

2025

Food and Beverage Technology and Trends Report

UK & Ireland | *Key Software Insights and Action Points*



Introduction

Welcome to our 2025 food and beverage industry trends report for the UK and Ireland.

As a global specialist in food and beverage technology, it's important that Aptean has its finger on the pulse of the market. We strive to lead discussions on critical industry issues and to help manufacturers, distributors, processors and wholesalers meet challenges head-on and develop best practices for driving growth.

Our annual survey, which we commission B2B International to conduct, is a cornerstone of this commitment to industry insight.

In this report, we'll dive deeper into the data connected to each trend and provide actionable insights to support effective strategic decision-making in 2025 and beyond.

We hope you'll find our insights useful in shaping your strategy for the year ahead.



Our research revealed these five trends:

- 1 Changing consumer demands are the biggest external pressure**
- 2 Gaining rapid access to data is the biggest internal focus area**
- 3 Digital transformation is ready for a reboot—and cloud migration will drive it**
- 4 Investment in industry-specific software is driving revenue growth**
- 5 Exploration and application of artificial intelligence (AI) is surging**



Who We Surveyed

100 Total
Respondents

C-Suite, VP and Director Level personnel across operations, IT, finance, executive management, product development, procurement and supply chain.

Country



UK
84%

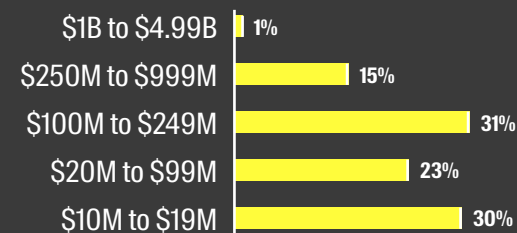


Ireland
16%

Sub-Industries Represented

- Agriculture
- Alcoholic drinks
- Bakery
- Confectionery
- Dairy
- Fresh produce
- Meat, poultry and seafood
- Sauces
- Snacks
- Soft drinks

Annual Revenue



Trend No. 1

Changing Consumer Demand Is the Biggest External Pressure

While inflation and rising material prices were the hardest-felt pressures in 2024, food and beverage companies are most concerned about their ability to keep up with customers in 2025.

A third (33%) of organisations rated changing preferences as a significant concern—higher than sustainability, cybersecurity and inflation.

There has also been a sharp rise in concern around changing regulations and legislation. 30% of food and beverage companies cite this pressure as significant—an increase of 16% compared to last year.

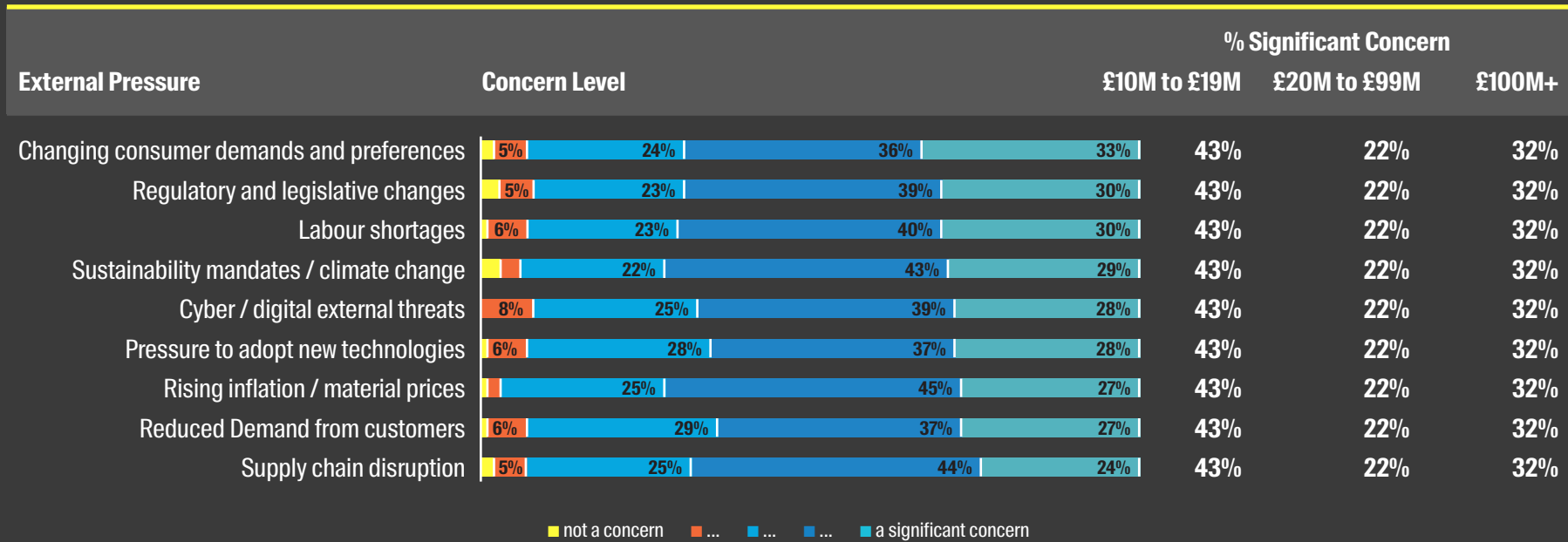
Companies are also focused on the happiness of current customers, with the organisations we surveyed stating that improving customer satisfaction is their top business goal for the year ahead.

