

Prepared Meals and Side Dishes - US - May 2014

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“Category purchasers value the convenience of prepared meals and side dishes and prefer items with natural ingredients, cleaner product labels, and better-for-you claims. Addressing the specific reasons consumers purchase these items, and promoting their versatility, can benefit the category overall.”

– Amanda Topper, Food Analyst

This report looks at the following areas:

- How can perceptions of the frozen category be improved?
- What will the main source of innovation for the category be?
- How can the use of prepared meals and side dishes be expanded?

The prepared meals and side dishes category declined from 2008 to 2013, partly due to negative perceptions about the nutrition and quality of frozen foods and the high cost associated with these products. Indeed, the top factors that would influence consumers to purchase more prepared meals and side dishes are natural ingredients, higher-quality items, and larger portions for the same price. The category is largely dictated by sales within the single-serve and multiserve frozen meal segments, which continue to experience sales declines. However, the refrigerated segments examined in this report, including refrigerated meals and side dishes, increased as many purchasers indicate they prefer the variety of cuisine types and taste of these meals.

Overall, the category is expected to decline from 2013-18. Future growth for the category will require product innovation focused on the inclusion of natural ingredients and higher-quality items. Additionally, BFY (better-for-you) options, such as products with fewer ingredients and high protein or fiber, as well as products meeting the individual usage needs of core purchasers are important to reverse the downward category trend.

For the purposes of this report, prepared meals are defined as complete meals or entrées that are precooked and frozen or refrigerated. These meals usually include a side dish and require minimal preparation or cooking time.

Side dishes are defined in this report as products intended to be used alongside an entrée or meal center. These items can be frozen or refrigerated. Please note that while the industry has a clear definition of side dishes, the demarcation is not so clear to the consumer, who may well use specific side dishes as a meal or a snack.

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This report is part of a series of reports, produced to provide you with a more holistic view of this market

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Table of Contents

Scope and Themes

What you need to know
 Definition
 Data sources
 Sales data
 Consumer survey data
 Abbreviations and terms
 Abbreviations

Executive Summary

Overview
 The market
 Sales to decline to \$9.5 billion in 2018
 Figure 1: Total US retail sales and fan chart forecast of prepared meals and side dishes, at current prices, 2008-18
 Single-serve frozen meals make up more than half the category
 Figure 2: Total US retail sales of prepared meals and side dishes, by segment, at current prices, 2011 and 2013
 Key players
 Nestlé and ConAgra continue to dominate category
 Figure 3: MULO sales of prepared meals and side dishes, by leading companies, 2014*
 The consumer
 Frozen meals have highest household penetration
 Figure 4: Household purchase of prepared meals and side dishes, March 2014
 Convenience, ease of use top motivators for purchase
 Figure 5: Reasons for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes, Top five, March 2014
 Reduced- and ingredient-related claims most considered
 Figure 6: Nutritional claims considered when purchasing prepared meals and side dishes, Top five, March 2014
 Natural, high-quality items top factors for greater purchase frequency
 Figure 7: Factors for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes more often, Top five, March 2014
 Strongest attitudes toward health and product labeling
 Figure 8: Attitudes toward prepared meals and side dishes, Top five, March 2014
 What we think

Issues and Insights

How can perceptions of the frozen category be improved?
 Issues
 Insight: Transparency and innovation are vital to a shift
 What will the main source of innovation for the category be?
 Issues

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Insight: Restaurant-quality items, convenience, and BFY options will all play a role

How can the use of prepared meals and side dishes be expanded?

Issues

Insight: Items can be marketed for specific eating occasions

Trend Applications

Trend: The Power of One

Trend: Prove it

Trend: Objectify

Market Size and Forecast

Key points

Sales forecasted to reach \$9.5 billion in 2018

Sales and forecast of prepared meals and side dishes

Figure 9: Total US retail sales and forecast of prepared meals and side dishes, at current prices, 2008-18

Figure 10: Total US retail sales and forecast of prepared meals and side dishes, at inflation-adjusted prices, 2008-18

Fan chart forecast

Figure 11: Total US retail sales and fan chart forecast of prepared meals and side dishes, at current prices, 2008-18

Market Drivers

Key points

Frozen food dissatisfaction

Figure 12: Attitudes/Opinions about Food, November 2012-December 2013

Households with children declining, single-person households rise

Figure 13: US households, by presence of own children, 2003-13

Competitive Context

Key points

Increasing interest in foodservice options dining out of the home

Figure 14: Frequency of dining out in 2014, by gender, October 2013

In-store prepared meals offer a fresh alternative

Segment Performance

Key points

Single-serve frozen meals represent more than half of the category

Sales of prepared meals and side dishes, by segment

Figure 15: Total US retail sales of prepared meals and side dishes, by segment, at current prices, 2011 and 2013

