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A man with glasses, wearing a white lab coat and a hairnet, smiles at the camera in a meat processing facility. In the background, another worker is visible at a workstation with meat products.

With a unique focus on Japanese and Asian cuts, **International Meat Processors** is emerging as the leader of a previously underserved market

HEAD HONCHO

Roller coaster

There are many 'ups and downs' to Walmart's new private label meatloaf product.



PRODUCT

Marketside Ready to Heat Entrées Meatloaf with Restaurant-Style Glaze

PRICE

Price: \$7.97/14-oz. package (3 servings)

PLUS

Good value, nice texture

PROBLEM

Unappealing flavors, bad nutritional

Pprivate label food brands have shown considerable growth these past few years, so it makes sense that Walmart continues to invest in its house brands, including its fresh-item brand Marketside. One of its newest refrigerated prepared offerings features Marketside “Ready to Heat Entrées Meatloaf with Restaurant-Style Glaze.”

This new multi-serve meal delivers a convenient entrée that does not require any prep

time or culinary skill in about 3 minutes from the microwave. Let’s see if this latest Marketside addition delivers on consumers’ evolving requests.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Tasters ranged in age from 14 to 70s, and all reported having eaten meatloaf.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Tasters were positive about the product’s exterior packaging, describing it as “great,” “clear,” “nice,” and “clean.”

As one taster put it, though, “Once I opened it ... that was a different story.” In an early sign of the product’s mixed reception, other tasters were quite critical of how the meatloaf appeared.

In a detailed comment, a taster shared, “The inside packaging was not appealing at all. The plastic wrap looked out of sorts and the meatloaf itself did not look appetizing. There were chunks of white throughout the top, assuming

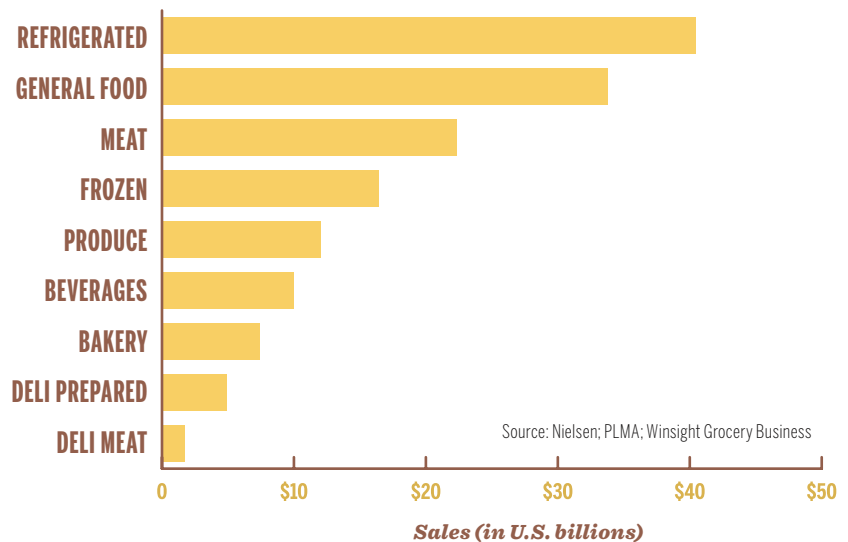
either cheese or cold fat. It certainly made a questionable first impression.”

A second taster remarked, “It’s just a chunk of meat and weirdly shaped, like it was lobbed off a bigger piece of meatloaf,” and a third stated, “The package scared me a little. I don’t really love microwaving plastic.”

Studying the nutritional information, a taster said, “There’s actually 3 servings/container, which equates to over 1,000 calories, and a

Privately HELD

Among private-label foods, the “Refrigerated” category posted the most 2021 sales at \$40.4 billion, according to analysis. Meat came in at No. 3 with \$22.3 billion, with prepared deli and deli meat at \$4.9 billion and \$1.7 billion, respectively.



lot of fat, cholesterol and sodium.”

TASTE, TEXTURE AND MORE

Consistent with our tasters’ first impressions, opinions about the Marketside meatloaf diverged wildly.

On the positive end, one taster shared, “I like it. It has good flavor and the texture is good. It doesn’t look processed, like school cafeteria meatloaf that is grainy and gristly.”

Another taster appreciated the meatloaf’s texture, commenting it was “not too loose and not too dense. It had a nice bite and mouth-feel. I did not get any grisly bits, which you get sometimes in

frozen ground meat products.”

Other compliments included “I like how the sauce browned up,” “The sauce was better than expected ... I liked the mild spiciness,” and “The gaze is good and it’s well seasoned. If it didn’t have glaze, it might not be as good.”

On the negative end, taster criticisms were many and varied.

“I couldn’t slice it because it crumbled,” a taster shared. “It looks like meat crumbles, and tastes like ground beef with ketchup. The meat looks too fine.”

The glaze, which was a hit with some tasters, came up repeatedly among the detractors.