Top Five Business Goals for 2025

- 1 Improve customer satisfaction
- 2 Improve operational efficiency and integration
- 3 Improve supply chain resilience
- 4 Acquire more new customers
- 5 Improve employee productivity



Which External Pressures Are You Most Concerned About?



What's Driving Concern Around Consumer and Regulatory Pressures?

There's no escaping the impact of continued strains on consumer budgets. Food prices have risen by 30.6% since May 2021, and while financial fears have reduced slightly compared to 2023, 28% of UK adults still find it difficult to cope with the cost of living.

Not every company deals directly with the end consumer, but regulatory pressures still leave a lasting impact. Processors and manufacturers serving retailers need to respond quickly to changing order demands while developing new products that will entice and excite cautious customers.

Yet significant regulatory changes approaching in 2025 will influence how companies evolve products and packaging.

Two of the most significant legislative changes affecting product sales and development in 2025 are updates to the regulation of foods that are High in Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS), and the introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) fees on product packaging.

Retailers often pass accountability through their supply chain, especially when applying new legislative frameworks to development and production. Processors and manufacturers will need to report on data such as the sugar and fat content of each product, and they'll also need (along with distributors) to calculate packaging usage.



Business Size Matters

While some concerns are universal, our research uncovered significant differences between business priorities based on company size.

For example, smaller organisations (revenue £10-19M) are more fearful of regulatory changes and labour shortages than larger competitors. They're also most likely to feel the pressure of changing consumer demands.

Meanwhile, larger for organisations (revenue £100M+) are much more aware of the risk that cybersecurity threats pose, and they're also most worried about supply chain disruption.

How Can Food and Beverage Companies Respond to External Pressure Points?

Whether companies are dealing directly with the end consumer or serving them through retail and wholesale customers, agility is critical to success in 2025. Food businesses need to understand sales trends and change direction quickly in response to emerging patterns and behaviours.

Ensuring rapid access to accurate data will prove key to keeping up with both consumers and compliance in 2025 and beyond. However, as our next trend will reveal, many companies are struggling to capture, manage and report critical information.

Trend No. 1

Key Takeaways

- » Food and beverage companies are significantly concerned about their ability to keep up with changing consumer preferences.
- » They are also worried about the impact of upcoming regulatory changes such as HFSS and EPR on product development and sales.
- » Operational agility and rapid access to data will prove critical to meeting customer and regulatory demands in 2025.
- » However, many companies struggle to capture and manage information.



Trend No. 2

Rapid Access to Data is The Biggest Internal Focus Area

As we've already established, data capture and reporting are essential to keep pace with production demands. And 65% of UK and Ireland food and beverage companies say quickly obtaining and analysing data on performance and efficiency is their top strategic priority for 2025.

Businesses are focused on using data insights to maintain inventory levels and improve equipment performance and downtime—particularly within smaller organisations. Our research found that while data analysis is the top priority overall, firms with £10-19M revenue are most focused on inventory improvements.



