

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

THURSDAY, MAY 10, 1990

★ MIDWEST EDITION

KIDS MEALS become a hot market for food companies.

Children ages six through 12 ate fewer frozen dinners in 1986 than any other segment, says the Lempert Report, Montclair, N.J. "Not many youngsters were jumping at the chance to chow down on breaded filet of sole with a side of broccoli." Now major food companies are filling the gap with frozen and shelf-stable products. First to market: My Own Meals, which began with mail-order in 1987 and now sells through supermarkets and Toys "R" Us stores.

This spring's entrants: ConAgra's Kid Cuisine and Tyson's Looney Tunes Meals for Kids, both frozen lines with items such as chicken nuggets. Geo. A. Hormel & Co. tests a shelf-stable Kid's Kitchen line. Taking a cue from fast-food chains, Kid Cuisine includes a fun pack so "the kid can play with the fun pack while the adult prepares the food," says ConAgra's Susan Hanley.

Parents' growing comfort in letting children use the microwave is feeding demand for such products, says Bill Bernardo of Hormel.

BRIEFS: Celsus Designs Inc., Hacienda Heights, Calif., markets stuffed-animal arms, heads and feet that attach to computer screens to create Computer Critters. . . . A new doll designed to bolster children's confidence is dubbed F.R.O.Y.D., standing for For Reality of Your Dreams.

—LYNN ASINOF

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