

Remodeled: The Home Kitchen Takes on New Life

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The unanticipated burden of everyday meal preparation occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic is driving a bevy of opportunities for makers of food products designed to aid and exhilarate today's at-home cooks. As of early June, 70% of U.S. households prepared more than 80% of meals for all household members at home, versus 40% who did that much home cooking for household members prior to the COVID-19 crisis, according to IRI's "Charting the Course for Continued Center Store Growth" webinar.

And the home cooking trend is expected to last for a while. Half (48%) of food shoppers say they plan to continue cooking more at home post-pandemic, according to the *Home Cooking in America 2020* report from FMI – The Food Industry Association.

At-home cooks are seeking menu inspiration. Although it's likely that they've been cooking for years, a quarter (25%) of baby boomers surveyed this summer reported that it's difficult to come up with new meal ideas, and 24% said they lack inspiration to cook, according to IRI's *The Changing Shape of the CPG Demand Curve (Part 5): Boomers*.

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Hartman Group research shows that nearly half of consumers (46%) are looking for more recipes now than before the pandemic. Banana bread, pancakes, chicken, pizza dough, brownies, crepes, meatloaf, French toast, lasagna, and cheesecake are the most Googled recipes since stay-at-home orders began.

FMI reports that one-third of millennial and Gen Z consumers have learned new cooking skills during the pandemic, and a similar number of all adults are claiming a newfound passion for cooking, according to Datassential research. So it's not surprising that culinary experimentation is on the rise.

Nearly half (47%) of food shoppers say they explore a diversity of cooking techniques and flavors when preparing meals, up 9% from 2019, per FMI, and 42% consider the uniqueness of the ingredients they choose, up 8%. Nine in 10 households now own a slow cooker, and more than half have a pressure cooker, according to FMI's *2020 Power of Meat* report.

Sales surged for leading meal kit providers this spring as home cooks sought easy meal options, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in May. Whether such sales growth will be sustainable is uncertain given that many meal kit companies had struggled with declining

sales before the pandemic hit.

Others are looking for even simpler approaches. Easy-to-prepare refrigerated comfort foods, including pizza kits, taco kits, and take-and-bake desserts, are in demand, per Datassential. For the 12 weeks that ended May 17, 2020, versus a year ago, unit sales of refrigerated bread/rolls/bun dough jumped 70%, pizza crust/dough was up 69%, and cookie/brownie dough jumped 56%, according to IRI.

Consumers are also cooking with more seasonings. For the quarter that ended May 31, 2020, McCormick's consumer seasoning sales rose 26%.

Baking has become a popular pandemic pastime. Sales in the bakery ingredient aisle jumped 21% for the year that ended July 4, 2020, according to a *Covid-19 Impact* report from the International Dairy Deli Bakery Association. Eight in 10 first-time bakers say they'll continue baking post-pandemic.

And while quarantine comfort foods clearly have their place, four in 10 primary food shoppers say they cook healthy meals three or more nights per week, and 38% cook meals from scratch that frequently, per FMI. Of those who cook three nights or more weekly, 37% say they are doing so without a recipe, and 36% assemble pre-prepared components.

Dinners are likely to include more meat cuts now versus prior to the pandemic. For the year that ended June 7, 2020, fresh meat/poultry sales grew 24% versus 2019, according to IRI's *Mid-year Meat Department Review*, and processed meat sales were up by 25%.

Eight in 10 cooks say they're keeping more chicken on hand, and 60% are stocking up on ground beef/patties, per Datassential. Frozen and fresh seafood each posted dollar sales gains of more than 40% for the year that ended June 7, 2020, per IRI's meat report.

Meat alternatives also have their place at the table. One-quarter of consumers prepare meat alternatives at home at least once a month, and 10% do so weekly, per FMI.

Of course, not everyone has enthusiastically embraced home cooking. One-quarter of food shoppers, led by households with children, want to spend as little time cooking as possible, according to FMI data.

This spring, half of frozen food purchasers said they planned to keep buying more frozen foods in the months ahead, according to the American Frozen Food Institute's *Frozen Food Sales Amid Covid-19* report. Unit sales of multiserve frozen dinners (up 29%) significantly outpaced single-serve entrée sales (up 7%) for the 12 weeks ending May 17 versus the same period a year ago, per IRI.