51% of companies plan to **invest in OEE software** in the next 12-24 months to improve operational efficiency.

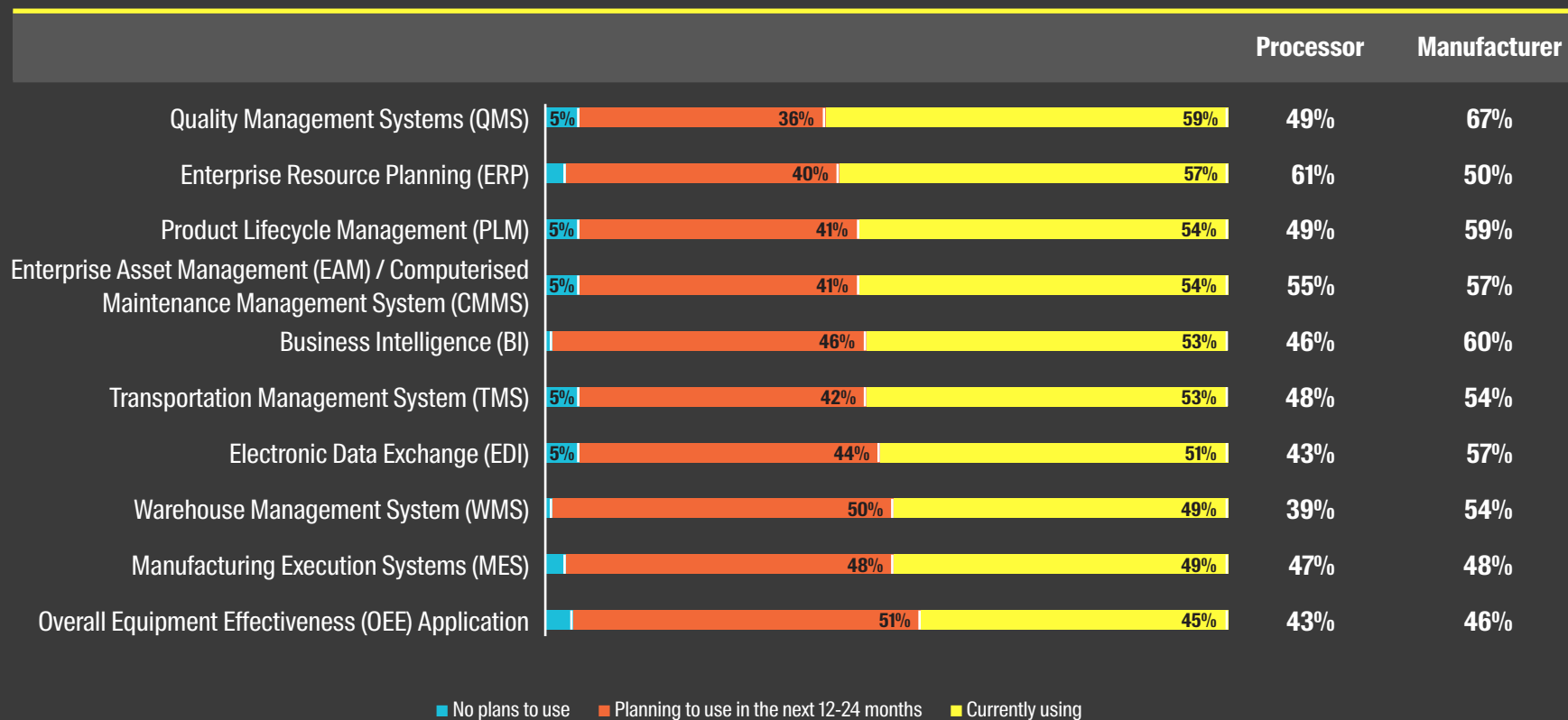


Top Strategic Priorities for 2025

Focus Area	Percent A Major Focus Area	£10M to £19M	£20M to £99M	£100M+
Quickly obtaining and analysing data on performance and efficiency	65%	63%	65%	66%
Maintaining inventory levels	59%	73%	57%	51%
Improving equipment performance and downtime	58%	63%	57%	55%
Finding new business / customers	56%	67%	57%	49%
Meeting industry regulations / compliance	56%	57%	52%	57%
Scaling to meet customer demand	55%	60%	65%	47%
Managing operating costs	54%	50%	57%	55%
Managing transportation / logistics costs	52%	50%	61%	49%



Food and Beverage Technology Usage



How Can Food and Beverage Firms Improve Access to Data?

