

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

Not Too Basic ...

Ignored for far too long, the basic cooking ingredient segment has quickly become one of the largest untapped opportunities in the food industry today. More sophisticated, flavorful, ethnic, healthier, and uniquely sourced ingredients can provide market differentiation in commodity categories, stave off private label, increase profitability, and create new food formats. Also, such ingredients lead to more home-cooked meals.

Cooking from scratch and the desire to make restaurant-style meals at home have accelerated across all age and income groups. In the *2009 Gallup Study of Dinner*, 54% of meal preparers made the previous night's dinner from scratch, up from 33% in 2004. And 32% of primary grocery shoppers cooked more from scratch in 2010 than they did in 2009, according to the *Grocery Shopper Trends* survey by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI). Home baking is also back in vogue. Thirty-eight percent of meal preparers consider themselves experienced bakers, according to the *2009 Gallup Study of Cooking Knowledge & Skills*. Sales of basic baking mixes hit \$1.2 billion, refrigerated dough mixes reached \$1.3 billion, and baking nuts hit \$559 million.

As a result of the from-scratch trend, combination ingredients that help save time and money and flavored ingredients that help ensure a foolproof result will be in high demand. Unit sales of spices/seasonings

were up 9.8% in 2010, sweeteners increased 9%, shelf stable sauces by 2.6%, and baking mixes/supplies/flour were up 1.4%, according to *State of the Specialty Foods Industry 2010* by the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT). In addition, a July 2010 *Louis Harris Cooking Poll* reported that half of adults watch TV cooking shows very often/occasionally. Such programs have inspired 36% of consumers to buy small kitchen gadgets, 24% to purchase cookbooks, and 6% to invest in large appliances.

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Over the past two years, seasonings, shortening/oils, butter/margarine, pasta, baking ingredients, bread crumbs and batters, instant potatoes, sauces, dry or canned beans, marinades, and vinegars enjoyed steady growth. In addition, frozen ingredients such as chicken, seafood, and plain vegetables were among the fastest growing supermarket categories overall last year.

Ethnic barbecue sauces will be the top foodservice trend for 2011. Technomic's *2009 Flavor Trend Report* indicates that grilled, spicy, sweet, smoky, tangy, herbal, fruity, salty, and sour are America's favorite flavors. With grilling at an all-time high and 56% using a marinade to grill, according to Mintel, pre-marinated proteins will find a

welcome market.

According to Allrecipes.com, recipe searches for takeout style Chinese dishes jumped 200% in 2009, and Indian dishes increased by 93%. Regional recipes (e.g., Tuscan and Sicilian in Italian and Sichuan and Hunan in Chinese) topped the list of international recipes users would like to see more of on the website. In addition, Culinary Federation chefs surveyed by the National Restaurant Association named ethnic cheeses (e.g., queso fresco, paneer, lebneh, and halloumi), specialty bacon or

ingredients tied to specific American regions and even farms (e.g. Florida Orange Blossom Honey or Superior Lake Trout) will have a distinct advantage in the marketplace.

According to FMI's *Shopping for Health 2010 Report*, offering healthier ingredient options is a must: half of shoppers tried new healthy recipes in 2010, and 58% reported swapping unhealthy ingredients for healthier versions. Chicken was the top healthy recipe tried, followed by salad, soup, pasta and rice dishes, fish, sandwiches, vege-

sausage, flavored and regional salts, and nontraditional eggs among the hot ingredients for 2011. Also, other popular ethnic-specific ingredients such as seaweed, raita, chimichurri, sri-racha, and chutney will gain in popularity. Soy sauce, fresh herbs, curry, salsa, green chilies, chipotle peppers, fish sauce, and lemongrass were the spices users cooked with most often.

The Packaged Facts' *2009 Foodies in the U.S.* report suggests that Gen Yers are the most likely to be foodies and to enjoy ethnic foods. Moreover, Gen Yers are the most frequent shoppers in gourmet stores, according to NASFT's *2010 Specialty Consumer Report*. And with rising current culinary interest in regional American cuisine,

tarian meals, and steak.

Eggland's Best has enjoyed great success with its high omega-3 eggs. McCormick's *Spices for Health* program provided a new reason to season: adding antioxidants to food. And the European trends of high omega-3, lower calorie, and herb- or vitamin-infused oil blends will make their way to the U.S. market.

Focusing on the exotic nature/source of ingredients for health can offer yet another highly desired point of difference and desirability for basic ingredients. **FT**



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