

talking about... Quinoa

Introducing a new series — the facts behind new, unusual or topical products for the organic market. This month a versatile grain from the Andes.

History

- Quinoa, pronounced 'keen-wah', is a native plant of the South American Andes, where it has been cultivated since at least 3,000 BC. For the Incas its seeds were known as the 'mother grain'. Incan armies marched, it is said, on a mixture of quinoa and fat, known as 'war balls'.
- After the 16th century Spanish conquest, production of quinoa declined but a revival sees it again being widely grown in Peru, Chile and Bolivia, as well as the US and Canada.

Botany

- The Quinoa, a plant of the Chenopodium family, is a relative of spinach, Swiss chard and beets, growing naturally in cool, arid climates at high altitude. The seeds — technically they are not grains — are similar in size to millet but are flat with a pointed oval shape.

Nutrition

- Quinoa is gluten-free and high in protein, calcium and iron, a relatively good source of vitamin E and several of the B vitamins.
- The protein is considered to be a complete protein due to the presence of all eight essential amino acids. It is exceptionally high in lysine, typically low in other grains. Quinoa also contains albumen, the protein that is found in egg whites.

In the kitchen

- Quinoa cooks in only 15 minutes and swells to four times the original size of the seeds. The outer germ twists outward forming a little white, spiral, C-shaped tail. The grain itself is soft and fluffy and the tail is crunchy, creating an interesting texture. The taste is mild and slightly nutty.



Photo: Northern Quinoa Corporation (NQCI) of Canada, www.quinoa.com

- Quinoa is a versatile ingredient. Cooked, it can be added to casseroles, soups, stews, stir-fries, or salads, substituted for rice or used in tabouli in place of wheat. Dry roasting quinoa before cooking gives a toasted flavour, and it can be stewed in fruit juice to add sweetness to use as a breakfast cereal or in desserts. Quinoa can also be ground into a flour and can be used to make pastas, biscuits, etc. Uncooked seeds can be added to soups and stews. Sprouting the seeds takes up to four days.
- Due to their relatively high oil content, quinoa grains and flour are best stored in glass jars in the refrigerator.
- In South America quinoa leaves are also eaten as a vegetable.

Seaweed for dental patients

Seagreens has developed a special pack of its Soil Association-approved Seaweed Food Capsules made from wild Norwegian wrack, for member clinics of The British Society for Mercury-Free Dentistry to prescribe to patients for detoxification in post-operative amalgam extraction.

Packing and distribution for Seagreens, which also makes

table condiments, is now being done at Oxford Wholefoods, a commercial enterprise partially supported by the Oxfordshire Learning Disability Trust. Of 38 staff, 30 are adults with learning difficulties who are developing the confidence and abilities to participate more fully in community life and progress to other employment.

Family Winery

The family-run Inge Allacher Keg winery in Austria has been producing organic wine for nearly a decade and has won a number of awards during that time, including a gold and silver at Bio Fach 2000 for its Grauburgunder Eiswen and

Welschriesling Kabinett.

The grapes are all grown on twelve vineyards around Lake Nueisdl, where the lake helps create a 'micro-climate' ideal for making wines using traditional methods. Allacher wines are now available in the UK from Hertford-based Elrayah Imports and Exports.

Ecover's 2001 campaign

A leading green cleaning products company and the UK's biggest organic organisation are working together on a major promotion.

Ecover's spring 2001 consumer campaign, Eat Organic, Clean Ecologic, is designed to raise funds and new recruits for the Soil Association, as well as attract new customers.

Featured on-pack, at point of sale and in advertising, will be an introductory offer to join the SA for



£18 instead of the usual £24,

plus the incentive of £5 worth of money-off vouchers for the Ecover range when consumers send off for an information pack.

Sauce 'n' soups

Ready to serve fresh Cheese Sauce, made with Cheddar and parmesan, is the latest addition to the Simply Organic range, along with three new fresh soups, Chunky Vegetable, Leek and Potato and Red Pepper.

plate mates

Seasonings and sauces are proving to be a popular organic sector. **Jennifer Britt** goes on the condiments trail.

If you are ever subjected to a high-powered job selection process involving assessment outside the interview room, a trait that could lose you points at the restaurant table — I am told — is pouring on the salt and pepper before actually tasting the food.

