

# PROGRESSIVE GROCCER



September 2017 Volume 11 Number 9 • Rs 100 • [www.indiaretailing.com](http://www.indiaretailing.com)

**INDIA EDITION**



**“Unconventional strategies are essential to yield breakthroughs for challenger brands”**

**RAVINDER KUMAR AGARWAL,**  
MD, Ravi Foods Pvt Ltd

Dukeswaffy @Dukes\_Waffly



# The Art of Gifting



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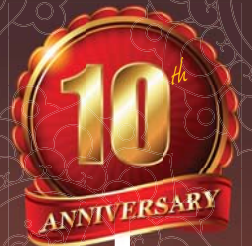
Mason & Co is doing its bit to promote artisanal chocolate

Page 28

**Technology**

Genome sequencing plays a critical role in food safety

Page 62



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## GETTING INTO HIGH GEAR

Page 30



**RETAILERS AND  
BRANDS LOOK TO  
RING UP RECORD SALES  
DURING THE FESTIVE SEASON**

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The long festive season is under way, the air is thick with anticipation, and expectations of consumers and sellers are at its peak. Brands and retailers are upbeat about doing record-breaking business in the months ahead. With the niggling issues and concerns related to GST now put to rest, businesses are exuding optimism and bracing to turn over a new leaf. As prices and inflation are under check, the economy is set to emerge stronger in the months ahead. No wonder that food and grocery players are confident of better sales and improved profit margins from high spirited festive sales.

By a conservative estimate, festive occasions contribute over 12 per cent of overall retail sales. Among the festivals, Diwali tops the chart in terms of increased sales. The grocery retail space brims over with an abundance of new product launches, gift hampers, and festive offers that drive the shopping frenzy. Competition is rife, as companies leverage their brand value on attractive offers.

In our cover story, we check out the preparations by brands and grocers. In modern trade, the coming days will be the time for festival-themed promotions, staples 'melas', and other such properties, in which brands and retailers regularly participate. There will also be plenty of lucrative offers, lowered prices and discounts to lure consumers to spend and splurge in the days ahead.

As a magazine for the modern trade, we have tried to put together in pages of this special 10th Anniversary issue, the industry's game plan for maximizing sales, boosting profit and winning over new markets and consumer segments. Happy celebrations.



Amitabh Taneja  
 Editor-in-Chief

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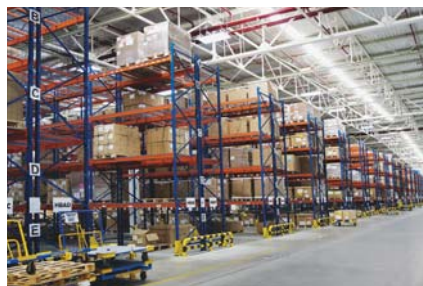
straight from the **heart.**

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### COVER STORY

# 30 Drum roll for sales season

The festive season is the time when maximum purchase happens in a household and brands and retailers experience the fastest turnover. Businesses pull out every trick in the playbook to cash in on this opportunity, making inroads into the customer's heart through effective messaging, new products and innovative packaging to boost their sales and maximizes shelf visibility.



### 10 SUPPLY CHAIN LOGISTICS

**Redefining Retail Warehousing**  
Warehousing automation can help retailers address the supply chain challenges.

### 20 GROCERY

**Baked Goodness**  
In line with current demand, baking ingredients are cleaner than ever.

### 26 FARM TO FORK

**Rising demand for residue-free vegetables**  
Healthy consumption has created an opportunity for entrepreneurs to enter residue-free farming.

### 28 PROFILE

**The bean-to-bar chocolatier and retailer of Pondicherry**  
Mason & Co makes hand-crafted chocolates from locally sourced ingredients.

### 50 INTERVIEW

**"We are market leaders in wafers category"**

Ravinder Kumar Agarwal, Managing Director, Ravi Foods

### 52 BEVERAGE

**The next wave in the beer industry**

The scope for Indian Pale Ale is immense and their consumption will pick up in times to come.

### 54 SUPPLIER

**"We are looking at E-retail partnerships to expand our consumer reach"**

Neelima Burra, Chief Marketing Officer, Cargill Foods India



### 56 HEALTH WELLNESS

**Whole-store Health Solutions**  
Encouraging customers to eat better.

### 58 GOURMET RETAILER

**"In-depth know-how of imported foods is our core strength"**

Sunil Agarwal, promoter of Pune-based Fine Foods



### 62 TECHNOLOGY

**Role of whole genome sequencing in food safety**

Ways to establish and implement food safety systems for food suppliers to operate responsibly and supply safe food to consumers.

### IN EVERY ISSUE

#### 68 COLUMN

Ongoing business analysis is a must for organised retail

#### 70 WHAT'S NEXT

Food, Beverage & Non-food Products





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# Redefining Retail Warehousing With Automation

**What are the challenges that Indian retailers face their supply chain? What are the key trends impacting the Indian retail industry and supply chain process in retail? How can warehousing automation help retailers address challenges?**

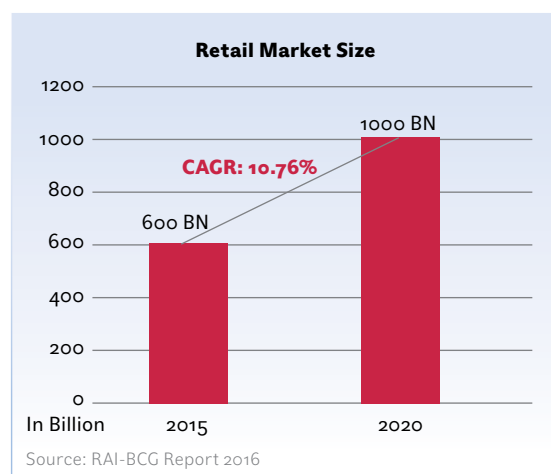
A report by Grey Orange– Zinnoy Study\* looks at these problems and offers the right solutions that can help reinvent the retailer’s supply chain to support the changing market dynamics.

**T**he retail industry in India is emerging as one of the largest industries in the economy. It accounts for over 10 per cent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and around 8 per cent of the employment.

**India’s retailing industry mostly consists of the local mom and pop store, owner manned shops and street vendors. Organised retail supermarkets are small but growing.**

The retail market in India undergoing fundamental change driven by the demographic shift with more than 50% of its population below the age of 25, rising disposable income, urbanization and blurring boundaries between offline and online worlds. The retail reforms and changes in the FDI policy have

**The retail industry is expected to reach to US\$ 1 trillion by 2020, attaining a CAGR of 10.76 per cent between 2015-2020.**





Trends in Retail

Demand-Side

**Smartphone Proliferation**  
 651MN  
 Smartphone users in India by 2019

**Rising Income Levels**  
 Disposable Income in India has risen 30% between 2012-2016

**Internet Penetration**  
 462 million internet users with 34% penetration

**Omni-Channel Fullment**

**200MN**  
 New consumer enter India's middle class by 2020

**410MN**  
 People in India will live in a city by 2030

**Young Population**  
 Over 50% of population is under 25

**Increasing awareness**  
 of international brands

Supply-Side

**Rising Labour Costs**

**Increased Focus On Improving Infrastructure**  
 Including Road, Rail

**Highly Inflationary Real Estate Costs**

**Increasing Raw Material Costs**

Regulatory Environment

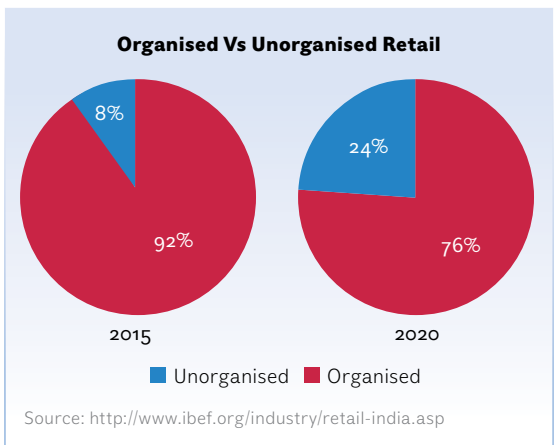
**FDI (Foreign direct investment)**  
 100% In Single -brand Retail  
 51% In Multi -brand Retail

**GST (Goods And Services Tax)**  
 Expected Implementation Of GST Will Reduce Inefficiencies In Retailers' Supply Chain

All the above trends have led to highly complex supply chain and warehousing processes that have increased challenges and costs of managing supply chain for retailers.

Components of a typical supply chain

- Vendor - Supplier of raw material, semi-finished goods or finished goods
- Factory - Finished goods are manufactured in the factory



opened the Indian retail market for international behemoths. With 100% FDI allowed in single-brand retail and go-ahead to start online channel without any approvals, the competition from international players to home-grown retailers has further intensified.

There's a growing need to reinvent the retailer's supply chain to support the changing market dynamics, specifically in warehousing with significant technological advancements happening in the automation space. What challenges Indian retailers face in their supply chain? What are the key trends impacting the Indian retail industry and supply chain process in retail? How can warehousing automation help retailers address challenges?



**The retail supply chain is highly fragmented. This leads to retailers having limited visibility over inventory and facing issues with demand forecasts and inventory management. Large number of intermediaries between manufacturers and retailers further increase complexity in managing retail supply chain.**

- **Primary Warehouse/Distribution Centre** - Finished goods are stored in this warehouse and are ready for distribution.
- **Secondary Warehouse/Depots** - Finished goods arrive at regional warehouses (through stock transfer) and are ready for sales order dispatches to distributors/stores
- **Stores** - Actual sales of finished goods happens at the store

**Scenario 1:** In this case, vendors manufacture the finished goods as per the retailers specifications and supply the finished goods to the retailers (ready for sale).

**Scenario 2:** In this case, the vendors provide the raw materials for producing the finished goods to the retailers at their factory. There could be multiple vendors providing raw materials to the factory. The factories then process the raw materials and manufacture the finished goods that are ready for sale.



### Typical Retail Warehouse Operations

#### Inbound Process

- Unloading from truck
- Palletization & External Verification
- Move to Staging Area
- 100% Units Stan
- Apply LPN
- Put-Away
- Scan Location, LPN & Confirm Put-Away/GRN

#### Outbound Process

- HHT Allocation to Picker – (*Order Based Picking*)
- HHT Navigates picker to Pick location
- Picker Scans location, SKU & Picks Qty displayed on HHT
- 100% Units Scan
- Tape, Strap & Outbound VAS
- Bring material to Processing Area on each level
- Move to dispatch bay –Zone wise Staging

#### Return Process

- Unloading from truck
- Palletization & External Verification
- Quality Check
- 100% Units Scan & Sorting
- System Guided Put-Away based on QC
- Put-Away Confirmation

#### Challenges in Retail Supply Chain

- High Number of Touch points
- Fragmented Supply Chain
- SKU Volume and Variability
- Unfavorable Regulatory Environment
- Shortage of skilled Manpower

#### Shortage of Skilled Manpower

While India is the second largest populated country in the world, shortage of skilled manpower is a big challenge for Indian retailers. The high attrition rate within the retail sector further increases problems

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for the retailers, as there is time and cost involved in training the manpower. The socio-cultural mindset makes a career in the retail warehouses and distribution centers an unattractive option for skilled youth. The poor working conditions within the warehouses also make it an unappealing career choice. Non-availability of niche courses and absence of institutionalized training infrastructure in retail supply chain has resulted in significant skill gap within the retail industry.

### Fragmented Supply Chain

The retail supply chain is highly fragmented. This leads to retailers having limited visibility over inventory and facing issues with demand forecasts and inventory management. Large number of intermediaries between manufacturers and retailers further increase complexity in managing retail supply chain. This often leads to excess inventory and stock losses, resulting in high costs of supply chain.

### SKU Volume and Variability

Most retailers have to deal with huge volumes of thousand of SKUs. Variability in SKU demand further adds to the complexity of retailers' supply chains. This leads to several challenges for the retailers including incorrect forecasts, insufficient or excessive inventory and poor customer experience due to non-availability of products at the right place at the right time. For multi-brand retailers, the problem is even more complex, requiring coordination with multiple suppliers and vendors.

### High Number of Touchpoints

Retailers' supply chain is a complex one with many intermediaries, resulting in high number of touchpoints. Each touchpoint means increased human intervention leading to increased wait time,

pilferage, stock loses and inventory wastage. Supply chain automation reduces the possible number of touchpoints. It not only accelerates delivery of product to the retail store and to consumers, but also helps in reducing pilferage and picking errors in the supply chain.

### Challenges for Big Box retailers

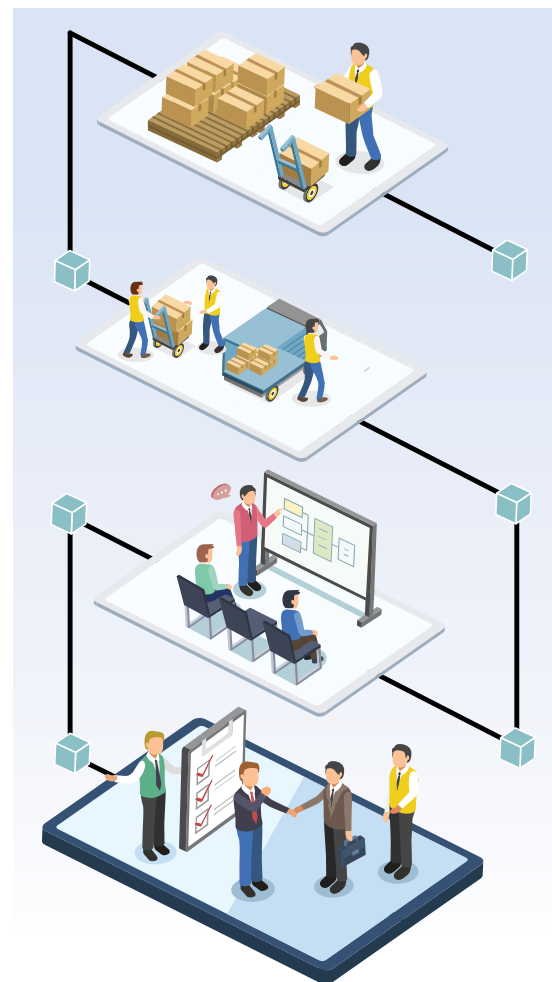
The changes in the FDI policy have opened up retail market in India to many international retail brands. Large number of big box retailers with successful international operations have launched or are in the process of launching operations in India. They face some unique set of challenges, while setting up their stores here. IKEA is one such leading big box retailer. The IKEA Group is the first major single brand retailer to be given FDI approval to set up retail operations in India and is in the process of setting up their stores.

### How Automation will Help

Handling Large Number of SKUs and Orders:  
Handling a large number of SKUs and orders

“  
For a multi-brand retailer like us, number of SKUs is really large and the SKUs itself keep on changing and that makes it all the more complex.

