

Consumers Are Big Fans of Small Appliances

With more than half (54%) of young adult meal preparers describing themselves as inexperienced cooks and 39% of all adults categorizing themselves as the same in the 2009 *Gallup Study of Cooking Knowledge & Skills*, it's not surprising that Americans are turning to a variety of small appliances to help make cooking easier, faster, and more affordable. The use of microwave ovens in meal preparation has jumped 10% since 2007, according to the NPD Group's 2009 *National Eating Trends Survey*.

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Microwave ovens are being used to warm and heat more food; they're not being used to prepare more dishes from scratch.

The success of microwave steaming technology for frozen meals is credited as an important driver for increased use of the microwave oven. The popularity of fresh-cut microwaveable vegetables is another contributor. For each of the past three years, a steamed frozen vegetable or entrée has made it onto Information Resources Inc.'s Pacesetters list of best-selling new food products. *Birds Eye Steamfresh Vegetables* netted \$87 million in year one sales, *Healthy Choice Café Steamers* \$95 million, and *Green Giant Valley Fresh Steamers* \$85 million. The Fredonia Group's 2009

Microwave Packaging Study projects that the demand for microwave packaging will grow 7% to \$2.4 billion in 2013. *Ore-Ida's* new *Steam 'n Mash* potato line is setting a new pace for sales of frozen steamable side dishes; *Green Giant Fresh Petite Sweet Potatoes* in microwave-steamable bags is a healthful new addition to the category of convenient side dishes.

At the same time, outdoor grilling is at an all-time high. According to the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Assn., 77% of households own an outdoor grill,

and 58% of this group use their grill year-round. The 2009 *Gallup Study of Dinner* reports that one-third of meal preparers frequently use the outdoor grill, ranking behind the toaster (57%) and the electric coffee maker (57%) as the most-used appliances. Those ages 18–32 are the fastest-growing segment of new grillers.

More than half (56%) of charcoal grillers use marinades, and 39% use barbecue sauce, according to Mintel's *Cooking Sauces & Marinades—U.S.* report. The Hartman Group's 2008 *Re-inventing Convenience Foods* report found that 67% of consumers wanted more marinating sauces and 62% wanted more spice rubs/mixes for grilling. With 31% of consumers

saying they ate more fish/seafood last year, seafood-specific grilling accompaniments should find a welcome market, according to Mintel's *Fish & Seafood—U.S.* report.

For many consumers, using small appliances adds convenience to the meal preparation process. The Gallup 2009 study on cooking skills reports that nearly one-third (31%) of meal preparers frequently use a crock pot or slow cooker. Apparently they're seeking inspiration; Allrecipes.com reports that online searches for slow cooker

recipes skyrocketed by 222% in 2009.

Watch for more wok-specific products. Already, one in five meal preparers (19%) regularly prepare a stir-fry meal. Online searches for take-out-style Chinese dishes increased 200% in 2009, according to Allrecipes.com, and searches for Indian recipes were up 93%.

Appliances that help consumers cut back on dining out at restaurants or offer a lower-cost alternative are among those with the fastest-growing sales. This includes regular and gourmet coffee makers, popcorn poppers, juice extractors, and hand-held mixers.

Gallup reports that 29% of meal preparers frequently use a toaster oven, 24% a blender, and

16% an electric griddle/frying pan. Rice cookers are among the trendy new appliances in American kitchens, which makes sense given that rice was the most popular side dish last year, according to Mintel data.

With home baking also on the rise due to the depressed economy, expect consumers to dust off their bread machines; 33% of meal preparers own them. In addition, 50% of meal preparers have waffle makers, and 26% own Panini sandwich makers, according to Gallup.

Small appliances can also play a big role in home entertaining, where a trend toward simplicity is emerging. Nearly one-third (31%) of entertainers often have a potluck meal, 30% use convenient appliances, and 27% serve take-out or prepared/microwaveable food, according to GfK Roper data. Nearly half (47%) of consumers have guests over at least once a month, and one in five (18%) do so once a week, GfK Roper reported in 2009. Nearly two-thirds (63%) served snacks, 52% alcoholic beverages, 48% a casual meal or buffet, and 46% a sit-down meal the last time they entertained.

Clearly, restaurant-quality, microwaveable hors d'ouvres, frozen entrees, and products suitable for crock pots and entertaining have strong potential. **FT**



A. Elizabeth Sloan,
Contributing Editor
• President, Sloan Trends Inc.,
Escondido, Calif.
• sloan@sloantrend.com