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PIZZA AT A PREMIUM

Units are down, but continued growth at the high end combined with rising inflation drove a 3.0% dollar gain.

BY NEAL LORENZI

During the 12 weeks ended Jan. 23, unit sales of frozen pizza fell 6.3% and volume, 7.0%, reports Chicago-based market research firm IRI (iri.worldwide.com). But dollar sales jumped 3.0% to \$1.46 billion across channels, thanks to worsening inflation combined with growing sales of more premium options, both indulgent and better-for-you.

Although consumers are picking up fewer frozen pizzas, many producers are taking a long-term view. “These latest numbers are likely driven by fewer trips to the frozen food aisle compared to the spikes in 2020,” says Linda Zink, CMO at Denver-based Quest Nutrition at Simply Good Foods. “But consumers have discovered new brands and aisles they had not previously shopped; thus, the opportunity to innovate in this space continues to grow.”

However, bringing new items to market isn’t as easy as it once was. The move to at-home dining created unparalleled demand for frozen pizza at the same time many retailers are experiencing stressed supply chains, resulting in higher-than-average out of stocks, explains Mike Breitenbach, vp of customer development and sales strategy at Schwan’s Consumer Brands, Marshall, Minn. “In addition, e-commerce has exploded, and what many thought would take five years happened in less than one year.” As a result, “E-commerce frozen pizza sales are growing almost four times faster than in-store sales, and e-commerce pizza share jumped from 5% to 9% of the total category in two months.”

Nonetheless, says John Reaves, CEO of Carlsbad, Calif.-based Milton’s Craft

Bakers adds a Meat Lover’s Trio variety to its cauliflower crust lineup.

Oggi Foods teams with Beyond Meat to create a New York-style meatless Pepperoni Pizza with real cheese.

Schwan’s expands its Freschetta Gluten Free lineup with a new Margherita variety.

Bakers, “Demand for innovation from consumer and retailers still exists. However, we anticipate that brands will focus more on broadly appealing flavor or crust line extensions instead of niche trends or products that add supply chain complexity but cannot generate sufficient volume.”

DELIVERING RESTAURANT-TYPE EXCITEMENT

The frozen pizza category is only a fraction of the size of the foodservice pizza segment, so trends tend to originate in restaurants, where consumers are finding big

portions, loaded toppings and exciting new formats, says Lindsay Brady, vp/general manager of frozen meals at Chicago-based Conagra.

“Frozen pizza has always had an advantage with convenience but has struggled to deliver on excitement. To help change that perception, she continues, Conagra introduced Banquet MEGA Pizza, single-serve slices amped up with a Mega twist: two layers of crust stuffed with meat, cheese and sauce and then topped with even more cheese and sauce. “Each package comes with two Mega slices and delivers 13 ounces of food. In addition, each package is packed with at least 39 grams of protein,” says Brady.

Beyond size and shape, “Unique additions to pizza also are trending,” says Nick Falluca, chief product and innovation officer at Milwaukee-based Palermo Villa, maker of the Urban Pie lineup. “Hot honey is one popular addition, and the balsamic glaze packet included in our new Roasted Vegetable & Goat Cheese variety elevates this pie to what you would expect when dining out at a restaurant.” He adds that mushrooms are also gaining momentum — particularly in the natural channel — spurring the company’s creation of a new Truffle Mushroom variety as well. A third new addition to Palermo’s Urban Pie lineup, 8 Cheese, is actually an improvement on an existing recipe. It includes Mozzarella, Provolone and Gouda among other cheeses atop a



Milton’s Craft Bakers adds a Meat Lover’s Trio variety to its cauliflower crust lineup.





Wise Choice Foods' protein-forward Chop'd collection features bold, unique flavor profiles.

▶ marinara sauce on an artisan thin crust.

"We are committed to using thoughtful ingredients in our Urban Pie line, including rBST-free cheeses, antibiotic-free meats, and no artificial colors, flavors or preservatives," adds Fallucca. "This allows consumers to indulge their pizza cravings without sacrificing their nutritional standards and goals."

NEXT-LEVEL BETTER-FOR-YOU

Other companies are going beyond clean label to higher-level better-for-you attributes, including gluten-free. "We've cultivated a loyal consumer base with our [gluten-free] pepperoni and cheese offerings, but we know that consumers are always looking for more flavor variety," says Maddie Essman, senior marketing manager for Schwan's Consumer Brands. To that end, she reports, the company plans to introduce Freschetta Gluten Free Margherita Pizza later this year.

Another player in the gluten-free space, Brattleboro, Vt.-based Against the Grain Gourmet, is focusing on meeting demand for its core flavors: cheese, pepperoni and pesto. "But we have some innovative offerings in the works that will speak to consumers' interest in better-for-you products and sustainability," says founder Nancy Cain. "I'm especially excited about one flavor that we hope to introduce in Q3 2022," she adds.

There's also plenty of activity in the meat-free segment where Montreal-based Oggi Foods is introducing a meatless pepperoni variety inspired by New York style pizza. "We took our award-winning crust and topped it with premium tomato sauce, real mozzarella and Beyond Pepperoni,"

reports founder and president Joe Turturici. He adds that the new pie is the only frozen pizza on the market topped with Beyond Meat's new plant-based pepperoni.

For consumers seeking better-for-you options with real meat toppings, Milton's Craft Bakers recently debuted its Meat Lover's Trio Cauliflower Crust Pizza in select Costco locations. "The pizza is made with our thin and crispy cauliflower crust and comes topped with real mozzarella cheese and hearty pieces of Italian sausage, uncured pepperoni and chopped Applewood bacon," says Reaves. It offers 16 grams of protein per serving. "While our Roasted Vegetable Cauliflower Crust pizza is a favorite," he adds, "we know that some consumers prefer the satisfaction of a [real] meat pizza."

