

# THE FUTURE OF FROZEN FOOD 2024

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Conagra Brands, a leading maker of frozen food including such brands as Birds Eye®, Healthy Choice®, Marie Callender's®, Banquet®, P. F. Chang's®, Gardein® and more, proudly introduces the inaugural Future of Frozen Food report. This first-of-its-kind report goes beyond traditional consumer surveys and instead leverages Conagra's cutting-edge demand science and insights expertise combined with robust sales data from NielsenIQ, in-home consumption behaviors from Circana's National Eating Trends®, and the latest social media trends from Black Swan Data. Together, this new report provides a comprehensive, data-driven look at the future of the nearly \$78 billion<sup>1</sup> U.S. frozen food department.

U.S. consumers are choosing from a diversified array of frozen food options, and they are consuming them in new ways. Five surging trends are reshaping the U.S. frozen food department. While Conagra Brands is a leader in the U.S. frozen food marketplace, the data and trends found within this report reflect the broader U.S. frozen food industry.

To adjust for price or product size variations during the past four years, this report examined an equalized volume metric to track purchase growth.

1. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

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# THE FROZEN FOOD LANDSCAPE

U.S. consumers are choosing frozen food based on attributes such as affordability, convenience, nutrition, longer shelf life and food waste reduction.



The U.S. frozen food market is the largest in the world.<sup>1</sup>



Nearly half of American households have a secondary freezer beyond their primary refrigerator/freezer.<sup>3</sup>



More than 8 in 10 Americans eat at least one frozen food item per week.<sup>2</sup>



Frozen vegetables remain one of the top frozen items Americans have on hand.<sup>3</sup>

**4x**

U.S. consumers eat frozen food products an average of four times a week.<sup>2</sup>

**55%**

Americans have a sweet tooth for ice cream, with 55% having it in their freezers.<sup>3</sup>

1. Euromonitor International, data as of 12/1/2023. Market sizing includes all frozen categories.  
2. Circana, LLC, National Eating Trends; Sourced In-Home/Retail. Data for year ending October 2023  
3. Circana, LLC, Kitchen Audit 2023



While nearly all U.S. consumers buy and/or eat frozen food, purchasing behaviors tend to differ based on household demographics and dynamics.<sup>1</sup>

**Larger families**, those with 4+ people in the home, **are 24% more likely to purchase frozen food** than the average household. That percentage increases dramatically as the household size grows.<sup>1</sup>

Those living in rural areas also frequently purchase frozen food. Many in this demographic have larger living spaces, own secondary freezers and, because they live further from grocery stores, may feel the need to stockpile frozen food.<sup>1</sup>

While frozen food has always existed in climates cold enough for food to freeze, it was not until the early 1900s when Clarence Birdseye was credited with inventing the quick-freezing method, which produces the type of frozen food we know today.

Clarence Birdseye learned ice fishing from native Inuit while on U.S. Department of Agriculture field assignments in Labrador, Canada from 1912 to 1915. Birdseye saw that Inuit methods of flash freezing their catches under Arctic temperatures offered a fresher alternative to the slow-freezing methods employed by seafood merchants in the States. When Birdseye received a U.S. patent for his quick freeze machine in 1927, the era of frozen food was officially born.

