Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada | Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada

International Markets Bureau
AMERICAN EATING TRENDS REPORT

COMFORT FOODS

OCTOBER 2012

Unless otherwise stated, all of the information in this report was derived from the NPD Group's National Eating Trends database, updated to November 2010, and reflects the eatings (defined by NPD as the number of times any particular category/item is eaten by an individual in a specified location or time period) of a product at home or carried away from home. These figures do not reflect purchases of food products made through foodservice establishments, or the consumption thereof. NPD monitors the eating habits and attitudes of American consumers by surveying 5000 individuals reporting on 14-day's continuous consumption of all meals and snacks.

CONSUMPTION DEMOGRAPHICS

- American consumption of comfort food* has experienced a slight decline between 2000 and 2010. In 2010, American consumers reported eating comfort food on average 35.7 times per year compared to 37.8 in 2000. All sub-categories declined with the exception of macaroni and cheese, which increased to 14.1 eating occasions per year per capita.

Core Markets (at least 20% above average consumption rate)

	Macaroni and Cheese	Casseroles	Stews	Chili	Baked Beans/ Pork and Beans
Household Income (US$)	•Under $10,000 •$20,000-$29,999	•$30,000-$39,999	•Under $29,999	•$20,000-$29,999 •$40,000-$49,999	•$20,000-$29,999 •$60,000-$69,999
Age/Gender	•Children	•n/a	•Adults between 55-64 years •Males 35-44 years	•Adults between 45-54 years •Adults 65+ •Males 35+ years	•Males 35-64 years
Age of Homemaker**	•44 years and younger	•n/a	•55-64 years	•65 years and older	•55-64 years
Family Type	•Affluent and low-mid income traditional families	•Affluent and low- to mid-income traditional families	•Low-mid income empty nesters	•Low-mid income empty nesters	•Low-mid income empty nesters
Family Size	•4+ members	•5+ members	•n/a	•3 members	•n/a
Education/ Employment/ Occupation	•Some high school	•Professional	•Some high school •High school graduate	•Out of workforce	•High school graduate •Some college •Blue collar
Race/Ethnicity	•n/a	•n/a	•n/a	•n/a	•Black
Region	•South	•Central	•South	•South	•South
Lifecycle	•Working parents •single parents	•75+ years	•n/a	•Single and married active seniors •75+ years	•75+ years

**For the purposes of this report, comfort food includes macaroni and cheese (excluding frozen), casseroles (excluding frozen), stew, chili, and baked beans/pork and beans. Foods would include those prepared from scratch and purchased pre-made.*
***The "homemaker" is defined by NPD as the head of the household or the primary food shopper, who is typically female.*

Underdeveloped Markets (at least 20% below average consumption rate)

	Macaroni and Cheese	Casseroles	Stews	Chili	Baked Beans/ Pork and Beans
Household Income (US$)	•Over $70,000	•Under $10,000 •$20,000-$29,999	•$30,000-$39,999 •$50,000-$59,999	•Over $70,000	•$50,000-$59,000
Age/Gender	•Adults	•Males 45-64 years	•Children	•Children	•Children 6-12 •Adults 18-34, especially males
Age of Homemaker**	•45+ years	•25 years and younger	•25 years and younger	•25 years and younger	•25-34 years
Family Type	•n/a	•Working parents	•Working parents	•Single parents	•Double-income and no children families
Family Size	•One-member •Two members	•One-member	•n/a	•5+ members	•n/a
Education/ Employment/ Occupation	•n/a	•Some high school	•College graduates	•n/a	•College graduates •White collar
Race/Ethnicity	•n/a	•Black, Hispanic and Asian	•Black and Hispanic	•Hispanic and Asian	•n/a
Region	•East	•East	•West	•East	•West
Lifecycle	•Affluent singles and empty nesters •Single and married active seniors •75+ years	•Affluent singles •Married active seniors	•Affluent traditional families	•Low/mid-income singles	•Low/mid-income singles •Single active and married active seniors

CONSUMPTION LOCALE

- Compared to the United States (U.S.) average, consumers in the Southern and Central regions consume the most comfort foods with 35.6% and 33.1%, respectively. Consumers in the Eastern and Western regions consume the least amount of comfort food, accounting for only 15% and 15.7%, respectively, of all eating occasions.

