

The Grocer

Focus On: Oils by Robyn Vinter (robynvinter@gmail.com)

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The Story

Sales of speciality cooking oils have surged with volumes up in the past year, as other oil categories have struggled to grow: extra virgin olive, sunflower and vegetable oil losing value in the past year. What's going on? Which brands and types of oil are driving speciality's growth? Why are most other oils in decline? What are retailers and brands doing to address this?

Key themes:

Retailers: Crucial to this feature will be an exploration of how different retailers are approaching this category in terms of their ranging (branded and own label), merchandising, pricing, promotions and so on. How have ranges been rationalised in the past year and how has this affected the performances of the sector's biggest brands?

Pricing: This feature will pay particularly close attention to the factors that have led to significant rises in average prices across most of the major cooking oil sectors, apart from vegetable. These will range from the impact of the discounters, which continue to outperform the wider market, to commodity cost fluctuations arising from variations in yields in raw material growing regions.

Speciality oil: Sales of speciality oils are in strong growth. This feature will explore which types of oil are driving this growth and how factors such as NPD, price and promotions, marketing and so on are being used to maintain this. How much of this is down to coconut oil?

Olive oil: Value sales of extra virgin olive oil have dipped slightly as volumes have fallen, suggesting that higher prices are deterring shoppers from buying. Standard olive oil, meanwhile, is in value growth, although volumes are down slightly. What dynamics are at play here?

Sunflower oil: This feature will explore the factors that have led to this sector's value decline on volumes that have fallen the past year.

Vegetable oil: This feature will explore in detail the factors behind vegetable oil's value decline as volumes rise. Which brands are driving this? Are lower prices attracting shoppers from elsewhere?

Rapeseed oil: This feature will explore in detail the continued strong growth in rapeseed oil. How are factors like branding, price and promotions, the trend for healthy eating and so affecting the growth of this sector?

Own label v brands: In general, brands are outgrowing own label in the oils market. This feature will explore why this is and which players are proving most successful in the current climate.

Innovation: This will be key to this feature. We will be investigating how new product development has shaped the category over the past year and what is in store for shoppers in 2016. We will be profiling four of the most interesting launches in a separate innovation panel.

Promotions: This feature will explore how the promotional strategies of retailers and brands have changed over the past year. Attention will be paid to the promotional strategies of retailers and how this has affected average prices over the past year.