Companies are looking to increase their efficiency by seeking out systems that manage inventory, production and equipment performance and provide real-time data.

For example, 51% want to invest in software to measure and improve overall equipment effectiveness (OEE) in the next 12-24 months, and 41% plan to invest in enterprise asset management (EAM) solutions.

We also forecast an uplift in the use of business intelligence (BI) tools to better understand customer demand, as 46% plan to invest in BI software. BI modelling can prove particularly beneficial for companies in less predictable categories (such as fresh fruit and vegetable production) for mapping produce yields against demand patterns.

Trend No. 2

Key Takeaways

- » Efficiently capturing and analysing data on performance and efficiency is the top strategic priority for UK and Ireland food and beverage companies in 2025.
- » Generating real-time data on inventory, production and equipment will prove critical to meeting this objective.
- » OEE software is the top planned technology investment for the next 12-24 months, closely followed by warehouse management systems (WMS), manufacturing execution systems (MES) and BI tools.





Trend No. 3

Digital Transformation Needs a Reboot and Cloud Migration Will Drive It

While data access and analysis are top priorities for British and Irish food and beverage companies in 2025, overall progress towards digital transformation appears to have stalled.

Our research found that while 89% of companies are in the process of digitally transforming their organisation, there has been no significant increase in the number of companies completing digital transformation projects and realising the results year on year.

However, the business case for continuing to pursue digital transformation is compelling. When we analyse digital transformation data against financial confidence, companies in the advanced stages of digital transformation anticipate growing business revenue by 11.3% by the end of the year. In contrast, companies in the early stages of digital transformation only predict 6.6% revenue growth.

Digital Transformation: A Year-on-Year Comparison

	No Digital Transformation Started or Planned	Beginning Digital Transformation Process	In Progress of Digital Transformation	Gathering Data Automatically / Digitally and Using Analytics for Business Insights	Completed Digital Transformation Project and Realizing Benefits
2023	7%	13%	39%	25%	16%
2024	11%	22%	37%	13%	17%

Cloud Will Kickstart Digital Transformation

For the digitalisation of food and beverage production to progress, companies need to reboot their digital transformation strategies in 2025. Our research suggests this will happen—and cloud Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software will be the key driver.

Aptean's study found a significant increase in the number of companies that are in the process of moving to cloud ERP software compared to 12 months ago. Processors (72%) are more likely to be moving to the cloud than manufacturers (41%).

Perhaps surprisingly, more small businesses are using (33%) or exploring (53%) cloud ERP compared to midsize (25% / 50%) and enterprise companies (21% / 60%).

Cloud ERP Strategy

	2023	2024
On-premises with no plans to move to cloud ERP	14%	0%
Investigating moving to cloud ERP	28%	19%
In process of moving to cloud ERP	33%	56%
Have already moved to cloud ERP	25%	26%

Which Processes Have Food And Beverage Companies Mostly or Completely Automated?

	2023	2024
Forecasting	44%	71%
Managing production processes	50%	68%
Ensuring compliance	43%	66%
Managing the supply chain	46%	64%
Tracing ingredients	46%	62%
Calculating formulas / recipes	42%	58%

Are We Setting Higher Standards for Digitalisation?

The percentage of companies completing digital transformation projects seems to have stalled. But if we look at how many companies say their processes are mostly or completely automated, statistics have risen significantly in all areas. How can this be?

One explanation for stagnation in digital transformation initiatives could be the higher expectations companies set for themselves. What was considered “transformational” a few years ago is now a basic improvement, and automated processes have become a core expectation. As a result, businesses are grading themselves more harshly on their digital transformation progress.

What's Driving Cloud ERP Adoption?

While keeping up with the consumer is the main external challenge in 2025, innovation is not the key driver of cloud ERP adoption.