“I like where the glaze flavor was trying to go, but it’s peppery,” a taster explained. “Not sure if the pepper is coming from the glaze or the meat. The glaze has a sweetness to it, yet the meatloaf is not seasoned to complement the sweetness. It has an Italian meatball taste.”

A third taster remarked, “After it was cooked, the smell caught me off guard. There’s something about it that really rubbed me the wrong way. ... Instead of a sweet meatloaf sauce, it’s more like a bad marinara — very tangy, which is what’s throwing me off.”

A different taster observed that the

meatloaf’s cooking limitations when/how it can be prepared.

“I’m shocked that there weren’t oven/convection oven directions — the package only includes microwave heating directions,” they said. “It would be kind of repulsive to make in a microwave in an office setting, because of the aroma.”

And finally, some tasters again zeroed in on the production’s nutritional downsides.

“Too high in salt,” a taster stated. “Meatloaf was soft, spongy and had some gristle.” Another taster added, “They clearly didn’t use lean beef with 33% DV in total fat, 50% DV in Sat Fat, and 32% DV in cholesterol.”

And a third taster observed that if one were to eat the entire package (which would be three servings), the end result would be “1,000 calories, 78 grams of fat and 42 grams of protein. That’s not great for someone that may choose to eat the entire package.”

There were a few tasters who bridged the divide, and reported both pros and cons to Walmart’s new meatloaf product. For instance, one taster was “not a fan” of the meatloaf’s flavor, but found it “surprisingly moist” with good texture. Another taster was “a big fan of the initial taste,” but did not appreciate the aftertaste. And

TASTE *test*

“After it was cooked, the smell caught me off guard. *There’s something about it that really rubbed me the wrong way.*”

the third disagreed with the meatloaf’s “off-putting” appearance, but found the final dish “very good!”

UPSHOT

When it was all said and done, a couple tasters did conclude they would again purchase the Marketside meatloaf.

“Somebody at Walmart actually cared enough to come up with this,” one of the tasters shared. “I’m curious as to what other kinds of meals they have.”

The second taster remarked, “Actually, it’s a good value for the money,” while acknowledging that

the many parentheses in the ingredient list threw them off.

Overall, though, the vast majority of tasters were not impressed.

“I think it tasted good, but looked awful,” a taster stated. “Very much a roller coaster of ups and downs with this one!”

“I would not purchase this product due to the nutritionals,” another stated, complementing another taster who said, “They need to use leaner beef and clean up the ingredient statement.”

A fourth taster concluded, “Meatloaf is easy and inexpen-

sive to make. I would never buy it because we did not enjoy the flavor and it has a lot of calories and fat. Not for us.”

CONCLUSION

Walmart has invested in a 3-serving-size, fully-prepared and seasoned meatloaf that goes from refrig-

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TASTE *test*

erator to table in 3 minutes. For many of our evaluators who view taste as the most important product attribute, this meatloaf was just fair. For the many folks who are scrambling to get

a “decent” dinner on the table for a “decent” price, this may just fit the bill as the center of the plate protein — since for them, convenience may be the most important purchase attribute.

But for many of our tasters, who had some issues with Market-side “RTH Entrées Meatloaf with Restaurant-Style Glaze,” this product was a big mixed bag. Some hated it, some were positive.

For Walmart, what is the number who will repeat and also consider (as a few of our tasters did) the rest of the product line? Clearly, Walmart needs to start with cleaning up the nutritional by

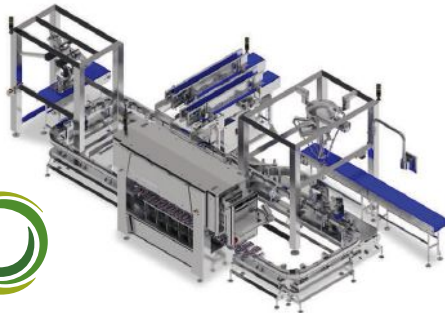
using a leaner ground beef (to change the concern about fat content) and reducing the sodium. The idea brought forward for this product is good; we expect better execution from Walmart.

by **Jacqueline Beckley, The Understanding & Insight Group, and Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, U&I Collaboration LLC**

Food product development and consumer research veterans, Jacqueline Beckley, Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, join Meatingplace Magazine as regular contributors to MeatingTaste, a consumer sampling of new products featured in our monthly Taste Test column. Here's how the program works: The meat item is distributed to consumers, including the core demographic, for preparation in their own houses. No instructions are provided to the consumer, other than to write their overall impressions of the product, as well as to evaluate the flavor, texture, packaging and ease of use. Beckley, Cesario and Vahalik look for common threads by using Getting It!®, a system developed to listen to consumers about products. The sample of people is not intended to be a “taste test” in a controlled setting, nor is it intended to simulate a focus group. Others are doing both. Rather, the intent is to interpret the response of the people who might purchase a product like this and use it, simply based on their encounters with the product in their individual, unique home environment. That is how U&I has been developing cutting-edge product and people understanding since 1999.

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