



05/05/2026

FRENCH FEAST : 27 ANS À EXPORTER LE GOÛT FRANÇAIS AUX ÉTATS-UNIS

<https://www.salon-gourmet-selection.com/fr-FR/actualites/Newsroom/french-feast-importateur-epicerie-francaise-etats-unis>

Phyllis Brooks—co-founder of French Feast, a New Jersey-based importer distributing over 2,000 French products to 1,000 independent grocery stores across the United States—shares with **Gourmet Selection** her insights on exporting, the evolving expectations on the other side of the Atlantic, and the brands that successfully stand the test of time on store shelves.

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your role at French Feast?

Michel Bouvier (my husband) and I founded French Feast in 1999—a project born out of a genuine passion. At the time, we were living in New York. Michel was working as a computer programmer, and I was in publishing. We thought it would be fun to create a website where we could sell our favorite French treats: for Michel, it was Cachou Lajaunie, and for me, Coussins de Lyon.

Back then, there weren't thousands of websites dedicated to food, and it was actually possible to launch a new site right out of your garage (or, in our case, a fifth-floor walk-up apartment on the Upper East Side). We launched the site with about thirty products, but we quickly realized that wasn't enough. Then, after the site was featured in a great article in **The New York Times**—which triggered an explosion in orders and dozens of stock-outs—we realized the absolute necessity of taking control of our supply chain.

And so, a year after launching the business, we began importing pallets directly from France and shifted our focus toward wholesale, supplying local stores (some of which we even delivered to via subway!). Today, 27 years later, we offer over 2,000 French products sourced from 100 French suppliers. Our client base includes more than 1,000 independent gourmet shops across the United States. We employ 20 people and operate a 2,300-square-meter warehouse in Oakland, New Jersey.

What role do you play in creating and developing the product range at French Feast?

Michel and I still play a key role in product selection. I think that our different backgrounds—Michel being French and I an American passionate about France—constitute one of our assets...

Michel knows the products from his childhood—the ones he misses and simply cannot do without. As for me, I tend to have more of a gourmet palate. But this dynamic works well, as this blend reflects the backgrounds of our customers—and our customers' customers—many of whom are French expatriates, avid Francophiles, or passionate travelers. When it comes to product suggestions, we also rely on our talented team; thanks to their diverse ages, tastes, and backgrounds, they bring a fresh perspective to the table, all while remaining attentive to our customers' recommendations and requests.

What are your objectives for participating in the Gourmet Selection trade show?

By participating in Gourmet Selection, we aim to discover the latest trending products and strengthen our relationships with our current suppliers. Phone calls and emails are all well and good, but nothing compares to face-to-face interaction—and, of course, the opportunity to taste the products!

Which categories or types of brands are you specifically looking for?

We are seeking artisanal brands that are looking to enter the U.S. market and that understand—or are willing to learn—the specific requirements of that market. This includes everything from FDA-compliant labeling and shelf-life considerations that account for overseas shipping, to pricing strategies that enable French products to compete effectively against high-end American goods. We are on the lookout for high-quality, authentic, and innovative brands—while keeping in mind that what is currently trending in France does not always perform just as well in the United States. It is truly a balancing act. One example that immediately comes to mind is that of our friends at Maison Marc, who managed to make the *cornichon* trendy—precisely by staying true to traditional farming and production methods.

How does Gourmet Selection help you anticipate your customers' expectations?

Gourmet Selection is our favorite trade show because it is the most quintessentially French. While some of the companies exhibiting there already have an international presence, many others do not; it therefore offers an opportunity to make new—and delightful—unexpected discoveries. This is precisely what we aim to offer our American customers.

In your opinion, what are the key elements that distinguish a specialty food brand that successfully establishes and maintains lasting shelf visibility?

For a specialty food brand, the most important elements for establishing and maintaining lasting shelf visibility are authenticity and, of course, quality. Beautiful and

original packaging also plays a key role; for us, it is important that the brand manages to convey its French essence without coming across as stuffy or pretentious.

What trends do you currently see defining the food sector?

Super-healthy ingredients. In the United States—partly thanks to the efforts of Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert Kennedy—we are seeing a growing interest in "real" food and products free from additives, artificial colorings, and excessive added sugars. Consequently, there is a surge of enthusiasm for traditional ingredients. This presents a genuine opportunity for French producers, who have never lost touch with "real" food and who enjoy a reputation for producing healthy, traditional, and authentic products—even when launching new items.

Have you noticed any evolution in how brands position themselves (premiumization, social engagement, storytelling, product innovation, formats, etc.)?

When it comes to exports, the answer may differ from that of the European market. If a brand places too much emphasis on its premium status, it risks pricing itself out of the export market—and we have seen numerous examples of this mistake. What manufacturers need to understand is that for Americans, "French" is already synonymous with premium—so they don't need to overdo it.

Storytelling remains crucial, and we love it when that story is authentic and can be effectively conveyed to American consumers. Product innovation is a delicate subject; we likely won't be able to sell a product that is *merely* innovative, as it would face direct competition from innovative products hailing from every other country—including the United States.

Product formats are another key consideration. We admire companies like François Doucet, who have grasped that smaller formats provide them with a distinct advantage in the export market. It is also worth noting that—for better or for worse—carbon neutrality serves less as a marketing asset in the United States than it does in France.

If you had to summarize the future of the food market in a single conviction, what would it be?

In the past, it was always easy to feel optimistic about the market, since food is not merely a necessity but also an indulgence that people allow themselves, even during times of economic crisis. However, we are currently navigating a period of extraordinary uncertainty, and as we write these lines, it is somewhat difficult to maintain that optimism. We fear widespread disruptions to supply chains, as well as substantial spikes in fuel and freight costs. Yet, we take comfort in the strong relationships we have cultivated with our French suppliers over the years. Although we have no idea what the

future holds in these uncertain times, we know that we are in good hands, and we will continue to do our utmost to bring authentically French gourmet products to the United States.

If you had to summarize the future of the food market in a single conviction, what would it be?

In the past, it was always easy to be optimistic about the market, as food is not merely a necessity, but also a luxury that people allow themselves even during times of economic crisis. However, we are currently navigating a period of extraordinary uncertainty, and as we write these lines, it is somewhat difficult to remain optimistic. We fear widespread disruptions to supply chains, as well as substantial increases in fuel and freight costs.