Single-serve frozen meals lead category but continue to decline

Sales and forecast of single-serve frozen meals

Figure 16: Total US retail sales and forecast of single-serve frozen meals at current prices, 2008-18

Multiserve frozen meals decline most of any segment

Sales and forecast of multiserve frozen meals

Figure 17: Total US retail sales and forecast of multiserve frozen meals at current prices, 2008-18

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Refrigerated meals demonstrate strongest growth

Sales and forecast of refrigerated meals

Figure 18: Total US retail sales and forecast of refrigerated meals at current prices, 2008-18

Refrigerated side dishes grow 16% from 2008-13

Sales and forecast of refrigerated side dishes

Figure 19: Total US retail sales and forecast of refrigerated side dishes at current prices, 2008-18

Frozen side dishes maintain smallest market share

Sales and forecast of frozen side dishes

Figure 20: Total US retail sales and forecast of frozen side dishes at current prices, 2008-18

Retail Channels

Key points

Most prepared meals and sides purchased in supermarkets

Sales of prepared meals and side dishes, by channel

Figure 21: Total US retail sales of prepared meals and side dishes, by channel, at current prices, 2011-13

Supermarket sales dip 7% over past five years

Supermarket sales of prepared meals and side dishes

Figure 22: US supermarket sales of prepared meals and side dishes, at current prices, 2008-13

Greater retail availability positively impacts other channel sales

Other retail channel sales of prepared meals and side dishes

Figure 23: US sales of prepared meals and side dishes, through other retail channels, at current prices, 2008-13

Leading Companies and Brand Analysis

Key points

Nestlé, ConAgra maintain category lead

Figure 24: "Lean Cuisine Diet Reality Check," TV ad, 2014

Figure 25: Lean Cuisine website, April 2014

Figure 26: Healthy Choice "No-carb Queens," TV ad, 2012

Figure 27: Weight Watchers Smart Ones "America Gets a Clean Slate," TV ad, 2014

Figure 28: Smart Ones Print Ad, April 2014

Increases for Amy's Kitchen, Bob Evans

Manufacturer sales of prepared meals and side dishes

Figure 29: MULO sales of prepared meals and side dishes, by leading companies, rolling 52 weeks 2013 and 2014

Brand Share – Single-serve Frozen Meals

Key points

All leading brands experience year-over-year sales declines

Manufacturer sales of single-serve frozen meals

Figure 30: MULO sales of single-serve frozen meals, by leading companies, rolling 52 weeks 2013 and 2014

ConAgra, Nestlé lead in household penetration

Figure 31: Key purchase measures for the top brands of single-serve frozen dinners/entrees, by household penetration, 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2013 (current) and Dec. 29, 2012 (year ago)

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Brand Share – Multiserve Frozen Meals

Key points

ConAgra, private label face largest sales declines

Figure 32: Stouffer's website, April 2014

Manufacturer sales of multiserve frozen meals

Figure 33: MULO sales of multiserve frozen meals, by leading companies, rolling 52 weeks 2013 and 2014

Strongest brand loyalty for Stouffer's, private label

Figure 34: Key purchase measures for the top brands of multiserve frozen dinners/entrees, by household penetration, 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2013 (current) and Dec. 29, 2012 (year ago)

Brand Share – Refrigerated Meals

Key points

Hormel leads in a highly fragmented segment

Manufacturer sales of refrigerated meals

Figure 35: MULO sales of refrigerated meals, by leading companies, rolling 52 weeks 2013 and 2014

Hormel leads in segment household penetration

Figure 36: Key purchase measures for the top brands of refrigerated dinners/entrees by household penetration, 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2013 (current) and Dec. 29, 2012 (year ago)

Brand Share – Frozen Side Dishes

Key points

Leading brands face year-over-year sales declines

Manufacturer sales of frozen side dishes

Figure 37: MULO sales of frozen side dishes, by leading companies, rolling 52 weeks 2013 and 2014

Nearly one quarter of households purchase frozen side dishes

Figure 38: Key purchase measures for the top brands of frozen side dishes, by household penetration, 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2013 (current) and Dec. 29, 2012 (year ago)

Brand Share – Refrigerated Side Dishes

Key points

Private label products lead in segment market share

Manufacturer sales of refrigerated side dishes

Figure 39: MULO sales of refrigerated side dishes, by leading companies, rolling 52 weeks 2013 and 2014

