

# Ready Meals and Ready-to-Cook Foods: Inc Impact of COVID-19 - UK - July 2020

Report Price: £1995.00 | \$2693.85 | €2245.17

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“During the COVID-19 pandemic demand for ready meals has been hit by people doing more cooking from scratch. Offering quick meals is still important though, and NPD should focus on both better-for-you options that tap interest in healthy eating, as well as meals that are attractive as a nice treat and an alternative to a takeaway or meal out, in light of consumer interest.”  
– **Richard Caines, Senior Food & Drink Analyst**

## This report looks at the following areas:

Replicating restaurant and takeaway meals more closely will help products appeal as wariness around busy public places lingers and household incomes are stretched.

### What you need to know

For 53% of people ready meals are a nice treat. In appealing to those not wishing to cook or wanting a meal they wouldn't cook at home, ready meals compete against both meals out and takeaways. Given this competition, in order to appeal as a nice treat, the meals remain under pressure to strive to match foodservice options on quality, taste and excitement.

The benefit to ready meals of people being at home for more meals during the COVID-19 pandemic has been negated by them cooking more meals from scratch/part scratch, reducing demand. In 2021 though, the market will benefit from people returning to workplaces and placing a bigger focus on convenience again, as well as still eating out less.

Healthier variants remain a necessity to help to encourage more frequent usage as ready meals are seen as too unhealthy to eat more than once a week by 44% of people who eat and buy ready meals/ready-to-cook foods, with just 21% disagreeing. Key aspects of healthy eating that consumers are interested in seeing here are being lower in calories, having chunks of vegetables and functional benefits.

Ready meals are seen as a good route to trying new cuisines, with 50% of buyers of ready meals/ready-to-cook foods buying them to do so. This shows how ready meals can benefit from expanding choice in emerging ethnic cuisines. To gain traction though, awareness and familiarity have to first be built up – something brands can help with through clear descriptions of what the cuisines taste like.

### Key issues covered in this report

- **The impact of COVID-19 on the ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market.**
- **How consumers' spending on ready meals and ready-to-cook foods will change in the short, medium and long term.**
- **Most important factors influencing choice of ready meals and ready-to-cook food, and future shape of the market.**
- **The latest new product developments and consumer interest in different product features.**
- **Consumer behaviour surrounding and attitudes towards ready meals and ready-to-cook foods.**

### Products covered in this Report

This Report examines ready meals and ready-to-cook foods. Mintel's market size includes products sold through the grocery retail channel including:

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## 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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## Chilled and frozen ready meals,

including complete and part meals, and meal centres. This includes complete meals such as spaghetti Bolognese and curry with rice.

## Ready-to-cook (RTC) 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.

Market size data includes all retail sales of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods through the grocery retail channel, but excludes direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales ordered by telephone or online from ready meals specialists (eg Wiltshire Farm Foods) and 'meals on wheels'.

## COVID-19: Market context

*This update on the impact that COVID-19 is having on ready meals and ready-to-cook foods was prepared on 23 July 2020.*

*The first COVID-19 cases were confirmed in the UK at the end of January, with a small number of cases in February. The government focused on the 'contain' stage of its strategy, with the country continuing to operate much as normal. As the case level rose, the government ordered the closure of non-essential stores and foodservice venues, except for takeaway and delivery, on 20 March.*

*A wider lockdown requiring people to stay at home except for essential shopping, exercise and work 'if absolutely necessary' followed on 23 March. Initially, a three-week timeframe was put on the measures, which was extended in mid-April for another three weeks.*

*On 10 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced revised guidance, recommending that people who could not work from home should return to the workplace, and giving people more scope to spend time out of the home. Further relaxations to lockdown rules were announced in the week of 23 May, including gradual re-opening of non-essential retail in stages, and increased opportunities for social interaction across households.*

*4 July saw further significant easing of lockdown restrictions, with pubs, restaurants and hotels all allowed to reopen to the public under guidelines that help to enforce social distancing.*

## Economic and other assumptions

*Mintel's economic assumptions are based on the Office for Budget Responsibility's central scenario included in its July 2020 Fiscal Sustainability Report. The scenario suggests that UK GDP could fall by 12.4% in 2020, recovering by 8.7% in 2021, and that unemployment will reach 11.9% by the end of 2020, falling to 8.8% by the end of 2021. The current uncertainty means that there is wide variation on the range of forecasts however, something reflected in the OBR's own scenarios. In its upside scenario, economic activity returns to pre-COVID-19 levels by Q1 2021. The OBR's more negative scenario, by contrast, would mean that GDP doesn't recover until Q3 2024.*