Quest Nutrition at Simply Good Foods also added a meat-topped variety recently, though its nutrient-rich version appeals to consumers also seeking a low-carb option, says Zink. "Our Meat Lover's is topped



Available in three flavors, Banquet MEGA Pizza offers a decadent twist on traditional slices.

FROZEN PIZZA

Sales in supermarkets, drugstores, mass merchants, military commissaries and select club and dollar stores combined for the 12 weeks ended Jan. 23, according to Chicago-based market research firm IRI (iriworldwide.com). Percent change is versus the same period a year ago. Data in yellow is for manufacturers; data highlighted in green is for brands.

CATEGORY	\$ SALES	% CHG	UNIT SALES	% CHG	VOLUME	%CHG
FZ PIZZA	\$1,459,572,565	2.9	328,555,236	-6.3	378,688,739	-7.0
PIZZA	\$1,448,259,918	3.0	325,863,116	-6.2	376,205,845	-6.9
Nestlé USA	\$574,601,478	2.8	110,774,442	-6.6	137,906,719	-8.1
Schwan Food Co.	\$305,781,549	6.4	71,482,871	-0.4	83,789,411	0.1
Private Label	\$174,195,267	3.0	48,528,015	2.9	57,487,882	-2.2
General Mills	\$71,124,128	-26.8	34,863,042	-32.4	31,338,885	-35.0
Bernatello's	\$44,409,000	12.1	8,791,333	12.4	10,578,861	10.5
Palermo Villa	\$42,443,282	7.5	7,534,681	3.0	10,239,728	-0.1
Home Run Inn	\$29,487,243	4.6	4,710,776	-2.6	6,792,728	-7.2
Newman's Own	\$23,735,611	0.1	3,893,985	-0.4	3,838,570	-0.4
Caulipower	\$17,875,986	10.7	2,540,147	3.7	1,862,704	4.9
Amy's Kitchen	\$17,273,105	9.5	2,294,624	7.9	1,858,752	9.3
Di Giorno	\$351,539,515	4.8	53,765,650	-2.8	84,590,209	-6.7
Red Baron	\$238,422,365	10.4	56,044,731	1.1	63,472,184	2.0
Private Label	\$174,195,267	3.0	48,528,015	2.9	57,487,882	-2.2
Jack's	\$77,331,701	2.0	23,868,744	-10.8	23,299,229	-10.5
Totino's	\$71,124,128	-26.8	34,863,042	-32.4	31,338,885	-35.0
Tombstone	\$55,147,042	-0.5	13,331,151	-7.2	16,793,365	-7.1
California Pizza Kitchen	\$50,346,088	-6.9	7,172,431	-15.4	6,346,468	-16.8
Freschetta	\$47,924,106	-2.1	8,674,870	1.9	12,956,981	2.1
Home Run Inn	\$29,487,243	4.6	4,710,776	-2.6	6,792,728	-7.2
Brew Pub Lotzza Motzza	\$24,945,906	13.1	3,958,970	14.4	6,120,505	13.8
PIZZA CRUSTS/DOUGH	\$9,851,045	-15.9	2,521,428	-16.0	2,359,112	-20.6
PIZZA KITS/TOPPINGS	\$1,461,602	17.5	170,693	9.2	123,782	70.4



Rufus Teague debuts a line of frozen pizza featuring a base of its own sweet and smoky BBQ sauce.

of TD Specialty Foods, Brick, N.J., confirms that the line between premium and better-for-you is blurring. As a result, his company created Veggie Power Pizza, a better-for-you premium pizza featuring a gourmet New York-style crust made of cauliflower. The product is vegan, gluten free, non-GMO, and lower in calories and carbs — while still delivering premium pizza taste, he says.

SEEKING ‘THE NEXT COOL SNACK’

“Companies are creating different varieties of pizzas to cater to consumers who are looking for ‘the next cool snack,’” says Turturici. “Whether it has to do with convenience or unique content, consumers want something that is tasty and different.”

One such product comes from BBQ sauce maker Rufus Teague, Shawnee, Kan., which recently rolled out a five-flavor line of frozen pizza featuring BBQ sauce as the base ingredient. “There are a few BBQ pizzas on the market, but they typically have a small amount of sauce added to the toppings,” says marketing director Brad Jungles. “With our new Rufus Teague line of pizzas, there is no mistaking the sweet, smoky flavor of the BBQ sauce complementing the abundant, savory toppings.”

Another interesting new choice comes from Wise Choice Foods, Albuquerque, N.M., which recently expanded its Hatch Green Chile collection to include a new Roasted Chicken Green Chile Fredo Pizza featuring a green chile-infused Alfredo sauce. “We’ve also developed a protein-forward Chop’d line that targets consumers who are looking for premium, all natural ingredients along with heavier proteins and unique, bold flavor profiles,” says company president Season Chavez. The line includes the Smoked Bacon Jalapeno Popper Pizza, the Italian Meat Up, the Chop’d Supreme and the Big Beef Taco Pizza. ■

with spicy Italian sausage, Canadian-style bacon, uncured pepperoni, and smoked bacon layered on top of mozzarella cheese.” It offers 22 grams of protein and 5 grams of net carbs per serving but still meets consumer demand for great taste, highlighting the need for products that do it all.

Tony DeLorenzo, brand owner