

Talking Point

Andy Link, chef/patron at The Riverside Inn, Aymestrey

Now that Dry January is over, either successfully or not (as with some of us), then what next? As we all know, creating a more healthy lifestyle takes more than just a month's worth of abstinence, it takes a permanent tweaking of how we live, eat, drink...

I think that February is a great time to have a look at this, and create a balance that's sustainable in the long-term. Fads come and go, of course, but I have noticed some significant changes that seem here to stay.

Core trends include sticking to a lower alcohol intake, eating more plant-based meals, and looking at what we eat, from the ingredients to the packaging, so that we shop and eat in a more sustainable way. A term that's been coined is 'evergreen consumption'.

Increasing numbers of people are infuriated by unnecessary packaging: aubergines, which come with a thick and powerful skin, but still wrapped in plastic, to conjure up just one example. There has also been a backlash against the huge amount of waste our society creates: single use drinks bottles, throwaway coffee cups and crisp packets, to name check but a few examples. The arguments that some big companies use that creating a more sustainable method of operating is not commercially viable has shown to be spurious. Take Two Farmers crisps, a Herefordshire business making artisan crisps with local produce, and using compostable packaging, and generating a huge amount of interest. If they can do it, so can others.

We need to look at the whole product lifecycle of things we buy - from the farm to the packaging to the waste implications. It's shocking that even the materials we faithfully put in our recycling bags often land up in landfill regardless. The key is to produce less of the stuff that cannot be recycled or composted in the first place.

In the pub we have noticed changes in our guests' drinking habits. Many are ordering 'no alcohol' drinks as a matter of course. In response to these shifts we have started to offer no alcohol aperitifs, and a wider range of soft drinks (from fantastic companies such as Radnor Hills and Pixley Berries).

As I mentioned earlier, the trend for plant-based food is growing too, and by that I mean vegan dishes rather than simply vegetarian meals. We now prepare separate vegetarian and vegan menus on request to cater for this growing trend.

In 2019 there really does seem to be a shift towards cleaner, healthier eating, that's much more than a passing phase. From our point of view, it's an exciting challenge, it means that us for us chefs have to keep learning and being creative and inventive to conjure up delicious plant-based dishes. But with all these things sometimes a balance is best. As I grew up on a dairy farm, I will always champion eating sustainably sourced meat, fish and dairy, alongside local and organic vegetables.

Maybe the best way forward is to make some days a plant-based eating day - giving you the opportunity to experiment with new flavours and textures and ingredients - then have meat and dairy on the remaining days. That way it's possible to balance health and environmental concerns, and support farmers who produce meat and dairy products.

And it's important to keep supporting your local pub -such places are the lifeblood of a local community, and we are adapting to make sure we meet your needs. Small, local producers/businesses also need our

continued backing, as they are the ones who keep rural places viable as places to live and work.