*We are working on the assumption that a vaccine will be available by mid-2021, but that there will be continued disruption to both domestic and global markets for some time after that.*

*As long as there is not a second wave of infections, social distancing measures should be gradually relaxed over the course of 2020, but we don't expect industries such as spectator sports, tourism or foodservice to return to any kind of normality until a vaccine is introduced. In the meantime, the economic disruption will mean that many operators will be forced out of the market, hitting capacity. In markets which were already in decline, we expect this reduction in capacity to be permanent.*

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## Table of Contents

### Overview

- What you need to know
- Key issues covered in this report
- Products covered in this Report
- COVID-19: Market context
- Economic and other assumptions

### Executive Summary

#### Impact of COVID-19 on ready meals and ready-to-cook foods

Figure 1: Short-, medium- and long-term impact of COVID-19 on ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, 4 July 2020

#### The market

More cooking from scratch during COVID-19 reducing demand

Return to growth expected in 2021 with volumes falling to 2025

Figure 2: Forecast of UK retail value sales of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, 2015-25

Rate of growth of total value sales stalls between 2015-19

Steep decline in sales of ready-to-cook foods

Figure 3: UK retail value sales of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, by segment, 2018-20

Strong interest in healthy eating

More shared meals during lockdown

Plant-based trend important influence on ready meals

Income squeeze will hit discretionary spend

Companies and brands

Own-label dominates chilled ready meals

Figure 4: UK retail sales of leading brands in chilled ready meals, by value, 2019/20\*

Sales of own-label frozen ready meals grow strongly

Figure 5: UK retail sales of leading brands in frozen ready meals, by value, 2019/20

Premium launches continue to feature strongly in own-label NPD

Plant-based ranges a big focus of product development

Increase in advertising across most media in 2019

The consumer

86% of adults eat ready meals/ready-to-cook foods, three in 10 eat chilled ready meals at least weekly

Figure 6: Frequency of eating ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

Taste and price most important purchase drivers

Figure 7: Purchase drivers when choosing ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

Ready meals are an emergency meal solution, but also serve for trying new cuisines

Figure 8: Behaviours related to buying and eating ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

Opportunities for more fish and chunks of vegetables in main dishes

Figure 9: Interest in different features for ready meals or ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

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Saving time the major driver of purchasing but ready meals also appeal as a nice treat

Figure 10: Attitudes towards ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

What we think

## Impact of COVID-19 on Ready Meals and Ready-to-Cook Foods

The market

More cooking from scratch reducing demand

Return to workplaces and recession will boost sales

Success of remote working may result in longer-term changes

The consumer

Pandemic and aftermath will increase focus on health

Functional claims will be more important

COVID-19 expected to further boost flexitarian and plant-based trends

COVID-19 puts spotlight on hygiene over plastic concerns

Companies and brands

Taste and price most important purchase drivers

Replicating restaurant experience at home holds potential

'Dine in' meals in good position to do well again

## Issues and Insights

Elevating the appeal of ready meals as a nice treat important

The facts

The implications

Opportunity for healthier ranges to increase usage frequency

The facts

The implications

Focus on different main ingredients and cuisines will support sales

The facts

The implications

## The Market – What You Need to Know

Rate of growth of total value sales stalls

More cooking from scratch during COVID-19 reducing demand

Return to growth expected in 2021 with volumes falling to 2025

Steep decline in sales of ready-to-cook foods

Strong interest in healthy eating

Plant-based trend important influence on ready meals

World cuisines are an ingrained part of UK cuisine

Ready meals compete with meals out and takeaways

Income squeeze will hit discretionary spend

## Market Size and Forecast

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Rate of growth of total value sales stalls

More cooking from scratch during COVID-19 reducing demand

Figure 11: UK retail value and volume sales of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, 2015-25

Return to workplaces and post-COVID recession will boost sales

Success of remote working may result in longer-term changes

Figure 12: Forecast of UK retail value sales of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, 2015-25

Figure 13: Forecast of UK retail volume sales of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, 2015-25

Short-, medium- and long-term impact on the industry

Figure 14: Short-, medium- and long-term impact of COVID-19 on ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, 4 July 2020

## Market Segmentation

Steep decline in sales of ready-to-cook foods

Figure 15: UK retail value and volume sales and shares of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, by segment, 2018-20

## Market Drivers

Strong interest in healthy eating

Being healthy an important driver of choice

Strong demand for speedy meal solutions

Ready meals cater well for busy lifestyles ...