Whether this reveals a gaucheness in the social graces department or a lack of independence of mind is an open question.

Either way, when to add seasoning, and what it should be, is certainly a matter requiring some discernment. So waiter, I hope there are no additives in the salt?

Harvested from the Atlantic Waters around the Island of Anglesey off the North Wales coast from an area next to a Blue Flag beach is Halen Môn a Soil Association-certified sea salt.

The Anglesey Sea Salt Company pumps sea water, which is frequently sampled to ensure there is no

contamination, to large tanks on shore. It is left to settle before it is filtered and pumped through a series of further tanks on its way to the harvesting plant. Here the water is boiled and the concentrated brine transferred to large pans. After gentle warming by steam, the salt crystals start to form.

Sourced from further afield — the Red Sea in Israel — is another SA-certified sea salt, Seasun, launched last year as a manufacturing food ingredient and for catering. The Cheshire-based Sea Salt Company, a division of F.J.Need (Foods) Ltd, has been so busy keeping up with demand, says marketing manager Kay Basnett, that retail packs were put on hold, but they will definitely be available this summer.

The company chose Israel, where an Israeli government body does the inspection for the SA, because the heat in that windswept and extremely barren part of the world



meant that the salt could be produced without any mechanical process. The water is pumped into a tank and then left to evaporate naturally in the sun and wind.

Purity

Sea salt, compared to the standard commercial salt, which is usually a mined product, highly refined and with added anti-caking agents such as magnesium carbonate and sodium hexacyanoferrate II (these stop the salt becoming damp), contains a balance of all the 82 essential trace elements and minerals. Key ones to mention are zinc, calcium, potassium, magnesium and iodine.

Organic approval is an independent verification of purity and minimal processing, although there are of course other high-quality, additive-free, naturally-produced sea salts which do not carry the organic mark. Hon Môn, by the way, also comes in a with-spices version, another variation on the sea salts mixed with herbs or with seaweed for that extra briny tang.



One of the varieties of wakame from the Norwegian coast which go into Seagreens.

Seaweed

The harvest of the sea in the form of seaweed figures in culinary traditions of the British Isles — think of laver bread in Wales (laver or sea lettuce is the Japanese nori) — but as a flavoursome finishing touch to a meal, seaweed is hardly commonplace at the dining table. Changing that is Seagreens' organic-approved seaweed specifically prepared and packaged as a condiment — and there are Seagreens capsules as well for use as

The mustard file

Seeds from some mustard plants make a yellow flour when ground, others a browner one. Weather causes variation in the colour, though, and the colour in French Brown is caramel. Yellow flours tend to be milder, but it doesn't always follow.

French mustard is not always mild, either... traditional Dijon is often fiery,

more so than English. Wholegrain mustard should have a 'nutty bite, just a little crunch'.

Contrary to some opinion, mustard does not go on for ever. Some wholegrain mustards do last well, but mustard is a living product and it will mellow with age until the heat is gone and only bitterness remains.

a food supplement.

Three different types of wild wrack, a short, thick seaweed, are gathered from the arctic Norwegian coast. All seaweeds are highly nutritious and wrack, says Seagreens Managing Director Simon Ranger, has a particularly broad and balanced nutrient content — minerals and trace elements, vitamins, including the antioxidants and B group (some not present in land plants) and amino acids.

A staple of Japanese and Chinese cuisine, seaweeds include arame, for instance, which is a good garnish for soup, while delicately-flavoured wakame goes well with beans.

The Japanese macrobiotic store cupboard offers a hoard of other condiments as well which not only impart flavour but also health benefits.

The best known are the soya sauces made from fermented soybeans — shoyu with wheat and tamari without. As well as the protein from the beans, the lactic fermentation process creates digestion-aiding enzymes. Made in the traditional way in cedarwood kegs to ferment gradually, shoyu and tamari will take at least 18 months to produce.

Balance

From India — actually they are made in Germany but based on Indian Ayurvedic principles — are Maharishi Ayur-Veda Churnas, blends of herbs and spice, all providing a balance of the six food tastes, sweet, salt, sour, pungent, bitter and stringent. There are Vata, Pitta and Kapha blends, each appropriate to a different state of imbalance within the body... check your score at www.maharishi.co.uk.