Instead, food and beverage companies are motivated by the security benefits of moving to the cloud, and the increased mobility, scalability and flexibility that cloud-based ERP software provides.

There is also a strong financial incentive for investing in cloud ERP. Our research found companies using cloud ERP software predict 13.2% revenue growth in 2024/2025 and 14.4% profit growth.

In contrast, those not using a cloud-based ERP system only predict 7.5% revenue growth and 7.9% profit growth.

How Can Companies Maximise the Value of Cloud Migration?

To “level up” digital transformation in 2025, food and beverage companies need to approach cloud migration as part of a holistic improvement strategy. Transferring existing systems into the cloud improves access, but replacing them with purpose-built cloud solutions could deliver much greater value.

For businesses in the early stages of migration, moving ERP software into the cloud should be a top priority. It can feel daunting and disruptive, but moving core systems first will unlock data-sharing capabilities that enable better, quicker decision-making.

For companies further along the cloud journey, consider which Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions can quickly obtain and analyse data on performance and efficiency, and translate that data into tangible improvements.

For example, cloud EAM software can deliver asset information to technicians in the field or on the production floor, improving responses to equipment performance issues and minimising downtime.

What Are The Main Drivers for Moving to the Cloud?



Companies using cloud ERP software predict **13.2% revenue growth and 14.4% profit growth** in 2024/25. Firms not in the cloud only predict 7.5% revenue growth and 7.9% profit growth.



Trend No. 3

Key Takeaways

- » Cloud migration will be a key focus for food and beverage companies in 2025 as they seek to quickly obtain and analyse data on performance and efficiency.
- » Companies using cloud ERP software driving higher revenue and greater profit margins than those using on-premises technology or manual processes.
- » The greatest value may come from replacing current technology with purpose-built solutions, rather than simply moving existing systems into the cloud.





Trend No. 4

Companies Will Upgrade to Industry-Specific Software

Transitioning to the cloud allows businesses to evaluate the compatibility of their existing systems and upgrade from legacy technology to more advanced, industry-specific software.

Our research found that most food and beverage businesses are currently using a horizontal, homegrown or manual solution, with less than half using industry-specific software.

However, when we analyse this data against financial performance, companies using industry-specific software generate more revenue than those with horizontal solutions across almost every system type.

The Business Case for New Software

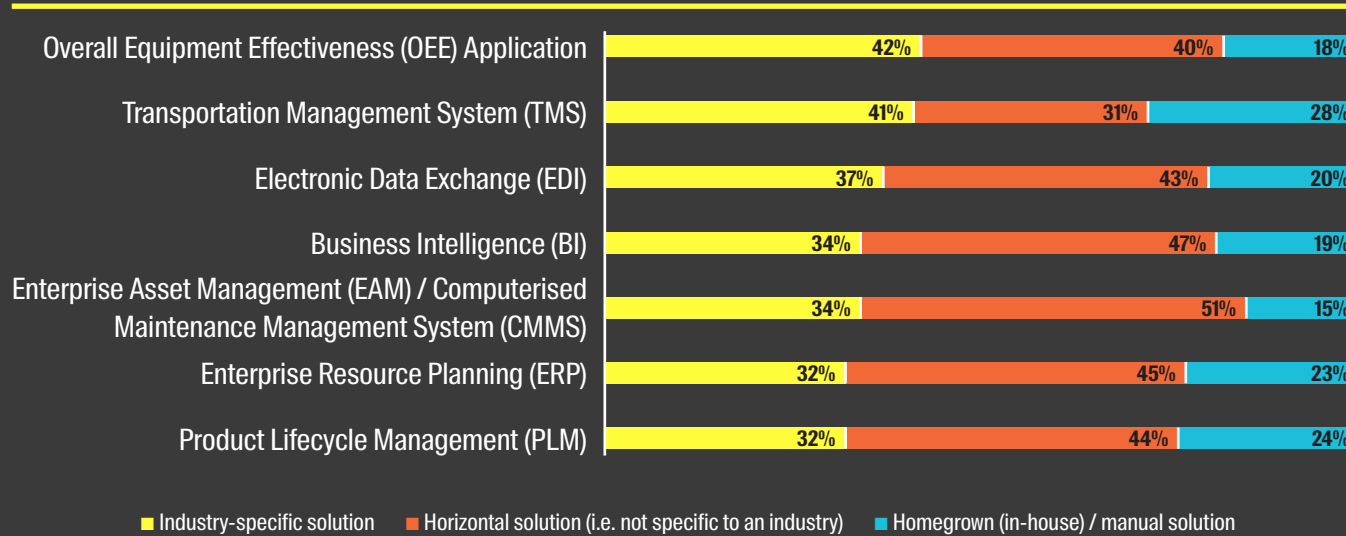
Transitioning from generic software to tailored, industry-specific solutions can be a tough sell to the C-Suite, especially if the company has also spent significant resources on existing platforms.