— Yakeen Gazi  
Sr. V.P. - IT &  
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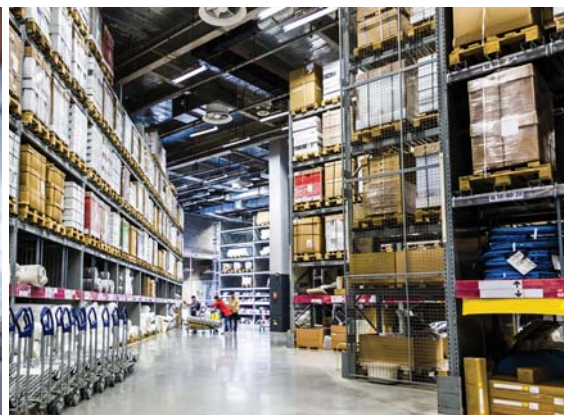
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**IKEA is obsessed with creating low prices and to be affordable for the many people. Being a single brand big format retailer that produces products globally in many countries, adding labels with country-specific requirements (eg. MRPs) manually adds to costs and is a challenge operationally and interrupts our global supply chain.**

— **Bimal Patel**  
Distribution  
Establishment Manager -  
India, IKEA



is typically a manual process that requires large workforce within the warehouse premises. Absenteeism, attrition, labour unions and shortage of skilled manpower can hamper such operations, leading to shortages, put-away/picking errors and loss of profit arising from incomplete orders. Automation helps in managing large number of SKUs and fulfilling multiple orders simultaneously.

**Cutting-Down Touch Points and Picking Errors:** A manual warehousing operation has large number of touchpoints, and therefore, is prone to picking errors. By adding automation, the number of touch points can be reduced with less manual intervention, thereby, reducing picking errors.

**Increase Warehouse Efficiency:** Automation helps increase the overall efficiency of the warehouse by ensuring all processes are system directed. It also enables carrying out of simultaneous tasks, while streamlining the processes inside a warehouse.

**Improve Manpower Productivity:** Automation enables existing manpower to handle multiple orders efficiently thus increasing their productivity. Since all processes are system directed, highly

trained manpower is not required to manage the automated processes.

**Dynamically Managing Changing Requirements:** In a traditional warehouse, storage spaces are usually static and change in the configuration of the storage can lead to a complete change in warehouse zoning and in backend systems. Automation can help store goods dynamically which are managed by mobile units and a Warehouse Control System (WCS), making it easier to handle dynamically changing requirements that are typical to a retail operation.

**Reducing Warehouse Footprint:** Automation helps make the storage space more efficient by better allocation of space, denser storage and lesser aisle space. It also helps manage inventory more efficiently and therefore, helps in reducing the days of inventory stored in a warehouse.

**Shortening Order Fulfilment Time:** Automation can help handle multiple orders thus reducing the window of order handling and order fulfilment time and helping the warehouse increase throughput. With GST now in force, warehouses will typically



**The availability of skilled manpower is one of the key challenges the warehouse industry faces.**

— **Gurpreet Sandhu**  
Head - Supply Chain &  
Replenishment, Aditya  
Birla Retail Limited



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“  
**With the advent of e-commerce, the only way forward to process a high volume of orders is to implement automation in the warehouses using modern sortation systems.**

— **Devdas Nair**  
 Head - Logistics & SCM, Shoppers Stop

handle a large number of orders and this can be enabled by leveraging automation.

**Complexities Involved in Automation**

- Inexible and Non-Expandable
- Return on Investment
- Change Management
- Lack of awareness

**Lack of Awareness:** Low awareness of available automation solutions is one of the primary reasons for poor automation adoption within retail supply chain industry in India. There is a strong need for companies like Grey Orange to invest in online and offline marketing channels to create awareness of such solutions and how automation solutions can help retailers overcome supply chain and warehousing challenges for retailers. Automation of repetitive tasks in warehouse allows managers and operators to focus on more complex, value-driven tasks that help organizations meet their business objective.

**Change Management:** Changing people’s mindset and driving them to use automation is another big challenge in adopting supply chain automation in the Indian retail industry. Many organizations face resistance from current employees, who think automation would take away their jobs.

Technological change and automation solutions also bring along the cultural shift that requires people to change the way they work and train themselves to use new processes. The management needs to make the staff aware of the benefits of automation and how automation will help them overcome some their challenges.

**Return on Investment (ROI):** RoI is the most critical parameter for organizations to decide whether to go for automation. Without a compelling RoI, organizations are reluctant to invest in automation. The executives expect a payback period of less than 24-36 months for warehouse automation.

**Inflexible and Non-Expandable:** Most retail organizations think that warehouse automation solutions are not scalable to support the business growth. Automation once installed in a warehouse remains fixed and cannot change dynamically, as the business requirements change. Also, automation is not flexible to support peaks in demand. However, it’s a myth. Automation technologies available today are agile and scalable to meet the future demands of organizations. **PG**

**\*Authors:**  
**Sippy Taneja**, Product Marketing Manager, GreyOrange  
**Kunal Almeida**, Industry Manager - Retail and Consumer, GreyOrange

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# Baked Goodness

In line with current demand, baking ingredients and even mixes are cleaner than ever.

By Bridget Goldschmidt



**B**aking, as retailers know well, encompasses a broad spectrum of skill levels, from utter beginner all the way up to those capable of producing restaurant-quality breads, cakes, pastries and the like.

During Progressive Grocer's visit to the Food City store in Johnson City, Tenn., our September 2016 Store of the Month, Dan Gleib, EVP of merchandising and marketing at the Abingdon, Va.-based grocer, pointed out this fact during a brief stop in the baking aisle: "We have a strong [number] of customers that seek a high level of convenience, and many customers, still, that are very, very basic, scratch-made cooks at their house."

Given this wide divergence in ability among home bakers, the trending demand for clean ingredients can be more easily met by some products than others. For scratch bakers who control every item they include in their creations, it's a relatively straightforward process — depending on market availability, of course — to source organic, all-natural, non-GMO or free-from ingredients, but for consumers dependent on mixes

for their bake-at-home treats, it's been somewhat more tricky — until now.

Suzu Monford, CEO of Emeryville, Calif.-based Andronico's Community Markets, which operates five stores in the Bay Area, acknowledges that while baking products were slower to follow the trend toward cleaner cooking ingredients that began more than a decade ago with the elimination of trans fats, the category is seeing what she calls a "massive emphasis" on lower-sugar and lower-sodium solutions, as well as such innovations as gluten-free, ancient grains and even cricket flours.

Andronico's flags these types of ingredients in the baking aisle with its FitMarket attribute, creates eye-catching end cap displays, and offers clean options in its bulk sections, as well as promoting items online via its e-newsletter and website.

Meanwhile, the baking ingredient category "has been performing well over the past year and continues to grow," notes Jeff Culhane, SVP merchandising at Williamsville, N.Y.-based Tops Markets LLC, which operates more than 170 stores in upstate New York, northern Pennsylvania, western Vermont and north central Massachusetts.



“Consumer trends are toward cleaner, less refined products, more organic, more natural, less artificial colors and less high-fructose corn syrups.”

Private label offerings, as well as an integrated product assortment, can help draw shoppers to cleaner baking ingredients. “We promote Tops brand products in conjunction with other brands,” explains Culhane. “We traditionally merchandise these alongside one another, so in some cases you’ll see an integration of cleaner-label flours and organic flours. Even in our bulk section, we’ve introduced more organic and more natural products like oats, flours and cornmeal for [consumers’] baking needs. We promote these both in our fliers and TPR during key baking seasons, so we will run them in conjunction with more traditional, conventional products like Tops Sugar or Pillsbury flour, or if we’re adding in the whole wheat flour or organic flours into our promotional plan.”

**Sweet Stuff**

“Parents want to instill the values of making healthier lifestyle choices in their families,” notes

Russ Moroz, VP of research, development and quality at South Bend, Ind.-based Whole Earth Sweetener Co., a maker of baking-friendly zero- and lower-calorie sweeteners incorporating natural ingredients such as stevia and monk fruit. “While they want to be mindful of where their food is coming from, they don’t want to sacrifice the recipes, ingredients or tastes that they love.”

When it comes to encouraging trial, Moroz says Whole Earth “[works] closely with retailers to co-promote and leverage the baking season starting in October and the New Year resolution period to promote healthier ingredients for baking.” The company has also teamed with celebrity chef Buddy Valastro — TV’s “Cake Boss” — on a campaign to get consumers to Rethink Sweet, which includes easy-to-prepare recipes for lower-calorie baked goods.



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Recent introductions, such as zero-calorie Nature Sweet packets and Monk Fruit Juice Concentrate, and lower-calorie Baking Blend, Turbinado Raw Cane 50, Whole Earth Sweetener Honey 50 and Whole Earth Sweetener Agave 50 (the last three blended with stevia extract for half the calories and sugar of their traditional counterparts), receive particular emphasis. “When introducing a new product ... we make sure we are properly educating the consumer at the point of purchase, with shelf and floor signage detailing the nutritional facts and information,” adds Moroz.

Sugar 2.0 + Probiotics, launched in March 2016, is “marketed as a clean-label product with just three natural ingredients [and] no artificial ingredients or high-intensity sweeteners,” says Trong Nguyen, CEO of Riverside, Calif.-based Foods 2.0 LLC, who describes the product as “a healthier sugar replacement that aims to fill the gap between regular sugar and artificial sweeteners.”

To promote such items in-store, Nguyen suggests: “Retailers can place ‘call tags’ in-store to promote clean baking ingredients. Such call tags could effectively identify clean-label products in the store and highlight the benefits of using [them].”

### Mixing it Up

“Now, more than ever, consumers are looking for quality products that are made with natural ingredients — a trend that directly ties into how they approach baking at home,” asserts Hannah Hershey, marketing manager at Ukiah, Calif.-based Pamela’s Products, which offers items that “are

always made with natural ingredients that are non-GMO and meet gluten-free certification standards as well.”

Pamela’s latest product rollouts include a Grain-Free line offering a Nut Flour Blend of almonds, coconuts, pecans and walnuts. “We have marketed this line as gluten-free, vegan and Paleo-friendly, dairy-free, sugar-free, and non-GMO, which are attributes that we call out on the package and highlight in our marketing messages,” says Hershey. “These products are being merchandised with other products like almond meal and Paleo baking mixes.”

Hershey recommends merchandising such items as a group. “Categorizing products together that feature these ingredients makes it easy, so consumers don’t have to sift through the entire store to find what they are looking for,” she notes. “Highlighting product certifications such as Non-GMO Project Verified, which consumers have come to expect from brands and the ingredients they use, [is] also a great way to promote and merchandise these ingredients.”

In common with Pamela’s, which has sourced clean ingredients since its founding in 1988, the folks at Norwich, Vt.-based King Arthur Flour believe that “scratch baking and clean ingredients have always gone hand in hand,” according to Brand Manager Erika Randolph.

The venerable company, which has been around since 1790, is still coming up with new products, having introduced this past summer a line of Essential Goodness baking mixes containing no preservatives, artificial colors, flavors, corn syrup and hydrogenated oils. “To make it feel even more like scratch baking, [the] line is supported on our website with recipe content and ideas to transform each mix into a creative, decadent treat,” notes Randolph, who says that the products’ “appeal to retailers is driven in part by the opportunity these mixes present to reinvigorate a flagging category.” According to Schaumburg, Ill.-based Nielsen, total baking mix sales dollars fell 4.8 percent for the 52 weeks ending July 2.

Meanwhile, the packaging combines an on-trend ingredient deck with retro styling. “The back panel harkens to the old-school recipe cards you remember from your mom’s or grandma’s kitchen, and the line represents a blend of classic baked goods like Everyone’s Favorite Chocolate Chip Cookie ... to unique products like our Cinnamon Sugar Puff Muffin,” observes Randolph.

She explains that “the consumer trend toward understanding their food has allowed us to broaden our horizons. The mix section of the baking aisle has long been dominated by highly processed, low-cost mixes that consumers have known for a long time.

“  
Consumer trends are toward cleaner, less refined products, more organic, more natural, less artificial colors and less high-fructose corn syrups.

— Jeff Culhane  
Tops Markets LLC





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“  
**Consumers are looking for quality products that are made with natural ingredients — a trend that directly ties into how they approach baking at home.**

— **Hannah Hershey**  
 Pamela's Products

... That's scary for a consumer looking to nourish their family with a quick, convenient alternative to baking from scratch.”

“Many consumers are now baking their own breads, muffins and cookies with specialty ingredients because they can't find what they're looking for in stores,” notes Katlin Smith, founder and CEO of Chicago-based Simple Mills, which she says is the third-largest natural baking mix company by dollars sold and No. 1 for dollar sales per point of distribution. “For example, almond flour is now one of the best-selling flours in grocery stores because it enables consumers to bake with simple, nutrient-rich ingredients.”

Simple Mills' success “is indicative of a larger trend,” Smith believes. “As you look at the baking shelves, you often find a lot of carbohydrates, sugar or ingredients you can't pronounce. ... This is true even in natural grocery stores.” The company's newest product is Organic Frosting in Vanilla and Chocolate flavors.

Notes Smith: “Our baking mixes have less than half the sugar and carbohydrates of leading brands of baking mixes, and we clearly indicate our sugar content on the front of our packages. Retailers that have created a strong brand block of our products have been effective in grabbing the consumer's attention at shelf and bringing them back into the category with this simple messaging. Additionally, we have conducted many in-store demonstrations, which have been a great educational opportunity.”

She advises that “the best way to promote clean baking products in-store is by giving them display space, as this grabs the consumer's attention outside of the baking aisle, where many consumers may not have walked down for years. Retailers can increase the value of the display by pairing the clean baking-mix products with other complementary clean products, providing the consumer with a full solution versus just a piece of a puzzle, and thereby increasing basket ring. For example, our products are often merchandised with products like pure maple syrup, coconut oil, organic vanilla extract or organic dark-chocolate chips.”

Smith further observes that “our products do incredibly well when on displays for Paleo products, grain-free products or lower-sugar products. In addition to in-store displays, these product bundles also work incredibly well when featured in store ads or included in in-store demonstrations.”

#### The Raw or the Cooked

“Home bakers are experimenting more with clean substitutions, for instance replacing eggs with other binding agents such as flax or chia, and refined flours with nutrient-rich alternatives such as chickpea flour, coconut flour and root vegetables,” observes Chef



Franklin Becker, co-founder and head of culinary development at New York-based Hungryroot, whose inventive products include Almond Chickpea Cookie Dough and Black Bean Brownie Batter, which are gluten-, dairy-, soy- and preservative-free, as well as vegan, and can be eaten either raw or baked.

Becker teases that an “exciting new dessert [is] launching this fall that will capture the flavor of the season, and several more desserts [are] on the product roadmap for the remainder of the year.”

At the Whole Foods in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn where the shelf-stable cookie dough and brownie batter made their debut, and from which they are “quickly expanding throughout the region,” the products “are merchandised in the dairy aisle alongside other cookie dough products,” notes Becker. “As the category of clean baking continues to expand, retailers can help build awareness for these ingredients and products through in-store signage, displays and strategic placement.”

Retailers and manufacturers agree that the enthusiasm for clean baking will only grow, with Becker the chef placing particular emphasis on a related rise in culinary experimentation. “We foresee that there will be a shift towards the increased inclusion of less conventional baking ingredients that are healthy and clean as a way of reinventing traditional baked goods and making them healthier,” he says. “This will include everything from substituting healthy fats such as almond butter and tahini to creating new binding agents through ingredients such as seeds and legumes.”

Tops' Culhane believes that “we'll see a trend more toward non-GMO products from the larger brands, [while] more smaller brands [will] pop out and evolve from local communities as that expands and grows, and you'll see more evolution in this category, because that's where all of the consumer trends are pointing.” **PG**



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**Retailers can pair clean baking-mix products with other complementary clean products, providing the consumer with a full solution versus just a piece of a puzzle.**

— **Katlin Smith**  
 Simple Mills



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# Rising demand for residue-free vegetables

The drastic shift in consumer behaviour towards healthy consumption has created an enormous opportunity for many budding entrepreneurs to enter residue-free farming.

