

From kraut to kombucha, tempeh to kefir, fermented food and drink is growing in popularity as its health benefits are more widely cited in the media. But how far into the mainstream can this sector go?

“Fermented foods such as Korean kimchi, Japanese natto and sauerkraut have been an emerging trend in the UK in recent years,” says Mintel research analyst Alyson Parkes. “While availability is still low, with many fermented products only available through specialist and health stores, the mainstream media has influenced this trend, with its sources linking fermented foods with functional health benefits. This looks to have had a tangible effect on consumers, with 52% of those interested in fermented foods also in agreement that they can add a ‘health boost’ to dishes.”

Bertie Chamberlain, founder of Hurlly Burly, which launched a three-strong range of fermented organic raw slaws in 2017, agrees that people are increasingly familiar with fermented foods and their benefits. “I think there is a wider acceptance of fermented food categories. For example, kombucha could be likened to coconut water five years ago – it had a slightly uncertain start, but now there is a huge amount of ready-to-drink kombucha.”

However, he adds, it is still far from mainstream. “There’s still a long way to go before fermented foods become a weekly staple – its current consumers are still early adopters. The acid test will be when you are able to buy your fermented foods in Sainsbury’s as opposed to having to go and seek them out.”

Chamberlain sees a link between the growing popularity of fermented foods and the rise in veganism. “What you’re seeing with both fermented foods and veganism is a return to basics. When I explain that our products are organic, unpasteurized, completely natural and have a very small number of ingredients, it

Live & kicking

The health benefits of fermented food and drink provide a strong pull to consumers, but to achieve widespread acceptance in the UK, **Jane Wolfe** discovers that great taste is paramount



says that a lot of new brands are experiencing the pitfalls he initially did. “There is a danger that some are jumping into it too quickly only to realize down the line that they are losing control of the balance between the yeast and the bacteria. Suddenly you get a product that doesn’t taste great – you’ve got no control over it because it’s a live product. It’s not just a case of putting the ingredients in, mixing them up and bottling them. It’s a natural process that takes weeks.”

Authenticity is also something Leigh feels very strongly about. “When I started up, my aim was to produce kombucha just as it was made 2,000 years ago, in small batches, by hand and with no artificial processing. But there are some brands just looking to make money, and in order to scale up they’re introducing artificial processing, which takes away from what kombucha is in terms of the health effects. By pasteurizing they’re actually destroying the very probiotic component people think they are buying into. I call these soda pop versions of kombucha – they are not real kombucha. The worry is it will become so devalued that nobody will trust any of it.”

“Kombucha should absolutely be made on a small scale,” Leigh adds. “We want to get a bit bigger but we need to be very careful that we don’t sacrifice our principles. We’ve had Holland & Barrett, we’ve had Pret a Manger, we’ve had Boots all knocking on our door over the years, and we’ve had to say no.”

Leigh says his real ‘bug-bear’ is anyone who sells kombucha in plastic. “Not just because of the environmental issue, but if you are putting an astringent product in plastic, regardless of the sort of plastic it is, it’s inevitable that there is going to be some leaching of residue chemical into the drink.”

Chamberlain is also passionate about authenticity and stresses that Hurlly Burly products are raw. “In the UK, most sauerkraut is pasteurized to make it an ambient product which can keep on the shelf for two years. Our products are not heated at all and that is something that we are at great pains

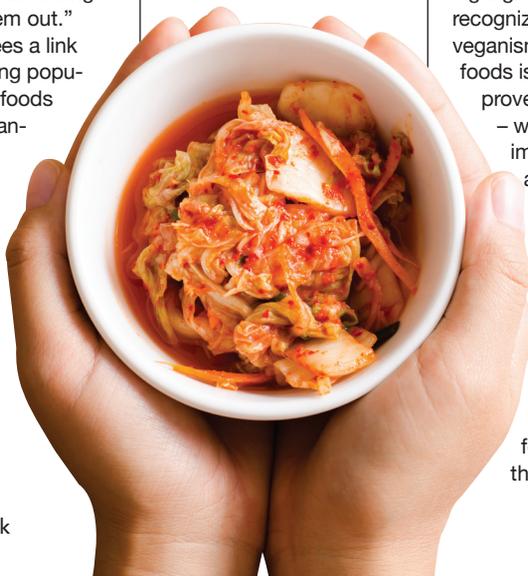
resonates because people are increasingly uncertain about eating products containing ingredients they don’t recognize. The thread between veganism and fermented foods is the simplicity and provenance of ingredients – which is an increasingly important factor. There are no negatives, just huge health benefits and great taste.”