To gain their support, it's crucial to present clear evidence demonstrating that industry-focussed technology boosts revenue and ensures future scalability and competitiveness.

Companies using **industry-specific software generate more revenue** than those with horizontal solutions.



What Type of Software Does Your Company Use?



2024 Revenue by Solution Type

	Expected Revenue Growth, 2023-2024 (%)		
	Industry-Specific Solution	Horizontal Solution	Homegrown (In-house)
Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) Application	8.2%	7.4%	5.7%
Transportation Management System (TMS)	6.9%	8.1%	8.0%
Electronic Data Exchange (EDI)	8.9%	7.2%	2.5%
Business Intelligence (BI)	8.2%	6.8%	4.1%
Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) / Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS)	8.7%	6.7%	5.5%
Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)	8.4%	7.1%	6.1%
Product Lifecycle Management (PLM)	10.4%	6.1%	7.1%



Where Are the Biggest Software Upgrade Opportunities?

Interestingly, our survey revealed that the least used industry-specific systems are ERP, product lifecycle management (PLM), EAM and BI tools. Yet these are the most critical solutions for enabling food and beverage companies to keep pace with consumers and quickly obtain data on performance and efficiency.

There may be a misconception that industry-specific solutions are niche and small-scale, and therefore better suited to small to midsize businesses. This would explain why 46% of companies with £10-19M revenue are using industry-specific software, compared to 41% of midsize companies and only 30% of larger companies. Larger companies may doubt the scale and reliability of a smaller, specialist provider.

However, organisations don't need to choose between a globally known technology provider and industry-specific functionality. There are specialist food and beverage systems that are built on global platforms like Microsoft Business Central, which offer a "best of both worlds" solution.

What Features Can Industry-Specific Software Provide?

Industry-specific software can help food and beverage companies address inherent issues that generalist software can't solve.

For example, specialist food ERP software can manage inventory by expiration date, enabling a business to operate on a first-expiry, first-out (FEFO) model to prevent the freshest ingredients from being used first while older stock perishes. Forecasting models can also factor in ingredient shelf lives to optimise quality control and replenishment.

Meanwhile, a food-specialist PLM solution can speed up product development if it features built-in databases to automatically generate a list of ingredients and nutritional information. It can also cross-check ingredients with local allergen guidelines to outline any restrictions or requirements that need to be considered.

In addition to the software itself, choosing the industry-specific route can facilitate a long-term partnership with a technology provider that deeply understands the food and beverage sector. They can bring vast knowledge to technology implementations and share best practices from other organisations.



46% of SMEs are using industry-specific software compared to 41% of midsize companies and 30% of enterprise firms.

Trend No. 4

Key Takeaways

- » Less than half of companies are currently using industry-specific software, but those who have deployed it are more likely to generate higher revenue.
- » There is an untapped opportunity to replace generalist ERP, PLM, EAM and BI software with industry-specific solutions that help food and beverage companies improve operational performance and keep pace with the consumer.
- » Many companies misconceive industry-specific software as small, niche solutions, but there are global providers using internationally recognised platforms to build specialist food and beverage functionality.
- » Working with a partner who understands the food and beverage sector is critical to maximise the value of industry-specific technology.



Trend No. 5

Application of AI Is Surging

Alongside industry-specific upgrades, the other significant influence on food and beverage strategies in 2025 is curiosity around AI.

There has been a significant increase in companies actively exploring AI over the past 12 months as access to new tools (particularly generative AI) has increased.