... but more scratch cooking a barrier to sales growth

Plant-based trend important influence on ready meals

Four in 10 limiting meat/poultry consumption

Headlines link human activity to pandemics

Concerns about packaging waste

World cuisines make up a big part of ready meals

Ready meals compete with meals out and takeaways

Decline projected in some core younger user groups

Figure 16: Trends in the age structure of the UK population, 2014-24

Income squeeze will hit discretionary spend

## Companies and Brands – What You Need to Know

Own-label dominates chilled ready meals

Sales of own-label frozen ready meals grow strongly

Premium launches continue to feature strongly in own-label NPD

Plant-based ranges a big focus of product development

Meals with less than 400 calories feature prominently in new launches

Ready meals also focus on balanced nutrition

Small proportion of launches make functional claims

Gino's at Iceland puts emphasis on real Italian food

Advertisers of branded products dominate spending

## Market Share

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## Own-label dominates chilled ready meals

Figure 17: UK retail sales of leading brands in chilled ready meals, by value and volume, 2018/19-2019/20

## Sales of own-label frozen ready meals grow strongly

Figure 18: UK retail sales of leading brands in frozen ready meals, by value and volume, 2018/19-2019/20

## Big drop in own-label sales of ready-to-cook foods

Figure 19: UK retail sales of leading brands in ready-to-cook foods, by value and volume, 2018/19-2019/20

## Shopping patterns favour familiar favourites

### Launch Activity and Innovation

#### Premium launches a big feature of own-label NPD

Figure 20: New product launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market making premium claims, 2015-20

Figure 21: Examples of premium launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market, 2020

#### Plant-based ranges a big focus of product development

Figure 22: New product launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market making vegetarian and vegan claims, 2015-20

#### Growing choice of own-label plant-based meals ...

Figure 23: Examples of own-label launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market under own-label plant-based ranges, 2020

#### ... with continued activity also from brands

Figure 24: Examples of exclusive and branded vegan/plant-based launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market, 2020

#### Plant-based meat substitutes featuring in ready meals

Figure 25: Examples of launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market containing meat substitutes, 2020

#### Meals with less than 400 calories feature prominently in new launches

#### Slimming World range expands, WW relaunch continues

Figure 26: Examples of diet launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market, 2020

#### Mainstream ranges deliver under 400 calories

Figure 27: Examples of launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market with less than 400 calories that do not make diet/light claims, 2020

#### Ready meals also focusing on balanced nutrition

#### Leading grocers expand 'Balanced' ranges

#### Scratch highlights experts, The Gym Kitchen calls out 'macrobalanced'

Figure 28: Examples of launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market focused on balanced nutrition, 2020

Figure 29: New product launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market making high/added protein claims, 2015-20

#### Small proportion of launches making functional claims

#### COVID-19 boosts interest in immune healthy, suggesting opportunities

Figure 30: New product launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market making functional claims, 2015-20

#### Gino's at Iceland puts emphasis on real Italian food, Côte goes DTC

Figure 31: Examples of launches in the UK frozen ready meals market under the Gino D'Acampo range at Iceland, 2019

#### Supermarkets making big moves away from black plastic trays

### Advertising and Marketing Activity

#### Increase in advertising across most media in 2019

Figure 32: Total above-the-line, online display and direct mail advertising expenditure on ready meals\*\*, by media type, 2016-20

#### Advertisers of branded products dominate spending

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Figure 33: Total above-the-line, online display and direct mail advertising expenditure on ready meals, by advertiser, 2019 and 2020

- Top two advertisers are home delivery companies
- Wiltshire Farm Foods and Parsley Box target older population
- Bigham's promotes 'Only Delicious Will Do' message
- Nielsen Ad Intel coverage

## The Consumer – What You Need to Know

- 86% of UK adults eat ready meals/ready-to-cook foods
- Three in 10 people eat chilled ready meals at least once a week
- Taste and price most important purchase drivers
- Strong demand for healthy readymade meal solutions
- Three quarters buy ready meals as an emergency meal solution
- Ready meals seen as a good way of trying of new cuisines
- Opportunities for more fish and chunks of vegetables in main dishes
- Saving time the major driver of purchasing
- Ready meals need to maximise appeal as a treat, replicate popular foodservice meals

