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Produce at Planet Organic in Islington, London – but caterers are favouring the cost benefits of local sourcing and seasonality

# Organic sales drop as operators cut costs

BY KERSTIN KUHN

Organic food sales are starting to drop in the hospitality sector as operators tighten their belts because of the economic downturn, experts have revealed.

Last month it emerged that organic food sales at supermarkets are falling sharply, and many hospitality operators are now also changing their priorities.

Peter Backman, managing director of food service consultancy Horizons, told *Caterer* that, while there has never been a big demand for organic produce among hospitality businesses, trends in supermarkets are likely to be mirrored in the industry.

“Organic produce is not as important in the food service sector as it is in the retail sector,” he said. “However, operators who are marginally deciding to cut their costs are starting to move away from buying organic ingredients.”

Christian Paynton, director of United Fresh Consortium, the small suppliers’ body, agreed, suggesting that local sourcing is a more pressing issue. “Due to cost issues, the demand for organic food in the hospitality industry has never been great, but this has declined even further in the last months as operators are looking to cut costs,” he said.

“There is now an increased awareness of food provenance as the sector realises the benefit of

locally sourced and seasonal produce, both in terms of costs and quality.”

Paynton’s point was echoed by Diana Spellman, managing director of Partners in Purchasing, who said that businesses, especially in the leisure sector, are starting to shift their focus.

“Many event caterers we supply are now much less focused on organic produce and are increasingly concentrating on food provenance,” she said. “It’s more and more about where the food comes from; less and less about how it was produced.”  
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