

The Grocer

Focus On: Free from by Daniel Woolfson (daniel.woolfson@wrbm.com)

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The Story: Is free-from still in demand during Covid-19? Before lockdown, the category was a byword for healthy eating, as so-called ‘lifestylers’ lapped up gluten-free and dairy-free choices. But lifestyle choices were a luxury that few could afford to have as the pandemic first hit home, and shelves were stripped bare. So how has this pandemic influenced sales? Have lifestyle choices changed along with priorities? And what happened to customers who badly needed these products but were unable to get hold of them in the mults – have they turned elsewhere for their dietary needs?

Demand: how did the free-from category perform as Brits hunkered down? As supermarkets rationalised their ranging and/or struggled to keep shelves during shoppers’ stockpiling, were enough free-from products available for people who genuinely needed them?

Lifestylers: What percentage of the category do they represent? And how have their habits changed during lockdown? Is free-from still seen as a byword for health as the focus shifts to immunity?

Consumers with allergens: Free-from products are a necessity, rather than a lifestyle choice, for many. How easy have they found it to get hold of the products they need? Especially in the case of vulnerable consumers relying on deliveries and food boxes? Has there been a rise in customers turning to DTC operations?

Range rationalisation: How hard has the free-from category been hit by rationalisation, as the grocers look to maintain supply of mainstream lines?

Milk: before the pandemic, dairy alternative drinks were a massive driver of the free-from category. In the past weeks, sales have surged thanks to a new wave of Brits buying into milk alternatives where regular versions aren’t available. How big has the sector become? Can it maintain its growth? How?

Bakery: The pandemic saw widespread reports of gluten-free bakery products being out of stock. Has availability returned to normal levels? How have sales fared since, and which lines are doing well?

Trends: not so long ago, people going free-from simply for health (rather than for medical, religious or ethical reasons) avoided gluten. Then cutting meat and dairy was the trendy thing to do. How have free-from trends changed over the past 12 months? And what’s the next big thing going to be?

Shopper Intelligence: how do Brits shop the free-from segment?

Comfort eating: Brits made miserable by the coronavirus pandemic took to comfort eating. Confectionery and crisps flew off the shelves. How did people with free-from diets snack away their blues in lockdown? Which products were most sought after?

Kantar data: using Kantar commentary, we explain the reasons behind the rise and fall of the sub categories

Nielsen: using Nielsen commentary, we explain the reasons behind rise and fall of the leading free-from brands.

Innovations: We identify four new products that have ideally not appeared in The Grocer before including launch date and RSP, and a picture of each.