



Picture by Chris George

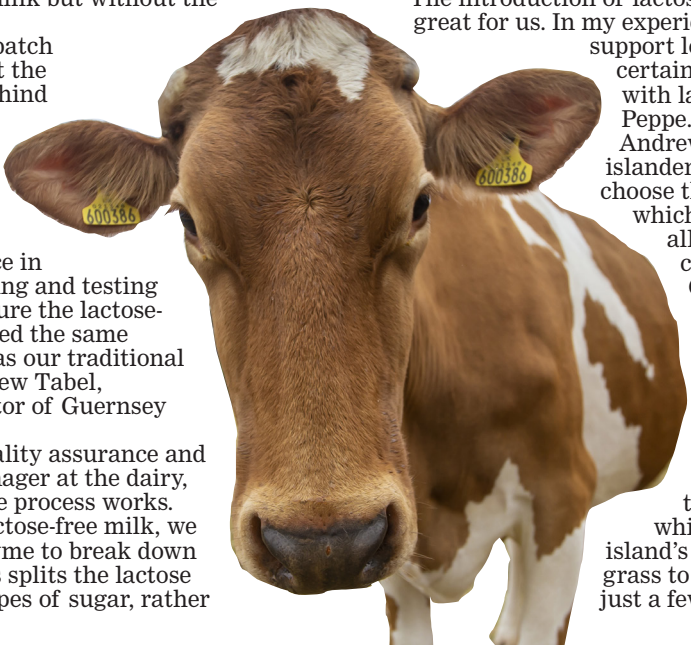
Guernsey Dairy's new lactose-free milk is proving a hit with one of the island's most popular chefs. We found out why...

PEPPE CERCIELLO REGA is one of Guernsey's most popular chefs and his busy Gusto restaurant in Smith Street is a shrine to his roots, passion for Italian cooking and love of local produce. However, no matter how much he loves local produce, there is one Guernsey delicacy he simply does not have the stomach for. A proud Neapolitan, Peppe arrived in the island some 20 years ago and has worked his way through the ranks to now run his own renowned Italian restaurant with his brother, Sabino. He describes his style of cooking as 'simple cuisine with an Italian memory'. 'The basis of Gusto's menu is in the land we were born in, in the smell of the sea, in the scent of lemons but also in the produce we can source, and Guernsey is fantastic,' said Peppe. They embrace local produce as much as they can but there is one local delectation that literally turns Peppe's stomach – milk. 'It is devastating as I am lactose-intolerant so can't enjoy Guernsey milk. It impacts my digestion and as lovely as everyone tells me it is, I just don't have the stomach for it – until now.' Peppe has a severe reaction to lactose and therefore stays clear of it. He can consume hard cheese and other dairy products but milk and soft cheese he avoids. Although Peppe's condition is serious, he believes anyone who thinks they have intolerance to food should not believe the hype and take medical advice. 'You certainly shouldn't be influenced by bloggers or vloggers on the internet. I have a genuine intolerant reaction to lactose and therefore I

simply can't consume it,' said Peppe. A recent National Osteoporosis Society survey found a fifth of under-25s are cutting out or reducing dairy in their diet. It said it was concerned many young adults were putting their health at risk by following eating fads influenced by social media. The charity surveyed 2,000 adults, including 239 under the age of 25 and 339 aged 25-35. A recent Food Standards Agency survey also found that nearly half of the UK's 16-24-year-olds said they had intolerance to cow's milk and dairy products, compared with just 8% of over-75s. Yet only 24% had actually had their condition diagnosed by a doctor. Professor Susan Lanham-New, head of nutritional sciences at the University of Surrey, said: 'Diet in early adulthood is so important because by the time we get into our late 20s it is too late to reverse the damage caused by poor diet and nutrient deficiencies and the opportunity to build strong bones has passed.' Unlike food allergies, which are caused by an over-reaction of the immune system, intolerances are not life threatening. They occur when the body finds it hard to digest a particular type of food and producers have adapted products to ensure people like Peppe can still enjoy the nutritional benefits of certain foods. Peppe has to cater for all types of customer requests. 'My own experiences mean I never take people's requests lightly. We cater for allergies and intolerances in our restaurant kitchen and in our coffee shop too as more people switch to lactose-free milk,' he said.