Retailer Carol Dines, who co-owns The Real Food Company in Alsager, Cheshire, has seen steady growth in the sector over the last few years. “I am sure this is based largely on

the results people are seeing from including live foods and drinks in their diet,” she says. “We regularly speak to people with digestive distress for instance, and by incorporating these things into their day-to-day diet they are feeling improvements. TV, radio and magazine coverage alongside improved availability has boosted sales, as people are now more familiar with the unusual names – like kefir, kombucha and kimchi – and the concept of supporting their microbiome.”

Keeping it real

Gary Leigh from GO! Kombucha has been making kombucha for about 15 years, and



to communicate to the consumer – it is exactly the same as if you made it at home, so all the beneficial aspects of fermentation are preserved. Nothing is added apart from sea salt, which is required for the fermentation.”

Dines believes the category does have the potential to become mainstream because the benefits are noticeable for so many people, but also has reservations. “My concern is that corners may be cut in the fermentation processes that would reduce the beneficial activity of the products. I would not like to see fermented foods and drinks becoming ‘watered down’ so they can sit happily on supermarket shelves. Historically in the food and drink sector corners have been cut to make products more shelf-stable and less problematic to the retailers at the consumers’ expense.”

A question of taste

Chamberlain believes that taste is critical for fermented foods to move into the wider

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public domain. “I always make a point of pushing the taste above and beyond any health benefits. What I try to do with Hurlly Burly is to take the health benefits of the century-old production of sauerkraut but make the flavours and texture much more contemporary for the modern consumer. I think if rather than treating fermented food as a product to seek out because it’s healthy, people just enjoy the taste and texture, the rest will follow.”

“It is possible to have a great taste and great health benefits – but crucially not all consumers do find the tastes great in the beginning,” says Dines. “We have found that by encouraging people to repeatedly try small amounts they really begin to develop a taste for it, and usually end up loving it and missing it if they run out!”

Dines believes education is key to promoting this category. “As so much overall health is based around a healthy digestion, we in health food stores should be talking to the customers about strategies they can use to be more

comfortable when using these products. After all, fermented foods and drinks were once commonplace everyday foods, and this is where they need to be again.”

And the raft of recent launches in the fermented food and drink sector indicates that this may be happening. “Since Hurlly Burly has been in the marketplace there have been a lot of new brands launching, which is good from my point of view, because a rising tide lifts all boats,” says Chamberlain. “The more people are exposed to these products the quicker they’ll become accepted.”

“I think the market will continue to progress and develop if for no other reason than fermented foods are often in the press,” he adds.

“I anticipate there’ll be more brands coming to market and that consumers will continue to look for new flavours and experiences as well as, increasingly, organic certification.”

Leigh concurs: “I think the category is just going to get bigger and bigger, especially in light of the recent study about ultra-processed food and its negative effects on health. Our food is being overly processed, having all the nutrients extracted to extend shelf life and basically cheapen the food – they are taking out the stuff that fermented food is all about keeping in and people are waking up to what’s happening and the fact that what you put in you very much get out in terms of health and longevity.”

A view from America

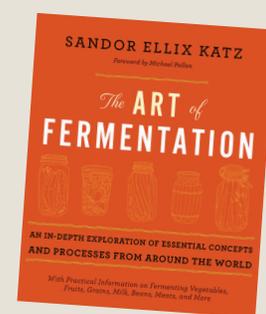
Explaining what drew him to fermentation, American food writer Sandor Katz – whose latest book *The Art of Fermentation* provides a comprehensive guide to DIY home fermentation – says: “What first drew me in were the compelling flavours. As a kid in New York City, I loved the sour pickles we bought at the neighbourhood deli – cucumbers fermented with garlic and dill. Later I started learning about the digestive and immune-stimulating benefits of live ferments, dense with diverse probiotic bacteria.”

“But what spurred me to fermenting myself and an experiential exploration of fermentation was moving to rural Tennessee and keeping a garden. The practical preservation benefit of fermentation got me doing it, and learning how easy fermentation is, how creative and varied it can be, and how delicious.”

Katz sees fermentation as a part of how people everywhere have always made effective use of the food resources available to them. “In the not-so-long-ago world, fermentation was part of most people’s direct experience and a practical learned skill. With fewer of us

involved in food production, many strands of continuity, passing this information from generation to generation, have been severed. And yet we now find – thanks in part to awareness of the microbiome and the importance of bacterial biodiversity to our health – that many people are hungry for information about how to ferment.”

