

The Grocer

Focus On: Free from

Rob Brown (rob_j_a_brown@hotmail.com) and Natalie Brown (natalie_brown@live.co.uk)

Publishing: 7 July
Advertising deadline: 25 June
Submissions deadline: 18 June

The Story

All aboard the free from bandwagon! The free from category has enjoyed yet another bumper year, up 37.5% to nearly £1.5bn. A blistering rate of NPD has kept growth rolling along at a dizzying pace. But the category is also being helped along by an increasing number of products making 'free from' claims when they are in fact naturally gluten- or dairy-free. So how long can this growth continue?

Themes to cover:

Frequency of shop: The number of new entrants into the category is starting to slow, but the frequency of purchase among existing shoppers is increasing. Why is this? Is it down to NPD, merchandising, or the result of the crackdown on gluten-free prescriptions?

NPD: The sheer rate of NPD in the free from sector is staggering. What have been the major launches and in which sectors? Sales of free-from ready meals have more than doubled in the past year, for example, what is behind that? Which categories are fill to the brim with free-from options, and which are ripe avenues for growth?

On pack claims: We've had gluten-free rice and dairy-free crisps. On one hand, it can be useful for consumers to know these products don't contain gluten or dairy, even if the foods are naturally 'free-from'. But to what extent are brands cashing in on the free-from boom and suggesting they're doing something special? There is already regulation on gluten-free claims so how long will it be before regulators clamp down on this sort of thing?

Discounters: Perhaps the final sign that free from has gone mainstream is its launch into the space-squeezed discounters. Aldi launched its own label free from range last August, and Lidl announced its first permanent gluten-free range in April. What does this mean for brands and other retailers?

Key questions the feature is likely to address:

- What consumer trends have impacted the category over the past year?
- How have promotional strategies (both in terms of price and marketing) evolved?
- How have individual retailers' strategies impacted the market?
- How has merchandising changed in the market?
- What impact has own-label had on branded players?
- What's next for the category?