

# Why Boris needs my advice

I recently wrote to Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, about the 2012 Olympics. Not the Games – even he should manage to complete the odd stadium or two with £9.2 billion of taxpayers’ money. No, I’m worried about the food the thousands of guests will be offered during their stay in our country.

Since the Government disbanded Food from Britain to free up money for cleaning moats and plastering ceilings, there’s no one coordinating a national speciality food programme to ensure regional foods feature on the menus of London hotels and restaurants in 2012. I’m fully qualified to help Boris sort this out.

Twice over the past three months, I’ve stayed in a Hilton Hotel in London. On my first visit, I spent a day in the loo after eating a chicken Caesar salad. A great cure for obesity but not recommended.

My second stay was on a deal that included dinner. The meal was some pseudo Spanish concoction owing nothing to its country of origin, was completely inedible and took two hours to serve. That’s the sort of food our guests will enjoy in 2012.

OK, we’ve got some of the best restaurants in the world but that’s not where most visitors to the Olympics will eat. At the more reasonably priced level (if such a thing exists in London), we’re still stuck at the bottom of the pile, where provenance, quality and service are all gut-wrenchingly abysmal. And we hardly give a toss because the British lifestyle sticks food pretty low down on the list of priorities – a fact confirmed by research from Harris Interactive.

According to their latest survey, 56% of UK shoppers habitually buy expensive branded food for their pets whereas only 40% choose branded lines to put on their own plates. So we’re more inclined to fork out on keeping Rover or Tiddles happy than to buy the branded foods we enjoy ourselves. In contrast, only 36% of German and 41% of French pet owners buy branded in preference to cheaper own-label products.

What does this tell us about our food culture? According to Harris Interactive, our priorities are quite clear. Over 75% of British consumers mostly buy branded cosmetics, 63% insist on branded drinks and 42% buy more expensive branded cleaning products. In the midst of recession, we buy the cheapest grub, but the plate we eat it from is squeaky clean, we look and smell good and the dog’s happy.

Which may explain the launch by those clever people at Patchwork Traditional Food of a branded pet food called Poochworks. If you enjoy their patés, would you dare buy Rover anything less? I’m watching their ad on You Tube while filling in time waiting for Boris’s reply.

● Bob Farrand, Publisher

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## in this issue regulars

news:

- industry 4
- delis 9
- farm shops 11
- food halls 13

- deli of the month 14

- deli chef 17

- cheesewire 23

- how to buy... 45

- shelf talk 47

- the producers’ pages 52

## features

- Cheeses of the month 24
- Harrogate show preview 25
- EPoS systems 27
- Free-free & health foods 41



4



11



23



17



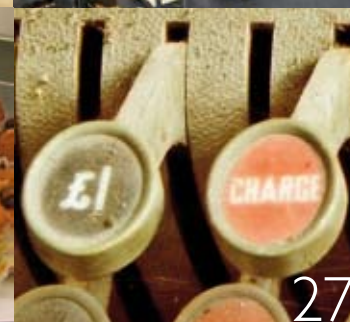
24



25



41



27

