

Chilled and Frozen Ready Meals - UK - May 2010

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What is this report about?

The ready meals market had seen sales stall before the onset of the recession. As consumer interest shifted towards authenticity and provenance in food, and with growing interest in cooking, ready meals lost momentum being increasingly seen as artificial and unhealthy. The market was further hit by the recession, one in four ready meal shoppers cutting back on them in favour of scratch cooking, unsurprisingly given the poor value image of the meals.

Promisingly, a number of major grocers reported significant improvement in the sales of top end ready meals in autumn 2009. However, ready meals continue to face many of the negative perceptions traditionally associated with the market. Nearly half the population see them as failing against home-cooked food on taste and two in five question their value and health credentials. The future prospects of the market depend on its success in tackling these views.

What have we found out?

- Expected to reach £2.7 billion in 2010, the ready meals market has grown by just 7% since 2005. The market contracted in 2008 as a result of consumer cut backs, but has bounced back strongly since, suggesting that the six million users switching to more cooking have not been lost for good.
- Ready meals with larger portions stand to attract nearly six million adults who buy ready meals but see the portions as often too small.
- Nearly five million people eat chilled ready meals from just one cuisine, such as Indian, Italian or Chinese. Cross-promoting dishes across cuisines has potential to support incremental sales growth among this group.
- Transparent packaging can help brands win over the nearly seven million ready meal buyers who prefer see-through packaging to know what they're buying.
- Nearly ten million people who do not buy ready meals see them as less tasty than home-made food. Sampling or taste tests could unlock this pool of demand for brands confident in their quality.
- Slow-cooked meats or stews could forge a place for ready meals on the menu of the 6.5m adults who do not eat them, and see cooking from scratch as being often as quick as preparing a ready meal.

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