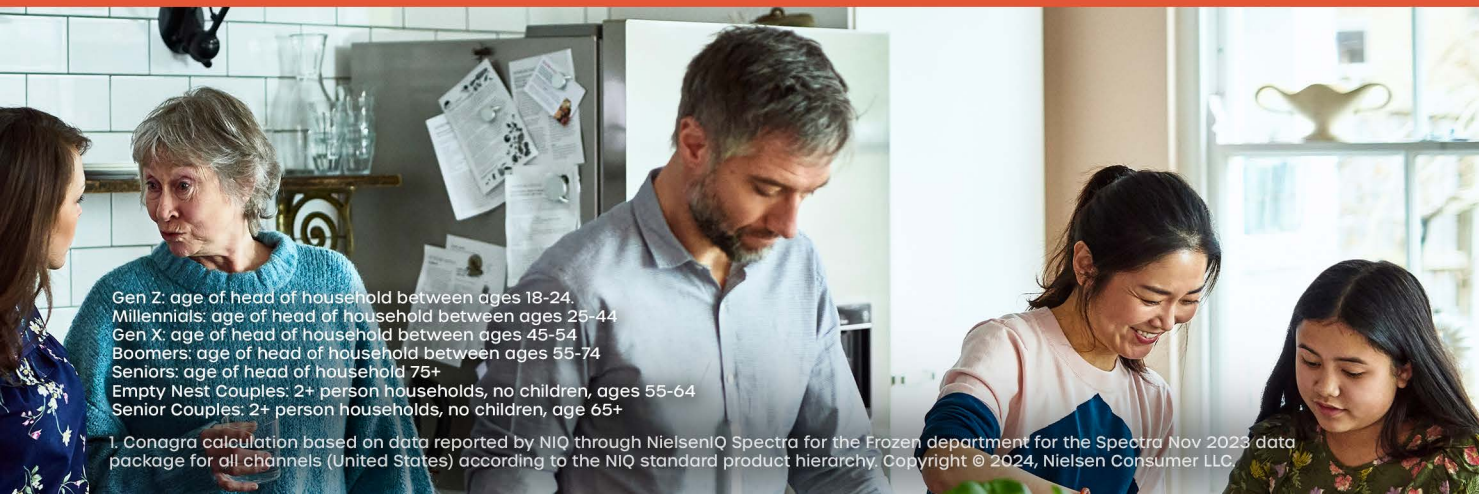
Birds Eye® continues to innovate and grow with new vegetable-based options.

1. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Spectra for the Frozen department for the Spectra Nov 2023 data package for all channels (United States) according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.



# GENERATIONAL FROZEN FOOD PREFERENCES<sup>1</sup>:

- **Gen Z:** more likely to choose variety, including sandwiches, breakfast sandwiches and chicken.
- **Millennials:** more likely to purchase chicken, appetizers, sandwiches, handheld entrees (e.g., burritos, quesadillas, corn dogs) and breakfast items from waffles to toaster strudels.
- **Gen X:** 13% more likely to purchase frozen food than the average consumer, values variety.
- **Boomers & Seniors:** exponentially more likely to purchase pot pies, pies/pie crusts, whipped topping, frozen fish and frozen vegetables.
- **Empty Nesters and Senior Couples:** make up 28% of frozen food purchases by dollar sales, driven by ease of preparation.



Gen Z: age of head of household between ages 18-24.  
Millennials: age of head of household between ages 25-44  
Gen X: age of head of household between ages 45-54  
Boomers: age of head of household between ages 55-74  
Seniors: age of head of household 75+  
Empty Nest Couples: 2+ person households, no children, ages 55-64  
Senior Couples: 2+ person households, no children, age 65+

<sup>1</sup> Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Spectra for the Frozen department for the Spectra Nov 2023 data package for all channels (United States) according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