By Nilesh Palresha

**Keeping in mind the “eat healthy and stay young” mantra of the younger generation, it is essential to understand the concept of farm to fork. It involves reducing/ minimizing the human handling of the produce which, in turn, enhances the quality of the produce.**

**E**at healthy and stay young is the new mantra for the young generation that believes in staying fit. Contributing to this belief is the huge influence of social media in the health care segment, which has led to this remarkable change in eating habits of a majority in the population. In support of this change, there has been a sharp rise in the demand of residue-free vegetables. This drastic shift in consumer behavior has created an enormous opportunity for many budding entrepreneurs to enter residue-free farming.

Residue-free farming is the use of organically derived biocides and bio-fertilizers to protect the crops and enhance their growth. Considering the role that technology plays in the environment, it is impossible to omit its role in the field of agriculture. By adopting modern day agri-technologies like greenhouses, drip irrigation system, fertigation, integrated fertilizers management, integrated pest management, residue-free production, rain water harvesting, high density



plantation, contour farming, waste land utilization, etc., it becomes relatively easy to maintain the quality of the produce and also add to its nutritional value.

Keeping in mind the “eat healthy and stay young” mantra of the younger generation, it is essential to understand the concept of farm to fork. It involves reducing/ minimizing the human handling of the produce which, in turn, enhances the quality of the produce. In order to meet the expected standards of the consumers, it is necessary to integrate the process of residue-free farming. The process of growing the produce starts from crop selection – land preparation – seed selection – seed sowing – irrigation – crop growth – harvesting – grading – packaging – transportation – retail outlets/ customers. An important element to note in the process is the lack of use of chemical fertilizers and use of natural fertilizers like cow dung and earthworm manure. This one change itself accounts for a big difference in the residue content of the produce and takes it a notch further in making it residue-free.

For years, pesticides have played a pivotal role in the agriculture sector leading to a major imbalance in the eco-system. The use of toxic chemical fertilizers has had a very negative impact on the environment and has caused potential damage to agriculture produce as well as adversely affected the health of masses consuming them. The major disadvantage associated with the use of fertilizers is the change in the soil health, leading to depletion of the nutritional value of the product and thus creating a hazardous impact on the consumers of the product. It should also be noted that the use of fertilizers not only affects the people consuming the produce but also the people dealing with the same, hence making it essential to emphasize that fertilizers that are non-residual in nature should only be used. This, in turn, will increase the health benefits, freshness and longevity of the produce. The time is now appropriate to encourage the use of organic fertilizers like manure, green manure, compost, etc.

In order to welcome this change, it is essential to adopt the practice of residue-free farming under which the food produced is pure, fresh, healthy and nutritious. As pointed out earlier, residue-free produce is grown in an eco-friendly way and without the use of any hazardous chemical fertilizers, which offers a host of health benefits to the end consumer. **PG**



The writer is Executive Director, EarthFood, which grows and sells a wide range of residue-free fruits and vegetables on its 206 acres of farmland near Pune.

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# The bean-to-bar chocolatier and retailer of Pondicherry

India's growing awareness of artisanal chocolates has consumers paying more for better quality and healthier alternatives as more companies enter the fray to produce high quality, hand-crafted chocolates made of primarily locally sourced ingredients.

By **Roshna Chandran Stonebridge**



**M**ason & Co, the celebrated bean-to-bar chocolate maker in Auroville, Pondicherry, is owned by French husband-wife duo Fabian Bontems and Jane Mason. The company works directly with organic certified farms in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and offers many kinds of chocolate bars made from single origin Indian cacao. Over the past few years, India has witnessed a burgeoning trade in cacao, which is used in making high quality and gourmet chocolate. Companies like Mason & Co specialize in high quality, hand-crafted chocolates that encourage consumers to discover and find a connection to locally produced chocolates. Nowadays, consumers are not only becoming more conscious about the product's origins but they are also open to trying out a variety of flavors.

The two chocolatiers confirm this rising trend and say that consumers are becoming more discerning about the quality and health benefits of chocolate. "Chocolate snobbery is heavily on the rise as consumers have started taking to 72%-80% dark bitter chocolates. We make organic dark and vegan chocolate. Our flavors are very classic and we want people to enjoy their favorite flavors," says Jane Mason, trained Chocolate Maker and Raw Food Chef who has teamed up with her husband Fabian Bontems, a Sound Engineer by training, to set up Mason & Co.

Jane and Fabian started manufacturing their products out of their house and slowly grew it into a factory unit of approximately 200 square feet with nine people to manage the work. Fabian uses standard chocolate making equipment like stone





grinders and adjustable machines depending on the functionality and productivity. For removing the skin of cacao beans, Mason & Co has designed some of its own equipment. Cacao beans look like an almond and come with a thin skin covering. This skin can be removed by hand or by soaking the beans in warm water. Chocolate making companies with a large processing facility use machines to remove the skin. In the case of an artisanal outfit like Mason's, Fabian has designed his own machinery to separate the two. These beans once crushed are known as cacao nibs, which are further processed for a long duration to make chocolate bars. Cacao beans are particularly found to be very healthy for its flavonoid content. The darker the chocolate, better the flavonoid content is, which helps to prevent diseases Cancer and Alzheimer.

Mason & Co currently supplies to over a 100 stores in India. The company has a varied product range comprising 13 flavors in the market today. These include cacao powder, nibs, drinking chocolate and herbal tea. "Out of these, chocolate bars have become the fastest moving category. Most of our products have a 12 months' shelf life, except for a couple of flavors of chocolate bars that have a shelf life of nine months," points out Fabian. "Currently, we have reached our maximum production capacity and so we are working to expand now," informs Jane, adding that the company is focused on supplying to as many of its customers within India as it can. Originally a product that is bought for special occasions or as gifts, organic chocolate is now being pushed as a product that one can eat every other day. And chocolatiers like Mason and Co are propagating healthier chocolate alternatives by buying produce made from locally found organic ingredients, which hold a bigger appeal for consumers.

Mason & Co chocolate products are available in all major Indian cities, including Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Cochin, Pune and Goa. The company also has a partnership

with Bread & Chocolate, a highly rated bakery cum café in Auroville, Pondicherry. Though it operates as a separate business, the local eatery serving breakfast, desserts and bakes, and vegan options has become Mason and Co's main selling point in the French union territory. "We have a café that we run with our business partners Bread & Chocolate. This is our main point of sale for our products locally where people can try a wider range of flavors as we use chocolate in a number of our recipes," says Fabian.

Though Mason & Co enjoys a high reputation for the quality of their chocolates and its healthy ingredients, maintaining a regular supply of quality ingredients is a challenge. Logistics too is an issue bearing in mind the limited available infrastructure within the locality, which becomes more accentuated in the case of transporting a product that melts and degrades quickly under tropical conditions. This also acts to restrain the production levels while making it difficult to export. "As we are in a small city, we do not have a steady supply of water or electricity, which poses a challenge for production," says Jane.

To overcome some of the challenges, Jane and Fabian work with like-minded people who are passionate about chocolate and understand how to store and display chocolates in the right way. They also offer services such as post harvesting advice to farmers and bean-to-bar training. "We have our own team and we take all the efforts to ensure that goods are not damaged; we have not had any complaints of damaged goods till date," avers Fabian.

Jane and Fabian are cautious about scaling up though both are confident of the steady growth of Mason & Co. The company has been able to build a rock solid foundation and reputation by ensuring careful selection of raw ingredients, especially good quality cacao. With consumers taking a keen interest in where the food actually comes from and how the product is made, their chocolates have been very well received and the demand is growing steadily. "People are moving toward artisanal chocolate and away from mass produced standardized products. They are looking at connecting with their food in a more holistic way, which we feel is fantastic. What comes with this is also an interest and motivation to eat locally," says Jane.

Going forward, the husband and wife duo is looking to expand the production and supply chain, and are in touch with the right channels. The two are also working on building a new processing unit, which will allow them to increase production and help them to expand their supply within the country and abroad. **PG**



**People are starting to move toward artisanal chocolate and away from mass produced standardized products. They want to connect with their food in a more holistic way, which we feel is fantastic.**

— Jane Mason  
Chocolate Maker,  
Mason & Co



**We have a café that we run with our business partners Bread & Chocolate. This is our main point of sale for our products locally where people can try a wider range of flavors.**

— Fabian Bontems  
Chocolate Maker,  
Mason & Co

# Drum roll for sales season

The festive season is the time when maximum purchase happens in a household and brands and retailers experience the fastest turnover. Businesses pull out every trick in the playbook to cash in on this opportunity, making inroads into the customer's heart through effective messaging, new products and innovative packaging to boost sales and grow their consumer base.

By Sanjay Kumar



“

**We are all geared up for the festival season and hope to do over 500% more business than in the regular months. Post GST, consumers were a bit uncertain at the start of the third quarter but now sales momentum has picked up.**

— Shaishav Mittal  
Founder & CEO, Lovely  
Bake Studio

**T**he festive season is around the corner, and gaiety and abandon is in the air. If Rakhi and Janmashtami celebrations in the latter half of August were the perfect springboard to the festive months ahead, the Pujo celebrations followed by Dussehra, Diwali and eventually culminating with Christmas and New Year, will mark the climactic points in the season of shopping, splurging and joyful indulgence. It is the period when people are in the mood to spend and lavish gifts. They love to go out, explore the market and look for different buying options. Naturally, the festive season brings



higher footfall in retail stores. Consumer demand is at its highest during the season and so is market sentiment. In general, sales volume of all products peak during the festive season.

Overall, F&G business zooms, lead by chocolates, dry fruits, juices, sweets, biscuits, staples, oils, spices, *namkeens*, etc. The arrival of the festive season sparks an unusual gifting fervor among consumers, making the period the perfect sweet spot for retailers and manufacturers to rake in the moolah and whip up plenty of dough. A study done by industry body Assocham revealed that middle and lower middle income families in India spent an average of 29 per cent of their salary during the festive season. However, if brands offer more incentives by way of discounts or freebies during the festive season, customers would spend more, according to the survey, which was conducted in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad,



Hyderabad, Pune, Chandigarh and Dehradun. “Over 78 per cent of the respondents said that if they plan to spend more, discounts will act as incentives for them,” said the study.

**Gifting fervor and business expectations**

Not surprising that corporate houses and businesses use festivals to come up with new products and ideas, revamp their collection and presentation style and introduce new SKUs and packs to appeal to more numbers of consumers. **Yogesh Bellani, CEO, Fieldfresh Foods**, which operates the Del Monte brand, says, “An interesting differential in the cluttered festive market would be a product that appeals to the more youthful consumer, has both modern and cultural relevance, is aesthetic, adopts a contemporary approach to its use of traditional festive cues, captures the fun and spirit of the occasion, and reflects the upbeat personality of the brand.”

Brands and manufacturers hope to bag significantly higher volumes during the festive season and roll their inventories. “We are all geared up for the upcoming festival season and hope to do over 500 per cent more business than in the regular months. Post GST, consumers were a bit uncertain, especially at the start of the third quarter, but now sales momentum has picked up,” says **Shaishav Mittal, Founder & CEO, Lovely Bake Studio**, a premier European inspired bakery, which offers its guests 100 per cent egg-less delicacies, a first-of-its-kind concept in north India. Bolstering Lovely Bake Studio’s presence in the food segment is its sibling, Lovely Sweets, a leading manufacturer and retailer of traditional Indian sweets in north India. “Our product range across both brands performs extremely well in all formats. Cookies sell all the year round and sales of sweets range picks up during the festival season,” he adds.

“We are all charged up and look forward to positive growth from the forthcoming festive season during which we will be introducing new gift packs ranges. We expect 200-300 per cent growth in the festive season as compared to the normal season and hope to achieve 25 per cent of our total turnover from the festive season,” says **Prateek Athwani, Managing Director, Lal Sweets Pvt. Ltd**, one of the finest and premium brands of Indian traditional *laddoos*.

Businesses are all the more in anticipation of the upcoming festive season because the past few months had been quite volatile. “The past 8-9 months have been difficult for the industry on account of demonetization and GST implementation. However, we believe that in the long run these measures will be good for industry. Things have already started turning since last month and the trade is now in recovery mode. We are looking forward to the festive season with lots of enthusiasm in terms of boosting sales and catching up on the earlier lag. We expect the forthcoming festive season to be very good and promising,” says **Sanjay Jain, Director, Dugar Overseas Pvt. Ltd**, which is amongst India’s leading import, manufacturing, distribution and marketing houses, managing a products portfolio across categories such as chocolates, cream wafers, candies, cookies, juices and more with a bevy of globally loved FMCG brands from Europe, South America and Asia.

The buoyant festive sentiment is shared by **Gunjan Jain, MD, VKC Nuts**, a leader in nuts & dried fruits that sells its products under the brand name Nutraj. “As a land of multitude geographies, India is a true melting pot of diverse, myriad ethnicity and cultures, resulting in a number of festivals celebrated with much fervor and fanfare. We are now at the cusp of a major festive season and the excitement is palpable amongst diverse sectors, each expecting a surge in sales. The settling of the niggling issues related to GST a month ahead of the season augurs well for the business. The sectors expected to do particularly well are the ones that offer products ideal for Diwali gifting – FMCG, textiles and household goods in



“Percentage-wise, we should be growing by 20% as compared to the previous year. Since the previous months’ sales record has not been too good, we are hoping to see a tremendous rise in sales this festive season.

— **Sanjay Jain**  
Director, Dugar Overseas Pvt. Ltd



“We are expecting a 100% increase in overall business from the festive season, with our new line of gifting options in place. Also, we are now venturing into the consumer and corporate gifts arena.

— **Rishav Kanoi**  
Founder, Tea Trove



**We are aware that the consumer today has high expectations and, at the same time, is looking forward to innovation. With our Misht products, we endeavor to exceed expectations on all parameters.**

— **Pawan Kumar**  
Director, Supa Foods Pvt. Ltd



**An interesting differentiator in the cluttered festive market would be a product that appeals to the more youthful consumer, has both modern and cultural relevance, is aesthetic and adopts a contemporary approach.**

— **Yogesh Bellani**  
CEO, Fieldfresh Foods

general and dry fruits and sweets gift packs in particular.”

**Kamal Agarwal, MD, Sri Shandar Snacks Pvt. Ltd.**, which operates the Tastilo brand of snacks, says: “We are expecting exponential growth in sales this festive season with rapid growth in our premium category segment of snacks.” Even new players and entrants are setting great store by in souped up sales and profits in the coming months. “We have great expectations of sales this festive season as it will be our first festive season since we entered the Delhi market. We are expecting a 100 per cent increase in overall business from the festive season, with our new line of gifting options in place. Also, we are now venturing into the consumer and corporate gifts arena, innovating with an eco-friendly cork to make the best use of it as our tea gift packaging material,” says **Rishav Kanoi, Founder, Tea Trove**, a Kolkata-based tea company engaged in the cultivation, processing, trading and packing of tea.

Another new player, Supa Foods Pvt. Ltd, which operates the sweets brand Misht, is similarly gung-ho on business prospects in the months ahead. “We are very excited about our first festival season. Considering that we have already received great response through advance orders, we are very confident of achieving our goals. We are aware that the consumer today has high expectations and at the same time is looking forward to innovation. With our Misht products, we endeavor to exceed expectations on all parameters,” says **Pawan Kumar, Director**, who expects brand Misht to pull in bumper sales during the coming months and is counting on at least quadrupling its current sales.

