



The importance of Allergen Management



The prevalence of food allergies has been on the rise globally, including in the United Kingdom. Allergen management has become a critical concern in the food industry due to the potential life-threatening consequences of allergen exposure.

As the number of individuals with food allergies increases, proper allergen management is no longer just a choice but a necessity. According to Allergy UK, 44% of British adults now suffer from at least one allergy and as much as 20% of the population experience some reactions to foods which make them believe they do have a food hypersensitivity.

This article delves into the significance of allergen management in the UK, with a focus on small businesses, businesses operating in small spaces, those using fresh ingredients, and catering establishments.

Over the past few decades, the UK has witnessed a significant increase in the incidence of food allergies. Peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, and wheat are among the most common allergens that can trigger severe reactions in sensitive individuals.

Small businesses, often with limited resources, may find allergen management particularly challenging. However, adopting effective allergen management practices can lead to several benefits. These include enhanced customer trust and loyalty, legal compliance, and a broader customer base as allergy-conscious consumers seek safe dining options.

Ed Farrell from The Duck Truck operates in fixed site and festival food settings. Farrell has seen allergen awareness increase from his customers and had to react: "Since 2019 we have been with Ani to help us manage our allergens. Customers want greater transparency and Ani helps us achieve this. We also use Ani as a staff training tool so all of our staff are up to date with all allergy information."

Ani is not just a detailed allergen management system but a must-have to build loyalty and trust with guests by putting allergen information right at their fingertips. Ani works directly with business owners or the food experts within the business. Ani then takes all their ingredient and recipe information and builds a digital menu highlighting allergens and nutritional information. Working with the Ani system means all the food information is going directly from kitchen to customer eliminating any staffing mistakes.

Businesses such as The Duck Truck that heavily rely on fresh ingredients, must exercise heightened caution in allergen management. Scott Randles, Ani CEO believes "Smaller businesses operate in limited space and limited resources. They have to ensure their staff training is done and their prep spaces are used correctly to avoid cross-contamination, but they also need to deliver accurate information about their food to their customers." This is where Ani helps food businesses of all sizes.

As society becomes more health-conscious and individuals with food allergies seek safe dining options, effective allergen management will inevitably become an even more integral aspect of the food industry. Moreover, regulatory bodies are considering the introduction of Owens law which could see further allergen





requirements placed on food businesses. This proposed law would include:

1. Restaurants required by law to label the fourteen regulated allergens on their menus with standardised symbols, numbers or words.
2. Restaurants required by law to provide a full breakdown of ingredients for each dish in an allergen matrix.
3. Restaurants required by law to ask each customer about allergen requirements on all occasions. The duty manager to be obligated to directly supervise this process where allergens are present, with it being an offence if they fail to do so.

This will have an impact on the food industry in the same way that Natasha's Law did for PPDS products. Farrell can see this being difficult for the food industry.

"I see it going in the direction where customers literally pick and build their own food through apps or customer ordering screens, so displaying all allergens for food that people can build themselves will be challenging."

Randles understands Farrell's concerns but believes that all food businesses need to act quickly to keep up with customer demands and upcoming legislation.

"I was an operator for 20 years before I started Ani with my Co-Founder. The increase in allergen awareness has been incredible and it is clear that it isn't going anywhere. We designed Ani for all businesses and we work with multi-site operators, food trucks, restaurants and caterers. Ani ensures the menu information is accurate and can be updated at the touch of a button to allow for ingredient substitutions and recipe changes. Your information needs to be accurate at all times."

So how do businesses deal with a greater level of regulation that is being proposed?

"I agree with Ed (Farrell) that customers will be wanting to customise menus to meet their needs. It is not too dissimilar from the catering sector of the food industry. A lot of their current practices are to make menus bespoke to their clients. This is great for the customer experience, but they now must do it and ensure they can deliver the required information with it. I think operators need to start by committing to ingredients that they use and cataloguing the allergens in those ingredients. From there they need to ensure they have all of their recipes written down with allergens showing as well. If they then need to make something bespoke then they have the ingredient and recipe information that they can share. We have successfully onboarded caterers this way."



Catering establishments serve diverse clienteles, increasing the likelihood of encountering customers with varying dietary restrictions. Allergen management is paramount in catering to ensure the safety of guests. Proper communication between clients and caterers is key to good management. Using technology means you can get the information directly from kitchen to customer which can help when using agency or temporary staff.

Allergen management is no longer an option but a necessity for food businesses in the UK. The rising prevalence of food allergies and the potential life-threatening consequences of exposure require a proactive approach to ensure customer safety. Small businesses, those operating in limited spaces, using fresh ingredients, and catering establishments all stand to benefit from effective allergen management. By prioritising customer safety, legal compliance, and business growth, establishments can create a positive reputation and ensure long-term success. As the future unfolds, allergen management will continue to evolve, driven by technological innovations and regulatory advancements, solidifying its place as a cornerstone of the food industry.

If you would like to find out more about Ani App, check out their partner page on our website here: www.ncass.org.uk/ani

NCASS has partnered with Ani to help our members provide clear and transparent allergen and nutritional information.



All NCASS members will receive a 53% discount on the original consultation and onboarding fee.