

# **Problems Associated with Purchase and Use of Frozen Foods**



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# PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH PURCHASE AND USE OF FROZEN FOODS

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A survey of the practices of a randomly selected group of homemakers in Ohio in buying, caring for, and using frozen foods was conducted by mail and by personal interview in the autumn of 1962<sup>1</sup>. Among the questions on the questionnaire used in the survey, an opportunity was provided for respondents to comment on their problems with frozen foods. Answers were expected to be useful to members of the industry as indicators of need for or means of improving some aspect of service or product and to reveal areas in which additional emphasis is needed in consumer information programs.

Usable returns were received from 2,670 households in the mail sample and from 335 in the interview sample. For the purpose of this preliminary report on problems, all of the responses, a total of 3,005, were grouped together as one sample. Among these participants, 2,856 stated that they used at least some frozen foods. Of these 2,856 women, 2,035 of them (71 percent) either left blank the space provided for listing problems or indicated satisfaction with frozen foods, and 821 women (29 percent) listed one or more problems.

A total of 935 comments were received from the 821 women listing problems. A summarization of these is presented on the following pages. No attempt is made here to evaluate the reasonableness of criticisms or merit of suggestions. Most of the statements refer to commercial frozen food items<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Details of sampling will be represented in a later report.

<sup>2</sup>In a few instances an item may have been purchased in an unfrozen state and frozen by the homemaker or by a locker plant (for example, bacon or a large cut of meat).

## HOMEMAKERS' PROBLEMS WITH FROZEN FOODS

	Number of Comments
<b>Buying</b>	
Premature thawing:	
Partial thawing of frozen foods before reaching home	56
Partial thawing of frozen foods in grocer's case	50
Suspicion that "sale items" are those that have thawed and been refrozen	2
Cost:	
Frozen foods are too expensive	48
Heavily breaded items are misleading in quantity	1
Availability:	
Items sought are not available	36
Store practices:	
Want grocer to use insulated bags	21
Want more careful handling at check-out counter (less roughness, standing pies on edge, etc.)	15
Want frozen food display cases nearer exit	9
Want thermometer in display case	2
Want packages individually priced (e. g., not 5/x¢)	2
Want unrestricted number of packages per customer on sale items	1
Suspect grocer is careless about rotating stock	1
Dislike rusty fruit cans	1
Dislike soiled display case	1
Want step stool in order to reach into case (especially when stock is low)	1
Items wanted:	
More items in "pour and store" packages	17
Special diet foods	4
Unsweetened fruit	3
Half turkey	2
Stuffed turkey	1
Wax beans in "pour and store" packages	1
More variety in vegetables with prepared dinners	1
More frozen desserts	1
Fresh cranberry relish	1
White corn	1
Beets	1
Black raspberries	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>281</b>

## Packages

### Size:

Packages too small for family	43
Packages too large for family; difficult to thaw partial package	22
Need in-between size packages—small too small, large too large	16
Package size deceptive—package large, contents small	1

### Opening:<sup>1</sup>

Packages too difficult to open	21
Difficult to remove food from some packages	15
Can't open package of fruit with metal ends without spills	13
Wrapper sticks to product	3
Can't open small orange juice cans with automatic opener	3
Difficult to remove frozen soup from can	1

### Labels:

Want directions on front of label	7
Want package dated (how long to keep)	5
Want date of processing on label	4
Want weight on front of label	1
Want vitamin, mineral content on label	1

### Use of partial package:

Closing of partial package for continued storage is difficult	5
Frozen packages too hard to cut in half	4

### Suggestions for improvements:

Compartmentalized or portioned packs for easier separation	5
Portioned packs for fish and poultry	3
"Variety packs" of fruits and vegetables—two kinds of fruit or vegetable in regular-size package	3

### General:

Wrappers tear too easily	7
Want "see through" packages, plastic boxes	2

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Total	185
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<sup>1</sup>Some women suggested that an opening tape such as is used in chewing gum wrappers would make package opening easier.

