The Grocer

Focus On: Rice & Noodles by Jennifer Richardson jennifer_richardson01@yahoo.co.uk

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The Story

Britain's biggest rice and noodle brands are under pressure as retailers ramp up their own label offerings. Sales of own label Chinese noodles, for example, have almost doubled in the past year. Own label rice is up by nearly 10%. Which retailers are driving this and how? How are brands looking to fight back? And why are Brits buying more rice & noodles in general?

Key themes (this list is not exhaustive; we will investigate new angles as they arise):

Brands: How are brands responding to the growth of own label? To what extent is NPD, marketing investment, merchandising initiatives and so on being used to regain the upper hand? And which brands have been hit hardest by own label's growth? Who is weathering the storm?

Health: In recent years a raft of new healthy alternatives to rice and noodles have hit the market, from courgetti, to cauliflower rice and even boodles (butternut squash noodles). How much of a threat do these pose to traditional carb-heavy favourites? Or, is the fact they're mostly in the fresh aisle, allow both to live in harmony? Also, many are adding ancient grains such as quinoas and pulses to their products; how are these lines performing?

Convenience: Convenience is king in this category. So how are brands and retailers looking to take the faff out of cooking rice and noodles?

Innovation: Key to this feature will be a discussion of the latest NPD from the category's brands and own label players, large and small. The feature will explore the market trends that have inspired recent innovations and weigh up which new launches are most likely to encourage future growth in the market. We will profile 12 of these in separate innovations panel including rice, noodles and ready to eat formats.

Pouch rice: This sector has continued its meteoric rise and is now worth a whopping £196m. How has this been achieved? Is it brands, or cheaper own label, driving the bulk of this? This feature will canvas the opinions of the sector's biggest and most interesting players on how factors such as new products, changing consumer trends, price promotions, merchandising and so on are driving this growth.

Prices, promotions and pack sizes: Our research shows that average price per kilo has fallen by 2.5% across rice & noodles in the past year. Why is this? Are retailers promoting harder? Or are we seeing decreases in everyday prices? How has this market been affected by the ongoing price war?

Ramadan and ethnic consumers: Tesco predicts £30m uplift in sales as a result of Ramadan, with some retailers claiming last year the season was expected to be the third biggest seasonal event of the year after Easter and Christmas for the first time. Were these expectations realised? How important is the holiday to the rice & noodles category? What are retailers doing to realise the opportunities of this event? Plus: how are brands looking to target ethnic consumers at Ramadam and throughout the year?

The retailers: Central to this feature will be an exploration of how different retailers are approaching this sector and how this is impacting their performance and the overall performance of the category. Which retailers have driven the growth in own label? Why are some focusing more on their own label lines?

Key questions the feature is likely to address:

- What consumer trends have impacted the category over the past year?
- How have promotional strategies (both in terms of price and marketing) evolved?
- How have individual retailers' strategies impacted the market?
- How has merchandising changed in the market?
- What's next for the category?