“Visiting the UK intermittently, as I do, I can see the growing interest and growing availability of ferments there,” notes Katz. “I think it just takes time. In a place like the UK, where the traditional food has tended toward bland, some of the stronger flavours of fermentation can be inaccessible. But all ferments that can be made stronger, can be milder, and often people need bridges to the stronger flavours.”



Hot Stocks

Man alive!

Living Nutrition’s offer includes three kefir-kombucha fermentation activated food supplements: Holy Basil Alive, Rhodiola Alive and Maca Alive, the latter being produced to a traditional shamanic recipe using three types of fermented raw maca plus camu camu berry.

Cranberry & Chia are made from British milk and packed with billions of live gut-friendly bacteria.

Miso magic

Clearspring’s Unpasteurized Organic Japanese Brown Rice Miso Paste is described as a robust miso. Made with whole soya beans and brown rice, it is said to have a very ‘wholefood nutritional profile’.

Fermented fizz

Just launched is Profusion’s Kefir Fizz, a raw organic kefir made with vegan water kefir cultures using apple juice to start the fermentation process. Free from beet or cane sugar, it comes in Tropical Turmeric and Zesty Lime & Dragonfruit.

On impulse

Impulse Foods has a wide selection of tempehs, including Fresh Chilled Tempeh with Sea Vegetables – containing arame and hiziki sea vegetables, organic tamari and organic lemon juice – as well as Frozen Tempeh with Herbs & Garlic.

Oh so Bio-tiful
Bio-tiful Dairy has created what it says is the world’s first combination of bio-live kefir and high-protein quark. Kefir-Quark Original and Kefir-Quark



Captain Kombucha

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Captain Kombucha™ is the UK's first fermented Kombucha health drink that's presented in a stunningly unique PET bottle that can be served and enjoyed both chilled and ambient. Launched by Bravura Foods it is organic, vegan, made with natural content only, free of any artificial flavours and colours and its naturally high probiotic content is great for both digestive and immune systems. Award winning Captain Kombucha™ is available in classic Original, Raspberry and Coconut flavours. This legendary health drink is lightly carbonated and available in 400ml PET Bottles.

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Tideford Organics Fresh White Miso

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Tideford Organics are proud to bring the first fresh, organic, unpasteurised miso to the UK. Their White Miso is fermented for 6 months to give it a mild but complex umami flavor, perfect in stews, sauces, soups, marinades and more. The fermentation process encourages friendly microflora – and Tideford's unpasteurised miso provides all the benefits of this live bacteria, promoting good gut health. Miso is also high in immune-system boosting vitamins including vitamin B12, vitamin E and vitamin K, plus essential amino acids. Like everything in the Tideford range, it's organic, vegan and gluten-free, with no added sugar and no GM.



Bio-live, vegan kimchi and sauerkraut

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Eaten Alive is all about fermentation and flavour. Started by two chefs, Pat and Glyn, our products are hand crafted to taste amazing, and they are all vegan, raw and packed with gut-health boosting good bacteria!

Our Classic Spicy Kimchi is the top selling fermented vegetable product in most stockists. The delicious balance of sour and spicy with fresh vegetable crunch ensures repeat sales. Eye-catching branding and extensive sales support makes Eaten Alive a must for your fermented food selection. The 375g retail packs retail at £6.49. Available through Marigold, The Health Store and direct.



Switchle Sparkling Organic Apple Cider Vinegar Drink 250ml

The rise in popularity of fermented food and drinks, set to register a CAGR of 7% between 2017 and 2022, has unsurprisingly gone hand-in-hand with consumers' increased understanding of their many health benefits, particularly for the gut. In reality, fermented products have been consumed around the world for centuries so it is predominantly a Western awakening or rather re-awakening that we are seeing today.

We, like our forefathers, incorporate age-old beneficial ingredients into a tasty and thirst quenching drink called Switchle, which is a modern take on a centuries old fermented

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apple cider vinegar-based beverage popularised in U.S. colonial times when farmers used it to keep going in the hot fields whilst harvesting hay in Summer. Back then it was a blend of water, apple cider vinegar, honey or maple syrup and ginger. In the U.S. they now describe this type of thirst quencher as the original and natural "Gatorade" as it contains electrolytes and provides energy along with the beneficial anti-inflammatory properties of ginger and the pre and probiotic qualities of apple cider vinegar with mother.

