

MARKETING REPORT

Working mom markets kids' entrees

Shelf stable and microwavable, My Own Meals, eyes niche

DEERFIELD, IL: The proliferation of heat-and-eat meals that have hit stores in recent years target a range of consumers from gourmets to the budget-conscious. None, however, has addressed the market for kids' foods until My Own Meals.

A shelf-stable, microwavable line of entrees, My Own Meals is tailored to the tastes and nutritional requirements of kids ages two to eight. The product's prime market is the more than 50 percent of mothers who work.

Working mothers have been looking for foods that are fast to prepare, nutritious, and appeal to their kids' tastes, noted Mary Anne Jackson, founder and president of My Own Meals Inc. and, herself, a working mother. She says My Own Meals was created as an alternative to typical fast meals like hot dogs and canned spaghetti.

"We felt this was a consumer niche



Mealtime: Dishes developed for kids' tastes.

he none of the major food companies was addressing," Jackson said. She attributes the lack of variety in kid's meals to the fact that most food company executives are men who've "never had to worry about what to feed their kids."

Jackson had been an executive at Chicago-based Beatrice Cos., and began developing My Own Meals after she left the company when it was taken over in 1986.

Through surveys and focus groups with children, Jackson came up with a product she feels appeals to children. "What tastes good to a 5-year-old probably tastes very bland to an adult," she said.

Five varieties are available including My Kind of Chicken, My Meatballs & Shells, My Turkey Meatballs, My Favorite Pasta and Chicken, Please.

The line has been available through mail order since last December, though recently distribution has been expanded to several Chicago-area supermarkets.

Chicago's largest supermarket, Jewel, is testing the product, and Jackson said the chain has sold through its first shipment and has reordered.

Jackson hopes My Own Meals will gain national distribution within five years. Signs are promising so far. Another large Chicago grocery outlet, Scot Lad Foods, decided to take the line on in August.

My Own Meals joins the ranks of Hormel's Top Shelf and General Foods' Impromptu in the new class of shelf-stable entrees.

The suggested retail for the individual 8- or 8.5- ounce dinners is between \$2.39 and \$2.99.