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MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

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BELTWAY *in the* BALANCE

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Frumble

The uniform looks good, but Kelce product struggles to score



PRODUCT

Travis Kelce's Kitchen Sausage & Meatball Marinara with Peppers & Onions

PRICE

\$9.88/16-oz. package (about three servings)

PLUS

Branding, overall appearance and sausage quality.

PROBLEM

Meatballs and veggies disappointed; serving sizes not realistic.

Tight end and three-time Super Bowl winner Travis Kelce has been front and center in all forms of media, yet we were still surprised when we saw his name on beautiful eye-catching packages of refrigerated entrées. His Travis Kelce's Kitchen brand, owned by Golden West Food Group, recently introduced a line of seven hearty-looking heat-and-eat items as Walmart exclusives, including a sausage and meatball marinara with peppers

and onions. The striking black package showcases enticing food photography and is emblazoned with "KC Style 87." Let's find out how Travis' playbook scored with our tasters.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Participants included several families, some of whom were Italian Americans who often make their own meatballs.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND APPEARANCE

Tasters mostly had positive first impres-

sions of the packaging and product, in part due to the Kelce-related branding. "Although sausage and peppers is not the first thing I'd go for, the picture looks pretty good, and just knowing it's Travis Kelce's [brand], I think a lot of sports fans would gravitate towards it."

Beyond the brand, the visuals also helped to pique people's interest.

"The package was cool looking, and all the info was easy to find," one taster shared. "I liked that

this was microwavable; nice and easy!"

A few other reviewers had positive things to say at the outset. "Good-sized meatballs. I could smell a hint of sausage when opening the package," one wrote. Another taster said, "Happy it says sausage AND meatballs, because sometimes sausage and peppers is just not enough."

Not everyone was wowed at first glance, however. "Surprisingly little food," one taster wrote. "Three meatballs, three

sausages, small pieces of red pepper and maybe one small piece of green pepper in the entire package. No way does this make three servings!”

TASTE, TEXTURE AND MORE

The mostly positive first impressions gave way to a mixed picture when tasters dug into the product. Only a few had mostly positive things to say. “Truth be told, when I made it in the microwave it actually looked exactly like it does on the packaging,” one wrote. Another said, “There’s enough sauce to make a little pasta to go with it. Good Italian sausage flavor with noticeable fennel, even in the sauce. The meatballs were tender. Very herby overall, but still balanced, except for the strong green bell pepper flavor in the sauce.”

A few reviewers liked the sausage but turned their thumbs down on the meatballs. “The meatballs had that pre-packed meatball taste,” one wrote,

with another sharing “the meatball was tangy, almost sour.”

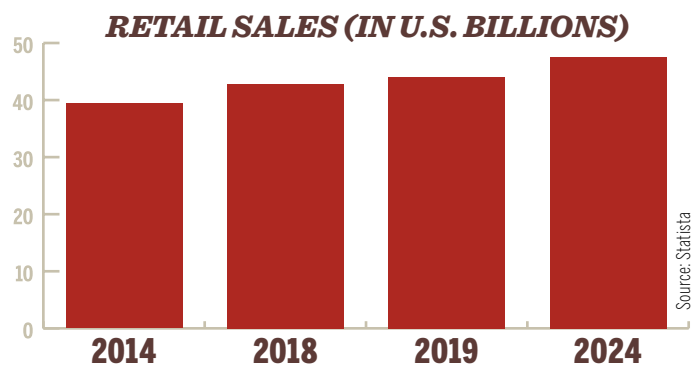
Others had mixed reactions for various sets of reasons. One reviewer wrote, “The sauce was well-balanced, as was the sausage and meatball, although both were soft, and the meatball had a few pieces of gristle.”

A few other tasters did not enjoy the meaty inclusions at all. “The meatballs were a bit soft, but similar to a frozen meatball texture,” one wrote. Another said, “The meatballs are very soft and don’t taste anything like cheese.” And a third shared, “The quality of the sausage and meatball was poor-quality meat, and the overall flavor of the sauce took over everything.”

A few reviewers turned thumbs down on the veggie elements. “When I think of peppers and onions, I think of long strands,” one wrote. “This is more the sausage, meatballs, and a

A steady GRIND

Sausages have been a source of steady growth for close to a decade. According to research, the retail sales value of sausages rose from \$39.39 billion to \$47.58 billion from 2014 to 2023.



sauce.” A second said, “The peppers are more blended in than the picture shows.”

Finally, one taster panned the nutritional elements, based partly on how portion sizes are calculated. “The nutrition is OK if someone is going to eat one piece of sausage and one meatball as their serving, but I highly doubt anyone would,” they wrote. “An entire package over pasta would be

almost 70% DV for fat, 90% for sat fat and 96% DV for sodium!”

UPSHOT

Although taster reactions to the product were decidedly mixed, the majority of people said they would buy the product again, although they mostly had only certain occasions in mind. “It’s easy in the microwave and good college-kid food,” one wrote. Another said,

“For \$9.88, it’s still decent once in a while for lunch or camping.”

Others did not see the Kelce entrée moving the chains for them. “The amount of food for 600 calories, if eating the whole thing, was pretty good; but overall, I wouldn’t get this again,” one reviewer wrote. And another opined, “The price is not too bad for what it is, but I don’t think I’d buy it again. It’s disappointing that there are no peppers and onions – I was looking forward to that.”

“Happy it says sausage AND meatballs, because sometimes sausage and peppers is just not enough.”

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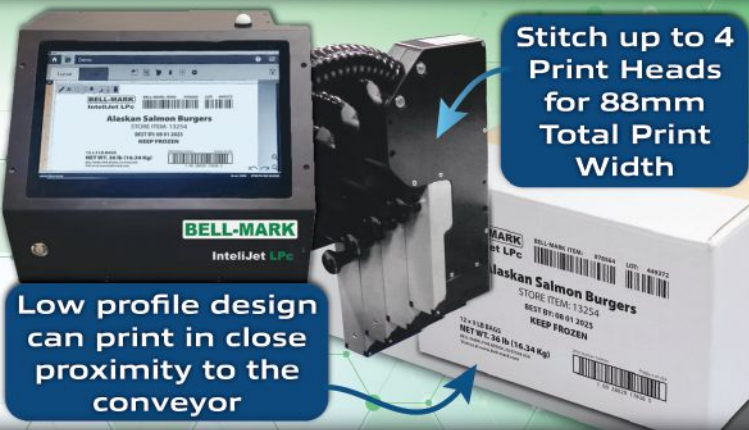
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TASTE *test*

“

The price is not too bad for what it is, but I don't think I'd buy it again.

”

CONCLUSION

We're sure that given the brand name and enticing packaging, Travis Kelce's Kitchen entrées will garner trial, especially from his fans. We are concerned about the “sour” taste noted by several of our reviewers. The product is sold refrigerated with a “Use By” date, but the Travis Kelce Kitchen website introduces the entrées as “frozen.”

There was a lot of disappointment in the quality of the meats, although the sausage rated better than the soft meatballs, which some felt lacked flavor. The quantity of food was also a concern — no one thought there was

enough for three servings — yet eating the whole entrée as a meal for one might even blow a tight end's caloric diet! Lastly, many were looking for the “peppers & onions,” which appeared to disappear in the sauce; ditto to the “cheesy” component.

Having Travis' name on this culinary item enhances the brand's appeal, but let's see if Travis' products are simply part of the growing movement of a celebrity launching their own line... or if they actually become game-changing entrées. Given the price point, nutritional and the range of opinion, repeat purchase might or might not happen.

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.