Another Indian invention is chutney — the word comes from the Hindi — and there are now plenty of organic choices, along with all kinds of other pickles and side-of-plate accompaniments.

As well as its famous cider vinegar, Martlet has organic wine and balsamic vinegars and some traditional sauces to accompany meat, such as Apple and Cider, Orange & Cranberry, Redcurrant, and Cumberland Sauce which combines



Picture courtesy of Seagreens

redcurrants with oranges and port.

Mint Jelly (a silver winner in the Great Taste Awards 2000) is among a small organic range from Wiltshire Tracklements, a family company based at Malmesbury from where they specialise in supplying independents.

Ketchup

On to the all-over-plate category including brown sauce, but in which tomato ketchup is king. Just for fun, I asked Heinz if they were planning, hot on the heels of their Organic Tomato Ketchup, to introduce an organic version of their new green variety — green as in colour, rather than in special eco-friendly credentials. They are not.

That's enough of the kids' stuff.

The Japanese file

- Shoyu sauce — soya sauce made with wheat.
- Tamari sauce — soya sauce made without wheat.
- Umeboshi salted plum — green plums preserved in salt. An aid to indigestion when eaten whole or can be cut into small pieces as a seasoning. The red juice extracted from the plums makes a sharp, salty liquid.
- Gomasio — roast and lightly ground sesame seeds with salt.

The vinegar file

Vinegar can be made from any fruit or grain — traditional Balsamic vinegar is made from the sugary, white Trebbiano grapes which are grown on the hills around Modena in Italy. Coconut and Cane vinegars are common in India, the Phillipines and Indonesia. Date Vinegar is popular in the Middle East.

Clearspring's Kyushu Organic Brown Rice Vinegar is aged for several months in partially buried earthenware crocks. In the winter the surrounding grasses are cut short to expose the crocks to gentle sunlight. In the summer they are left to grow high to filter out the harsher rays.

Ketchup has gained something of a reputation as a health food since the discovery that lycopene, low levels of which are linked to cancer, is more easily absorbed from processed tomatoes.

Spiced Up Extra Tomato Sauce from Pollen Organics — the people whose mayonnaise was an Organic Food Awards winner last year and whose Red Onion Marmalade Relish was voted a favourite in the Organic Business kitchen — is described as a 'more authentic form of tomato ketchup'. Made mainly with tomatoes it also has enough onion, garlic, cider vinegar, and spices to kick.

Now is there much to say about mustard? You bet.

We spoke to an expert, Andrew Gordon, managing director of Gordon's Fine Foods. "You have to get the processing just right," he

says. Much of the taste comes from the chemical reaction between the enzymes and volatile oils in the flour and the water, spices, vinegar and other ingredients. Get it wrong and you get a bitter flavour and no heat.

Gordon's makes both organic and non-organic mustards and there is a difference in the taste. "The organic seeds do manufacture differently. It isn't just a perception, you do get a stronger, more robust flavour," says Andrew Gordon.

Gordon's organic mustard seed comes from US prairie country, Wisconsin, where it is grown to traditional methods, leaving the seeds to dry slowly out in the field.

Mustard is reputed to be good for digestion and low in fat. "An unsung hero really," says Gordon. "Not a product to leave on the side of your plate."

Wholesaler's Choice



Charlie Booth of the wholesale arm of Infinity Foods, the Brighton-based organic and

wholefood co-operative, savours popular organic condiments.

Top sellers

- Clearspring Tamari and Shoyu sauces — classics.
- Lima Atlantic Sea Salt — salt made trendy. Lima are now doing a Herb Salt Shaker.
- Manicardi Balsamic Vinegar — authentic, stylish and great value (rrp £5.76 for 500ml).

Tip for the top

Tasty Vittles Chutney from Community Foods — the Spicy Apricot Chutney is nearly as good as my mum's and a good price.

Gap in the market

Anything new that is not going straight into the multiples.

Personal favourite

Delouis Fils Dijon Mustard — we have some 5,000 products in our warehouse. This is the best one.

Infinity Foods in 50 words:

Wholesaling nationally since 1985 and with claim to the largest range of organic products anywhere, infinity has played a pioneering role in sourcing and developing organic products. Its own brand Super Muesli was Best Breakfast Cereal in 1998's Organic Food Awards. Infinity's shop and café are an integral part of the Brighton scene.