

Meat and veg vending machines do roaring trade in coronavirus crisis

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Choose the best definition.

A vending machine is ...

1. a machine that grows things for you to eat.
2. a machine that you can buy things from.
3. a machine that keeps food cool and fresh.

b. Where can you see vending machines? Name four places, for example, *at a train station*.

c. What types of products do vending machines sell? Name four product categories, for example, *sweets*.

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

lockdown	fussy	hassle	shipping containers	honesty box	pests
produce	dispense	reluctant	roast	profit margins	wheelbarrow

1. a large piece of meat that has been cooked in an oven _____ (para 1)
2. a time when large numbers of people are ordered to stay at home either most or all of the time _____ (para 1)
3. (of a machine) give you something _____ (para 4)
4. a large open container with one wheel that you use outside for moving things. It has two long handles at the back that you use for pushing it _____ (para 5)
5. a container where you put money for something that you buy when there is no shopkeeper or seller present _____ (para 5)
6. fruit, vegetables and other things that farmers grow _____ (para 8)
7. the differences between how much money you get when you sell something and how much it costs you to buy or make it _____ (para 8)
8. a situation that causes problems for you or that annoys you _____ (para 8)
9. not willing to do something _____ (para 9)
10. very large metal boxes designed to be loaded easily onto boats and trucks _____ (para 12)
11. insects or small animals that damage plants or supplies of food _____ (para 13)
12. only satisfied if things are exactly as you want them to be _____ (para 15)

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Fiona Harvey

18 April, 2020

- 1 Vending machines for the Sunday roast, fish to your door and salads grown in car parks – British food producers are finding new ways to get food to the table during lockdown, changes that may lead to benefits long after lockdown ends.
- 2 Many UK farmers have been hard hit by the coronavirus crisis, despite the strong demand for fresh food. Before the lockdown, half of all food and drink was eaten outside people's homes, and changing from supplying big companies to selling to individuals has been difficult.
- 3 But some farmers and food entrepreneurs are finding different ways to be successful, and the environmental benefits – and the profits – may encourage more to follow suit.
- 4 In 2018, Neil Stephen, from Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, bought self-service vending machines dispensing everything from farmhouse cheese and shortbread to joints of meat, whole chickens and fresh fruit and vegetables.
- 5 He was inspired by his grandfather who, in the late 1970s, used to leave a wheelbarrow at the gates of the family farm filled with turnips and cabbages, and an honesty box for people to pay.
- 6 Now Stephen's investment is paying off, as people are attracted to a hygienic system where the food is neatly packaged in portions in a refrigerated machine, behind glass doors. They put in the number, pay by card and the windows open for them to collect the food.
- 7 Sales at Thorneybank Farm Shop have increased by five times, Stephen reports. "We were rushed off our feet. It's worked really well."
- 8 The shop sells produce from neighbouring farmers, too – asparagus and strawberries come from six miles away and eggs and dairy from three miles down the road. They can make better profit margins than they would selling to a big supermarket, without the hassle of door-to-door deliveries. The shop has a strong social-media presence, shoppers come from nearby Turriff town, and the city of Aberdeen is only about 30 miles away.
- 9 Fishing is another industry hard hit by the Covid-19 crisis. In normal times, most of Britain's fish goes abroad, where people like the types of fish commonly caught in UK waters. People in the UK have been reluctant to move beyond cod, haddock and tuna, which mostly has to be imported.
- 10 The UK government is giving £1m to English fishermen to set up new ways to sell their fish and find local markets. There are already schemes for selling fish directly, such as SoleShare in London and Call4Fish, a service that operates from Berwickshire to Cornwall.
- 11 Food campaigners hope these services, where the fish for sale depends on what is caught by small boats, will encourage a more sustainable way of fishing. They hope people will try local fish, not just overfished cod.
- 12 Sebastien Sainsbury has a London-based company called Crate to Plate, which grows lettuce and other leafy greens in shipping containers, stacked up in air-conditioned units under heat lamps.
- 13 The containers seem more like labs than farms – workers are kitted out in protective gear, from boot shields to hairnets, to prevent pests getting in. As a result, the lettuce, kale, pak choi and herbs are free from pesticides, insecticides and herbicides, and 96% less water is used than in fields.
- 14 Once all of the units are fully up and running, there could be 12 harvests a year, producing 15 to 18 tonnes from this site. Another will be producing soon in London's Elephant and Castle, where a development of 3,000 homes will receive salad weekly from containers.
- 15 Sainsbury believes this is the future of fresh produce for fussy Londoners. "Younger people are more focused on where their food comes from, how fresh it is, what's in it. This coronavirus crisis is an opportunity for us all to become aware of what we are eating."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Complete the table using information from the article.

	Thorneybank Farm Shop	Crate to Plate
Where is the shop?		
Who runs it?		
What does it sell?		
Where does the produce come from?		
What are the advantages for the seller?		
What are the advantages for customers?		

b. What other companies are mentioned in the article? What do they sell?

4 Phrases

a. Complete the phrases from the article. The first letter of each missing word is given to help you.

- do (a) r _____ trade – sell a lot of products
- follow s _____ – do the same thing that someone else has done
- pay o _____ – bring benefits
- rushed off our f _____ – extremely busy
- kitted o _____ – when someone has been given all the clothes and equipment that are necessary for an activity
- up and r _____ – starting to work correctly

b. Check your answers. Then use the phrases to complete these sentences. Change the form where necessary.

- The medical staff were _____ in masks and gloves.
- It will take at least a year to get the system _____.
- Supermarkets are _____ in toilet paper.
- In the week that we were allowed to reopen our shop, we were _____.
- Staying at home and away from other people seems to be _____.
- When one country introduced testing for everyone, others _____.

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5 Discussion

- a. What food do you buy from vending machines?
- b. What are the main advantages and disadvantages of selling food from vending machines?
- c. Have you seen or heard of other people selling food in new ways?
- d. Have your food shopping habits changed in the last five or ten years? If so, how?
 - o Do you go shopping more or less often?
 - o Do you buy more online?
 - o Do you buy more or less local or organic produce?
 - o Have any foods been difficult to get?

6 Webquest

- a. On a map, find the places in the UK that are named in the article, and write them down.
- b. What is each place? E.g. town, city, area, county.
- c. Find out about these places. Which of them would you most like to visit and why?