Attitudes towards Ready Meals and Ready-to-Cook Foods - UK - June 2017

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The above prices are correct at the time of publication, but are subject to change due to currency fluctuations.

"That over half of ready meal/ready-to-cook eaters/buyers opt to cook from scratch more when money is tight leaves the sector vulnerable with mounting inflation is expected to put pressure on disposable household incomes. However, premium products should benefit from people choosing these as a money-saving alternative to eating out, but innovation is needed to keep shoppers engaged."
– Alice Baker, Research Analyst

This report looks at the following areas:

- **Regular innovation could help premium varieties to succeed even as incomes come under pressure**
- **Scope for expansion in healthier ready meals**
- **Ethical claims offer promising means to stand out**

Products covered in this Report

This Report examines consumers' attitudes and behaviours relating to ready meals and ready-to-cook foods. Mintel's definition includes products sold through the grocery retail channel and direct to consumers including:

Chilled, frozen and shelf-stable ready meals
, including complete and part meals, and meal centres. This includes complete meals such as spaghetti Bolognese and curry with rice. It also includes part meals/meal centres (including burgers in a bap/bun) to which the consumer may, but need not, add items such as vegetables, pasta or rice, such as single ethnic dishes like chicken tikka.

Ready-to-cook foods
are chilled foods specifically positioned as needing no further preparation on the part of the consumer other than opening the packet and cooking the product according to the on-pack instructions. The major grocers have developed their own specific sub-branded ranges of such foods, such as the Sainsbury's Just Cook range. It should be noted that some sectors of the trade use the terms 'part prepared' or 'partially prepared foods' – both terms are deemed to refer to ready-to-cook foods as defined for the purpose of this Report.

'Pies'
that have no pastry content (for example, shepherd's pie) and, therefore, do not conform to Mintel's definition of a pie, are included as ready meals in this Report.

DID YOU KNOW?

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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Weight Watchers offers subscription service for keen dieters

Retailers and brands explore Brazilian flavours to capitalise on Olympics

Advertising and Marketing Activity

Wiltshire Farm Foods remains the largest advertiser amid a rise in overall spending

Pushing closeness to homemade foods

Promoting its international flavours

Figure 8: Total above-the-line, online display and direct mail advertising expenditure on ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, 2013-17

Retailers put the focus on quality

M&S promotes feel-good aspects of its diet meals

Morrisons highlights its in-store preparation

Waitrose emphasises ingredient provenance

Iceland promotes its authentic flavours

Slimming World range portrayed as ideal for time-pressed healthy eaters

Spar puts particular emphasis on ready meals' time-saving attributes

Nielsen Ad Intel coverage

The Consumer – What You Need to Know

89% eat ready meals or RTCs, a third eat chilled at least weekly

Families are the key users

Favourite dish is the primary deciding factor

New twists and in-store sampling could help to expand users' limited repertoires

Prepared meals at risk if incomes come under pressure, but premium versions could benefit

Influence of health considerations offers opportunities for healthier variants

Ethical claims could be a differentiator

Low quality rating for ready meals suggests negative perceptions still linger

Usage of Ready Meals and Ready-to-Cook Foods

A third eat chilled ready meals once a week or more

Figure 9: Usage frequency for ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, by type, March 2017

Families are key users of ready meals…

…as are under-25s

Product labelling helps to boost RTC usage frequency

Frozen ready meals' lower usage frequency largely stems from the limitations of the frozen aisle

Meal deals and in-store positioning could help to encourage more frequent usage

Ready Meal Eating Habits

Most users microwave, but over a third oven cook

Promoting on-hob heating could help some dishes to be seen as closer to their homemade versions

Figure 10: How ready meals are typically heated, March 2017

Most users eat ready meals from a separate plate or bowl