

## UPDATE

**Imitating 'My Own Meals'**

**I**t's nice to be all alone in a new market, but few enjoy that luxury very long.

When My Own Meals Inc. introduced its line of shelf-stable microwaveable meals for children last year (AMW, Aug. 8, 1988), the line was available in just a handful of stores around the firm's Deerfield, Ill. headquarters and was the only such product in the new category. Now My Own Meals has expanded into 1,000 stores in ten states and is facing a host of imitators.

My Own Meals' preservative-free line was the first convenience food targeted to nutrition-conscious parents. Founder Mary Anne Jackson, a former Beatrice Cos. marketer, founded My Own Meals after searching in vain for convenient food for her daughter.

But last March Geo. A. Hormel & Co. began a three-city test for Kids Kitchen, dubbing it "the first line of shelf-stable microwaveable meals intended for children." ConAgra Inc. has also launched a line called Kid Cuisine.

Jackson says she isn't worried about the competition. "They're not even pretending their product is nutritious," Jackson says. "I saw one entrée intended for a teenager, but it was only 93 calories. I almost died."

To defend her niche in nutritious kids meals, Jackson says she is working closely with retailers, and has just hired her first director of marketing. Sales of My Own Meals should reach \$2 million this year, she says.

Higher volume has helped her persuade the manufacturer that produces the line to lower per unit cost. Jackson has dropped the price of My Own Meals to between \$1.99 and \$2.69. This is still a premium over other kid's foods, like \$1.09 Chef Boy-Ar-Dee products, but is less than the \$2.39 to \$2.99 My Own Meals initially sold for.

—Christine Donahue