More than half (54%) of UK and Ireland food and beverage companies are in the process of implementing AI—more than double the proportion seen 12 months ago—and a quarter (28%) are already using AI, compared to just 6% at the end of 2023.

We also asked companies what they perceive to be the main benefits of using AI, which established a clear link between AI capabilities and solving current internal and external challenges.

The most popular benefit was the automation of routine tasks (35%), while better customer insights (33%) also held strong appeal—particularly among small- and midsize companies. Yet only 23% said faster, more accurate data analysis is a key benefit, showing untapped potential for AI to relieve internal pressures.

Larger companies are also interested in exploring AI’s potential to enhance decision-making capabilities and provide personalised customer experiences.

How Are You Exploring AI Within Your Business?

	2023	2024
No plans to leverage AI	30%	4%
Investigating AI	39%	14%
In process of implementing AI	25%	54%
Already using AI	6%	28%



Where Do You Think AI Can Add the Greatest Value?

Primary Benefit of AI	Percent A Benefit	£10M to £19M	£20M to £99M	£100M+
Automation of routine tasks	35%	34%	32%	38%
Better customer insights and engagement	33%	48%	50%	16%
Cost reduction in operations	32%	45%	14%	33%
Increased competitive advantage	31%	28%	36%	31%
Enhanced innovation and development capabilities	31%	34%	23%	33%
Enhanced decision-making capabilities	30%	21%	18%	42%
Improved efficiency and productivity	30%	38%	45%	18%
Personalized customer experiences	30%	24%	27%	36%
Faster and more accurate data analysis	23%	17%	32%	22%
Improved product or service quality	22%	10%	18%	31%

In Their Own Words

As part of the survey, respondents were given the chance to elaborate on their organization's plans for AI and current usage. Here's what some of them had to say:

"Analysing historical sales data, market trends and seasonal factors to predict product demand, optimise inventory management and reduce excess inventory and shortages."

- IT Director, Midsize Sauces Processor, Ireland

"Transform how teams collaborate and function."

- Technical Director, Small Dairy Products Manufacturer, UK

"Real-time monitoring of temperature, humidity and contaminants in the production environment for timely detection and treatment of potential food safety issues."

- IT Director, Midsize Sauces Processor, Ireland

"Embed AI algorithms in the supply chain management system to improve the transparency and response speed of our supply chain."

- Operations Director, Large Sauces Processor, UK



What Are the Barriers to AI Adoption?

While interest in AI's potential has increased, our research revealed significant barriers that stand between the food and beverage sector and widespread AI adoption.

The greatest concern is the complexity of AI tools (40%) and how best to integrate them into current infrastructures. Many businesses are also concerned about the ethics of using AI (38%), which may also influence cultural barriers, as 35% say there is resistance to change within their organisation.

How Can Companies Use AI to Meet Their 2025 Goals?

If we look at the top five short- and medium-term goals among the industry leaders we surveyed, AI can play a significant role in helping companies achieve several on the list, including enhancing customer relationships, improving operational efficiency and moving from reactive to predictive models.

However, AI should be considered at the top of the technology pyramid when it comes to meeting these business challenges and driving progress. AI needs high-quality data to generate effective results, otherwise it's a case of "garbage in, garbage out." And this data can only be extracted with the right solutions and a fully integrated infrastructure.

Therefore, the first step towards harnessing the power of AI is to implement foundational systems and complementing them with good data capture, good process management and good BI.

Some technology partners can deliver all these things in a single solution, with AI functionality baked in as part of a full-stack approach. However, it's important to be aware of "AI-washing" from providers that make buzzword promises without addressing the digital foundation that lies underneath.

Top 5 Barriers to Adopting AI

Complexity of AI technologies	40%
Ethical concerns regarding AI decisions	38%
Resistance to change within the organization	35%
Data privacy and security concerns	31%
Regulatory and compliance issues	31%



Trend No. 5

Key Takeaways

- » The number of companies exploring and using AI has more than doubled in the past 12 months.
- » Automating tasks is the most popular benefit of AI functionality, followed by better customer insights and operational cost reductions.
- » There are still major barriers to overcome before AI can be more widely adopted, namely the complexities of AI tools and concerns regarding the ethics of incorporating AI into operations.
- » Companies should focus on optimising their systems, processes, data and analytics before investing heavily in AI to yield the greatest results.