# MOMENTUM BEHIND THE US FROZEN FOOD INDUSTRY

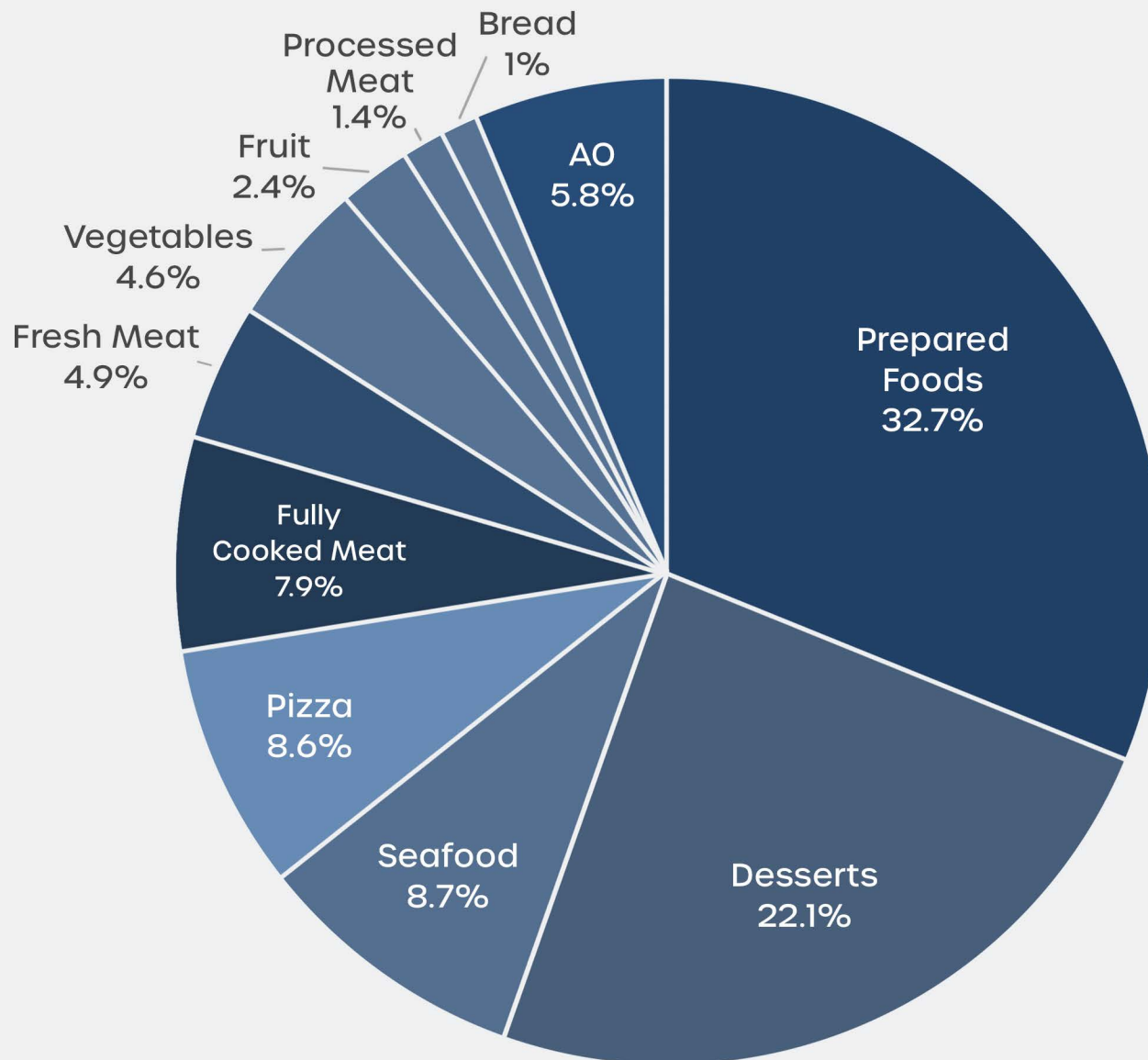
Prior to 2020, the frozen food industry was gaining momentum, due in large part to product innovation. During the COVID pandemic, frozen food experienced unprecedented growth due to how, what, where and when people bought and consumed food and beverages. Even though the initial surge of frozen food purchases normalized after the height of the pandemic, frozen food volume sales remain above pre-COVID levels. In fact, **U.S. frozen food volume sales were up 5%** in 2023 compared to 2019 **and have surpassed that of total food.**<sup>1</sup> Today, the U.S. frozen food industry generates...

**\$77.6 BILLION**  
IN ANNUAL SALES<sup>1</sup>



1. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

## FROZEN DOLLAR SHARE BY CATEGORY<sup>1</sup>



Within the U.S. frozen food marketplace, the **Prepared Foods category makes up the largest percentage of sales, growing 8% vs. 4YA.** Prepared Foods consist of complete meals (single-serve and multi-serve), as well as potatoes, appetizers, sandwiches, breakfast sandwiches, burritos and more\*. In addition to Prepared Foods, Desserts, Seafood, Fully Cooked Meat, Fruit, and Bread frozen categories are all outpacing the growth of total frozen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

\*Full definition of prepared foods includes: food that has been prepared in a way that requires no preparation (i.e. washing, chopping, dicing, etc) by the end consumer. The top 10 categories that comprise Frozen Prepared Foods include Complete Meal, Potatoes, Appetizer, Sandwiches, Breakfast Sandwiches, Handheld Entrees, Waffle, Main Course, Lasagna, Pot Pie (these categories make up ~90% of the total Frozen Prepared Foods super category).

