

MSU Product Center

For Agriculture and Natural Resources

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Minimally processed vegetables - Overview

Products included in the product line

- Minimally processed vegetables are prepared and handled products to improve shelf-life and convenience to the consumer while minimizing changes that would alter the product's freshness.

General market trend and information

- Per capita consumption of fresh vegetables is on the rise. In 2000, consumption was 202 pounds, up from 171 in 1991.
- There are some differences in the consumption patterns. Between 1999 and 2001, per capita consumption of head lettuce, cauliflower, sprouts and broccoli declined, while consumption of romaine and leaf lettuce, spinach and snap beans showed a significant increase.
- In 2003, sale of fresh-cut vegetables through supermarkets, mass merchandise stores and food service operators stood at \$5.9 billion, 11% higher than sales in 2002. The market for bagged salads has especially shown a steady growth over the last few years. Between 1998 and 2003, retail sales of these products grew at 28% in constant 2003 prices.

New product trends

- New products are coming as mixes of a wide variety of vegetables that are pre-washed, fresh-cut or shredded, pre-cooked, steamed or dehydrated and ready-to-eat as side dishes, salads, snacks, etc. Others need to be microwaved or heated.
- There are also stuffed vegetables and pureed vegetable mixes. Some salad mixes are coming seasoned and spiced or with additional sauces, dips, and dressings. Some products position themselves in the gourmet product line.
- A range of vegetable mixes are coming in tubs, trays or flexible plastic containers designed to maintain freshness. Some products come in single-serving packets ideal for single individuals and for the on-the-go consumer. Most products are chilled while some are entering the market as shelf stable products.
- Product innovation in salad dressings is one other important factor that affects the market for salads. New salad dressing products are coming in different packaging options that include glasses, plastics, squeezable or pourable. Many salad products are also coming bundled with salad dressings in the same package.

Manufacturing and distribution issues

- Retail market opportunities for minimally processed vegetables are not widespread in all mainstream retail outlets. Part of the problem is the need for refrigerated or chilled shelf spaces for most of these products. Mass merchandise retail stores are focusing on low-priced bulk products and on products that do not necessarily require chilled shelf spaces.
- Specialty food retailers that primarily focus on the distribution of natural and organic fresh produce are currently losing their market share in fresh produce to supermarkets as a result of increased supply of these products through supermarkets and the products' availability at relatively cheaper prices than in the specialty shops.

Overall assessment of opportunities

- The rising demand for healthy vegetarian foods and the product's appeal to a wide variety of consumer groups provide many product development opportunities for minimally processed vegetable suppliers and packers.

Sources

Cook, R. 2003. <http://cook.ucdavis.edu/rankfoodii/UFFVACook03.pdf>.

Mintel, Global New Products Database. <http://www.gnpd.com>.

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_____, *Bagged salad and salad dressings*, US, January 2004.