



Ready Meals Are Quickly Heating Up the Market

Three Trends Indicating This Mainstay Has Macroscopic Growth Potential

From gamers grabbing instant noodles they can eat with one hand to harried parents seeking hassle-free dinners to those on anti-obesity medications (AOMs) looking for portion control, the ready meal market is booming. It's all thanks to a culture that is absolutely craving convenience.

While speed and ease top the priority list, today's consumers are also after global flavors and functional benefits, creating opportunities beyond basic convenience. The challenge? Ready meals already win on affordability and family appeal, but elevating taste, ingredients and nutrition could boost their popularity even more over homemade and takeout options.

Consumers say ready meals are the ultimate helper at home...¹

- 88%** "Ready meals are a convenient backup option in my routine."
- 87%** "I often choose ready meals when I don't feel like cooking."
- 68%** "Ready meals make it easier to meet everyone's food preferences at home."
- 68%** "Ready meals help me quickly serve something my kids will eat."
- 64%** "I prefer to eat ready meals directly from the container they come in."



TREND 1:
Exploration & Personalization

More than three-quarters of consumers use ready meals to explore new cuisines, with variety and flavor topping their improvement wish lists. Classics like pulled pork act as a gateway to more sophisticated flavors such as Pad Thai and schnitzel and emerging options like gobi Manchurian. Meanwhile, meal kits offer a lot of customization and fresh ingredients, though cost remains a barrier for many.

This also comes during the era of *snackification* of meals or the *mealification* of snacks. Ready meals can easily be made into snackable formats for on-the-go consumers or be enjoyed as a heartier, more satisfying option than a typical snack.

Customization Makes It Feel More Like Cooking¹

- 72%** 72% pair their ready meals with other foods (appetizers, salads, desserts, etc.).
- 70%** 70% often add a personal touch to their ready meals (sauces, toppings, garnishes, etc.).
- 40%** 40% tweak some of the ingredients or preparation required.
- 34%** 34% would buy more ready meals if they had customizable components.

Preferred Flavor Profiles in Ready Meals¹

- 63%** Savory
- 46%** Smoky
- 45%** Mild/Comforting
- 43%** Creamy
- 42%** Spicy

2026 Global Culinary Trends

ADM's culinary trends research ties directly into innovation opportunities with ready meals.

Third Culture Cuisine is storytelling through global flavors. **Big-Impact Bites** see shifting eating habits that require more pizzazz and personalization in fewer forkfuls. **Maxxing Your Way** is doing what you do to the fullest, be it your wellness approach or dietary path.

All three can be leveraged in ready meals, with the inclusion of fuller and novel flavors that align with modern lifestyles.

TREND 2:

Functional & Wholesome Nutrition

Manufacturers need to align with growing expectations for what modern meals must *not* contain: no artificial colors or flavors and decreased sugar and sodium content. However, there is also opportunity to add ingredients back in, specifically, protein and fiber, which are top attributes consumers look for in ready meals.

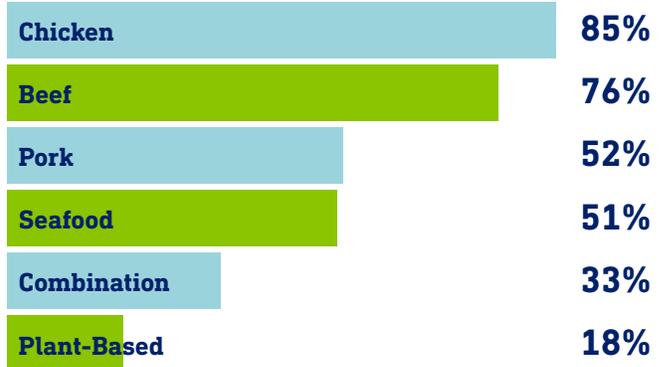
43% of consumers say that high-protein content would motivate them to buy more ready meals.¹

59% are looking for more fiber in prepared meals (16%), handhelds (12%), prepared salads (17%) or meal kits (14%).¹

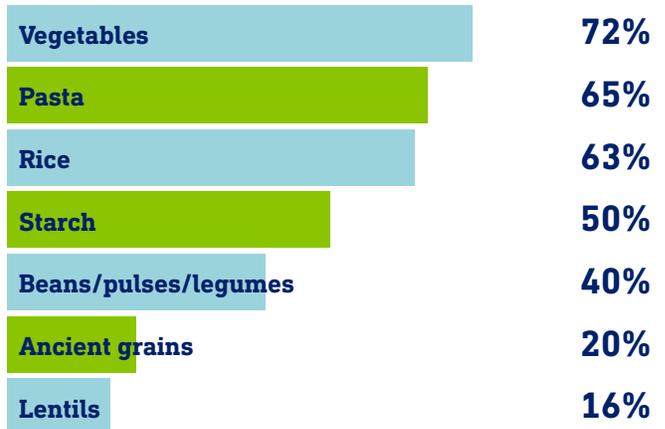
Modern Uses of Ancient Grains

68% of global plant-forward consumers (defined as flexitarians, vegetarians or vegans) consider ancient grains to be healthy and nutritious.² But many are confused about how to prepare them. **Inclusion in easy-prep ready meals**, where rice and couscous are already popular, can remove that barrier.