# FROZEN INDULGENCE

Consumers are increasingly looking to satisfy indulgences, with sales of convenient desserts from the frozen food department growing. Notably, frozen pies have seen a spike in innovation, with the number of new products tripling in comparison to 2022.<sup>1</sup>

27% of frozen pie innovation within the last year has come from Conagra Brands' Marie Callender's.<sup>1</sup> Marie Callender's frozen desserts overall have experienced double digit growth as consumers buy more ready-to-bake or easy-to-thaw pies, as well as new items including mini pies, and flavor extensions like Confetti Birthday Cake Cream Pie.<sup>2</sup>



According to Black Swan Data's predictive social media analysis of emerging trends to watch in the frozen aisle, there are endless opportunities for frozen desserts. **Italian desserts are especially gaining momentum**, with a clear growth opportunity for quick and easy Italian-inspired frozen desserts. From tiramisu, and Sicilian cheesecake, to mashups like chocolate lasagna and pizzelle ice cream sandwiches, consumers are hungry for more decadence and creative twists on classic treats.

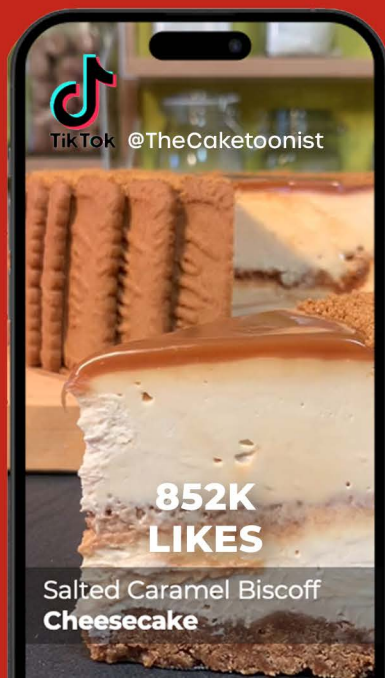
## Predictive social media analytics also underscore the potential for cheesecake.

The dessert's versatility is inspiring reimagined recipes - from fun twists, such as cheesecake dip, to new sweet, salty, and sometimes savory flavors.<sup>3</sup>



1.4 MILLION  
LIKES

Top Tiramisu Post\*



852K  
LIKES

Salted Caramel Biscoff  
Cheesecake

\*NewsWhip social media engagement tracking, Year Ending 2023

1. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ BASES Innovation Measurement for the Pies/Tarts Sweet Multi Portion - Frozen & Pies/Tarts Sweet Single Portion - Frozen categories for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

2. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

3. Black Swan Data, U.S. Meals database, capturing 2 years of data through September 2023

# REDUCING FOOD WASTE

Consumers are increasingly interested in reducing food waste as a way to manage household budgets.

Each year, **the average American family of four loses \$1,500 to uneaten food**, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which offers a range of advice to help people reduce food waste including touting the use of freezers and frozen food which won't quickly spoil.<sup>1</sup>

According to Feeding America, the largest network hunger relief agency in the U.S., **people waste 80 million tons of food every year, which equals 149 billion meals**, and throw away more than \$444 billion worth of food annually.<sup>2</sup> Shockingly, consumers waste 38% of all the food in America.

In a survey conducted by the American Frozen Food Institute, consumers reported that frozen ingredients provided additional meal flexibility, with nine in 10 frozen food consumers agreeing that frozen food allows having a back-up plan without the risk of spoilage.<sup>3</sup>



1. Consumers. (n.d.). USDA. <https://www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste/consumers#:~:text=Each%20year%2C%20the%20average%20American,reduce%20food%20waste%20at%20home>  
2. Food Waste in America: How You Can Help Rescue Food | Feeding America. (n.d.). Feeding America. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/reduce-food-waste>  
3. Young, M. E. (2023, June 29). New research reveals Frozen Food's role in reducing food waste - affi - american Frozen Food Institute. AFFI. <https://affi.org/new-research-reveals-frozen-foods-role-in-reducing-food-waste/>

# FUTURE OF FROZEN FOOD 2024



**1**

A Taste of Global Cuisine

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**2**

Frozen Foods Rising and Shining at Breakfast

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**3**

Big Appetites for Bites and Mini Portions

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**4**

Fun and Convenient Kids Meals

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**5**

The Air Fryer's Influence on Food Prep

# A TASTE OF GLOBAL CUISINE

Today's frozen food department provides shoppers with more variety than ever, as consumers are being exposed to a broader set of global flavors and cuisines. As consumers' desire for a wide array of quick and easy cuisine options increases, so has the rate of innovation within the frozen department.