On their part, retailers too are nursing high hopes from the ensuing festive season in terms of better sales traction, consumer connect, branding, etc. “We usually see a spike of 20-25 per cent in sales during



the festive period compared to regular months. Overall, F&G business zooms up, lead by chocolates, dry fruits, juices, sweets, biscuits, staples, oils, spices, *namkeens*, etc.,” reveals **Kunaal Kumar, Owner, Modern Bazaar** superstores in Delhi-NCR. According to **Sunil Jindal, Managing Director, SRS Ltd.**, a chain

of convenience stores in Delhi-NCR, “The festive season brings a great deal of cheer for both consumers and retailers. With a slew of festivals ahead, we expect great footfalls and sales traction at our stores. As the festive season is a period for spreading joy and happiness, the purchasing power of consumers is at its peak because there is a lot of gifting to be done. We expect to see a sales hike of 10-20 percent during this period.”

In fact, as Jindal point out, gifting has become a characteristic and intrinsic feature of the festive season. Both retailers and manufacturers aver that gifts have come to occupy an important part in our lives and gifting builds human relationships. “In the festive season, gifts occupy an important part as they help to cement ties and build bonds. In this fast-paced life, we occasionally get time to meet and greet our friends, relatives or business associates and gifts are a beautiful way to keep up and nurture our relationships. Festive season, through the medium of gifting, helps in nourishing our connections and this is a theme that plays across all product categories.

In the food category, people like to shop for value-offering items that have unique flavours and product combinations,” says **Vikram Agarwal, Director, Greendot Health Foods Ltd**, which operates the Cornitos brand of snacks. Agrees **Rafathullah Mohammed, CEO, Dukes India**, makers of a wide range of cookies, chocolates and wafers. “Given the Indian culture and traditions, gifting holds a very important place for each and every occasion. Whether it’s Rakshabandhan, Diwali or New Year, we love to celebrate it with something sweet and spread the joy of festivities with our near and dear ones.”

Retail analysts estimate that the gifting industry in India has registered strong growth over the past decade thanks to the rising income levels and aspirations. Also, aiding this growth are such factors as (on the demand side) the widening of the customer base, and (on the supply side) the offering of innovative products at attractive prices. Currently, the gifting market’s size is estimated at close to USD 50 billion, with many industry players reporting annual growth in the range of 20-40 per cent during the festive months. According to Sunil Jindal of





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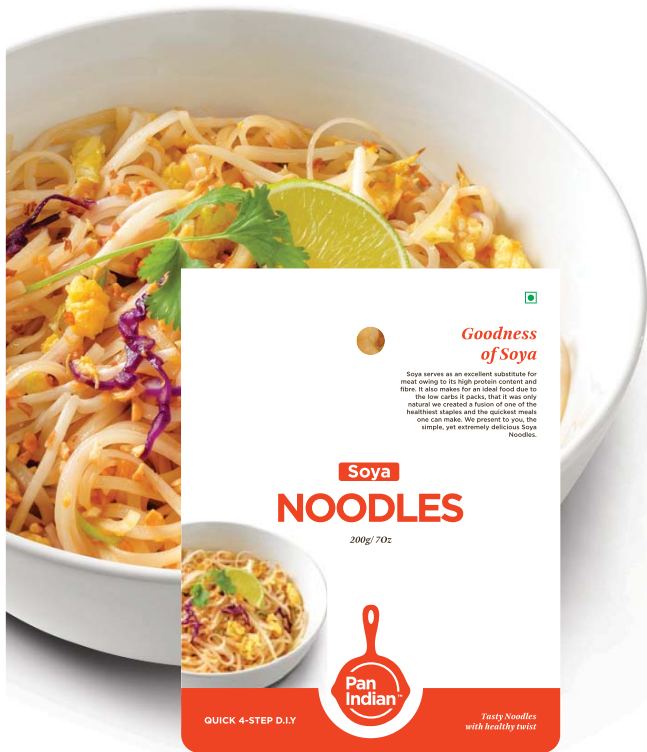
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SRS Ltd, "Food has always been a popular gifting category irrespective of any season. Sales of food items has always been very profitable during the festival season. The credit for higher sales during the period is due to the exciting range of products alongside attractive offers by retailers. At SRS, the sales contribution from the food segment is about 70 per cent whereas it is 30 per cent from non-foods."

### **New launches, innovations, gift packs...**

With gifting being an indispensable part of the festive season, the category has traditionally been dominated by



sweets, dried fruits and chocolates. However, in recent years, the gifting segment has grown and expanded considerably and now includes myriad product categories, even within the food segment. No wonder that markets suddenly come alive with an array of 'giftables' during the festive months. Though the season continues to be strongly dominated by sweets, chocolates, dry fruits and snacks, sales of non-traditional products like tortilla packs, exotic teas, coffee and fruits, jams, honey, saffron, marshmallows, crackers, sauces, wines, etc, have picked up sharply in recent years.

Retailers feel that gifting has moved away from being an occasional activity limited to events like Diwali, birthdays, weddings, etc., to becoming almost an everyday routine. Now, people are finding reasons to gift everyday and to everyone around them. So today you have gifts for occasions like a daily class test performed well, for achieving weight-reduction targets, for helping at home or work, etc. "The scope for gifting has increased hugely. This has led to new categories of gifts, which are being added on a regular basis. Also, the prices of gifts has been coming down, making them more affordable to larger swathes of the population and expanding the market for gifts," says Kumar of Modern Bazaar.

Not surprising that retailers, manufacturers and brands are focusing on coming out with attractive gift packs and new product launches. For instance, Nature's Basket offers food and gourmet gift hampers, which are occasion-specific and customizable. Foodhall, a Future Group company, has similar product offerings. Haldiram's, a traditional mithai store, realizing the opportunity in other food gift categories,



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**We usually see a spike of 20-25% in sales during the festive period compared to regular months.**

**Overall, F&C business zooms up, lead by chocolates, dry fruits, juices, sweets, biscuits, staples, oils, spices, namkeens, etc.**

— Kunaal Kumar  
Owner, Modern Bazaar



**Festive season, through the medium of gifting, helps in nourishing our connections and this is a theme that plays across all product categories. In the food category, people like to shop for value-offering items.**

— Sunil Jindal  
MD, SRS Limited

now offers innovative products and hampers in chocolate, gourmet, and bakery space. FMCG companies like PepsiCo, Parle, Coca-Cola offer innovative gift products during festive occasions, apart from their regular product offerings. New product innovation, creating consumer mindset about new products, enhancing the reach through both e-tail and retail, designing variety options, and bundling products based on consumer preference are the focus areas for players wishing to tap new consumer segments during the long festive season.

“This festival season, we will launch two new flavors – Mango Pickle & Cool Wasabi – besides also launching two attractive gift packs for the corporate sector as well as for modern retail market. We hope these new launches will give our brand a great mileage and offer an opportunity to our consumers to relish healthy snacking with their family and friends,” says Tastilo’s Kamal Agarwal. Greendot’s Cornitos brand, which hopes to garner a 25 per cent increase in sales during the festive season on the back of its newly launched Pop-N-Crunch nuts and seeds range has also recently launched a couple of exciting new gift packs in different categories ranging from nachos, seeds, nuts, dips, etc. “The new products launched as gift packs include 30 gm new packs of nacho crisps in nine flavors inside 9 Star Dip O’ Treat gift packs, roasted premium cashews in crack pepper flavor, and roasted pumpkin seeds in individual and combo gift pack named Nuts Delight. We have also introduced nacho crisps in 60 gm and 150 gm packs along with salsa 4 in 1 tray in Nacho Fiesta Gift Pack. Nacho Fiesta Gift Pack and 9 Star Dip O’ Treat gift packs are going to be our star performers as they combine nacho crisps in exotic flavours along with delectable dips – cheese dip and salsa dip,” points out Cornitos’ Vikram Agarwal.

Dugar Overseas, which believes in expanding its range by launching new products regularly, has launched Chocodates – a product from Dubai’s Notions Group – in four flavours (milk, dark,



coconut and assorted). Dugar Overseas’ Sanjay Jain says that Chocodates is a perfect gifting solution as it has all the three components that make for a good gift – date, nut (almond) and chocolate in each serving. “We have also launched two products from Germany. One is Katjes, premium jellies and a 100 per cent vegetarian product in five different shapes. The second German product is Impact Mints, which are sugar-free mints in seven different flavours. All the products in our portfolio have a loyal customer base, which keeps growing. In Sapphire nuts (almond, fruit & nut, hazelnut, etc), Sapphire cookies (butter cookies, chocolate & butter scotch flavour) and Chocodates, we have a great variety of products and all of these come in packs of 90 gm to 350 gm. Hence, retail and corporate customers can select any of these products based on their requirement. Also, both Sapphire and Chocodates come in affordable, medium range and premium packaging in order to cater to all segments of customers.”

Over the past few years, Dugar Overseas has been growing well and it expect to continue the momentum this year as well. “Percentage-wise, we should be growing by 20 per cent as compared to the previous year. As mentioned earlier, since previous months’ sales record has not been too good, we are hoping to see a tremendous rise in sales in the coming season,” says Jain. The company does not believe in run-of-the-mill schemes like ‘Buy One Get One Free’ as it feels that its prices are very reasonable and offer value for consumers. “We want to give something big to our consumers. Therefore, this season we are running a Golden Ticket scheme wherein every tin pack of our products will have a peel-off inside and the consumer might be lucky enough to find the Golden Ticket. These tickets will be redeemable gift vouchers of Tanishq ranging from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 20,000,” reveals Jain.

Likewise, Lal Sweets will be introducing several new products, especially for the festive season. Its new launches include Lal Sugarless Nutty Bites and





### Bakery, Cheese & Dairy Products

Dairy Products <b>Elle &amp; Vire</b> PROFESSIONNEL France	Cheese <b>ILE DE FRANCE</b> France	Cheese <b>CHAVROUX</b> France	Cheese <b>CEAUR LION</b> France	Cheese <b>Saint Agur</b> France		
Cheese <b>LE RUSTIQUE</b> France	Cheese <b>DELAKTIS</b> France	Cheese <b>TARTARE</b> France	Cheese <b>CHAVROUX</b> France	Cheese <b>GIOVANNI Ferrari</b> Italy	Cheese <b>VIRGILIO</b> Italy	
Cheese <b>sterilgarda</b> Italy	Cheese <b>FrieslandCampina</b> Holland	Cheese <b>Daily Dairy Holland</b> Holland	Cheese <b>Cheese Ingredients</b> France	Cheese <b>Ruscello</b> Holland	Cheese <b>CASA DEL CAMPO</b> Denmark	Cheese <b>CASA DEL CAMPO</b> Spain

### Snacks & food products

Biscuits <b>S'Michel</b> France	Canned & Frozen Vegetables <b>Bonduelle</b> France	Peanut Butter <b>peanut Butter &amp; Co</b> USA	Chocolate <b>VILLARS</b> Switzerland	Sauces <b>SACLA ITALIA</b> Italy	Meat <b>FONT-GANA</b> Spain
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### Beverage Products

Beverages <b>Cocio</b> Denmark	Beverages <b>granini</b> France	Syrups <b>Torani</b> USA
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**All the products in our portfolio have a loyal customer base, which keeps growing. However, we expect that this season our brand Sapphire and Chocodates will be star performers.**

— Vikram Agarwal  
Director, Greendot Health Foods Pvt. Ltd.



**We expect 200-300% growth in the festive season as compared to the normal season and hope to achieve 25% of our total turnover from the festive season.**

— Prateek Athwani  
MD, Lal Sweets Pvt. Ltd.



a range of gift boxes such as Lal Royal Treat, Lal Warm Wishes, Lal Happy Treat, among others. “We are expecting our Lal Happy Treat gift box to be the star performer due to its attractive packaging and affordable price point,” says Prateek Athwani, adding that the company will also be offering bumper promotions such as ‘Buy 1 Get 1 Free’ on *besan laddoo*, dry fruits, *halwa* bites, *shahi sohan papdi*, and its other products sporting a price range between Rs. 75 and Rs. 1,000. “Our affordable range will have products such as Lal Happy Treat, Lal Shahi Treat and Lal Warm Wishes. The premium and luxury range will comprise Lal Kaju Katli and Lal Sugarless Nutty Bites.”

Sweets brand Misht too will launch two new variants and introduce new packaging including a special packaging for gifting purpose. “While we have *kaju katli*, milk cake, *besan barfi* and *dodha barfi* in the market, we will launch Mathura *peda* and *badam barfi* as well. All these products are packaged in our unique single-piece packs that we call ‘Pods’, which have a high shelf life and are very convenient to store and consume. We are counting on our *kaju katli* and *badam barfi* to be big winners during the festive sales,” says Pawan Kumar.

“Launching new innovative products is a better strategy than giving offers and promotions to push your existing products range. Not only do you get word of mouth publicity, even your customers will always be on the lookout for what’s new that you are coming up with, which they can try or gift to their dear ones,” feels Tea Trove’s Rishav Kanoi, who will be introducing Blue Tea in the Indian market made from 100 per cent dried butterfly pea flowers. “We expect our new launch Blue Tea and Maharaja Kashmiri *Kahwa* to be star performers in tea category and our Cork Tea Gift packages to be a big hit with consumers and a bestseller in corporate gifting arena.”

Tea Trove, which has so far been a one-stop destination for buying all types of tea online, is now venturing into the consumer and corporate gifts arena. It has come out with an eco-friendly cork, an innovation that serves as a superior tea gift

packaging material. “Cork lends its unique textures, colors, and designs to our tea packaging, adding elegance to it,” he says. Pawan Kumar of brand Misht is also a great believer in the benefits accruing from new launches during festival months. “I believe there are many advantages of launching new products during the festive season. As consumer spend is at its peak, people are looking for all kinds of gifting options. So along with eyeballs, new products are able to get lots of trials.” According to Sanjay Jain of Dugar Overseas, “Launching a new product during the festive season guarantees automatic placement as the mood of retail channel partners is upbeat and they are willing to take the risk of trying out new products.”

### Sales drivers

Consumer gifting in food space is a very big market and growing at a very healthy rate. Therefore, in spite of competition, brands with good positioning and differentiators are growing quite well. While most brands continue to focus on quality and packaging and on new promotions to create excitement with the trade and the consumers, they are also focusing on developing value offerings and product lines with the affordability mindset in order to drive higher sales. Bringing in smaller packs at lower price points is a good way to gain volumes and be able to reach out to the masses.

“All our products are very economically priced, starting from Rs. 100 and going up to Rs. 600. This is mainly done keeping in mind the various needs of consumers and their gifting preferences. Our products are also more price-point driven and we are now providing unique ‘baskets’ to corporate clients wherein they can pick and choose the desired products to create a customized combo. This is going to be a very innovative concept in addition to the organized retail chains that we are already targeting,” points out Dukes’ Rafathullah Mohammed whose brand enjoys a huge market share in the wafer segment and has an extensive product portfolio across cookies and chocolates.