Source: *Shutterstock.*

***The "homemaker" is defined by NPD as the head of the household or the primary food shopper, who is typically female.*

COMFORT FOODS

CONSUMPTION CALENDAR

- Comfort foods are eaten in-home during meals 96.2% of the time and are rarely carried away from home as a meal or snack. Dinner is the most popular occasion to eat these dishes, representing 69.7% of all comfort food eatings; 27.8% of comfort food eatings take place at lunch.
- Comfort foods are consumed during the week 70.7% of the time, and on weekends 28.3% of the time. During the week, comfort food eatings vary little, ranging from the highest consumption on Saturday (15.3%) to the lowest on Friday (13%).
- Comfort foods are eaten evenly through the fall, winter and spring months, but are less likely to be consumed during the summer months (June-August).

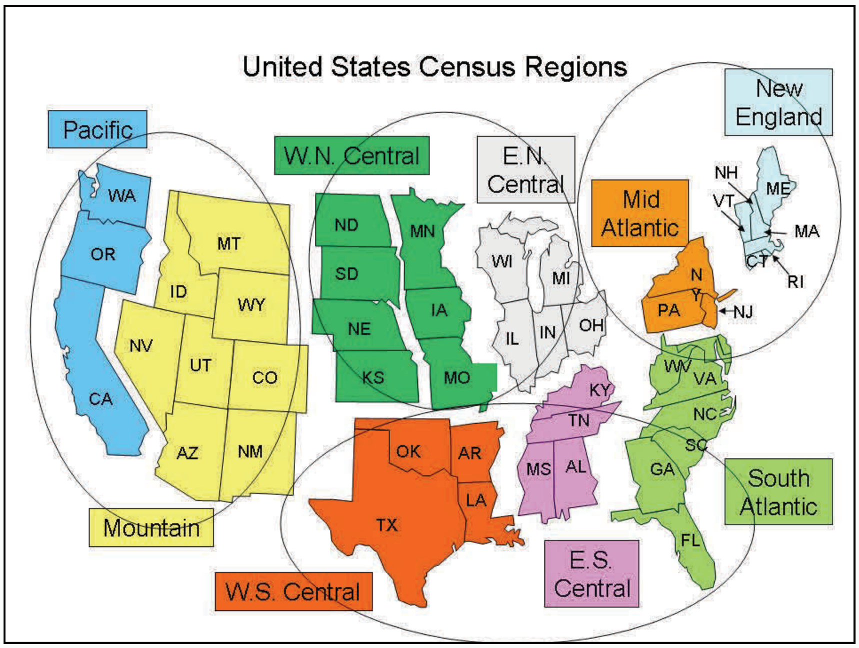
PLATE COMPOSITION

- Americans who consume comfort foods at home during a meal primarily eat them as a main dish (57.2%), followed by a side dish (33.6%), and a snack (3.8%).

PREPARATION METHODS

- Comfort foods are prepared warm at 89% of all eatings, and are not warmed at 11% of all eatings. The most common methods of preparing comfort foods are by warming on the stove top (48.3%), microwave (26.4%), oven (10.3%), and occasionally crockpot (2.4%). Macaroni and cheese is prepared 62% of the time on the stove top, and casseroles 40.3% of the time in the oven.

CONSUMPTION BY REGION



Source: *NPD Group.*

Eatings by U.S. Region (%)	
North East	
New England	2.8
Mid-Atlantic	12.8
Central	
East North Central	20.7
West North Central	12.3
South	
South Atlantic	17.3
East South Central	10.2
West South Central	8.2
West	
Mountain	6.7
Pacific	9.0

Source: *NPD Group.*

NEW PRODUCTS

- According to the Mintel Global New Products Database (2012), a total of 127 new comfort foods were introduced to the U.S. market between June 2011 and May 2012. There were 69 branded products and 58 private label products. The following are some examples.