Protein Preferences – Prepared Meals¹

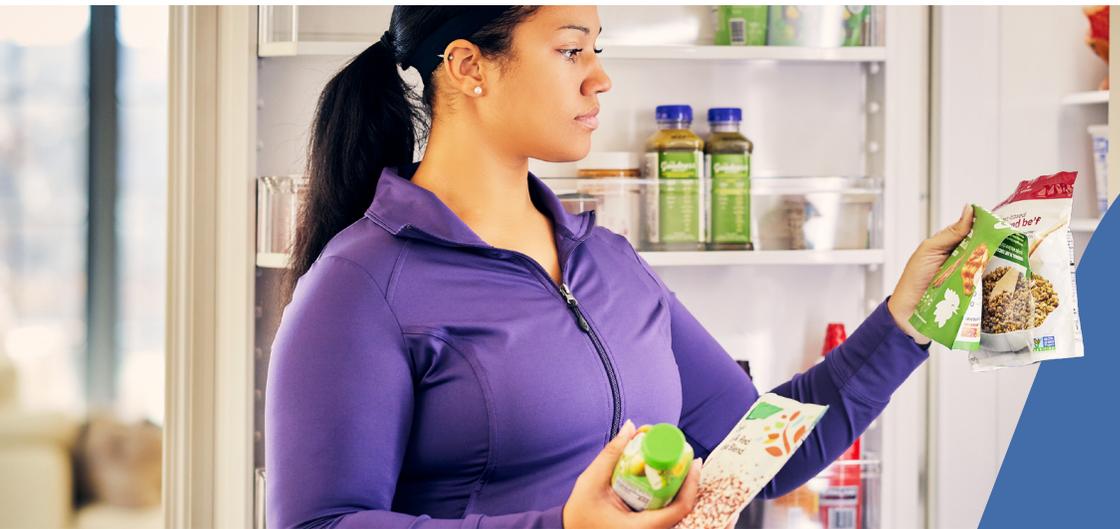


Side Dish Preference¹



Almost half of ready-meal consumers would be interested in trying **hybrid or blended meat alternatives**, indicating interest in more protein diversity and content.¹





73% of AOM users say portion control is more important now than before GLP-1s, making ready meals a useful option for these consumers.³

TREND 3:

GLP-1 Lifestyle Alignment: Small Portions, Smart Fuel

Consumers taking anti-obesity medications (AOMs) are actively seeking options tailored to their unique dietary needs and preferences. They also have better perceptions of ready meals than those not taking the medications. This includes improved perceptions of taste, affordability, convenience, ingredients, quality, nutrition and family-friendliness.¹

Convenience is still the top benefit for all... but GLP-1 users are significantly more likely to see diet support, portion control and overall nutrition as the main benefits of ready meals.¹

Of GLP-1 Users¹

- 57%** 57% consume ready meals.
- 67%** 67% are consuming the same amount (32%) or more (35%) ready meals since starting on the medication.
- 78%** 78% are consuming ready meals specially targeted to GLP-1 users (45%) or aligned to their needs (35%).
- 84%** 84% believe ready meals make it easier to meet everyone's food preferences at home.
- 78%** 78% pay close attention to the ingredients in ready meals.

*GLP-1 users are more likely than non-users to **prefer plant-based protein sources and wholesome ingredients.***



Flavor exploration is significantly more important for GLP-1 users

Consumers taking AOMs may experience changes to their taste preferences, including sweetness perception. Ready meals offer an opportunity for GLP-1 users to try out new tastes and textures that better align with current needs.

Ready to Get Started?

The ready meal category stands at an exciting crossroads, brimming with opportunities for innovation that address evolving consumer needs. From convenient handheld formats that fit busy lifestyles to adventurous savory offerings that satisfy culinary curiosity, and portion-controlled solutions that support nutritional goals, manufacturers have numerous avenues to explore.



ADM is uniquely positioned to support ready meal innovations through its comprehensive portfolio and capabilities:

Our plant-based ingredients and systems

- Include soy, pea and wheat proteins
- Enable brands to increase protein content while catering to flexitarian consumers through hybrid formulations

Our extensive selection of value-added beans, pulses, ancient grains and seeds

- Provide versatile options for protein and fiber
- Function as carriers of global flavors with inherent nutritional appeal

Our global team of culinary experts and flavorists

- Deliver end-to-end solutions combining authentic culinary profiles, foundational flavor systems and advanced modulation technologies
- Provide the keys to customized reformulation initiatives like reduced sugar and sodium, improved mouthfeel and overall taste performance

Our flour and milling expertise

- Provides support for the continued popularity of pasta in ready meals
- Helps brands offer healthier whole-grain and high-protein pasta options
- Delivers globally inspired pasta varieties like soba and rice noodles

Learn more about how we're innovating new solutions for Ready Meals [here](#).

Together, these capabilities add up and position ADM as a strategic partner for brands seeking to capture the full potential of the current ready meal market. It's not just consumers who benefit from having more convenience; turn to ADM to help make your next formulations easier and more effective.

SOURCES:

¹ADM Outside VoiceSM, Ready Meals Attitudes & Usage, 2025

²ADM Outside VoiceSM, Global Protein Consumer Discovery Report, 2025

³ADM Outside VoiceSM, Anti-Obesity Medication Users Landscape Report, 2025