The Grocer

Focus On: Rice & Noodles, publishing 11th August
Online Listicle to go live on 10th August

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The Story
Rice pouches are this year's champions, tempting more shoppers away from dried rice and gaining £15.3m in value. Having mastered convenience, pouches are now looking to offer more variety with new flavours and grains. So who is driving innovation? And how long can our preference for pouches continue? Following a recent launch, will pot rice be the next big thing?

Online Listicle: Rise of the riced vegetable

Key themes:

Pouch Popularity: After breaking the £200m barrier last year, ready to heat (RTH) rice pouches have continued to see substantial growth, with value sales up. What do recent launches suggest about how the category could evolve over the next year? Which brands have launched the most impactful NPD and what have been this year's most popular rice flavours?

Grains and Pulses: Rice brands are appealing to the health-conscious with a raft of NPD containing grains and pulses. Successful launches have contributed to the brands value growth this year and are also driving sales growth. Is the ongoing investment in healthy products giving rice an edge over noodles? Where is innovation coming from in healthy rice, and can the sector sustain its current growth?

Noodles: Noodles are enjoying healthy growth driven by Own Label lines. Branded noodles continued to lose share and sales to OL, who have taken value from all three of the biggest noodles brands. How can branded noodles get back in the game?

Price wars: Own label has performed well this year by recruiting new shoppers and continuing to undercut branded prices. Recognising the ongoing threat from Own Label, branded rice pouches have decreased average prices and engaged in more promotional activity to hold onto customers this year. Which promotional activities have been most successful, and how else can brands retain shoppers this year?

The retailers: All major retailers saw category growth this year with the exception of Co-op and the discounters saw the strongest growth. What can be learned from the discounter strategy, and why has Co-op slipped?

Innovation: Key to this feature will be a discussion of the latest NPD from the category's brands and own label players, large and small. The feature will explore the market trends that have inspired recent innovations and weigh up which new launches are most likely to encourage future growth in the market. We will profile 12 of these in separate innovations panel including 4 x rice, 4 x noodle, 4 x ready to eat format.

Rise of the riced vegetable: First, it was cauliflower rice. Now the riced vegetable sector seems to have moved on to celeriac. Who is putting riced vegetables into their baskets, which brands are capitalising on this movement and which vegetable could be next to undergo a ricing?

Chinese New Year: One of the key events and drivers of growth in the rice and noodle category, Chinese New Year this year saw ready to heat rice as the main victor, and despite doing well last year, noodles underperformed. Which brands and retailers successfully capitalised on Chinese New Year, and why did noodles fall from grace this year?

Instant rice cups: Single serve rice cups launched in May to target one-person households looking for quick and easy dinner solutions. Have any other brands taken up the format? Could this lead to a rise in rice-on-the-go products?

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 has merchandising changed in the market?