Source: *Mintel GNPD, 2012.*

Bush's Best Grillin' Beans Sweet Mesquite Black Beans are described as black beans simmered with onions and red peppers in a sweet and smoky sauce. According to the manufacturer, the baked beans are slow-cooked according to a secret family recipe for a taste like no other. They are microwaveable, and are said to go great with grilled steaks, chicken and pork chops. This gluten-free product retails in an easy-to-open pantry dispenser pack of six 21-oz. recyclable cans. Labelling claims include “microwaveable,” “gluten-free,” “low/no/reduced allergen,” “ethical - environmentally friendly package,” and “convenient packaging.”

Source: *Mintel GNPD, 2012.*

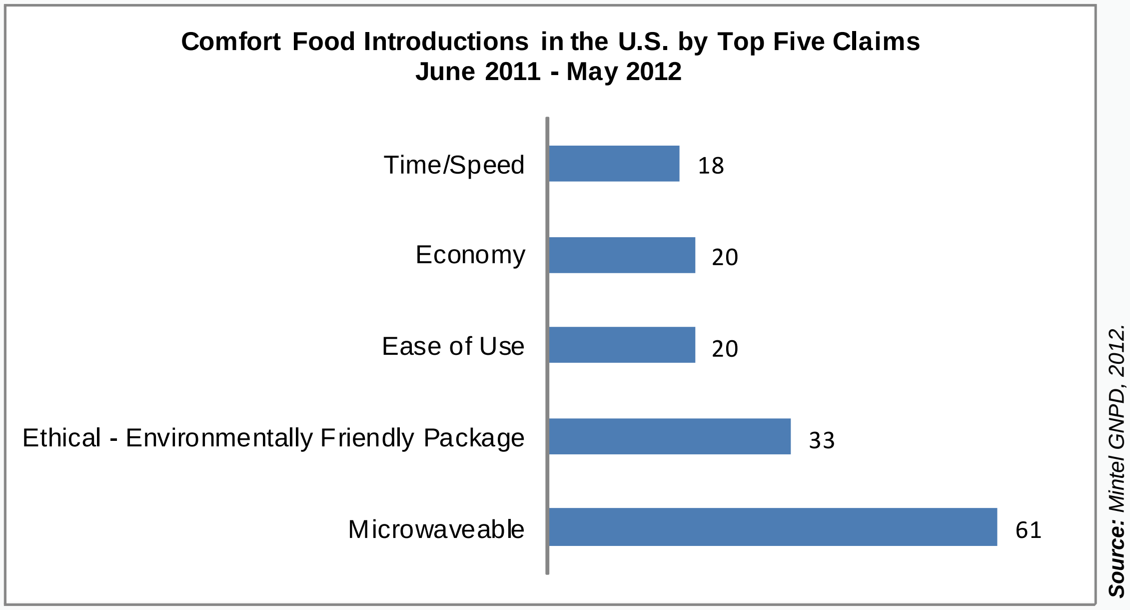
Sprout Organic Toddler Meals Macaroni & Cheese with Butternut Squash Entree is certified organic by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The preservative-free product is suitable for toddlers and up, is chef designed, and is available in a vegetable flavour variety. The product is described as a delicious family favourite, which has all the flavour kids will love, with the benefits of nutritious vegetables blended in the sauce. The microwaveable product contains 13g of protein per serving, which is 56% of the daily value per serving, and 20% of the daily recommended value of zinc. It retails in a 6.5-oz. pack. Labelling claims include “no additives/preservatives,” microwaveable,” “organic,” and “babies & toddlers (0-4).”