Bob Evans maintains strong brand loyalty

Figure 40: Key purchase measures for the top brands of refrigerated side dishes by household penetration, 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2013 (current) and Dec. 29, 2012 (year ago)

Innovations and Innovators

Growth in side dish product development

Figure 41: Prepared meals and side dishes product launches (frozen and refrigerated), by subcategory, 2009-14*

Lack of new product innovation

Figure 42: Prepared meals and side dishes product launches (frozen and refrigerated), by type, 2009-14*

Convenience-related claims most common for prepared meals

Figure 43: Prepared meals product launches (frozen and refrigerated), by top 10 claims, 2009-14*

Increase in side dish ingredient claims

Figure 44: Side dishes product launches, frozen and refrigerated, by top 10 claims, 2009-14*

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Products with reduced claims appeal to dieters and non-dieters
Homestyle favorites

Social Media – Prepared Meals and Side Dishes

Key points

Market overview

Key social media metrics

Figure 45: Key social media metrics, April 2014

Brand usage and awareness

Figure 46: Brand usage and awareness for select prepared meals and side dishes brands, March 2014

Interactions with prepared meals and side dishes brands

Figure 47: Interactions with select prepared meals and side dishes brands, March 2014

Leading online campaigns

New product launches

Rewards programs

Promoting healthy lifestyles

What we think

Online conversations

Figure 48: Online conversations around selected prepared meal and side dish brands, by month, April 1, 2013-March 31, 2014

Where are people talking about prepared meals and side dish brands?

Figure 49: Online conversations around selected prepared meal and side dish brands, by page type, April 1, 2013-March 31, 2014

What are people talking about?

Figure 50: Online topics of conversation around selected prepared meals and side dishes brands, April 1, 2013-March 31, 2014

Household Purchase

Key points

Frozen meals have highest past purchase

Figure 51: Frozen complete dinners consumption, October 2007-December 2013

Figure 52: Frozen dinners consumption, October 2007-December 2013

Figure 53: Frozen dinners consumption, October 2007-December 2013

Figure 54: Complete packaged prepared dishes & complete dinner mixes consumption, October 2007-December 2013

Figure 55: Household purchase of prepared meals and side dishes, by gender, March 2014

25-44s most likely to have purchased prepared meals and sides

Figure 56: Household purchase of prepared meals and side dishes, by age, March 2014

Past purchase skews toward higher-earning households

Figure 57: Household purchase of prepared meals and side dishes, by age, March 2014

Motivations for Purchase

Key points

Men motivated by cost, flavor of prepared meals and sides

Figure 58: Reasons for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes, by gender, March 2014

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25-34s more practical in purchase motivations

Figure 59: Reasons for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes, by age, March 2014

Refrigerated sides lack in variety

Figure 60: Reasons for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes, March 2014

Consumption Occasions

Key points

18-34s more likely to eat prepared meals and sides as a snack, ingredient

Figure 61: Consumption occasions for prepared meals and side dishes, by age, March 2014

Refrigerated meals most versatile

Figure 62: Consumption occasions for prepared meals and side dishes, by household purchase of prepared meals and side dishes, March 2014

Health and Nutrition Claims Considered

Key points

Younger consumers more ingredient conscious

Figure 63: Nutritional claims considered when purchasing prepared meals and side dishes – Any consider, by age, March 2014

Reduced claims most important to those purchasing frozen meals

Figure 64: Nutritional claims considered when purchasing prepared meals and side dishes, Top five, March 2014

Factors for Greater Purchase Frequency

Key points

Ingredients, value, most important for increasing purchase frequency

Figure 65: Newman's Own Chicken Florentine & Farfalle Complete Skillet Meal

Figure 66: Factors for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes more often, by gender, March 2014

Storage a top factor for the oldest consumer groups

Figure 67: Factors for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes more often, by age, March 2014

Attitudes toward Prepared Meals and Side Dishes

Key points

25-44s most concerned about health, ingredients

Figure 68: Attitudes toward prepared meals and side dishes, by age, March 2014

Refrigerated meal purchasers feel strongest about labeling, packaging

Figure 69: Attitudes toward prepared meals and side dishes, by household purchase of prepared meals and side dishes, March 2014

Race and Hispanic Origin

Key points

Hispanics motivated by taste, cuisine

Figure 70: Reasons for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes, by race and Hispanic origin, March 2014

Hispanics more inclined to use prepared meals and side dishes as snacks

Figure 71: Consumption occasions for prepared meals and side dishes, by race and Hispanic origin, March 2014

