

Chapter Case Study

The Frozen Food Age **

In the early 1900s, many people experimented with mechanical and chemical methods to preserve food. Then along came Clarence Birdseye discovered a way to flash-freeze food and deliver them to the public. This was an important event in the annals of preserved food. By 1944 Birdseye's frozen foods business was up and running. This not only brought him profits but ensured his name in the history book. What started as a minor venture changed the lives of a countless number of people and revolutionized a whole industry. The frozen food technology has come a long way since then, especially with respect to semi-processed, nearly ready-to-eat food or snack preparations. In the West, one would be forgiven for asking "what can't I get frozen these days?" Even in Bangladesh, the frozen food habit is just starting to catch up. Today, it may not be an indispensable part of our urban life, but it might very well turn out to be so, sooner than you think.

The obvious advantages of frozen food are the significant saving in preparation time, and the irrelevance of culinary skills. To get a palatable snack or meal inside you, all you need to know is how to boil, fry, grill, or microwave. In the West, the quality of some ready-to-eat frozen meals almost rival those produced by cordon bleu chefs in good restaurants. Although the convenience of frozen food comes at a price, efficient preparation, better freezing technology, greater competition, and rising income levels have narrowed the affordability gap in many countries.

Bacterial hazard is a potentially serious problem with respect to frozen food. People can get seriously ill or even die from a severe case of Salmonella bacteria poisoning. Hygienic requirements during the preparation stage, the freezing process, and the storage conditions need

to be of the highest standards. A particular danger may result from thawing and re-freezing. In the West, government food inspectors and stringent quality check by vendors ensure to keep the possible harmful effects to a minimum. There are specific expiry dates, storage instructions, and cooking instructions for potentially hazardous foods. These include any food that consists in whole or in part of milk or milk products, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, edible crustaceans, baked or boiled potatoes, cooked rice, cooked beans, raw seed sprouts, cut melons and some garlic-in-oil mixtures. If there is an occurrence of food going bad, then the whole batch is thrown out.

A visit to one of Dhaka's prominent super markets, Agora, illustrates the growing demand for frozen meals and snacks. There are branded, imported frozen food, such as pizzas, burgers, sausages, lasagnas, pies, chicken fillets, rolls, parathas and French fries. These come in attractive packaging, with expiry dates, details description of ingredients, storage and cooking instructions. Local products include a limited range of frozen pithas, chops, samusas, shingaras, wrapped, packed and ready to be fried. Even a year ago these were difficult to find. But today even smaller grocery shops sell these frozen delicacies. However, few come with an expiry date, or cooking instructions. Presently the number of local frozen food producers is limited. So there is plenty of room for new players, introduction of new items, better and safer technology, better packaging, and improving hygienic standards.

Demand for frozen food will continue to grow as the lifestyle of city dwellers, especially the young professional class, change rapidly. Home help is becoming expensive for many. Others living in small apartments do not have the room for a

permanent live-in cook. Newly weds are more busy planning their separate careers. Our daily lives are gradually turning busy as in the West, but we still need to eat, whether it is a snack or a meal. A frozen meal may be viable option for many such people soon.

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Questions for Discussion:

1. What micro and macro environmental forces influence the business of frozen food in Bangladesh?
2. How demographic and economic environment affect marketing of frozen foods in Bangladesh?
3. What are the trends in technological environment in frozen food industry?

4. Does frozen food concept contradict with our local cultural environment? Or you think this is going to be the part of our culture?
5. What marketing strategies the frozen food producers should be utilizing to get better market acceptance? Explain.