## ASIAN INSPIRED INNOVATIONS CONTINUE TO BE A FROZEN FAVORITE:

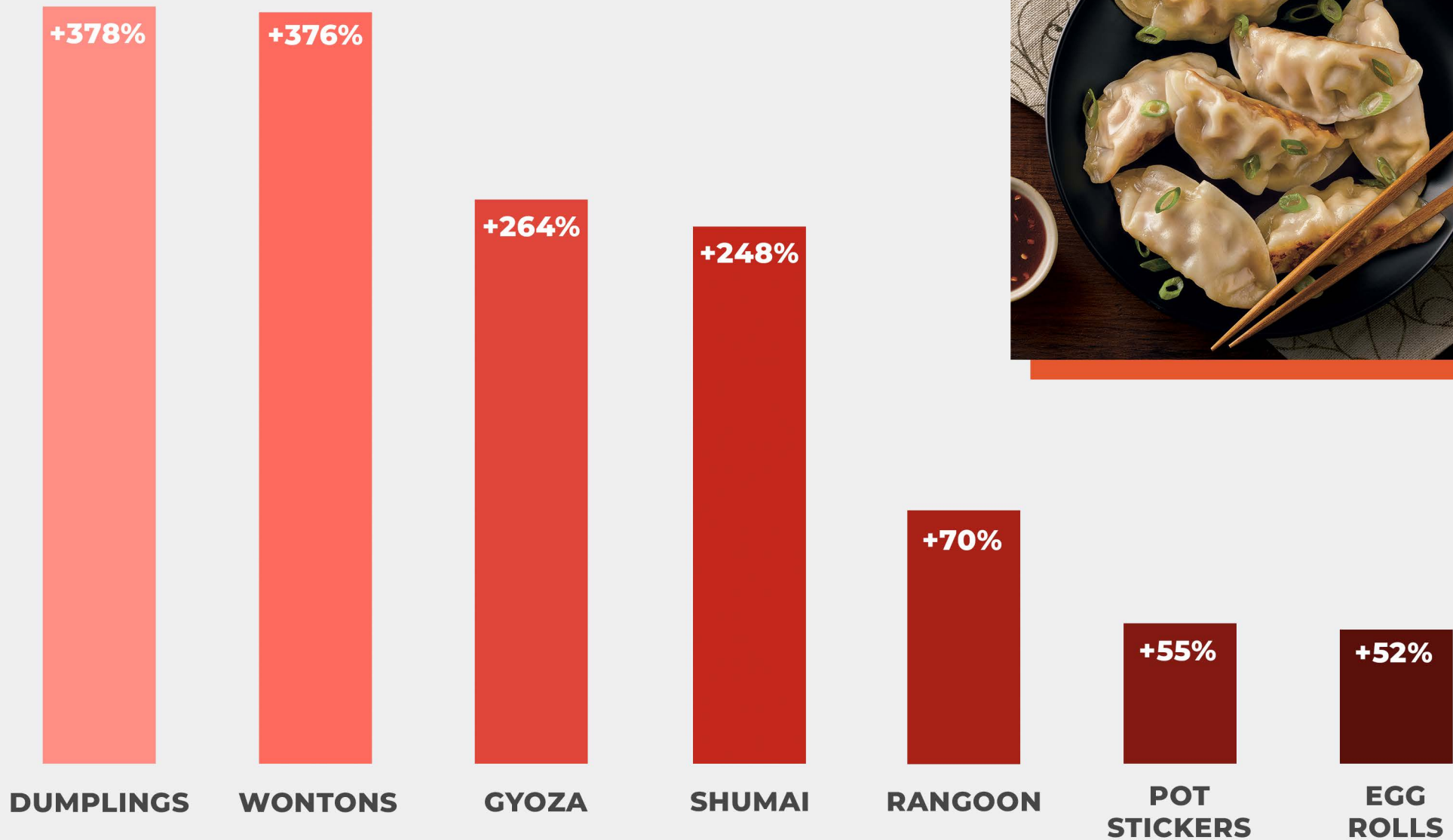
Asian-inspired foods are especially loved by U.S. consumers, namely Chinese, Japanese, and Korean flavors, such as **Sweet & Sour, Orange** (i.e., Orange Chicken), **Teriyaki, General Tso's**, and **Korean BBQ**.<sup>1</sup>