The lactose-free market has gained popularity, particularly within the dairy sector, where the variety of products has grown exponentially in recent years. Last August, after growing demand from customers and consumers, Guernsey Dairy began to fully investigate the feasibility of producing its own lactose-free milk made from fresh Guernsey milk, containing all the nutritional benefits of its normal low-fat milk but without the lactose. 'An initial trial batch was made to test the methodology behind our research before committing to two larger production runs. This gave us the confidence in the manufacturing and testing protocols to ensure the lactose-free milk achieved the same high standards as our traditional milk,' said Andrew Tabel, managing director of Guernsey Dairy. Alex Tielles, quality assurance and compliance manager at the dairy, explains how the process works. 'To make our lactose-free milk, we add lactase enzyme to break down the lactose. This splits the lactose into different types of sugar, rather

than the one naturally produced by the cows, although in the end it contains the same amount of sugar as normal milk.' The dairy laboratory staff carried out tests for each trial and found no detectable levels of lactose remaining (typically it contains less than 0.01% lactose but can contain up to a maximum of 0.03%). This was verified by an accredited independent UK-based testing facility. 'The introduction of lactose-free Guernsey milk is great for us. In my experience islanders want to support local producers and we certainly serve a lot of coffees with lactose-free milk,' said Peppe. Andrew hopes that other islanders like Peppe will choose the local product, which he says contains all the natural healthy constituents of regular Guernsey milk but without the lactose. 'Unlike imported variants, Guernsey Dairy milk supports the conservation of our unique rural environment designed to maintain Guernsey's traditional countryside while enhancing the island's biodiversity. From grass to glass, it has travelled just a few miles,' said Andrew.



Lactose-free coffee panna cotta

Serves 6

- 300ml lactose-free cream
- 100ml lactose-free low-fat Guernsey milk
- 80g caster sugar
- 3 sheets of gelatine
- 120ml strong coffee
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- Shaved chocolate for decoration

1. Put the gelatine sheets in a small bowl of cold water until soft.
2. Add the milk, cream and sugar in a pan and heat it gently, stirring until the sugar is dissolved.
3. Add the coffee and the vanilla extract, mix well and remove from the hob.
4. Squeeze the excess water from the gelatine leaves and add them into the hot cream mixture, stir well until it is dissolved.
5. Pour into serving glasses and keep them in the fridge overnight until set.
6. Top the panna cotta with chocolate shavings before serving.



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Andrew Tabel, Guernsey Dairy managing director, pictured below



THE TASTE TEST

So what does Guernsey Dairy's new lactose-free milk actually taste like? **Helen Hubert** and family found out...



Eliza and Erin Hubert tasting the new lactose-free milk. (29573812)

TO FIND out if Guernsey Dairy's latest product is up to scratch, I turned to two of the toughest food critics I know – my daughters. I filled one glass with our usual low-fat milk and another with the lactose-free version to see if they could tell the difference. First up was the super-selective seven-year-old. She might be a massive milk-lover, but she is also the fussiest eater I have ever known and is able to detect a change of brand with little more than a sniff, so I was confident she would have no problem detecting which was the new product. She took a single sip of each and immediately pointed at the lactose-free milk. 'It's that one,' she declared. 'It just tastes like there's a bit "extra" to the normal one.' She struggled to explain exactly what she meant by 'extra', but I was able to ascertain it was 'not bad, just different'. For a more detailed analysis, I sought the verdict of my discerning 10-year-old. While much more adventurous with her tastes, she can still be hard to please. Could she spot the difference? 'I think this is the new one,' she correctly assessed after a few mouthfuls. 'It tastes a bit creamier, but nice.' My husband, who generally favours oat milk over the dairy drink, decided to get involved in the taste test too. 'It's a bit sweeter, but quite pleasant,' he announced, having also identified the new milk. So there you are. Having tried it myself, I am happy to endorse my taste-testers' comments. You can definitely tell the difference between standard low-fat and the lactose-free milk. The latter seems slightly sweeter, with a creamier after-taste – whether that is a good or bad thing will depend on your preferences. But for those with an intolerance, it is undoubtedly an excellent alternative.

