

## Take five...

### Lentils

**1** A good source of protein and fibre, lentils, like beans, deliver lots of B vitamins and are excellent at keeping a healthy digestive system.

**2** Use green or the smaller green Puy lentils instead of meat in shepherd-style pies.

**3** Lentils make excellent soup and are best cooked first before being added to lightly cooked onion, garlic, celery, carrot, celeriac or simply to stock. Puree until slightly grainy or completely smooth.



**4** Lentils are delicious as a side dish with simply grilled fish. Add some crème fraîche, cream, yoghurt or mascarpone to bind and squeeze lemon juice just before serving.

**5** Lentils make an excellent curry. Use cooked lentils with curry paste and a can of tomatoes, garlic, onion and winter vegetables for an easy supper dish.



### Roz Crowley

**I**N THESE days of belt tightening, it's hard to believe that certified, organic convenience food could be profitable. Small may be beautiful, but can also mean high-unit costs, which any accountant would warn against. But five food awards this year, and increasing sales, have proven the cynics wrong, for justfood boss, Deirdre Hilliard, maker of organic handmade food. Deirdre is proving the accountants wrong, too — interesting as Hilliard is an accountant.

For six years, a career in finance gave Deirdre, 44, and her husband, Kevin, a comfortable lifestyle in Holland.

Deirdre's father was unwell, and, thinking about starting a family of their own, Deirdre and Kevin came home to Cork, Kevin to work as an accountant in Musgrave's. Deirdre undertook the Ballymaloe 12-week cooking course, but ended up back working as a financial controller for a multinational — which meant her young baby saw little of her. It was time for change.

She experimented with soups, which she sold on a corner of Darina Allen's stall at the Middleton country market. "I took the organic route, as I always felt it didn't make sense to eat food which had been sprayed with chemicals," she says. "We all ate organic food growing up, it just wasn't called that. Then, somehow, chemicals started being sprayed on fruit and vegetables and our choices diminished."

Feedback at the market confirmed her belief that customers wanted the reassurance of organic certification. "Some of them had had cancer and wanted to avoid chemicals in their diets, so I decided to go fully certified, which was a huge commitment."

Deirdre is pleased with the result, so the rigours of certification and food sourcing have been worth it and people appreciate the difference. "We secured a decent order from SuperValu, and solved the distribution problem by finding a company that could deliver straight to shops without the delay of storage in a warehouse. I wanted customers to be able to enjoy our products as fresh as possible."

When she reached a critical mass, the accountant in her knew she had to invest and expand, and now she employs six and her husband, Kevin, has given up his job to work on the IT side of the business.

Thanks to help from the Cork Enterprise Board, her base in the dockyard development, in Cobh, allows for further capacity. Her range is impressive, with the award-winning spicy lentil and winter minestrone soups, a corn and squash soup for children, the award-winning, smooth, chicken liver



**JUST THE JOB:** Justfood boss, Deirdre Hilliard, with a selection of her produce.

# Food that's just right

paté, vibrant guacamole and chunky hummous, which are good on brown bread. The delicious, seed-rich toasted muesli is just going onto shop shelves. All the products are low on salt and have an excellent, natural texture, each ingredient is recognisable and lively, as all organic food should be.

Price-wise, while we expect to pay a little more for organic, generous-sized portions are

fair value. Soups range from €2.50 for 375ml, to €3.75 for 670ml, while sweet chilli hummus is €3.63 for 180g.

Justfood products are available in some SuperValu stores, Ardkeen Foodstore, Waterford, Morton's, Dublin, McCambridge's, Galway, Joyce's, Galway, Urru Bandon, and Mallow and Middleton markets. For other stockists, log onto [www.justfood.ie](http://www.justfood.ie).

## Get into the spirit

THE Cork Free Choice Consumer Group presents A German Christmas, with tips on traditional decorations, activities, food and drinks for the festive occasion, on Thursday, November 27, at the Crawford art gallery Café, Cork, at 7.30pm. Entrance fee is €6.

## A 'cheesy' celebration

CÁIS, the Association of Irish Farmhouse Cheesemakers, celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, and yesterday marked the occasion with a tasting of 40 Irish farmhouse cheeses in the Cashel Palace Hotel.

"When we look back, we can see we have come a long way from rubbery, sliced cheddar to a wonderful choice of Irish cheeses, spearheaded by Veronica Steele, who inspired so many others," said a spokesman.



## A clean start

SAFEFOOD works with restaurants to improve poor hygiene standards and Martin Higgins, chief executive, is encouraging consumers to speak out. "53% of consumers surveyed said they were reluctant to speak out, while 62% of consumers will not return to the food establishment if they experience poor food hygiene standards, and will most certainly tell others of their bad experience," he says.

A total of seven closure orders were served on food premises in September 2008.

## Ethical coffee

BEWLEY'S have invested a further \$1.5m in ethically-certified contracts, continuing their support for sustainable coffee production in Central America. Certified coffee accounts for 22% of Bewley's intake and the company plans to have all its coffees independently certified by 2011. The company plans to involve coffee producers in carbon reduction initiatives that actively support their economic viability, crop sustainability, and coffee quality. Initiatives will include support for solar power on coffee farms where the mains electricity supply does not exist or is unreliable.