Asian-inspired frozen appetizers have particularly been gaining popularity, with brands like P.F. Chang's helping to drive that growth.<sup>1</sup>



1. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

## ASIAN APPETIZER GROWTH DURING THE PAST FOUR YEARS



# HOT AND SPICY MEETS FROZEN FOODS

It is common for some global cuisines to incorporate many spices, which has resulted in both increased familiarity and heightened desire for heat and spice. Americans' love of hot and spicy foods continues to increase with sales amounting to nearly \$600 Million within the frozen department and growing +8% vs 4YA. Most notably, frozen foods with **sriracha** (+92% vs 4YA) are gaining steam. And **"hot honey,"** while new to the frozen aisle and most often found on pizza and chicken, is quickly becoming one of the hottest new spice profiles across dishes.<sup>1</sup>



## INDIAN INSPIRED CUISINE HOT IN FROZEN

Consumers are also exploring Indian flavors, which have increasingly been showing up in the frozen aisle. During the past four years, Indian flavors have been one of the fastest-growing frozen food cuisines with explosive growth.<sup>1</sup>

Consumers are continuing to push the boundaries of traditional tastes and have become much more experiential in terms of adding heat to their meals. While not yet proliferated throughout the frozen department, predictive social media analytics have identified a handful of emerging "hot" spices to keep an eye out for: **arbol chili, chili oil, gochujang, pepperoncini, harissa and lastly sweet chili**, emulating the new "swicy" trend—a sweet and spicy combination that is a crowd pleaser, especially for those new to the heat game.<sup>2</sup>



1. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

2. Black Swan Data, U.S. Meals database, capturing 2 years of data through September 2023

## 5 OF THE FASTEST-GROWING FROZEN INDIAN FLAVORS<sup>1</sup>



**CHICKEN  
TIKKA**



**SAMOSAS**



**BUTTER  
CHICKEN**



**BIRYANI**



**CHICKEN  
CURRY**

**Predictive social media analytics peg Indian cuisine as the hottest emerging trend to hit the frozen aisle.** With growth of younger consumers choosing plant-based options based on their ethical beliefs, Indian cuisine provides a delicious alternative to meat, with authentic bold flavors. Some emerging Indian dishes to keep a watch out for are **Aloo Tikki** and **Paneer Butter Masala**.<sup>2</sup>

## A CAJUN CRAZE

According to predictive social media analytics, we expect to see an eruption in Cajun cuisine and have identified a whitespace opportunity for the frozen aisle from pre-seasoned Cajun meats and french fries, to complete skillet meals like Cajun chicken and shrimp. While known for its distinctive, bold, and comforting flavors, Cajun is also showing up in novel mashups, for example, Cajun Chicken Alfredo.<sup>2</sup>

\*NewsWhip social media engagement tracking, Year Ending 2023

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2. Black Swan Data, U.S. Meals database, capturing 2 years of data through September 2023



# FROZEN FOODS RISING AND SHINING AT BREAKFAST

The familiar adage "**breakfast is the most important meal of the day**" also applies to the significant growth in frozen breakfast foods. Breakfast has become one of the hottest eating occasions for driving growth within the frozen department. Frozen breakfast items are not only helping busy consumers save time but are also providing them with increased choices beyond traditional ready-to-eat breakfast foods.<sup>1</sup>



**Frozen breakfast sandwiches have seen double-digit volume and velocity growth** during the past four years and now account for \$2.3 billion in sales.<sup>1</sup> Because many parents have busy schedules, it makes sense that families with children, in particular those households with five or more people, are among the biggest consumers of breakfast sandwiches.<sup>2</sup>