Top 5 Focus Areas for 2025 and Beyond

2025	2026-28
Improve customer satisfaction	Increase visibility, accuracy and rapid access to business data
Improve operational efficiency and integration	Move from proactive to predictive maintenance
Improve our supply chain resilience	Generate more value from our existing customers
Acquire more new customers	Improve our supply chain resilience
Improve employee productivity	Acquire more new customers



Top 6 Action Points From Our 2025 Research

Aptean's industry research has revealed deep insights into the challenges and priorities of UK and Ireland food and beverage companies in 2025 and beyond. That said, it's impossible to implement all our key learnings at once—so here are our top six takeaways to influence your business development strategy:

- 1** Companies are more concerned about their ability to keep pace with changing consumer demands than the pressures of inflation, cybersecurity and supply chain disruption.

Action: Invest in agile sourcing and product development processes and real-time data analytics to quickly respond to shifting preferences.

- 2** Companies want to improve their ability to rapidly obtain and analyse performance data to address consumer behaviour concerns.

Action: Implement BI tools and ensure your ERP system can provide real-time insights across all operations.

- 3** Digital transformation has stalled, though this may be in part a reflection of process automation now being considered standard.

Action: Assess your current digital maturity and create a roadmap to accelerate your transformation, focusing on areas that align with your strategic objectives. You can beat competitors using horizontal software by implementing industry-specific solutions.

- 4** Cloud migration, especially cloud ERP, is crucial for maximising revenue and profit growth.

Action: If you're not already using cloud ERP, prioritise this migration to improve security, mobility and scalability.

- 5** There's untapped potential in industry-specific solutions, which have been proven to generate higher revenue than horizontal software.

Action: Evaluate your current software stack and identify opportunities to replace generic solutions with industry-specific alternatives, particularly ERP, PLM, EAM and BI tools.

- 6** AI exploration and implementation has more than doubled in the past year.

Action: Start small with AI implementation. Before going all in, focus on optimising underlying processes, data quality and analytics.



Working With a Recognised and Reliable Partner

At Aptean, we know food and beverage. Our dedicated professionals and internal experts have first-hand knowledge of the market and deep experience with processing, manufacturing, distribution and wholesaling operations. We're proud to be a 'by-your-side partner' for the long term—more than just a vendor ready to sell you a product off the shelf, we're dedicated to achieving mutual success and helping you achieve maximum ROI.

The award-winning, cloud-native **Aptean Food & Beverage ERP** offers unique industry-specific technology and built-in AI capabilities on the robust Microsoft Business Central platform. What's more, we offer a comprehensive suite of software to complement your ERP, including **PLM, EAM, overall equipment effectiveness (OEE), electronic data interchange (EDI)** and **transportation management system (TMS)** solutions.

Further Reading

- » For a deeper dive on keeping up with the customer, read Adapt and Grow: Driving Success in Adverse Conditions. Read **this eBook**.
- » For a deeper dive on rapid access to business data, read Best Practices To Transform Your Food and Beverage Data Analytics. Read **this article**.
- » For a deeper dive on cloud migration, watch The secret to successful Cloud ERP with Aptean Food and Beverage. Watch **this webinar**.
- » For a deeper dive on the benefits of industry-specific software, watch Streamline Your Entire Food and Beverage Business. Watch **this video**.
- » For a deeper dive on exploring AI, read: Empower Your Food and Beverage Business with AI. Read **this infographic**.





About Aptean

Aptean is a global provider of industry-specific software that helps manufacturers and distributors effectively run and grow their businesses. Aptean's solutions and services help businesses of all sizes to be Ready for What's Next, Now®. Aptean is headquartered in Alpharetta, Georgia, and has offices in North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

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To learn more about Aptean and the markets we serve, visit www.aptean.com.



About The Research

The insights in this report are from original industry research conducted by Aptean and B2B International in August 2024. B2B International is a global, full-service market research firm, specializing in researching B2B markets.