## Impact of COVID-19 on the Ready Meals Consumer

- Move cooking from scratch a barrier to sales growth
  - Figure 34: Changes to cooking from scratch (ie using/preparing meals with raw ingredients) since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, by age, 23 April-7 May 2020
- More meals shared with friends/family during COVID-19
  - Figure 35: Incidence of eating with family/other members of your household, by age, 23 April-7 May 2020
- COVID-19 expected to further boost flexitarian and plant-based trends
  - Figure 36: 'The COVID-19/coronavirus outbreak has made a vegan diet more appealing', by age, 23 April-7 May 2020
- Pandemic and aftermath will increase focus on health
  - Figure 37: Concerns about health and fitness as a result of the COVID-19/coronavirus outbreak, 23 April-7 May 2020
- Consumers reticent about returning to restaurants
  - Figure 38: Concerns about going to restaurants/bars, 9 July-15 July 2020
- COVID-19 pandemic expected to heighten focus on sustainability
  - Figure 39: Changes in the environment being seen as a priority since the COVID-19 outbreak, by gender and age, 7-14 May 2020

## Usage of Ready Meals and Ready-to-Cook Foods

- 86% of UK adults eat ready meals/ready-to-cook foods
  - Figure 40: Types of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods eaten, May 2020
- Three in 10 people eat chilled ready meals at least once a week
  - Figure 41: Frequency of eating ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, May 2020
- 16-34s are core users of all meal types
  - Figure 42: Types of ready meals and ready-to-cook foods eaten, by age and frequency, May 2020
- Core 16-34s users will be starkly affected by the recession

## Purchase Drivers

- Taste and price most important purchase drivers

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Income squeeze will cement price focus but 'dine in' deals hold potential

Figure 43: Purchase drivers when choosing ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

Strong demand for healthy readymade meal solutions

Opportunity for healthier ranges to increase usage frequency

Figure 44: Examples of launches in the UK ready meals and ready-to-cook foods calling out 5-a-day or protein content, 2019-20

Nutritionally well balanced meals need communicating clearly

## Behaviours Related to Buying and Eating Ready Meals and Ready-to-Cook Foods

Ready meals seen as a convenient meal option

Three quarters buy ready meals as an emergency meal solution

Figure 45: Behaviours related to buying and eating ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

Meal kits appeal more to younger people

Ready meals seen as a good way of trying new cuisines

More environmentally-friendly packaging would help sales

Too much packaging puts consumers off

COVID-19 puts spotlight on hygiene

Recyclability checked by a third of shoppers

## Different Features of Interest for Ready Meals or Ready-to-Cook Foods

Opportunities for more fish and chunks of vegetables in main dishes

Figure 46: Interest in different features for ready meals or ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

Nearly one in four would like more on provenance of ingredients

Opportunities for more prepared meals for families to share

Demand for family-size ready meals not being catered for

## Attitudes towards Ready Meals and Ready-to-Cook Foods

Saving time the major driver of purchasing

Figure 47: Attitudes towards ready meals and ready-to-cook foods, May 2020

Ready meals need to maximise appeal as a nice treat

Ready meals continue to face close competition from foodservice

Treat credentials can help them win

Replicating most popular meals in foodservice important to NPD

But few examples of restaurant brands in ready meals

'Grocerants' take off

Moving from foodservice to direct to consumer to retail outlets

## Appendix – Data Sources, Abbreviations and Supporting Information

Abbreviations

Consumer research methodology

## Appendix – Market Share

Figure 48: UK retail sales of leading manufacturers in chilled ready meals, by value and volume, 2018/19-2019/20

Figure 49: UK retail sales of leading manufacturers in frozen ready meals, by value and volume, 2018/19-2019/20

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Figure 50: UK retail sales of leading manufacturers in ready-to-cook foods, by value and volume, 2018/19-2019/20

## Appendix – Launch Activity and Innovation

Figure 51: New launches in the UK retail ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market, by private label vs branded, 2015-20

Figure 52: New launches in the UK retail ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market, by storage type, 2015-20

Figure 53: New launches in the UK retail ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market, by company, 2015-20

Figure 54: New launches in the UK retail ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market, by claim, 2015-20

Figure 55: New launches in the UK retail ready meals and ready-to-cook foods market, by launch type, 2015-20

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