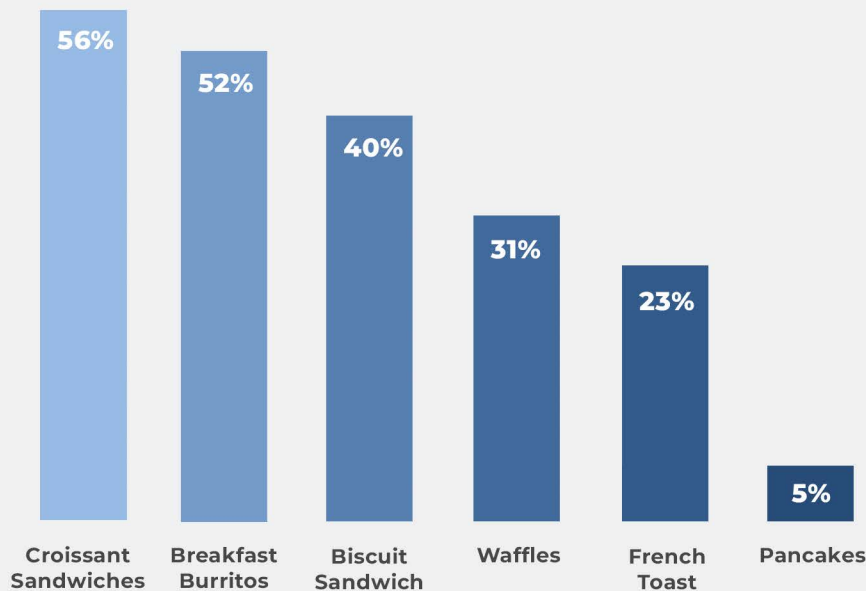


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2. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Spectra for the Frozen department for the Spectra Nov 2023 data package for all channels (United States) according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

Within breakfast sandwiches, frozen croissant sandwiches, breakfast burritos and biscuit sandwiches are among the most popular products. However, these savory breakfast items are not the only winners within frozen breakfast. In fact, at \$1.2 billion, frozen waffles are also growing, followed by the \$320 million category of pancakes and the \$215 million category of french toast.<sup>1</sup>

## FROZEN BREAKFAST GROWTH DURING THE PAST FOUR YEARS<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

Conagra Brands' Odom's Tennessee Pride® sausage and buttermilk biscuits is an example of breakfast sandwich growth (+12% vs 4YA), generating \$33 million in annual sales.<sup>1</sup>



There has been a surge of product innovation in the frozen breakfast category, including options that are **high in protein, gluten-free or "carb conscious."** These are all growing in annual sales, with high protein products moving off the shelves fastest.<sup>1</sup>



# BIG APPETITES FOR BITES AND MINI PORTIONS

Small servings are surging in popularity. **Last year, consumers gobbled up more than \$1.1 billion in frozen bites and minis.**<sup>1</sup> Multiple forces drive appeal for these foods including portion control, convenience, variety, and overall enjoyment, whether that comes from the joy of being able to easily share food at a social gathering or the pleasure people find in the visual presentation of miniature foods.

## SNACK ATTACK

The growing array of bite-sized and mini frozen food reflects the broader evolution of how and when Americans eat. **Nearly half of U.S. consumers now eat three or more snacks daily, up 8% in the past two years,** according to global market research and analytics firm, Circana, LLC.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the U.S. Snacking Universe today is worth \$200 billion.<sup>3</sup>

**3 MILLION**  
Internet Searches for  
Bites and Minis

Within the space of frozen bites and minis, there are a wide variety of growth drivers including boneless chicken bites, loaded cauliflower bites, mini corn dogs, mini tacos, mini pancakes, and egg bites. Consumers are also seeking out bite sized recipes to make at home with nearly three million internet searches over the last year for bites and minis. Top searches include egg bites, mini cheesecake, mini meatloaf, mini quiche, pretzel bites, energy bites, salmon bites, mini cake, mini donuts, and mini pie.<sup>4</sup>



\*NewsWhip social media engagement tracking, Year Ending 2023

1. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

2. Circana, LLC, Total US, Spring 2023

3. Circana, LLC, Total dollar sales for calendar year 2023, Total US.

# FUN AND CONVENIENT KIDS MEALS



Frozen foods that are fun for kids and easy for parents have experienced significant growth over the past several years. The visual appeal, kid-friendly tastes, and added convenience have contributed to shoppers buying more of said kid-friendly frozen solutions. Kid Cuisine® is an example of a brand that straddles two of the Future of Frozen Food 2024 trends of easy prep meals for kids and the growth of bites and minis. **Kid-friendly frozen food now generates more than \$248 million in annual sales and has grown 122% over the past four years.<sup>1</sup>**

