

ASIAN CLEANS UP

Healthier options from regions outside mainland China drive sales of Asian foods.

BY CHRISTINE BLANK

The Asian segment now accounts for an impressive 32% of frozen meal mix sales in all outlets, according to New York-based Nielsen. And they make up 19% of frozen multi-serve meal sales and 11% of single-serve meal sales. In many cases, however, healthier product introductions are fueling that growth. In fact, when Millennials are choosing which prepared or packaged food products to buy, “real ingredients” is the most important factor, followed by “calorie count,” “no preservatives,” “nutritional” and “natural,”



Feel Good Foods' gluten-free frozen Asian entrees, apps and sides fill a gap in the category for healthy options.

according to Charlotte, N.C.-based Concentric Marketing's (www.getconcentric.com) “Decoding the Millennial” report.

“Unlike mainstream frozen foods,

sales of natural frozen foods with ‘real’ ingredients have increased within the past year, pointing to consumers’ desire to enjoy convenience without compromising a healthy diet,” says Mike Ryan, vp of sales and marketing at Union, N.J.-based Deep Foods, maker of the Tandoor Chef lineup (www.tandoorchef.com).

Another important attribute is fresh, prompting the company to add a line of refrigerated Indian sides and entrees to its existing frozen lineup. Expected to hit retailers’ deli cases this winter, the collection will include Chicken Tikka Masala, Palak Paneer, Chana Masala, Garlic Naan, Tandoori

Naan, Chicken Korma, Paneer Tikka Masala, Baingan Bharta, Dal Makhani, and Basmati Pilaf.

“Consumers are telling us that they are excited about the mix-and-match capabilities and the ability to customize the flavor profile of each meal,” says Ryan.

NEW ‘HEALTHY’

Jack Acree, executive vp at Stamford, Conn.-based American Halal, maker of the Saffron Road brand (www.saffronroadfood.com), agrees that shoppers’ definition of “healthy” is based more on real and natural ingredients than calories or fat. “That’s not to say that we are not conscious of those things, but it gives us latitude where we don’t have to compromise on flavor or authenticity to deliver what is still considered a healthy entrée,” he explains.

The company has enjoyed a lot

of success with a couple of lighter products launched earlier this year, including its Vegetable Pad Thai entrée, which contains rice noodles, organic tofu, carrots and scallions, and its Teriyaki Chicken with crunchy vegetables.

Veggies are also at the forefront of Moonachie, N.J.-based Macabee Foods’ (www.macabeefoods.com) new appetizers. Offered under the all-natural Macabee label, the vegan trio includes Vegetable Egg Rolls, Vegetable Potstickers and Vegetable Spring Rolls.

Vegetable-based appetizers, including Vegetable Mini Egg Rolls, are also selling well for ConAgra-owned category leader P.F. Chang’s (www.pfchangshomemenu.com), Omaha, Neb.,



Day-Lee Foods' new sriracha chicken-based appetizers offer a bold, Thai twist on traditional potstickers and bites.

reports senior brand manager John Stanwood, who concurs with the notion that healthier ingredients and innovative flavor profiles are driving sales gains. As such, he says, “All our meals pair quality cuts of beef, white meat chicken breast and sauces that are made from scratch with crisp, colorful vegetables.” However, suppliers say there’s plenty of room for additional healthy introductions in the Asian category.

“This is such an opportunity for retailers and their private brands,” says Al Greenwood, vp of sales for private label manufacturer Water Lilies Food (www.waterliliesfood.com), Astoria, N.Y. “A certain healthy halo already surrounds Asian foods in the minds of many consumers, and the market should be taking more advantage of that fact.” Greenwood adds that, at Natural Products Expo West this spring, there were very few healthy frozen ethnic foods on display. However, Water Lilies launched a natural and organic Asian appetizers