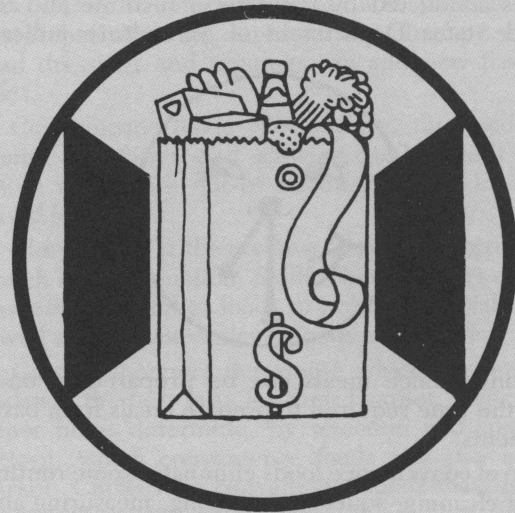


# FACT SHEET

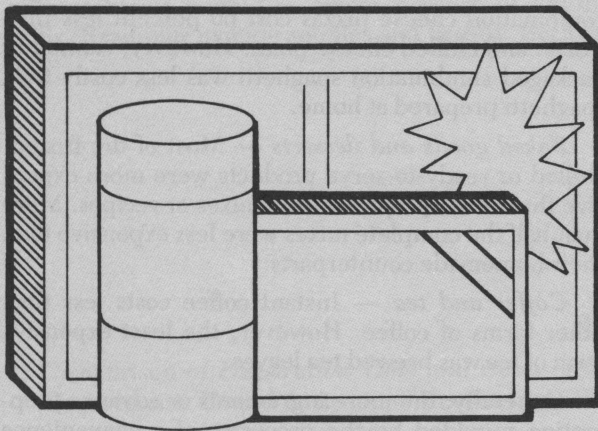
L-1080

## CONVENIENCE FOODS

Sally S. Coble\*



Convenience foods have become part of the typical consumer's grocery bag. This is a result of rising incomes, women working, increased value of the homemaker's time and the increased desire for leisure activities.



Convenience foods accounted for almost one-third of food expenditures during 1973 in the United States. Purchase of TV dinners tripled between 1962 and 1972. And purchase of pizza, hors d'oeuvres and other snack foods rose at least 150 percent from 1973-75. Frozen vegetable consumption increased 40 percent during the last 10 years due to the popularity of bulk bags and those frozen with sauces, creams and other vegetables. Frozen french-fried potatoes have increased consumption of frozen potatoes by 300 percent.

### What are convenience foods?

Convenience foods have undergone processing or preparation ordinarily done in the home. This includes canning, freezing, drying, concentrating, cooking, packaging and bottling. Other built-in services include basic measuring, adding sauces and combining of foods.

The convenience food concept has changed through the years. To the homemaker several decades ago, a loaf of bread was a real convenience treat. Today, a convenience food might be a frozen Chinese entree or vegetable casserole.

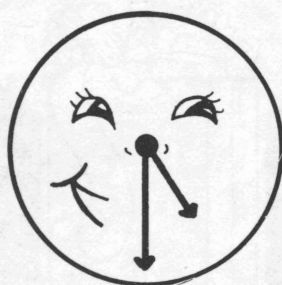
Cost of convenience is often the one consideration when deciding whether or not to buy convenience

\*Extension foods and nutrition specialist, The Texas A&M University System.

food. However, other factors also should be considered — time and equipment available for food preparation, nutritional value, family likes and dislikes, and the homemaker's skills. Each of these is considered below.

### Time savers

Convenience foods usually save preparation time. Studies conducted by the Drexel Institute and the United States Department of Agriculture indicate



that convenience meals can be prepared in one-fourth the time required to prepare meals from basic ingredients.

Use of convenience foods eliminates some routine tasks of cleaning, squeezing, peeling, measuring and mixing. Preparation is simplified and dishwashing is reduced because fewer utensils are used.

### Convenience food costs

Convenience foods may or may not cost more than the same food prepared entirely by an individual. Total food costs include money spent for ingredients, preparation and storage, electricity or gas, and your time.

In a recent United States Department of Agriculture study, only 36 percent of the convenience foods analyzed cost less than their homemade counterparts.

*Vegetables* — Almost half the convenience vegetable products cost less than their homemade or fresh counterparts. Included were the commonly used single ingredient items — canned or frozen peas, corn or spinach and frozen french-fried potatoes. Frozen vegetable side dishes and products prepared from dehydrated potatoes cost more. Fresh corn, asparagus and brussels sprouts were better buys in season than their processed counterparts.

*Fruits and berries* — Convenience fruits and berry products cost more than their fresh counterparts 61 percent of the time. However, reconstituted frozen orange juice concentrate was cheaper than any other form, regardless of the season. Coconut, grapefruit, peaches, pineapple, raspberries and strawberries cost less fresh (in season) than canned or frozen. Except for raspberries and peaches, products available canned or frozen were cheaper in the frozen form.