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**All our products are very economically priced, starting from Rs.100 and going up to Rs.600. This is mainly done keeping in mind the various needs of consumers and their gifting preferences.**

— Rafathullah Mohammed  
CEO, Dukes India



**The settling of niggling issues related to GST a month ahead of the season augurs well for the business. The sectors expected to do particularly well are the ones that offer products ideal for Diwali gifting.**

— Gunjan Jain  
MD, VKC Nuts

Like every year, this time too Dukes has come up with a wide range of products to cater to the huge demand of sweets and confectionery during festivals. As the brand prepares for its third consecutive year in the gifting segment, it has eight different SKUs of chocolate and confectionery to offer to consumers. “Almost all of our SKUs are brand new. From combi pack of Waffy, various size packs of Truffel, premium boxes of Danish Butter Cookies and Gourmet – everything is very fresh and unique! So, not just one but all our products will be bestsellers in their respective categories,” avers Mohammed. Some of Dukes SKUs like Truffel, Waffy, Gourmet and Danish Butter Cookies enjoy the reputation for being best-in-class products that are ideal for gifting and family get-togethers.

“Our special festive packages will not just be available in different sizes that suits everyone’s needs but will also be available in retail outlets from the beginning to the end of the season. Special attention is also being paid to accumulative stocking such that owing to last minute rush right before the festivals, we can replenish the products before stocks run out. In all, we are prepared well in advance to meet the increasing demand of consumers during the festivities and also to double our sales in this period as compared to the previous year. I am confident that with our pricing, distribution and stocking strategy in place, we are going to notch up a truly outstanding sales figure at the end of this period.”

Higher demand and sales of sweets, chocolates, cookies and confectionery have always marked the festive spirit. Says Kunaal Kumar of Modern Bazaar, “We do see the demand for chocolates, cookies and snacks grow higher in the festive season with improved availability. We are optimistic that with growing awareness and consciousness for healthier alternatives and eating options, the entire gamut of health products including gluten-free grains, honey, roasted and baked snacks, etc, to grow exponentially this season.”

In recent years, though a shift away from traditional sweets, cookies and confectionery has been noticed, sales of the latter remain strong and



continue to dominate the market. With the trend of gifting also catching up in smaller towns and cities and in the rural areas as well, baked confectionery has emerged as preferred gifting category, mainly due to the price positioning. As a mass consumption item, cookies and sweets enjoy huge acceptability amongst people from diverse background. “Tin gift hampers of cookies, assorted baklava and cookies boxes, granola dry fruit mix, baked sweets made out of rich dry fruit, assorted packs of *namkeen bhujia*, canned *jamun & soan papri* and *desi ghee channa barfi* are some products that we have lined up for the festival season. We feel tin boxes perform very well during festival sales as they are an ideal gift and people can reuse the tin boxes for their household chores. Our range of assorted baklava comes in gift packs of 6 pieces, 12 pieces and 15 pieces and the price range of our products is between Rs. 195 and Rs. 500,” says Lovely Bake’s Shaishav Mittal.

While Lovely’s Indian Sweets will be available in the affordable and premium category, its cookies gift hampers will be targeted at premium and luxury customers. “We have recently designed gift packs of granola dry fruit mix and introduced ‘Buy 2 and Get 1 Free’ for some products and ‘Buy 2 and Get 10 per cent Off’ as consumer offers for the festival season. We have also custom designed end caps/ display unit for the upcoming festival season and will be showcasing our complete range in those end caps.” Lovely Bake expects its cookies tin gift hampers and premium baklava sweets to have maximum sales traction during the festive season and will be undertaking extensive promotion, wet sampling and aggressive in-house branding via danglers, posters, boards in all MT chains.

While the festival season comes alive with an array of giftables, people are also becoming bored with traditional namkeens and snacks and are looking for something more exciting and innovative. “Customers are moving towards gift items that are personalized, classy, have a good shelf life, and which come in attractive packaging,” says Sunil Jindal of SRS. Gunjan Jain of VKC Nuts echoes a similar sentiment. “Though there is a huge demand for traditional nuts



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and dry fruits in the tier-2 and tier-3 cities, new-age customers from the urban sector are looking at experiencing new products and are exploring new varieties on offer. While we are catering to one segment of our audience with the regular products, we have also introduced a vast collection of exotics like apple rings, morels, pines, kiwis and more for the other segment to explore and indulge in.”

To meet the growing consumer expectations, brands like Cornitos are introducing differentiators in the form of attractive packaging and combinations of exciting flavours and products that offer delightful munching moments in tune with the effervescent mood of the festive season. “Our company’s strategy behind launching products during the festive season is to provide a platform for its consumers who are ready to pick new gift offerings that are unique and hold a value proposition. This time we have launched products catering to the interests of all kinds of customers. Cornitos gift packs have been designed to target all group of people whether young or old and all those who prefer healthy snacking and taste differentiators. We have worked to make our gift packs unique in packaging so that they have better

visibility on the shelf. Cornitos gift packs also provide different combinations of exotic flavours and products in a single pack. We are targeting everyone for our gift packs during the festive months by providing multiple price band choice to consumers for our gift packs,” says Vikram Agarwal. The company has positioned Cornitos’ offerings as a complete gifting solution under healthy snacking umbrella.

Brands also use attractive packaging to attract consumers’ eyeballs. Packaging design and aesthetics play a big role in the choices consumers make when it comes to festive gifting and that is why brands

**Packaging design and aesthetics play a big role in the choices consumers make when it comes to festive gifting and that is why brands lay great emphasis on eye-catching pack design.**



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lay great emphasis on eye-catching pack design. Most decisions about food gifting items take place in stores and packaging plays a key role in these fast, split-second decisions. Increasingly, companies are innovating with their packaging to underline their premium nature, adherence to food protection and safety standards, dynamism, the spirit of the occasion, etc. Given the importance of packaging in promoting sales, companies hire design teams and artists to create the right concept. Design, colors, and imagery play a vital role in the design process. PepsiCo, for instance, was successful in projecting packaged juices as a gifting item, owing largely to its attractive packaging.



**This festival season, we will launch two new flavors – Mango Pickle & Cool Wasabi – besides also launching two attractive gift packs for the corporate sector as well as for modern retail market.**

— **Kamal Agarwal**  
MD, Sri Shandar Snacks  
Pvt. Ltd.

Similarly, top beverage players Parle Agro, Coca Cola, Fresca Juices, Paperboat are banking on their newer offerings and refreshed packaging to stir up market buzz during the festive season. Fresca, which sells a range of 10 exciting variants such as litchi, mango, aam panna, tangy shikanji, lime water, mix fruit, apple, guava, pomegranate and pineapple, has developed attractive festive pack variants of tetra pack and PET. It plans to launch four different range of gift packs in both tetra and PET variants with a new fresh look, affordable prices in the Rs. 100 to Rs. 225 range along with the promise of assured quality. “We have made our festive packs very attractive and also convenient to carry; moreover the packs give a feeling of value for money. We have also done customization as to the number of pieces in a gift pack required by corporate and are also customizing specific flavors. Besides, we are coming up with Jaljeera drink for the festive season,” says **Akhil Gupta, MD, Fresca Juices**, adding that the

company expect 40 per cent of its overall business to come from the festive season sales ahead. “All food products have their own share in gifting but the share of juices has been increasing in the past 2-3 years. As far as brands are concerned, attractive packaging and distribution matters most in driving sales.

‘Healthy gifting’ as a category has gained noticeable traction among today’s consumers. More and more brands and new categories like olive oils, fruits, namkeens, dry fruits, etc, have joined the healthy snacking and gifting bandwagon over the years. Gift-ready packs, high on health, hygiene and variety are successfully engaging the consumers, and helping F&B companies gain a bigger market share during the festive season. Says **Ritesh Bajaj, Director, K.B.B. Nuts Pvt. Ltd**, which operates Tulsi and Gourmia brands, “Health products are currently in big demand so we are positive that dry fruits will sell big time this year too like every year. Our expectations are high and we hope to achieve double of the average monthly sales on the back of our premium gift packs comprising roasted nuts and exotic fruits.”

The company, which is among the largest nuts and dry fruits business group in India and among the top importers with over four decades of expertise in the nuts and dry fruits segment, offers a wide range of raw and flavored products for consumers, institutions, HoReCa and other sales channels. “We promote healthy nuts and nutritious dried fruits like prunes, cranberries, etc. Our brands in the gourmet segment are Tulsi, Gourmia and Magic Nuts with Gourmia Trail Mixes being the latest addition. Tulsi is our flagship brand with almonds as our lead product.” With a wide and attractive assortment of nuts and dry fruits at multiple price points between Rs. 445 and Rs. 995, K.B.B.’s new product offerings this season will include Trail Mixes and Blueberry. “We believe that the primary sales drivers during the festive season are product quality and right pricing. We plan to communicate our gift box options through strategic tie-ups with all major retail chains across India and by way of radio and print ad campaigns, says Bajaj.

According to Jain of VKC Nuts, “Our retail outlets will launch ‘Nut-Lounge Special gift boxes’, which will be a value addition on our traditional products. With newer flavours and coatings, these gift boxes will delight the connoisseurs on all the four parameters – health, taste, value and aesthetics. At Nutraj, we strongly believe that variety is the key to success of dry fruits in corporate gifting. We are expecting our customers to look beyond our traditional products like nuts and dry fruits and experience the modern and more exotic collection





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like dried pineapples, kiwis, apples, hazelnuts, pecans, macadamia nuts, etc., which are a treasure-trove of nutrition and good health.”

This festive season VKC Nuts hopes to tot up 25 per cent of its overall annual sales with the biggest contribution coming from its ‘dry fruit gift boxes’. “Our gift box segment make up about 95 per cent of our sales during the festive season. For our regular range of nuts & dried fruits, sales in the festive season accounts for almost 25 per cent of our annual sales. This season, we are bringing in a far wider range of attractive gift boxes to suit every budget. They will showcase our innovation in processes and products, and the value addition we bring in the form of new flavored range of nuts, dried fruits and berries. We are constantly looking for ways to enhance the snacking experience for our valued customers and, accordingly, we are offering a ‘value pack’ of handpicked, super selection of whole walnuts, along with a ‘unique designer walnut cracker’, which makes cracking these walnuts and consuming them fresh a deliciously wonderful experience,” reveals Jain.



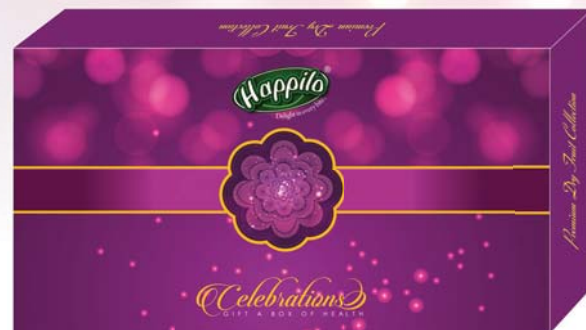
**We have also done customization as to the number of pieces in a gift pack required by corporate and are also customizing specific flavors. Besides, we are coming up with Jaljeera drink for the festive season.**

— Akhil Gupta  
MD, Fresca Juices

#### Branding, promotion and online

In keeping with the spirit of the festive season and the upbeat business sentiment, brands, manufacturers and retailers will be busy promoting products through print ads, radio, leaflets, in store marketing material, sampling and exhibitions. Also, one can expect to see lots of in-store promotions to attract consumers. “This year, we plan to actively engage with social media and we have hired an agency to take care of our back-end. We also have plans to take adverts in magazines. As I mentioned earlier, we are running a Golden Ticket scheme, which is a major investment towards brand building,” reveals Sanjay Jain of Dugar Overseas.

Rafathullah Mohammed of Dukes India has a slightly different take. “As the festive period is for a limited duration, one cannot really plan elaborate advertising schemes. So your target has to be very specific and to the point. We are aiming at having a



strong communication with our consumers through select mass media platforms. Also, as buying is a very impulsive decision in the FMCG category, it’s very rare that you pre-decide on a certain brand before entering a supermarket. So, we are looking at additional paid visibility within large retail outlets. We hire space in a large format retail store and use it to display our products in an attractive fashion. We believe this approach ensures your products receive consumers’ attention and even retailers take much interest in promoting the same to consumers.” As one of the top FMCG companies to have a strong presence in modern trade, which contributes 50 per cent of its total sales, Dukes is not averse to making bold investments for strengthening and expanding its outreach further and to more retail channels. “Over the years, we’ve gained hugely from organized retail presence and going forward we are confident of being on the right track. Our variety in cookies, wafers, digestive biscuits and cream biscuits allows us to make an impact on every category – from economical to niche.”

Other FMCG brands too have ensured strategic reach of their products this festive season with extensive tie-ups with retailers. “We are the only nuts & dried fruit company in India present in all the trade channels and we straddle imports, exports, processing, distribution, and private label packing. We have our own branded packing for pan-India sales through modern and traditional retailers. And now, we also have our own retailing venture with our newly opened ‘Concept Nuts & Dried Fruits Stores’. These self-owned stores offer a very unique retailing experience to customers by making available the widest range of nuts, dried fruits, seeds and berries,” says Gunjan Jain of VKC Nuts. “Modern trade is definitely the future of retail industry. More and more people like to go to supermarkets and browse. This helps new brands like ourselves get noticed and hence tried. I believe there is no other trade format that allows so much browsing and searching for new products. 75 per cent of our retail sales come through modern trade,” avers Misht’s Pawan Kumar.



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According to Sanjay Jain of Dugar Overseas, “We have tied up with the entire organized channel for the forthcoming season. We are also planning to provide exclusive in-shop promotions during Diwali with the top 40 retailers in Delhi/ NCR to promote our Sapphire gifting range.” “We will go for digital marketing and for advertising we have chosen social media as the medium to reach out to our consumers and would-be consumers. All the updates will be there on our page on Facebook and Instagram about our exciting festive range offers,” says Akhil Gupta of Fresca Juices.



**Health products are currently in big demand so we are positive that dry fruits will sell big time this year too like every year. Our expectations are high and we hope to achieve double of the average monthly sales.**

— Ritesh Bajaj  
Director,  
K.B.B. Nuts Pvt. Ltd.

The festive season also brings with it a host of opportunities for online retailing. With online shopping on the rise, there is an increasing demand for products like imported wines, cheeses, chocolates, dry fruits and gourmet products, etc. The demand is fueled by increased consumption during the festive period and paucity of time. Taking the cue, retailers have begun to aggressively focus on online as another new channel of distribution whereas large e-commerce companies like Amazon and Flipkart have dedicated specific sections to gifting.



At the same time, most players in the offline space like Nature’s Basket, Foodhall, etc, are widening their online presence to capture the online gifting space. New, dedicated gifting portals have been launched to capture this space like giftease.com, giveter.com, indianguiftsportal.com, and wishpicker.com, to name a few. The offerings on these websites include bakery products, assorted chocolates, confectionery, dry fruits, sweets, and other gourmet products, apart from other categories like flowers, jewelry, watches, etc. With rising time paucity and ever-longer distances separating families, the role of e-commerce will only deepen in the future, thanks to the rising penetration of Internet service providers.

The trends highlighted above are expected to become magnified in the years to come, and can result in radical changes in the gifting space in



terms of product offerings, channels, packaging, events and occasions, customer needs, and brand innovations. It is an exciting time to be in the space and enjoy alongside customers who are also rejoicing in their happy occasions, while also innovating with them. However, though online players have come to play a vital role in today’s world for individual gift pack deliveries, but when it comes to the corporate segment, companies still wish to take from the supplier directly and not through online channels. That is because they can get huge discounts and customization options from offline players. But at the same time, the trend towards buying gift items online is catching fast. For big retailers like HyperCity, the offline versus online contribution is about 80:20 currently for its gifting SKUs. But while it is true that the traditional way of organised delivery is time taking, the gifting season is more of an organized shopping compared to online shopping. According to Gupta of Fresca Juices, “Sixty-five per cent of our sales will be accounted for by traditional retail and 35 per cent through the online channel.