Source: *Mintel GNPD, 2012.*

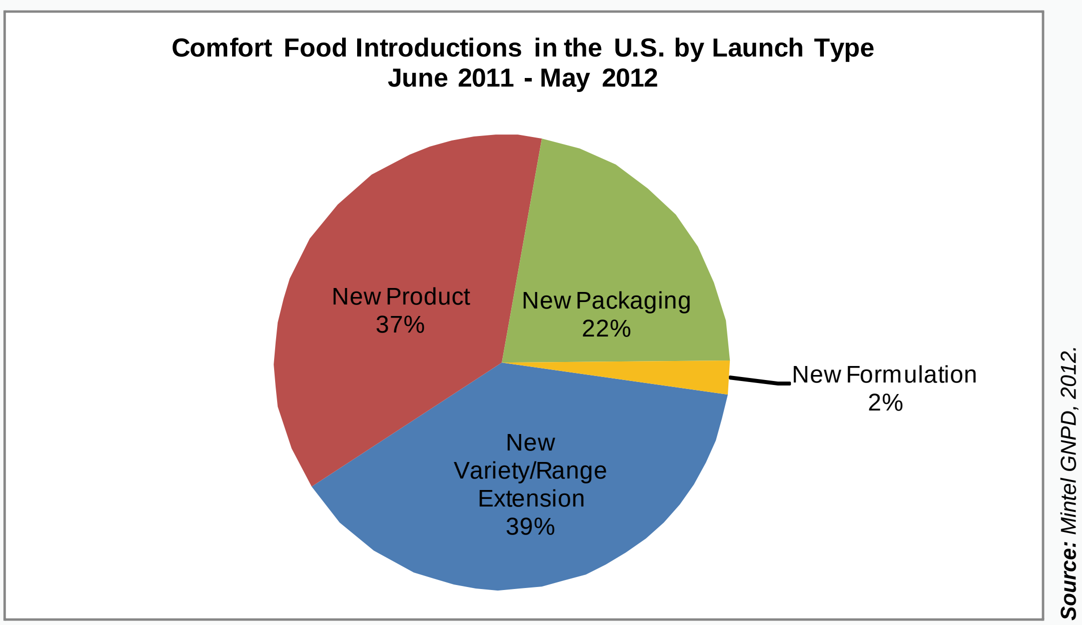
Brookdale Beef Stew has been repackaged and is now available in a 10-oz. pack. The gluten free stew is made with fresh potatoes and carrots, contains no added MSG and is ready in 90 seconds in a microwave. Product claims include “no additives/preservatives,” “microwaveable,” “gluten-free,” “low/no/reduced allergen,” and “time/speed.”

PRODUCT POSITIONING

- From June 2011 to May 2012, "microwaveable," and "ethical - environmentally friendly package" were the most popular specified claims for comfort foods launched in the U.S., according to Mintel.



- Of the 127 product introductions, the majority of products were launched as a new variety/range extension (39%), and new product (37%).



MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

Retaining Key Markets (targeting those who currently report high consumption rates)

- Comfort foods provide simple, familiar and affordable meal solutions to American families. Lower income households and families with children of all ages are the key markets for macaroni and cheese dishes. In comparison, stews, chili, and baked beans are the most popular among older adults that are low-to-middle income empty nesters. Variety extensions that market healthy claims with traditional tastes will address the concerns of homemakers seeking a nutritious, convenient and affordable meal solution for their families, and will continue to do well in the marketplace.

Extending the Market (targeting those who currently report mid-range to low consumption rates)

- Smaller affluent households report the lowest rates of comfort food consumption in the U.S. Product innovation will be key to expanding the market into this consumer base. New product formulations which explore the lighter side of comfort food classics will appeal to the health-conscious consumer. In addition, there is potential to grow the market by incorporating global tastes and using premium ingredients in these products. Macaroni and cheese dishes prepared with specialty cheeses or truffles and truffle oil, or stews and chili cooked with spicier flavours such as jalapeno, chipotle, or roasted pepper, may intrigue the more adventurous consumer looking for a twist on traditional American fare.

Source: *Shutterstock*

KEY RESOURCES

AAFC Global Consumer Trends Comfort Food (October 2011).
Food Trends 2012. Expect More Global Tastes. http://restaurant-hospitality.com/trends/food-trends-2012-global-tastes1011 (Retrieved June 19, 2012).
Mintel Oxygen Trend: Life An Informal Affair (March 27, 2012).
Mintel Global New Products Database (2011).
The NPD Group National Eating Trends database, for the year ending November 2010.

For more information, or to request additional copies or an alternate format of this publication, please email infoservice@agr.gc.ca or contact the International Markets Bureau - Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 1341 Baseline Road, Tower 5, 4th floor, Ottawa, ON Canada K1A 0C5