Switchle is not an energy drink as defined by modern standards as these, whether natural or not, are focussed

on stimulants like caffeine or guarana. Instead, it provides premium better-for-you refreshment that enhances your wellbeing with very carefully selected ingredients that fuel your body with natural goodness. Switchle's main ingredient, organic apple cider vinegar with mother, helps alkalise the body and has been shown to lower blood sugar levels and cholesterol, good for staving off diabetes and heart disease. It is also said to increase satiety, helping you lose weight. We carefully craft this with sparkling spring water, organic honey, and each SKU with its own complementary blend of organic fruit juices and botanical extracts - ginger, turmeric, matcha green tea, and rooibos.



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GO! Kombucha

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GO! Kombucha is the UK and Europe's longest-established Kombucha brand. Our handcrafted, small batch fermentation process is based on the Ancient Chinese method, perfected over 15 years to ensure the finest, most authentic Kombucha tea. Totally raw, gut healthy, below the new sugar tax threshold (a third of the sugar of fizzy drinks and fruit juice) and with a kick that satisfies the desire to drink alcohol, GO! Kombucha is an ancient drink remade for the modern age. And as a purely tea-based drink GO! Kombucha is zero-rated for VAT making it one of the best value Kombucha brands available!



OM Organic Mushroom Nutrition Cordyceps

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Discovered by Tibetan herdsman at high altitude, cordyceps optimises oxygen uptake and delivery to increase vitality and endurance. Supports cardiac function and respiratory health. Om Organic Mushroom Nutrition is a leading producer of pure, fresh, certified 100% organic fermented medicinal mushroom powders that contribute to optimise your health. Having travelled the world to discover unique mushroom varieties, Om have combined the perfect balance of ancient wisdom with modern growing methodology to grow these miraculous mushrooms in their state-of-the-art facility in California. Available now in the UK are a range of five single powders - Reishi, Chaga, Cordyceps, Lion's Mane and Maitake, and two blends - Fit and Beauty.

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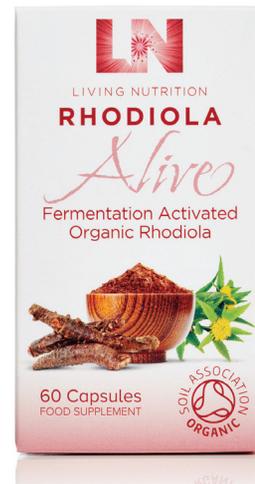


Rhodiola Alive

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Our exclusive kefir-kombucha fermented Rhodiola contains thousands of years of wisdom designed with modern day needs in mind. We use a unique synergy of 35 strains of microorganisms to ferment our products capturing a living food matrix of nutrients, enzymes and microbes, increasing bioavailability and nutrient levels. Our organic Rhodiola has been proven to be 300% more effective than standard Rhodiola extract at helping the body cope with stress, anxiety, exertion.

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Organic Apple Cider Vinegar Juice

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Lost Coast Food Co. is excited to announce the launch of our new line of Organic Apple Cider Vinegar Juices. These delicious and all-natural sparkling drinks are low calorie and low in sugar, containing approximately 5% apple cider vinegar, widely known for its health promoting benefits, and lightly sweetened with agave syrup. The first flavours to launch include our fruity Strawberry, Rose & Hibiscus, spicy Mango, Ginger & Turmeric, and citrusy Blueberry & Lemon. The fruit juices blend with the apple cider vinegar to form a unique and refreshing drink experience that can be enjoyed in home or on the go.

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Nourish Kefir

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Fermentation is a centuries old method of food preservation, but more recently is being recognised as food enhancing – as in the case of kefir. Nourish Kefir is a fermented food, traditionally made by fermenting living kefir grains with fresh organic cow's milk. Fermentation transforms the milk into a live, deliciously refreshing drink, enriched with a diverse range of gut friendly bacteria, which makes it both easier to digest and absorb the nutrients in the milk. Nourish Kefir was the only kefir drink tested and scientifically proven to colonise the human digestive tract of the participants in a month-long trial.



Remedy Kombucha Raspberry Lemonade

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www.remedydrinks.com

A tasty organic sparkling live cultured drink made with raspberry and lemon. Our long brewing methods ensure our kombucha naturally contains no sugar and is packed full of friendly bacteria, healthy organic acids & anti-oxidants that are good for gut health.

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