But all said and done, it is worthwhile to note that only those companies that pay attention to their supply chain can reap exponential benefits during the festivity period. The adage ‘supply creates its own demand’ can come true in the festive season with companies whose products are readily available and thus scoring higher in terms of customer preference. The customer is hassled by various commitments during the festive season and the decision to buy a product is generally a quick one. FMCG companies will need to reinforce their supply chains to avoid delay in supplies and to readily occupy shelf space. In this context, demand planning, inventory management, supply chain responsiveness, manufacturing agility and reliability, and logistics are some of the enablers on which the success or failure of a company will depend, especially during the festival season. With so much at stake and so much to look forward to during the months ahead, the festive season this year holds lots of promise in stores for all – producers, consumers and retailers. **PG**



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*“We are market leaders in wafers category”*

Ravinder Kumar Agarwal, Managing Director, Ravi Foods Pvt Ltd, which makes of a range of biscuits, wafers, chocolates and confectioneries under the Dukes brand, speaks to Progressive Grocer about the impressive growth of the brand and his vision to make it one of the leading household brands in the country with a global footprint.

“

**Our product portfolio ranges from our signature wafers, ‘Waffey’ to Waffey rolls, premium dark wafers, cream biscuits, chocolates, candies, cookies and assorted gift packs amongst others.**

— Ravinder Kumar Agarwal  
MD, Ravi Foods Pvt Ltd



**Tell us about your company and its products?**

Dukes, as a company, has been marketing a range of biscuits, wafers, chocolates and confectioneries for over two decades. Our product portfolio ranges from our signature wafers, ‘Waffey’ to Waffey rolls, premium dark wafers, cream biscuits, chocolates, candies, cookies and assorted gift packs amongst others. We have set up state of -the- art manufacturing facilities, kept pace with the market trends and adapted to the ever changing business landscape.

As a brand, “Dukes” was created under the Ravi Foods label in the year 1995. We started with a manufacturing facility based out of Hyderabad, introducing a modest range of biscuits and wafers to cater to the city and its neighboring towns. Today, we distribute our products across India and have a reputation for maintaining consistent quality.

We are able to achieve this on account of our stringent quality and safety processes, which remain our areas of focus. A testimony to our quality is the fact that we have been chosen as partners by brands like ITC, Britannia and Parle to manufacture for them. We started operations with a mission to ‘Make for India and sell to the world’ much before it became a buzzword. This has inspired us to go global as a leading exporter to over 90 plus countries including the US, Middle East and Africa. Today, the Dukes Group has a turnover of INR 1,200 crore.

**Which consumer segments are your products targeted at?**

Our products cater to the entire spectrum, from children to adults. Typically, 70% of our consumers is anywhere between the age group of 6-18 years. The rest 30% belong to all age groups. For our product range, children are key influencers and parents are the decision makers.

**What has been the growth rate of your product offerings?**

Our flagship brand in the modern trade format has been Waffey. As market leaders in the category, we have driven growth and triggered the entry of new players in this segment. Our business strategy is to grow the market exponentially and to partake of a larger pie as we have invested in increasing the overall market size in the cream wafer category.

**What is your strategy for taking your products to newer markets and demographics?**

We are a strong player in the export segment in our category and we are exporting to over 90 countries across USA, Canada, Europe, Middle East, Africa & South East Asia. We have been recognized for our stellar performance in the area of export with the Best Exporter award by the Ministry of Commerce, Government of India, in 2017. Our sales and distribution network is well spread across India and we are strong across both Northern and southern markets.

**How are you looking at health foods?**

Health consciousness is on the rise today. And so is the market for healthy, wholesome foods. We, at Dukes, are committed to good quality products. We have also launched our new product - digestive biscuit - in this segment. We will be keen on exploring products that would serve the health conscious and discerning consumer as a long term strategy as we envisage the size of this niche market growing into a sizeable segment.

**What is the contribution from MT and GT to the overall sales of your products?**

Our endeavor is to grow in general trade just as we are growing in modern trade. With 90 lakh outlets, it is possible to create communication synergy only with advertising and mass media. We have grown exponentially in modern trade in the last five years since we started focusing on this channel. Now with some strategic brand building, we would like to further drive consumer preference and leverage that to build a larger space for ourselves in both modern and general trade.

Taking up significant shelf space with multiple points of purchase within the same outlet and aiding recall and purchase have been among the many initiatives taken up by the brand. Product innovation is also a key ingredient for success in this marketplace. Dukes creams and bourbon are household favorites and enjoy a significant share in modern trade.

### What are the competitive advantages for your products?

Quality, innovation and competitive pricing give the Dukes brand a distinct edge. We promise unflinching quality. We keep introducing new variants into the market. Consumers love our range of innovative products and so also the attractive offers and deals we offer them. I can confidently state that Dukes has won the hearts and palates of consumers of all ages across India. From Dukes they expect and get a complete value deal.

### What is your marketing and branding strategy for promoting your line of products?

We have initiated a series of marketing initiatives. The brand's promotional and marketing strategy is comprehensive, communicating across multiple consumer touch points - from ATL and BTL to social and digital marketing campaigns. Dukes had recently launched its TV campaign for the flagship brand Waffy. To raise the product's Happiness Index, Waffy was positioned with the tag line 'Don't Worry be WAFFY'. Our digital campaign around Rakhi #sheismybro started trending on twitter at #2 position in many locations, grabbing the attention of over a million viewers on Facebook, thus building its own community of followers. With a range of Loony Tunes merchandise, and collectibles to be rolled out post Diwali, the company is set for ambitious targets for the last two quarters of the year.

### What is the scope for greater value-addition in your product range and is there any such innovation being done or planned by your company?

Unconventional strategies are essential to yield breakthroughs for challenger brands. Change is the key to growth. At Dukes, we are constantly pushing the envelope to explore new products and packaging. Over the next few years, we will roll out products that are innovative in terms of features and packaging. This has been the brand's hallmark from its inception and to that end a strategic long term road map is very much in place.

### Tell us about your future plans and what you are doing to strengthen the market share.

As a market leader, we enjoy a 70% presence for Waffy across Modern Trade. Currently we have a pan-India brand presence in all markets. We continue to focus on our objective to make sure we achieve sustained growth. Our vision for 2020 is to emerge as one of the leading household brands in the country having a global presence and delivering world-class products and bringing happiness and delight to all our customers and associates. We are focused at becoming an Indian multinational with a manufacturing footprint across the globe.

Our huge export base is constantly exposing our team to emerging trends and latest technology in product development, manufacturing and packaging. This would ensure and help us while introducing new products into the Indian market. The FMCG retail sector is fiercely competitive and challenging.

We are opening up new facilities and introducing new products. We believe we have a clear competitive edge in both traditional and modern business formats. With a robust e-Commerce and e-Retailing strategy, we hope to fully engage the modern technology driven customer and emerge as an innovative leader in this excitingly competitive Indian and global market. **PG**

**As a market leader, we enjoy a 70% presence for Waffy across Modern Trade. Our vision for 2020 is to emerge as one of the leading household brands in the country having a global presence and delivering world-class products.**



# Pale ale to be the next wave in the beer industry

Lagers have largely dominated the beer market in India but the scope for IPAs (Indian Pale Ale), wheat beer, sour beer and pilsners is immense and their consumption will pick up significantly in times to come.

By Fernando Bustamante

**In terms of volume, the Indian beer market grew from 18 million hectolitres in 2011 to 25 million hectolitres in 2015. The market is expected to cross 32 million hectolitres by end 2020.**

**B**eer is one of the oldest alcoholic beverages in the world, dating back to the fifth millennium BC. Its use has been recorded in the written history of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. So when we sip that refreshing mug of our favourite beer, we are actually tasting a brew that was much preferred by our ancient ancestors. That said, beer has evolved both with time and across cultures. So much so that today there are multiple types and brands of beer – virtually from every country across the world, each with its distinct taste and following.

As per the recent report by BMI Research, the beer industry of India presents a huge potential. In terms of volume, the Indian beer market grew from 18 million hectolitres in 2011 to 25 million hectolitres in 2015. The market is expected to cross 32 million hectolitres by end 2020, which is an absolutely amazing statistic! Beer has one of the lowest ABV (Alcohol By Volume) levels (usually in the range of 5–8%) among all alcoholic beverages, and that is perhaps one reason for its popularity both across the world as well as in India. That's considering the fact that the Indian palate has a tendency, by and large, to tip towards stronger beers with an ABV closer to 8%.

There is another reason for the unprecedented growth of the beer market in India. It could be because of the openness of beer connoisseurs in India to experiment both with brands and with freshly brewed craft beers. Experts feel that the impact of imported brands on the beer market in India will be akin to those of the coffee chains on the coffee business in India. Global beer brands such as Corona, Stella Artois, Hoegaarden, Mahou 5 Star & Mahou Clásica have been hugely successful in India. The rise of microbreweries has also opened India's palate to the charms of fresh as well as craft beers. Dating as far back as 2009, when India's first microbrewery, Doolally, opened its gates for the beer lovers in Pune, today India boasts of several hundreds of such microbreweries across all the major



metros with unbelievable variety such as the exotic mango beer or the delicious wheat beer. In turn, India's thirst for this delightful brew is ever growing!

But it's not just about business or alcohol content. Beer is seen as a social drink, one that is to be savoured in the company of friends, while sharing positive experiences. The beverage is associated with exuberance, passion, and energy. For example, it is par for the course to watch a game of football with friends while sipping beer. Beer is not usually consumed with the intent to get the so-called 'hit'. Instead, beer aficionados enjoy the brand for its taste and flavour and its association with football. Mahou, in particular, has a deep association with the world's most beautiful game. Mahou 5 Star is the official sponsor of La Liga in Spain, which sees fierce competition from powerhouses such as Real Madrid, Atlético de Madrid, Villarreal, Getafe, Leganés, Alcorcón, and other clubs.

When I think of India in terms of its beer consumption patterns, it has been largely dominated by lagers. The next wave in the industry will ride on IPAs (Indian Pale Ale), wheat beer, sour beer and pilsners. The scope is immense and these will pick up in India in times to come, which is good news for the consumer.

So the next time you want to enjoy beer – try it in the Spanish style of Cañas and Tapas. Roughly translated as 'beer and snacks' – a Caña is a small glassful of beer containing roughly around 200 ml of the brew, while Tapas are small portions of delicious bite-sized snacks that go with tempered amounts of beer. Mix and match the Tapas with the Caña to suit your palate and for that perfect taste. You will be pleasantly surprised to find that your evenings last longer, the conversations become more interesting, and the experience is memorable. **PG**



The writer is CEO, Mahou India, a fully owned subsidiary of Spanish beer company Mahou San Miguel.

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*“We are looking at E-retail partnerships to expand our consumer reach”*



**Neelima Burra**  
Chief Marketing Officer, Cargill Foods India



Neelima Burra, Chief Marketing Officer, Cargill Foods India, speaks to Progressive Grocer on the company's pioneering innovations in different oil categories and about its plans to expand the products' reach through the digital channel.

**Tell us about your FMCG business and products.**

Cargill Foods India operates across a wide array of oil categories – spanning sunflower and soyabean, groundnut, mustard largely as non-refined oils, as well as olive at the top end of the market. Sunflower and soyabean together constitute 67% of CFI B2C business.

Cargill Foods India enjoys a national presence through its brands Gemini, Nature Fresh oil and packaged atta, Sweekar, Rath, Sunflower (hydrogenated fats) and Leonardo olive oil. Gemini is Maharashtra's leading sunflower brand, built on the platform of heritage. It was the first branded oil to be vitamin fortified. Nature Fresh is positioned as a light oil for active life. Sweekar Advance is high oleic sunflower oil, while the Leonardo olive



oil comes in all variants including the recently launched new variant- Leonardo olive oil-Extra Light, which is best suited for day-to-day Indian cooking.

**What is the value differentiator for your products? How would you describe the competitive USP and differentiators for your products vis-a-vis the competition?**

The biggest differentiator for our product range is the high quality that we offer to the consumers. In line with our global philosophy of nourishing people, Cargill Foods India has been a pioneer in setting industry benchmarks in terms of quality, hygiene and packaging. We were the first in the industry to offer fortification in edible oil through our brand Gemini in the year 2008.

Our packaged atta brand Nature Fresh offers a unique consumer proposition of three pronged benefits: high dietary fiber; made from 100% whole wheat; perfectly grounded, i.e. 'Na Zyada Bareek Na Zyada Dardara'. These three benefits come together to give the new-age consumer a high quality product, which not only aids better digestion and absorption but also gives more strength and energy to the body. Nature Fresh Samporna Chakki Atta was awarded the esteemed Consumer Superbrand honour in the Superbrands Consumer Award and is also the fastest growing packaged atta brand in the country.

Our relentless commitment has made Cargill an endearing brand among consumers and our aim is to be the most preferred FMCG brand in the country.

**What is the consumption pattern, growth rate and market size for your product categories?**

The demand for a variety of oil is very region-specific (see infographic). For the urban population, we have



been witnessing a preference that is skewed towards healthier refined oils like soybean, sunflower and newer oils like olive oil.

**Which are your best-selling products, their major markets and the market share they occupy?**

Brands in Cargill India's portfolio cater to varied consumer segments with differentiated demographics, psychographics and geography. Oil industry is a very fragmented brand play. Every state has its own choice of brand which, in turn, is governed by ethnicity and the heritage of taste. Brands in Cargill like Gemini and Sweekar sunflower oil, Rath, are iconic leaders in their respective markets. We also have Leonardo olive oil in our portfolio, which is leading the olive oil category.

**How do you see the growth rate for your products in recent years? How do you see the demand for your products growing in the future?**

If you look at India geographically, food, lifestyle, culture and choice of oil changes every 500 kilometers. South India consumes more of sunflower oil, North and East consume soya and mustard oil respectively. It becomes very difficult to make a generic campaign, which will resonate well from North to South and East to West. Looking at the way the oil industry is fragmented, our strategy has always been to speak to consumers one-to-one in their language in a manner which reflects their culture and tradition, to make it relevant to them.

In addition, we have seen changes in the consumption pattern over a decade. Internet education has helped people to gain more information and consumers are seeking knowledge and understanding about the product they want to use. Their demand from the product and the manufacturers is very specific and hence our strategy is also to actively engage with the consumers on the digital platform through e-retail and e-marketing campaigns.

**Do you have a retail strategy for reaching out to the smaller towns and cities and how do you think of the growth opportunities in these geographies? How do you see the growth trends for your products in urban versus rural areas?**

We are present pan-India and our products and brands are widely distributed in leading stores in modern trade and general trade. E-retail is an upcoming channel trend and we are looking at partnerships to expand our consumer reach through this platform.

Our brands have a strong regional pull so we are strong both in metro and smaller cities.



**What are your plans for strengthening the market share and consumer reach of your products?**

Brands in the CFI portfolio enjoy good equity in their respective markets and we will continue to create more engagement opportunities with consumers. On brands that are still early in their life cycle, we plan to take them to more households, leveraging our wide presence of distributors.

**Tell us about your existing production capacity and manufacturing facilities and your plans for ramping up the operations going ahead?**

CFI owns and operates three state-of-the-art edible oil refineries located at Paradeep (Odisha), Kandla (Gujarat) and Kurkumbh (Maharashtra).

