

MSU Product Center

For Agriculture and Natural Resources

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Vegetable-containing prepared meals - Overview

Products included in the product line

- This product line covers three types of vegetable-containing meals: meal kits, prepared meals, and pizza and pies. Meal kits comprise food components that are to be assembled to create a complete course of meal including salads and other side dishes. Prepared meals are all complete (main course) meals, generally including protein, starch and vegetables. The pizza and pie category includes all pizza, pies/tarts, quiche and other related food items. The major interest regarding vegetables is pizza toppings and sauces that are mainly made of vegetable ingredients.

General market trend and information

- Between 1998 and 2003, retail sales of meal kits have shown 48% growth at constant 2003 prices. Frozen meal sales have remained unchanged during the same period. Shelf stable meals have experienced a declining trend in recent years.
- From 1998 to 2003, sales of prepared pizza at 2003 constant prices declined by 1.5%. In the pizza sauce market, sauces that are used with other food products such as bread, casseroles, meat and pasta, rather than just for making pizza, have gained some ground.

New product trends

- Vegetable-containing meal kits are coming as a blend of vegetables and other food ingredients to be sautéed with or added to grains like rice or noodles; fish and vegetable mixtures for making soups; ready to roll mixed vegetable tortillas; vegetable filled dumplings, etc.
- Most of the new prepared meals claim to be fresh with a variety of flavors and blends that include mixes of vegetables and other food items. There are also some fresh vegetable salads that are coming as whole meal replacements.
- There are prepared meals that come in single-serve packages and are designed to be a complete meal for one person. There are also many meals and vegetable stews that require just few minutes to heat or they are ready to eat once boiling water has been added to them. Some meals can also be microwaved without opening the package.
- New pizzas claim to be restaurant style pizzas topped with different roasted vegetables and cheese. In the case of pies, some of the products claim to be designed for the gourmet market. Other related products include burritos filled with different vegetables, ready to eat pastry pasties that contain mixed vegetable fillings, and vegetable quiche.

Manufacturing and distribution issues

- There are different branded products in this product line and the market share of the leading manufacturers is growing. Private label products are a small portion of the marketed meal products. As the price for branded products become low and a wide variety of products are available on the market, consumers may tend to remain loyal to brand products, providing limited opportunity for growth in sales of private label meal products.
- Supermarkets have competition with mass merchandisers. Sales in mass merchandise stores is mainly supported by the availability of a wide selection of shelf stable meals and pizzas that are sold at low prices making them appealing to low-income shoppers.

Overall assessment of opportunities

- Flavor, variety, convenience and ethnicity will remain the most significant market drivers that can provide many opportunities for vegetable-containing meal manufacturers.

Sources

Mintel, Meal kits, 2004.

_____, Frozen meals, 2004.

_____, Shelf stable meals, 2004.

_____, Pizza, 2003.