

frozenfood europe

The magazine for frozen food buyers



Breakthrough Innovations in Frozen Food in the Last 25 Years



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On the occasion of the anniversary 25th year of Frozen Food Europe magazine, we will present some of the major innovations in this particular food category, presenting the milestones in its evolution, dictated by changes in consumer behavior.

The innovative offer in the category of Frozen Products was structured with the same dynamics as the other food categories following the major international trends. There are three main areas where the frozen product innovation have developed in the past 25 years: pleasure, health and convenience.

By [XTC World Innovation](#)

A quarter of a century ago...

From 1990 to 1995, innovation in the "frozen product" category chooses convenience with two clearly identifiable levers: time-saving and handling the product.

The time-saving lever refers to meeting a need of a consumer whose urban lifestyle does not favor spending time for preparing meals. There is a range of products associated with microwave cooking for every moment of the day: frozen toast warm in 3 minutes for breakfast, individual cardboard fries ready in 2 minutes for children at lunch, and fully microwavable meal trays for the evening. Frozen products adapt our food to this cult of speed. The second innovation lever is the product handling, with an offer comprising accessories and presentation elements accompanying frozen food. Thus, the casserole appears and allows the consumer to serve the dish directly into the recipient where it was heated. Similarly, there are sauce cups associated with aperitif products. The logic remains the same: to simplify as much as possible the consumer's life.



Ethnic and Bite-sized

From 1996 until 2000, innovation dedicated to convenience declines and is replaced by a pleasure-driven frozen product innovation. Convenience declines while moving towards a third innovation lever: individualization of food consumption. In addition to time-saving and ease of handling, frozen products become more adaptable to the increasingly busy consumer lifestyles. Frozen food evolves towards an individual quickly heatable format for consumption: rolled pizza, filled mini-nachos, wrap, tortilla, cheese nuggets are all mini format declinable products. There are even dishes on sticks to eat similar to ice-cream.

The pleasure offering innovation develops around exotism: Asian, Mexican, Russian and American

specialties renew pizza and Italian Panini, which have become too commonplace. The offer for children becomes more complex with "fun" innovations: offering food with unusual colors by adding artificial or natural food coloring agents, or playing with forms (balls, dinosaurs, animals or sea stars). Individually prepared frozen dishes cause a burst of innovation around more practical packaging: single Tetrapak brick, box and microwaveable retort pouch, steamer trays or doypack. This development slows down in 2004 to make way for fun-focused innovations again: the first verrines (glasses), ceramic pots, giving authenticity to the product, or the association with micropipettes to add sauce yourself.

A Landmark Year

2008 represents a new turning point in the frozen product innovation: the tendency to enriched products. From 1990 to 2006, innovation around health implies a concept of "low" or "free". It all starts with fat: "low fat" products become "fat free" products. Then, sugar is the one to be removed: innovation moves from "light" to "ultra-light" and then integrates sweeteners such as aspartame. Between 2006 and 2008, there is a shift: industrialists move from the "low" concept to a "rich" concept, by enriching their products. Thus, there are products enriched with fiber, probiotics, vitamins and minerals. Enriched products ensure the innovative dynamics of the frozen product category offer, based on a health promise until 2010, when they are replaced by a range of products supposed to "naturally" bring benefits. This is achieved by the use of particular ingredients such as "superfruits" (acai, goji, guarana, pomegranate, cranberry, acerola, salba), "supervegetables" (kale, cabbage kale, garlic, spinach) or "supergrains" (chia, sesame, buckwheat, quinoa, amaranth). Naturalness, i.e. enhancing a product by a natural ingredient or natural manufacturing process, is the main innovative lever of frozen product intended to bring a functional benefit for the consumer.



Exotic, Fusion, Premium

The year 2010 introduces a new dynamic in frozen product innovation, related to the economic crisis affecting all markets. The consumer has new consuming habits to be met by manufacturers. The individual dish gives way to the family size dish: it is cheaper and more practical for everyone in a household to eat the same dish.

From here on out, the fun goes high-end; although the consumer spends less due to the crisis, he/she is also willing to pay a little more for a product that will convince him: "mini" and "appetizers" formats are expanding by offering a small daily pleasure at a price more affordable than the latest smartphone. The exotic offer changes and splits into two branches. The Food Fusion movement principle is to get inspired from world-renowned recipes and adapt to the consumer tastes of a country. For example, we have spring rolls with cheese filling on the Canadian market or foie gras sushi on the French market. The second movement is to highlight on an everyday basis the exotic and noble origin of the product: we now have meat from the prestigious livestock breeds (Wagyu, Angus) or products of still "unexplored" gastronomies in the food industry (Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar etc).

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