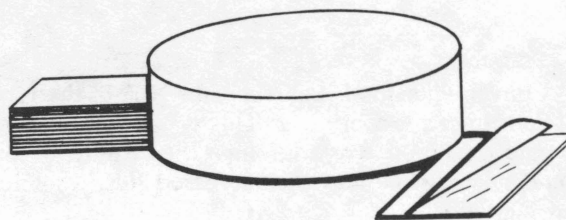


*Beef and poultry* — Generally, frozen meat entrees cost more than their home-prepared counterparts. Skillet dinners cost more or less than their homemade counterparts depending upon the particular brand.

Beef patties with soy protein were less expensive when soy was added to the ground beef at the grocery store rather than at home. Soy protein patties were cheaper than ground beef patties.

*Fish and shellfish* — Frozen fish sticks and crab cakes were less expensive, but several frozen fish and shellfish entrees were more expensive than those prepared at home.

*Cheeses* — Small price differences were found in the forms of American cheese — loaf, sliced or individually wrapped. However, American cheese food in an aerosol can costs three times more than that in a cheese loaf.



*Specialty dishes* — Home prepared and packaged combination cheese pizzas cost 60 percent less than frozen and chilled cheese pizza. However, canned or packaged combination spaghetti was less costly than spaghetti prepared at home.

*Baked goods and desserts* — Most of the frozen, chilled or ready-to-serve products were more expensive than those prepared from mixes or recipes. More than half the complete mixes were less expensive than their homemade counterparts.

*Coffee and tea* — Instant coffee costs less than other forms of coffee. However, the least expensive form of tea was brewed tea leaves.

Generally, the more ingredients or advance preparation provided by the processor of a convenience food, the more costly the product will be.

Convenience foods, even at higher costs than similar home-prepared foods, may be the best buy for the homemaker with limited time or cooking skills.

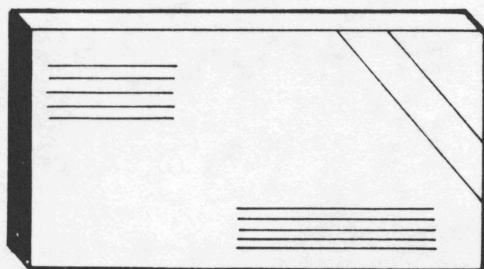


For small families or persons living alone, convenience foods may be more practical than recipes requiring many ingredients and providing several servings.

Savings or costs from the use of convenience foods depend upon the ingredients. A convenience food containing frequently used ingredients stored in the home kitchen may be an added expense. On the other hand, buying large amounts of infrequently used ingredients to prepare a meal does not save time or money.

### Quality of convenience foods

Nutritive value of convenience foods may or may not equal that of non-processed foods. Food manufacturers recently increased fortification and enrichment of convenience foods. The nutrition information label will list the food's nutritional value.



Other factors determining convenience food quality are the final product's appearance, taste, texture and color. Convenience foods do not always meet the home-prepared standards. For example, the taste and quality of homemade biscuits and homestyle fried chicken generally are superior to that of their convenience counterparts.

Convenience foods may assure quality that the homemaker is unable to obtain because of limited skills. Examples include souffles and breads. Because

the quality of convenience foods is consistent, the consumer can be assured of the same taste, color and appearance.

### Food variety

Convenience foods give the homemaker opportunities to add interest and variety to meals. They introduce a gourmet's touch to menus without extra work. Many famous restaurants now package their house specialties for supermarkets. Instant sauces, salad dressings and toppings can add new flavor to foods.

Convenience foods offer variety, thus widening menu possibilities, and allowing combinations of in-season foods with out-of-season products in a processed form.

They also offer the creative cook an opportunity to stretch her imagination. Skillful homemakers can add seasonings and other foods to produce special dishes as well as serve convenience foods as they are.

Careful shoppers determine which convenience foods are the best buys for their families. Every consumer helps determine, by selection and spending pattern, which convenience foods will stay on the market. Choices for convenience foods may depend on the following considerations.

*Service* — Will the product relieve you of work you would rather not do?

*Quality* — Will the product meet the quality of your home-prepared variety?

*Nutritive value* — Will the product provide as many nutrients as your home-prepared product?

*Time* — Will the time saved by using this product allow time for other activities?

*Storage* — Will the product require special storage facilities?

*Cost* — Will the product cost more or less per serving than the home-prepared product?

### References

1. *Comparison of Preparation Time and Costs of Convenience and Home Prepared Food*, Food and Nutrition Department, Drexel Institute of Technology, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
2. *Food Buying Guide*, Unit 2, Extension Service, North Dakota State University, Home Economics 107, October 1967, page 22.
3. *Convenience Foods — 1975 Cost Update — A Preliminary Paper*, USDA, ERS-ARS.
4. "Some Convenience Foods Do Save Money," *Changing Times*, January 1975, pp. 13-15.

### Acknowledgment

Acknowledgment is given to Frances L. Reasonover, Marilyn A. Haggard and Mary K. Sweeten, Extension Foods and Nutrition specialists, for their assistance in the preparation of this publication.



Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socio-economic levels, race, color, sex, religion or national origin.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, The Texas A&M University System and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914.  
20M—4-76, Revised