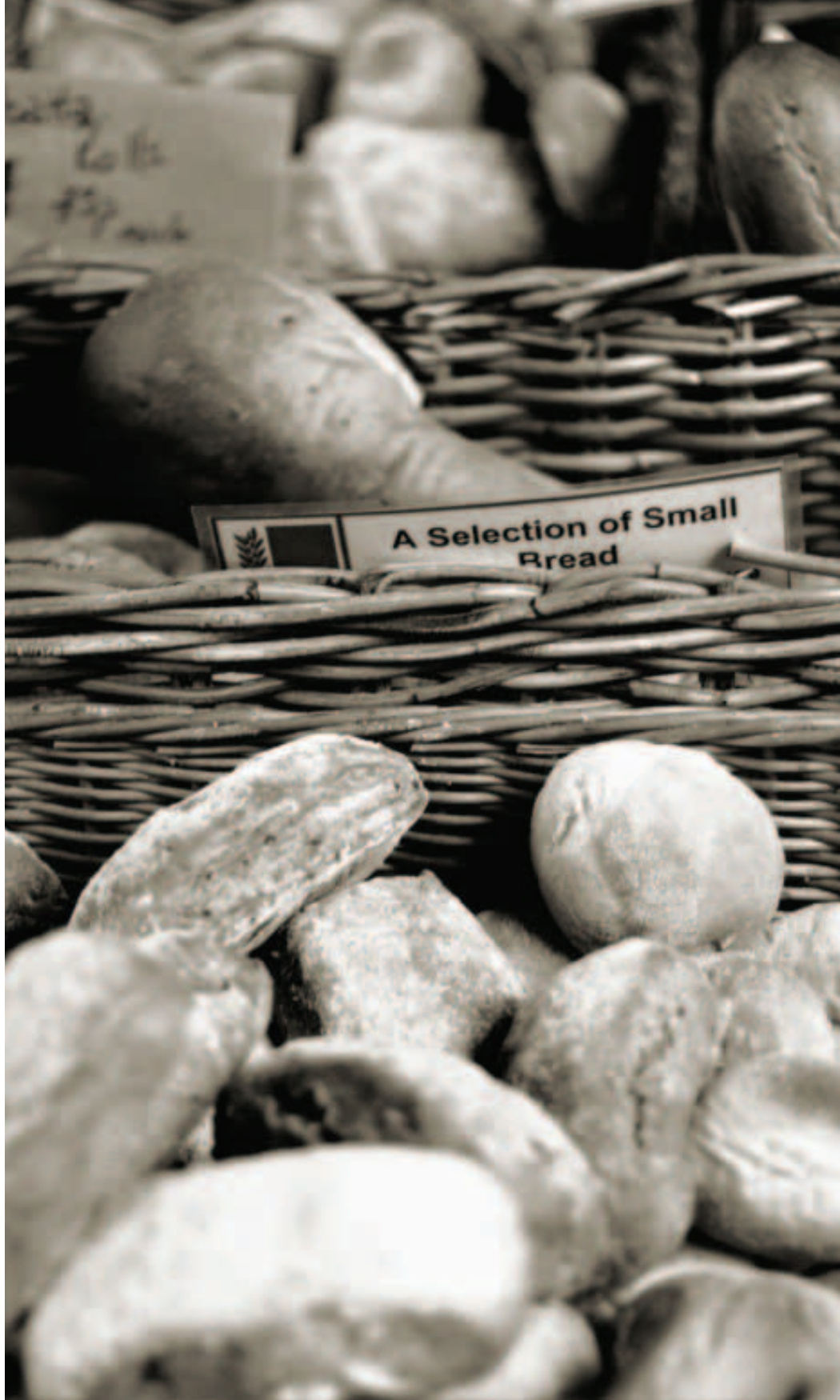
The television delivers a range of passionate individuals, extolling the virtues of fresh food, simple and easy to create dishes almost 24 hours a day to a ravenous public, keen to absorb this food and cooking advice. How many, I wonder, are sitting there with a ready meal from one of our UK supermarkets? Personalities and egos abound and the consumer is smothered in books, videos, personal appearances and websites on food, in the same way Nigella smothers desserts with cream and chocolate sauce!

At the same time the Slow Food movement is rising, building strong profiles in communities around the world, extolling the virtues of an alternative to multi national, fast food lifestyles. A non-profit, eco-gastronomic member-supported organisation that was founded in 1989, Slow Food sets out to counteract fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world. Very worthy and very relevant for the world we live in today.

The Slow Food movement has over 100,000 members all over the world. Not a large number, but growing and probably more importantly, expressing or representing the views of a much larger group of people.

Fast life – Slow food

IN THE FACE OF NUMEROUS SCARES ABOUT FAST FOOD AND WHERE EVEN TRADITIONAL INGREDIENTS ARE BEING BRANDED 'UNSAFE', CONSUMERS WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE FOOD THEY ARE EATING. ENTER THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT WITH OVER 100,000 MEMBERS WORLDWIDE.



The Salone del Gusto (Slow Food Fair), held in Turin every two years, is the world's biggest non industrial food fair - a celebration of this global community and a chance to find the best local produce from around the world. Anybody who has ever been will know exactly what I mean when I say it is the most salivating experience on the planet!

But you don't have to travel to Turin, as small shops in our neighbourhoods, towns and cities are springing up on a mission to bring us the 'brand new' experience of traditional foods made by people who actually enjoy what they do. We are rediscovering food, evoking memories of childhood shopping in independent butchers, bakers and grocers. This is not a new trend at all, but another cycle of events that was encouraged initially by the move to supermarket shopping.

Generations of consumers are 're-discovering' food in a purer, simpler format. Tomatoes that aren't perfectly round and red but taste heavenly, meat that is old and purple, not tasteless and bright red, chocolate that has high cocoa content. Luxuries? I don't think so, just a re-defining of the expectations of consumers. Just like the coffee bar revolution that occurred in the UK in the 90s, the consumer has moved away from the convenience of freeze dried coffee and is happily courting an addiction to the hand made, fresh, real thing.

At the moment Slow Food is still for those who are passionate about their food, or 'in the know', but in this world in which the consumer is now constantly searching for the "real", "authentic" and the 'genuine', local shops, artisans and small producers can and do challenge the supermarkets and fast food giants.

We are seeing a very interesting set of trends in both fast food and supermarket food, both areas that Coverpoint work extensively in around the world. As one sector of these markets focuses ever more on price, other retailers and caterers are polarising towards premium; offering solutions that match these conflicting customer desires of convenience and authenticity. Ready meals that are "not quite" ready and require a tiny element of finishing by the consumer, adding the personal touch. Restaurant and Café offers that offer personalisation through choice, flavours, mixing in front of the consumer all add to the impression that it is "made for you". This makes us happy, makes

us feel important and more importantly, makes us open our wallets! Reassuring customers by establishing quality and provenance is only a small part of the strategy.

The best foodservice operators and retailers, such as Wagamama, Carluccio's and Whole Foods Market have realised that there is no limit to the detail that customers want to see and hear. Recipe books, ingredients, open kitchens, skilled and knowledgeable staff, graphics and packaging are all techniques that work well.

The good news is this. We are only at the beginning of this quiet and polite food revolution. How very British.

www.coverpoint.co.uk