**What do you see as the way forward for Cargill Foods in terms of growth, opportunities and challenges?**

The CFI strategy is to emerge as the most preferred consumer brand in the food space through our brands – Gemini sunflower oil, Sweekar sunflower oil, Nature Fresh, Leonardo olive oil and Rath.

**What are the major milestones you are looking to achieve in India?**

Cargill India is a global leader in nourishing people. In India, our aim is to be the most preferred consumer brand with presence in center of plate through staple food categories and edible oils. **PG**

**We have seen changes in the consumption pattern over a decade. Internet education has helped people to gain more information and consumers are seeking knowledge and understanding about the product they want to use.**



# Whole-store Health Solutions

Take the following steps to encourage customers to eat better — no matter which part of the supermarket they shop.

**C**onsumers want to shop in supermarkets that support, rather than dictate, healthful food options. They want a shopping environment that presents healthful and delicious meal solutions, yet allows them to maintain the freedom to choose the foods they believe are right for themselves and their families.

To this end, customers expect high levels of food variety, freshness and nutritional quality, and demand greater transparency, accuracy and detail in food information supplied by both food manufacturers and food retailers. The term “healthy” now equates to a broader consumer expectation for nutritious, delicious, safe foods produced with integrity and sustainability in mind.

Grocers can become preferred health-and-wellness destinations by delivering authentic guidance and solutions across the whole store.

## Beyond the Perimeter

Without question, the store’s perimeter — stocked with fresh produce and high-quality seafood, meats, deli and prepared foods — is the first place that core wellness shoppers will look for foods that support health. It shouldn’t be the only place, however.

Health solutions can be found in unexpected places throughout the store. It’s now become part of a grocer’s job to explain the health benefits and provenance of these items and make them easier for customers to find.

## Nudge Shoppers Toward Nutritious Choices

While working as a director for a grocery retailer, I created a superfoods program — still in use today — to guide shoppers toward highly nutritious, whole foods sold throughout the store.

Using a combination of in-store signage, a superfoods shopping list and in-ad messaging, the program highlights dozens of specific superfoods across the produce, center store, frozen, dairy, seafood, meat and deli departments, and tells what makes each food so nutritious. The initiative works in synergy with ongoing efforts — nutrition attribute tagging, nutrition education store tours, healthy recipes with instructional videos, a bimonthly magazine and blog — designed to nudge shoppers toward nutritious choices.

## It’s Not Just About ‘Free-From’

The latest foods being introduced in the natural and organic space often include a host of claims of what they’re “free from,” including GMOs, additives, preservatives, dyes, corn syrup, allergens and gluten.

However, retail dietitians must remind customers that what the food includes is as important as what it excludes, when it comes to overall nutritional value. A gluten-free, non-GMO, organic chip is still a chip. Nevertheless, sales data suggest wellness-seeking customers are redefining health and wellness to include a balance of both indulgent and more sensible choices as part of an overall healthy dietary pattern.

## Make ‘Healthy’ Easy and Affordable

Try featuring a meal solution or recipe of the week that meets healthy criteria and is easy to prepare. Make it an affordable choice for customers by offering price savings on at least one or two key recipe ingredients, merchandise ingredients together for convenience, and offer recipe sampling during high-traffic hours to dispel the consumer myth that “eating healthy won’t taste good.” Suggest a portion-controlled, indulgent dessert that contains at least one healthful ingredient.

## Progressive Prepared Foods

Meet demands for prepared foods that are healthful options. Create menu selections and meal kits that support wellness goals and help trim the time and energy required to prepare meals from scratch. Short-cut solutions, including delicious veggies, whole grain side dishes and healthy main dishes, can conveniently combine with other foods sold in the aisles to create semi-homemade meals.

Be transparent by disclosing ingredients, origins, nutrition facts and production methods to help guide customer purchasing decisions. **PG**



**Grocers can become preferred health-and-wellness destinations by delivering authentic guidance and solutions across the whole store.**



**Karen Buch, RDN, LDN, is a registered dietitian/nutritionist who specializes in retail nutrition marketing and communications. One of the first supermarket dietitians, she’s now founder of and principal consultant at**

**Nutrition Connections LLC, providing consulting services nationwide. She can be reached on Twitter @karenbuch and at NutritionConnectionsLLC.com.**



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# “In-depth know-how of imported foods is our core strength”

Sunil Agarwal, promoter of Pune-based Fine Foods, speaks to Progressive Grocer about his stores' specialty and core strengths, trends in imported world foods and how his small format store chain has played to its strengths and established a solid reputation in gourmet retailing.

“  
Our customers come back to us repeatedly because of the assurance that most of their requirement in imported gourmet foods and other categories will be available with us.

— Sunil Agarwal  
Promoter, Fine Foods

## How would you describe the journey of your stores over the years?

Fine Foods, a specialty imported gourmet food store, opened in January 2010 in the upmarket Aundh area of Pune. We decided to open the store in this neighborhood as the area was lacking a premium gourmet food store. We got good response at Aundh, which encouraged us to expand. We identified that the west side of Pune lacked premium gourmet food stores despite the presence of a good potential clientele. We opened our second store on Karve Road in June 2010 and our third store in Bavdhan in February 2014.

Fine Foods stores follow the small gourmet store format. Our priority and focus is to provide an exhaustive range of premium imported food products in all the possible categories. Over the years, we have included frozen, non-veg & veg sections, local dairy & cheese sections, home baking sections to our already vast repertoire in imported foods.

## What is your location strategy for the stores?

Our stores are located in the proximity of residential areas that have a potential clientele for our products. Thanks to our location strategy, our stores enjoy a reputation for being the friendly neighborhood gourmet food stores. We offer the convenience of availing premium imported foods very nearby rather than having to travel far to the large format stores located on commercial high streets.

## What is the profile of your customer base?

We cater to and our products appeal to all consumer segments – young kids, working couples, expats, homemakers, home chefs, gourmet food enthusiasts, to name a few.

## What are the categories you specialize in as a gourmet retailer?

We carry an exhaustive range in imported food products: chocolate & confectionery, world



cuisines, snacks & savouries, dairy & cheese, bakery & biscuits, beverages, fresh & canned exotic vegetables, health foods, tea & coffee, home baking needs, ready to eat, edible oils, exotic groceries, specialty sauces & spreads, breakfast cereals, frozen meats & veg, impulse items (mouth fresheners, gums & mints, etc), specialty eggs & breads, specialty ice creams, and many more products across categories.

**What is your strategy for space allocation across different categories?**

In our stores, priority and space is given to the categories that have maximum sales turnover. Such categories in our stores are chocolate & confectionery, dairy & cheese, frozen foods and cuisine sections such as Oriental, Italian, Continental, etc. High sales turnover categories are given maximum frontage and merchandising space. As we have small format stores – with 500 sq.ft. average area – the merchandising flow is maintained as per the individual needs of respective stores.

**What is the sales contribution from your major product categories?**

The major product categories contribute 25-30% of our total sales.

**Which are the new and emerging categories at your stores?**

Home baking needs, locally made European style cheeses and organic/ gluten-free/ sugar-free foods are the new and emerging categories in our stores. In the future, we expect these categories will contribute considerably to overall sales.

**Which are the best-selling brands for your fast growing products?**

Imported chocolates, Italian foods like pastas, pasta sauces, pizza sauces, olives, oriental sauces, breakfast cereals, cheese, fresh exotic vegetables, frozen non-veg, Continental sauces & spreads are the fastest moving categories in our stores.

Brands like American Garden, Lindt Chocolates, Ferrero, Barilla Pasta & Sauces, Pantai, Tabasco, Haribo, Ritter Sport, Tiffany, Cavendish & Harvey, Yan Yan, Hintz Cocoa Powder, Monin syrups, Kara, Batchelors soups, etc, are some of the best selling brands in our stores.

**What are the trends in your stores for the major categories?**

Home baking needs, locally made European style cheeses, organic, sugar-free & gluten-free foods and ready-to-eat International foods are currently trending in our stores.

**What are the marked differentiators of your stores that put you apart from the other retail players? Which are the elements that are the hallmarks of your stores?**

Regular replenishment and consistent availability of the most popular imported SKUs is our specialty. We have maintained excellent relations with our vendors (Importers & Suppliers), due to which we have been able to build a loyal customer base. Our customers come back to us repeatedly because of the assurance that most of their requirement in imported gourmet foods and other categories will be available with us.

**Do you run loyalty programs/ schemes for strengthening your customer base?**

We are constantly providing schemes and offers to our customers on various products. We have a separate ‘Offer Section’ for customers and in our experience the schemes and offers provide a good boost to our average sales.

**Fine Foods stores follow the small gourmet store format. Our priority and focus is to provide an exhaustive range of premium imported food products in all the possible categories.**



**Any marketing activities that you prefer for pushing sales in your stores?**

We prefer to do ‘Direct to Customer’ promotional activities like dry & wet sampling of products. Potential customers get to experience the products first hand before making a purchase. We run sampling promotions of various companies and products during most weekends. We have built a good clientele by word of mouth and we enjoy a strong reputation for products’ availability in our stores. We also promote our stores through our Facebook page.

**How do you take care of the customer feedback loop at your stores?**

Our stores run on a very customer-centric model. The entire product mix of the stores vary according to the feedback and needs provided by our esteemed

customers of the respective areas. Of course, all SKUs are standardized in our stores, but we do some dynamic customizations in the product mix as per the customer needs, which is as an added value for our customers.

**How do you keep up with the fast evolving food trends and how do you keep refreshing your supplier base to align with the emerging consumer demands?**

We remain constantly in touch with the retail scene in our city and nationally. As such, we get to know about the latest and emerging trends for different categories of products. We also visit various trade exhibitions like Annapoorna and Aaahar. Magazines like Progressive Grocer, too, provide valuable inputs on the latest food and grocery trends and based on these inputs we work on improving our vendor base and the quality of suppliers.

**What is the extent of your direct sourcing?**

We source mostly from local distributors but we do source directly from importers for some product ranges.



**Are there any interesting concepts or innovations that you have introduced at your stores?**

Although it is not related to food, we have started a small category section of premium imported cosmetics, as per a customer requirement survey done by us. We are getting a very good response to this initiative.

**Any initiatives to strengthen your supply chain model?**

We have a back-end warehouse facility, which enables us to stock and replenish our stores without any gaps.

**What is the scope for utilizing and leveraging technology for your store format?**

There is tremendous scope for leveraging technology. Software systems for managing inventory control, POS, accounting, etc, provide us the exact information to perform in a better way and streamline our operations.

**What do you feel are your strengths and achievements?**

In-depth know-how of imported food categories is our core strength. Providing the most possible varieties and categories of imported foods products in small format stores consistently for the last seven years has been our most fulfilling achievement.

**What's in store for the future by way of your expansion?**

We are currently looking to increase the floor space at some of our stores to accommodate more product categories. We are also looking to increase our store count in other cities like Bangalore & Mumbai. **PG**

Providing the most possible varieties and categories of imported foods products in small format stores consistently for the last seven years has been our most fulfilling achievement.



**→ FACT BOX**

- ▶ Name of store/ chain: **Fine Foods**
- ▶ Retail format of stores: **Specialty imported gourmet food store**
- ▶ Number of stores in operation: **Three stores in Aundh, Bavdhan and Karve Road, Pune, Maharashtra**
- ▶ Start of Operation of the first store: **January 2010**
- ▶ Average size of stores: **600 sq.ft.**
- ▶ Total retail area under operation: **2,000 sq.ft.**
- ▶ Operating model - company owned/ leased/ rented: **Leased/ Rented**
- ▶ SKU count in stores: **6,000 to 7,000**
- ▶ Average daily/ weekly footfall at stores: **500 visitors per day**
- ▶ Average bill size/ transaction: **Rs. 500**
- ▶ Average sales per sq.ft.: **Rs. 2000 per sq.ft.**
- ▶ Supplier base: **Local suppliers, as well as those from Mumbai, Delhi, etc**
- ▶ Catchment of Customers: **Expats, NRIs, Foreigners, Fine Food Enthusiasts, Home bakers**
- ▶ Sales growth y-o-y: **10%**



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# Role of whole genome sequencing in food safety

Food safety is becoming a public health priority and governments are making efforts to develop policies and regulatory frameworks, establish and implement effective food safety systems to ensure that food producers and suppliers along the entire food chain operate responsibly and supply safe food to consumers.

By Dr. K. V. Satyanarayana

**F**ood safety is becoming a public health priority and governments are making efforts to develop policies and regulatory frameworks, establish and implement effective food safety systems to ensure that food producers and suppliers along the entire food chain operate responsibly and supply safe food to consumers.

The epidemiological investigation of a food-borne outbreak, which includes identification of pathogen, source attribution, removal of contaminated food items from the supply chain and development of other intervention strategies, depends on the ability to subtype the etiological agent at a high enough resolution to differentiate related from non-related cases. The traditional phenotypic subtyping

methods used include serotyping, phage typing and biotyping. Since 1990, the field of subtyping has been revolutionized with the advent of molecular and DNA-based subtyping methods, which allow more sensitive discrimination than the traditional methods. Commonly used molecular subtyping/genotyping methods include banding pattern-based Pulse Field Gel Electrophoresis (PFGE), and DNA sequencing-based Multi Locus Sequence Typing (MLST), and Multiple Locus Variable Number Tandem Repeat Analysis (MLVA). The establishment of PulseNet in USA in 1996 and its expansion as “PulseNet International” was instrumental in advancing the adoption of molecular subtyping for bacterial food-borne disease surveillance. PulseNet selected PFGE as the primary genotyping methodology, which substantially advanced food-borne disease surveillance and outbreak investigation.

## Whole genome sequencing (WGS)

Whole genome sequencing (WGS) is a laboratory procedure that determines the complete DNA sequence in the genome of an organism in one process. Recent advances in sequencing technologies and bioinformatics tools have made WGS a viable and advanced solution for epidemiologic investigation and surveillance of food-borne bacterial pathogens. Due to its advantages over PFGE, WGS is now becoming the preferred method for organism identification and comparison among isolates.

## Advantages/benefits of WGS

- WGS provides significantly improved subtype discrimination as well as interpretation of evolutionary relatedness of isolates
- WGS can provide location specificity for disease outbreak investigations, help in understanding how pathogens spread within and between geographic areas





- WGS is becoming inexpensive and is easier to use since it has identical sample preparation for all pathogens
- The data generated by WGS yields additional information on virulence factors, antibiotic resistance, mobile genetic elements and geographic location

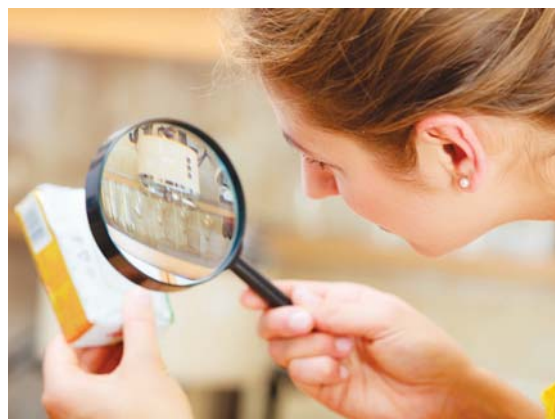
**Applications of WGS in food safety**

**(a) Regulators and public health agencies**

Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) has already been used in a few countries to subtype common food-borne pathogens wherein the high-resolution WGS subtyping data has enhanced the outbreak detection and facilitated epidemiological investigations. The high specificity and sensitivity of WGS provides greater confidence in regulatory decisions made by authorities on food safety, public health etc.