Hispanics are more interested in nutritional claims, packaging changes

Figure 72: Nutritional claims considered when purchasing prepared meals and side dishes – Any consider, by race and Hispanic origin, March 2014

Figure 73: Attitudes toward prepared meals and side dishes, by race and Hispanic origin, March 2014

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Appendix – Other Useful Consumer Tables

- Figure 74: Fresh refrigerated potato products consumption, October 2007-December 2013
- Figure 75: Frozen potato products consumption, October 2007-December 2013
- Figure 76: Household purchase of prepared meals and side dishes, by race and Hispanic origin, March 2014
- Figure 77: Nutritional claims considered when purchasing prepared meals and side dishes – Any consider, by household income, March 2014
- Figure 78: Nutritional claims considered when purchasing prepared meals and side dishes, March 2014
- Figure 79: Factors for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes more often, by household purchase of prepared meals and side dishes, March 2014
- Figure 80: Factors for purchasing prepared meals and side dishes more often, by race and Hispanic origin, March 2014

Appendix – Social Media – Prepared Meals and Sides

Brand usage or awareness

- Figure 81: Brand usage or awareness, March 2014
- Figure 82: Bob Evans (prepared meals and/or side dishes only) usage or awareness, by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 83: Weight Watchers Smart Ones usage or awareness, by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 84: Simply Potatoes usage or awareness, by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 85: Lean Cuisine usage or awareness, by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 86: Stouffer's usage or awareness, by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 87: Hungry-Man usage or awareness, by demographics, March 2014

Activities done

- Figure 88: Activities done, March 2014
- Figure 89: Bob Evans – Activities done – I have looked up/talked about this brand online on social media..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 90: Bob Evans – Activities done – I have contacted/interacted with the brand online on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 91: Bob Evans – Activities done – I follow/like the brand on social media because..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 92: Bob Evans – Activities done – I have researched the brand on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 93: Weight Watchers Smart Ones – Activities done – I have looked up/talked about this brand online on social media..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 94: Weight Watchers Smart Ones – Activities done – I have contacted/interacted with the brand online on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 95: Weight Watchers Smart Ones – Activities done – I follow/like the brand on social media because..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 96: Weight Watchers Smart Ones – Activities done – I have researched the brand on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 97: Simply Potatoes – Activities done – I have looked up/talked about this brand online on social media..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 98: Simply Potatoes – Activities done – I have contacted/interacted with the brand online on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 99: Simply Potatoes – Activities done – I follow/like the brand on social media because..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 100: Simply Potatoes – Activities done – I have researched the brand on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 101: Lean Cuisine – Activities done – I have looked up/talked about this brand online on social media..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 102: Lean Cuisine – Activities done – I have contacted/interacted with the brand online on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 103: Lean Cuisine – Activities done – I follow/like the brand on social media because..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 104: Lean Cuisine – Activities done – I have researched the brand on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 105: Stouffer's – Activities done – I have looked up/talked about this brand online on social media..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 106: Stouffer's – Activities done – I have contacted/interacted with the brand online on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 107: Stouffer's – Activities done – I follow/like the brand on social media because..., by demographics, March 2014
- Figure 108: Stouffer's – Activities done – I have researched the brand on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014

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Figure 109: Hungry-Man – Activities done – I have looked up/talked about this brand online on social media..., by demographics, March 2014

Figure 110: Hungry-Man – Activities done – I have contacted/interacted with the brand online on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014

Figure 111: Hungry-Man – Activities done – I follow/like the brand on social media because..., by demographics, March 2014

Figure 112: Hungry-Man – Activities done – I have researched the brand on social media to..., by demographics, March 2014

Key social media metrics

Figure 113: Key social media metrics—Lean Cuisine, April 2014

Figure 114: Key social media metrics—Stouffer's, April 2014

Figure 115: Key social media metrics—Hungry-Man, April 2014

Figure 116: Key social media metrics—Smart Ones, April 2014

Figure 117: Key social media metrics—Bob Evans, April 2014

Figure 118: Key social media metrics—Simply Potatoes, April 2014

Online conversations

Figure 119: Online conversations around selected prepared meal and side dish brands, by month, April 1, 2013-March 31, 2014

Figure 120: Online conversations around selected prepared meal and side dish brands, by page type, April 1, 2013-March 31, 2014

Figure 121: Online topics of conversation around selected prepared meals and side dishes brands, April 1, 2013-March 31, 2014

Appendix – Information Resources Inc. Builders Panel Data Definitions

Information Resources Inc. Consumer Network Metrics

Appendix – Trade Associations

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