

THE PRESENT STATUS OF CONVENIENCE
FOODS IN THE FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY

by 529

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INTRODUCTION

The food service industry has been changing rapidly in the past few years and the development and use of convenience foods have made an impact on this industry. Convenience foods are new market forms that have evolved as the result of advanced technological developments in food processing.

Several trends in food service have prompted the use of convenience foods. Labor and overhead costs are rising much faster than raw food costs because of increases in the minimum wage in the United States. Neither of these cost increases have been offset by an increase in worker productivity. There is also a scarcity of trained labor in the industry.

Use of convenience foods offers several advantages to a food service, but many managers are not convinced that they are enough to offset their disadvantages. Within the industry there are many differing opinions about convenience foods such as their cost, quality, packaging, sanitary safety, reconstitution and storage. Controversy also exists whether to adopt the convenience concept completely within a food service or whether convenience foods can be combined with conventionally prepared foods to create an effective system.

Food service managers should be informed of the latest developments in convenience foods and be aware of the new products available. Testing programs to evaluate the feasibility of the use of convenience foods could be conducted.

The purpose of this report is to compile a review of literature on this topic and to develop a check list for use by management to consider before initiating the use of convenience foods.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Definitions

A variety of terms are used to identify the so-called "convenience foods" being used in food service institutions today. Some of these are convenience foods, convenient food, efficiency foods, ready foods, productivity foods and prefab foods. The term "convenience foods" is used most frequently and this term has been defined in several different ways. In one definition (Anon. 1967a) a convenience food is considered "anything that's convenient to prepare in comparison to conventional preparation methods." Another expands this by stating that a convenience food is "a food product that is a copy of an original that maintains the same quality in taste, color and texture as when the original is served" (Anon. 1964). A third definition emphasizes the preparation by stating that "a convenience food is any food wherein all or part of the labor of preparation is done by the manufacturer or processor prior to the arrival in the kitchen" (Anon. 1966a). Willett (1967) distinguishes between convenience and convenient food by proposing that a convenience food is frozen and a convenient food is easy to prepare.

The term "ready foods" was first used at Cornell University by Sayles (1965) who defined ready foods as "the application of mass production to a la carte food service using 'prepared to order' food." Sayles further explained that ready foods are a special type of convenience food that have been processed to the point where they are ready to serve with a minimum amount of preparation.