Thawing		
Remembering to thaw; <sup>2</sup> thawing for emergency meals; thawing takes too long		135
Thawing fruits to suit family <sup>3</sup>		8
Concern about quality and safety of meat during and after thawing		6
Knowing what to do when food accidentally thaws (partially or completely)		4
Estimating thawing time (want it stated on label)		3
Relying on defrost time on label (incorrect)		3
Total		<hr/> 159
Quality		
Specific items objected to and reasons (if offered):		
Vegetables—Green beans (flavor)		25
Corn		8
French fried potatoes		3
Peas (flavor)		2
Corn-on-the-cob		1
Broccoli (stalks too tough)		1
Cauliflower (flavor)		1
Lima beans in plastic bags		1
Potato patties		1
Squash		1
Fruit—		
Peaches (turn dark)		8
Strawberries (dislike mushiness)		7
Orange juice (flavor)		1
Peaches, cherries (decayed material found)		1
Other fruits (general)		
Below standard or unsatisfactory		6
Too sweet		1
Soiled pieces found		1
Fish—		
Doesn't store well		18
Falls apart		3
Want head and tail removed (trout)		1
Poultry—		
Tasteless		11
Bones blackened		3
Needs singeing		1

<sup>2</sup>Fifty-two percent of these comments referred specifically to meat, fish and/or poultry; 6 percent, to fruit; 5 percent, to meat and fruit; and 37 percent were not specific.

<sup>3</sup>Partial thawing of frozen fruit for table use has been generally suggested in order to lend firmness to the fruit. Some women in this survey commented that fruit containing ice crystals is too cold to eat, but that they disliked the softness of completely thawed fruit.

Dinners-	Whole dinners (taste)	3
	Meat loaf	1
	Potatoes	1
Meat-	Beef (loses flavor if kept long)	2
	Hamburger patties	1
	Bacon (becomes rancid)	1

In general:

Poor flavor in all frozen foods	22
Variation in quality among brands	14
Artificial appearance of some frozen foods	1
"Unnatural" taste of seasoned vegetables	1
Objectionable odor of frozen whipped cream	1
Too little rising of frozen rolls	1
Poor quality in waffles	1
Poor quality in prepared casseroles	1

Total	157
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**Cooking**

Suggested cooking time for vegetables too short	13
Directions for cooking not clear	4
Frozen block of vegetables does not fit saucepan	3
Frozen vegetables in clumps difficult to cook evenly	3
Need more water than directions state	3
In mixed vegetables, other vegetables are mushy before Lima beans are cooked tender	2
Time needed for doneness varies among items on dinners	2
Can't make French fries crisp	2
Brussels sprouts difficult to cook properly	1
Frozen pies take too long to bake	1
Giblets difficult to remove from frozen turkey	1

Total	35
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**Using**

Frozen dinners too small	5
Need to learn how to sort and store to use oldest items first	3
Want recipes and serving suggestions on label (e. g., frozen juice recipes, what to serve with specialty items such as foreign foods)	3

Package directions on outer wrap are usually discarded when first opened; <sup>4</sup> may need to refer to them later if only partial package is used	2
Family prefers other pieces of chicken than those offered in frozen dinner	1
Total	<u>14</u>
<b>Miscellaneous questions and comments</b>	
Lack appropriate (or adequate) storage space at home	89
What should be done with frozen foods when cleaning freezer?	5
Not enough seasoning in frozen vegetables	3
How should one refreeze thawed foods?	2
Weight of frozen fruits is short	1
What type of freezer should I buy?	1
Dislike disposal of messy paper from thawed meats	1
Frozen onions and green pepper mixed with meat make it watery	1
On freezer food plans, "quality decreases with time"	1
Total	<u>104</u>
Grand Total	<u>935</u>

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<sup>4</sup>Some women suggested that contents and cooking directions be printed directly on box as well as on outer wrapper.



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Among the 2,856 homemakers in Ohio participating in this study and using at least some frozen foods, only 29 percent indicated any problems. The most frequently mentioned of these were problems with (a) purchasing—partial thawing on the way home from the store and in the grocer's display case, cost of frozen items, availability of wanted items, and the grocer's handling at the check-out counter; (b) package sizes and opening of packages; (c) getting foods requiring prethawing ready by mealtime; (d) inadequate home storage facilities; and (e) adjustment to flavor of frozen foods. The two most common problems had nothing to do with specific frozen food items but rather with the homemaker's remembering before mealtime to start the thawing of items needing prethawing and with inadequacy of storage space at home for frozen foods.

Some comments which may seem paradoxical may actually indicate a need for reworded directions on a package or renewed promotional efforts. For example, some women wanted thawing times stated on labels but other women said that the defrost times stated on labels were incorrect. Perhaps further clarification of thawing conditions is needed when thawing times are stated.

A second example of conflicting needs which could possibly be resolved by promotional materials involves package size. Some families thought packages were too large; others thought them too small. On the other hand, many women said that they had adopted and liked the "pour and store" packages because of the ease of removing just the amount needed at a time and the flexibility in numbers of servings readily available when guests were to be fed. There were, in fact, several requests for a greater variety of frozen items in "pour and store" packages than is now available. A need for more emphasis on the utility of this package type for families of all sizes seems indicated.