- Determining which ingredient in a multi-ingredient food harbored the pathogen associated with an illness outbreak
- Narrowing the search for the source of a contaminated ingredient, even when the source is far off place
- As a clue to the possible source of illnesses - even before a food has been associated with illnesses by traditional epidemiological methods

**Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) has already been used in a few countries to subtype common food-borne pathogens wherein the high-resolution WGS subtyping data has enhanced the outbreak detection and facilitated epidemiological investigations.**



**WGS and potential role in FSMA compliance:** Under US FDA's new Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), food industry is expected to have environmental monitoring programs (EMPs), especially when ready-to-eat food is exposed to environment prior to packaging, to verify the effectiveness of their processing and sanitation controls in their processing plants. With several recent cases, wherein FDA has linked environmental positives in facilities from previous years with illnesses occurring today, food industry is expected to embrace WGS technology to check if they have resident strain of a pathogen in their ready-to-eat product facilities. Recently, California based Clear Labs Inc. released WGS test based on their proprietary next generation sequencing (NGS) platform. The test will allow food companies in identifying pathogen strains in samples, determine how different pathogen strains are evolutionarily related, what regions they come from, and from which food groups they originate.

**(i) USA**

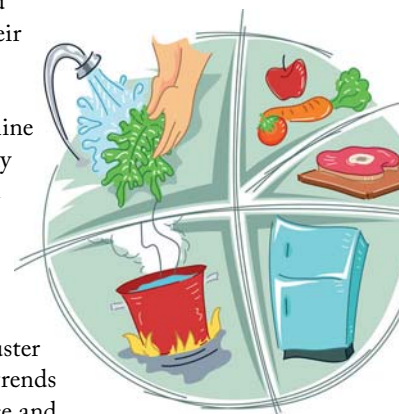
US FDA is utilizing WGS since 2008 and is coordinating efforts by federal, state, and international public health agencies to sequence pathogens collected from food-borne outbreaks, contaminated food products, and environmental sources and make their genomic sequences publicly available in a database called GenomeTrakr. GenomeTrakr, established by the FDA in late 2012, is the first distributed network of labs to utilize WGS for pathogen identification and can be used to help pinpoint the contamination sources of current and future outbreaks. As on September 2016, this network has sequenced more than 71,000 isolates, and closed more than 175 genomes.

Since 2012, FDA is using WGS of food-borne pathogens for regulatory purposes in various ways (<http://www.fda.gov>):

- Differentiating sources of contamination, even within the same outbreak

**(ii) Canada**

In Canada, WGS is being routinely applied in parallel to other methods like PFGE during cluster investigation or outbreak response; to monitor trends in emerging pathogens, anti-microbial resistance and to identify novel virulence factors. Canadian Food Inspection Agency is in the process of incorporating information from WGS into health risk assessments and epidemiological surveillance and the expansion of the PulseNet Canada laboratory network refers to the transition to include WGS as a primary subtyping method.



**(iii) Europe**

Public Health England (PHE) has been using WGS routinely as part of specialist microbiology and epidemiology services and has benefitted from the application of WGS through improvements in surveillance and outbreak investigation. In June 2014, a WGS-based investigation by PHE identified the root cause of a Salmonella outbreak through eggs and prevented further outbreaks. By 2014, over 28,000 bacteria and virus genomes were sequenced including over 3,500 salmonella genomes ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)). PHE is also using whole genome sequencing (WGS) to detect antibiotic resistance genes. In Denmark, food and environment monitoring for *Listeria monocytogenes* together with health surveillance using WGS was implemented in 2013.

**(b) Industry**

Industry players like Mars, Nestle, ConAgra & DuPont are implementing WGS in their own food safety programs. Industry can use WGS to monitor ingredient supplies, to determine the effectiveness of preventive and sanitary controls and determine the persistence of pathogens in the environment. WGS can provide a much faster response time for outbreaks and recalls in the food industry.

**International efforts on WGS for food safety**

When compared to developed countries, the application of WGS for food safety management in developing countries has been very limited. In the developed countries, a well-established reporting system used by public health agencies is resulting in the proper documentation of incidence of food-borne



illness in populations. This reporting system is absent or almost negligible in the developing countries and there is a need to establish this reporting/ surveillance system in the developing countries before WGS can be effectively used in food safety management. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) is leading global efforts to build capacity to detect, control, and prevent food-borne diseases. As part of these efforts, FAO convened a technical meeting on the impact of WGS on food safety management within a “One Health Framework” in May 2016, which was attended by participants from 50 countries. “One Health Framework” advocates the idea of fully connecting the clinical, food and farm environment as an integrated whole rather than being disconnected parts.

Global outreach for WGS in food safety will require concerted efforts and coordination among various organizations like WHO, FAO, International Standards Organization, (ISO) etc. There is a great need for training in WGS technology, its validation, harmonization, effective data-sharing and integration across the global community.

**How can India use WGS for food safety**

Indian food industry has been adopting various Food Safety Management Systems (mostly private standards like FSSC 22000, BRC, SQF, etc) largely to meet the customer/ export country requirements. US FDA is already using WGS in narrowing its search for the source of a contaminated ingredient. As part of the 2012 Salmonella outbreak investigation, FDA found that the Salmonella Bareilly DNA for the samples tied to the 2012 outbreak was very similar to the Salmonella Bareilly DNA isolated from shrimp that came from a processing plant in southwest India several years earlier. With FSMA in force, US FDA is expected to increase its use of WGS to link environmental positives in ready-to-eat product facilities from previous years with illnesses occurring today. In the next few years, there is possibility of WGS becoming mandatory for exports, specifically to few countries having WGS supported food surveillance systems in place. This could affect the economy of several countries

Industry players like Mars, Nestle, ConAgra & DuPont are implementing WGS in their own food safety programs. Industry can use WGS to monitor ingredient supplies, to determine the effectiveness of preventive and sanitary controls and determine the persistence of pathogens in the environment.





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**There is an imperative need for assessing India's readiness in deploying WGS for food safety. For implementing WGS, India already has good infrastructure and pre-requisites in terms of sequencing capacity, high capacity storage & data analysis, good internet connectivity and bio-informatics support.**

including India, which do not have this technology for food safety.

There is an imperative need for assessing India's readiness in deploying WGS for food safety. For implementing WGS, India already has good infrastructure and pre-requisites in terms of sequencing capacity, high capacity storage & data analysis, good internet connectivity and bio-informatics support. There are several research institutes in India with WGS facilities and research programs. There are also a few private service providers for WGS, supporting research in agriculture and health care areas.

The major challenge for India in adopting WGS for food safety would be the database construction and the validation since food-borne disease surveillance in India is lacking. Food-borne disease surveillance is essential for monitoring of food-borne



diseases and their trends, evaluating strategies for the control and prevention of food-borne diseases, detection, etc. India lacks systematic studies in understanding the types of foods involved and the agent causing the disease. Most of the food-borne disease outbreaks in India go unreported or are not investigated and some of them are only noticed after a major health issue or economic loss has occurred.

The Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act 2006, stipulates the duties and functions of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which include regulating and monitoring the manufacture, processing, distribution, sale and import of food so as to ensure safe and wholesome food. As per the Act, the Food Authority shall also search, collect, collate, analyze and summarize relevant scientific and technical data, particularly relating to (i) food consumption and the exposure of individuals to risks related to the consumption of food; (ii) incidence and prevalence of biological risk; (iii) contaminants in food. The Food Authority shall also promote, co-ordinate and issue guidelines for the development of risk assessment methodologies and monitor and conduct

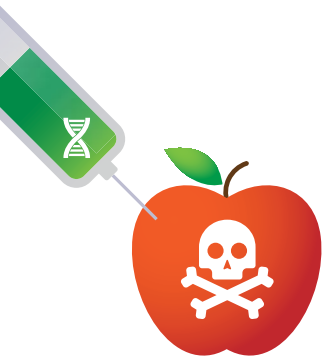


and forward messages on the health and nutritional risks of food to the government.

Epidemiological, environmental, and clinical components should integrate closely for carrying out food-borne disease investigation. Routine collection and analysis of clinical, food, and environmental samples is a pre-requisite for implementing WGS. Hopefully, FSSAI will coordinate with the agencies concerned and take initiatives in building basic epidemiology, surveillance, food monitoring and testing infrastructure for implementing effective food safety systems in the country.

### Conclusion

Whole Genome Sequencing is a powerful tool that can be used for a wide range of public health and food safety applications. WGS is now being used to monitor emerging food pathogens and understand how pathogens spread within and between geographic areas. It can help the food industry to monitor ingredient supplies, determine the effectiveness of preventive and sanitary controls and determine the persistence of pathogens in the environment. The high specificity and sensitivity of WGS provides greater confidence in regulatory decisions made by authorities on food safety, public health as well as decisions made by food industry. However, basic food-borne disease surveillance systems need to be established in developing countries including India, before WGS can be used for food safety. **PG**



The writer is a Senior Manager at Sathguru Management Consultants and leads the Food Processing and Retail practice. He can be reached at [satyanarayanak@sathguru.com](mailto:satyanarayanak@sathguru.com).

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# Ongoing business analysis is a must for organised retail

**T**oday's digital era has changed the traditional ways of running a business. Like other sectors impacted by this change, it is imperative for retail to modernize to stay relevant in this age.

Retailers need to transform their business to be more agile to their clients' needs and requirements. In order to adapt to the changing business landscape, more than 60% of retail has moved or is moving to the cloud. While this shift could be viewed as a cost-based technology imperative, there are further business drivers that warrant this change. In this age, data is present everywhere and the real measure of success is how quickly retailers can leverage this data into actionable insights.



## Improving product design & testing

With a plethora of products' choices and variations, it is indeed a challenge for branded retailers and consumer goods manufacturers to command a premium while preserving their brand identity. It is far more lucrative to allow the consumer to design his/ her own product of choice (wherever applicable) and command a premium through that. This helps increase the customer experience and is also a strong propellant of the 'personalization' era.

## Seamless connect through digital with consumers

The growing evolution of digital channel and its impact on the customer behaviour patterns has made retailers think beyond their brand. The ability to eliminate noise and listen to the trends and adapt to trends is the key challenge.

## Pricing dynamics

With a plethora of channels available to a consumer to engage with and access a product, it has become important to give him/ her a seamless experience regardless of whichever channel the customer engages with. It is also important to provide a 360-degree customer view so that personalized or dynamic pricing becomes possible. Based on the customer search profile or preference and purchasing history, it is now possible to give the customer timely inputs like competitors' price points and the resultant savings. Offering these services at the time of purchase provides for a higher possibility of sale. To facilitate this 360 degree view or enhanced customer touch points, the technology backbone has to be elastic and hyper-agile.

The sync between digital systems and brick & mortar stores has to be seamless so as to aid in making these decisions data driven or informed. The online e-commerce giants have taken the price game to a new high and there are a whole lot of machine learning techniques employed to churn out such insights.

## Better operational efficiencies for an effective supply chain

Retailers have tried to tackle supply chain problems by bringing in operational processes to consolidate the channel. However, given that businesses are now hyper-agile, the operational processes are lagging and there is a need to optimize the process and also have a technology solution that provides for real-time or short latencies. In summary, it is prudent for retail to develop systems and rely on a continuous analysis of data, where effective storage and retrieval of vast volumes and variety of data becomes feasible.

Modernizing to aid monetization is imperative for retail to thrive in this dynamic market state. So, why wait? **PG**



The author has over 30 years of learnings and winning experience with Food Retail, New concept/ brands, FMCG and Organised Retail. Currently he heads Dubai Overseas Trade office in India and is on the Board of Skill Development – SME for Retail – besides also advising on international food retailing in India. He is reachable at [rakeshgambhir@imagesgroup.in](mailto:rakeshgambhir@imagesgroup.in)



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# what's next

## ▼ Crispy & crunchy snacks



AFP Manufacturing Co. Pvt. Ltd. has added a new variant of Karare Peanuts to its existing product portfolio under Munchon's brand. These crispy coated peanuts make for a perfect snack option. The Karare peanuts are manufactured with unique craftsmanship and technology. These spicy peanuts are available in trial packs of Rs. 5 and Rs. 10.

## ► Premium festive gifting

With the festive season around the corner, Grover Zampa Vineyards has unveiled its premium selection of wines, which make for a perfect Diwali gifting option. These fine blends of wines are available in a plethora of variants such as Magnifique, Zampa Soirée Brut, Grover Chêne Grande Réserve, Vijay Amritraj Reserve Collection Red, Grover La Réserve, Grover La Réserve Blanc, to name a few. Awarded with many accolades from across the world, the Grover Zampa wines are available in all major cities and the prices start at Rs. 700.



## ► Lift your mood with YiPee

ITC Foods has recently added a fun twist to its existing range of Yippee noodles by introducing the new mood masala variant. The Mood masala pack will have two sachets of masala – one will be the main masala mix whereas the mood mix is an additional garnish, which will enable a consumer to customise the product as per her mood and taste preferences. The product will be available at modern and general trade outlets across India, in a convenient pack size of 70 gram priced at Rs. 15 and a family pack size of 280 grams priced at Rs. 55.



## ▼ Jasmine rice

Introducing bowl of Jasmine Thai jasmine rice – long-grain rice, valued for its delicate floral aroma and silky, soft texture. Jasmine Rice or Hom Mali as it is known in Thailand, has a delicious nutty taste that perfectly complements the traditional flavours of all Pan-Asian cuisines. Jasmine rice is a rich source of energy, low in fat and ideal for those looking for a naturally gluten-free staple. Available in 1 kg packs for Rs. 500 at [olivetreetrading.com](http://olivetreetrading.com) and select retail outlets across India.



## ▼ Poha on-the-go

Leading Indian food brand Mother's Recipe has recently launched its mom's style Poha on-the-go, in a ready for consumption container. The single-serve pack is designed for anytime, anywhere consumption. This instant mix poha, which gets prepared by just adding hot water, tastes similar to home-cooked poha as prepared by your mom, and is a nutritious hot snack option. A spoon inside the pack comes in handy for on-the-go consumption. It is available in two variants – Regular Poha in 70 gm and No Onion No Garlic Poha in 75 gm; both variants are priced at Rs. 45. These packs are available at all the leading retail outlets and online portals.



## ► Pop corn with a twist of flavours

On-the-go snacks and beverage brand Tasty Treat by Future Consumer Limited has recently added a new range of pop corns to its existing repertoire of snacks. These light and healthy pop corns make for a perfect snacking option and come in four different flavours such as spicy jalapeno, tangy tomato salsa, classic salt & pepper and cheddar cheese. Priced at Rs. 35, Tasty Treat pop corns can be purchased from Big Bazaar, Nilgiris, Heritage Fresh, Easy Day stores across the country and on Amazon.in.





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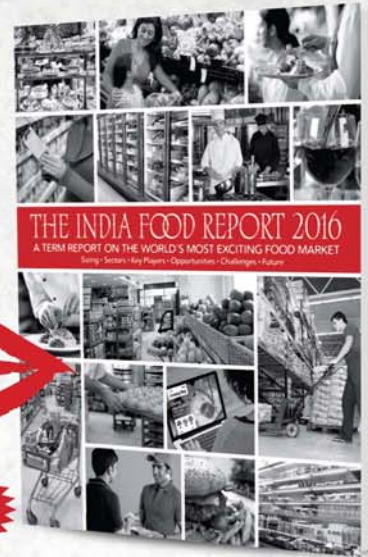
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