In addition, parents are looking for ways to provide kids with the nutrients they need. In fact, kid-friendly products with claims such as **clean label**, **"free-from,"** and **high protein** have seen outsized growth.<sup>1</sup> While smaller in dollar size, products touting benefits of **whole grains** or **added/hidden vegetables** are showing promising double digit volume growth as well.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the kid-friendly trend aligns with search data showing parents actively seeking lunch and dinner options that are easy to prepare and will win over the often fickle tastebuds of their youngest and toughest critics.<sup>2</sup>



1. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

2. Similarweb U.S. search engine data (desktop+mobile search volume) through November 2023

# THE AIR FRYER'S INFLUENCE ON FOOD PREP

Just as the wider adoption of more freezer space has contributed to Americans purchasing more frozen food during the past century, so has the level of innovation in kitchen appliances, gadgets, and tools. This includes the advent of the air fryer.

Currently, **63% of households own an air fryer which is 27 percentage points higher than in 2020**, when only 36% of households owned one.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the number of frozen food products with air fryer cooking instructions has jumped significantly (+90% vs 4YA)<sup>2</sup>, allowing consumers to prepare meals and snacks in a healthier, quicker, and often more delicious manner.



1. Circana, LLC, Kitchen Audit 2020 and 2023  
2. Conagra calculation based on data reported by NIQ through NielsenIQ Discover for the Frozen department for 52 weeks ending 12/02/23 for the Total US xAOC + Conv according to the NIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2024, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

Chicken, including nuggets and tenders, and potatoes/french fries are by far the top foods used at air fryer preparation occasions – both of which are primarily frozen food.<sup>1</sup>

While there is a long list of food consumers prepare in the air fryer, after chicken and potatoes, some popular items include vegetables, fish, and even frozen meals.<sup>1</sup>



Gardein® Ultimate Plant-Based Chick'n Wings and Birds Eye® Sheet Pan Meals are just a few examples of frozen foods designed for easy, air fryer preparation, which often uses fewer fats and oils in preparation compared to traditional frying methods.

<sup>1</sup>. Circana, LLC, National Eating Trends; Sourced In-Home/Retail. Data for year ending October 2023



# FROM FREEZER TO AIR FRYER

From Asian-style chicken to ziti, more food can go from Americans' freezers to air fryers, which are increasingly part of Americans' cooking preparation routines. Air fryers present an alternative cooking method for frying food without oil, making air frying a more convenient and healthier option.<sup>1</sup>

“AIR FRYER”  
RECIPES  
SEARCHED  
**185**  
**MILLION**  
TIMES

What's more, Americans searched for “air fryer” related recipes more than 185 million times in the last year, with top searches related to salmon, chicken breast, chicken wings, baked potato, and chicken thighs.<sup>2</sup>



1. Ferreira FS, Sampaio GR, Keller LM, Sawaya ACHF, Chávez DWH, Torres EAFS, Saldanha T. Impact of Air Frying on Cholesterol and Fatty Acids Oxidation in Sardines: Protective Effects of Aromatic Herbs. J Food Sci. 2017 Dec;82(12):2823-2831. doi: 10.1111/1750-3841.13967. Epub 2017 Nov 10. PMID: 29125626.

2. Similarweb U.S. search engine data (desktop+mobile search volume) through November 2023

# ABOUT CONAGRA BRANDS

Conagra Brands, Inc. (NYSE: CAG), with headquarters in Chicago, is one of North America's leading branded food companies. Guided by an entrepreneurial spirit, Conagra Brands combines a rich heritage of making great food with a sharpened focus on innovation. The company's portfolio is evolving to satisfy people's changing food preferences. Conagra's iconic brands, such as Birds Eye®, Duncan Hines®, Healthy Choice®, Marie Callender's®, Reddi-wip®, and Slim Jim®, as well as emerging brands, including Angie's® BOOMCHICKAPOP®, Duke's®, Earth Balance®, Gardein®, and Frontera®, offer choices for every occasion. For more information, visit [www.conagrabrands.com](http://www.conagrabrands.com).



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