Pulses, pasta & rice

Pantry staples that drive basket value

In a cost-pressured consumer landscape, pantry staples remain one of the most reliable engines of retail performance. Among these, pulses, pasta and rice stand out – not only for their affordability and versatility, but for how they anchor weekly shopping missions and influence cross-category purchasing. For retailers, these staples represent a powerful opportunity: high-volume turnover, predictable replenishment cycles, strong private-label potential, and the ability to support themed promotions from health to heritage cooking.

The consumer shift: Value, nutrition and versatility

South African shoppers are increasingly price conscious, but they're also paying closer attention to nutritional value. Pulses, pasta and rice deliver on both fronts. These categories offer high satiety per rand, suit diverse cooking styles across cultures, and store well for long periods – making them essential items in every pantry-based shopping trip.

Rising food inflation has shifted household purchasing toward ingredients that stretch meals further. Retailers who curate strong staple ranges at entry-level, mid-tier and premium price points can successfully capture multiple shopper segments – from budget-conscious households to foodies looking for specialty grains or artisanal pastas.

Whether you're whipping up a creamy hummus, a comforting curry, or a fresh summer salad – your chickpeas have taken quite the journey. It all starts with sustainable farming practices, trusted growers, and a passion for quality. It is grown with care, harvested at peak nutrition, then expertly processed and packaged. https://agtfoods.co.za/

Pulses: A protein workhorse and a margin opportunity

Dried beans, lentils and chickpeas have experienced renewed growth thanks to rising interest in plant-forward eating. Pulses are naturally high in protein, fibre and micronutrients, making them popular with health-conscious families and shoppers looking to reduce meat consumption without sacrificing nutrition.

Dean Miller,

As Dean Miller, Chief Commercial Officer at AGT Foods Africa, notes, the variety within pulses is immense – and strategic for retail. "We supply one of the most comprehensive pulse ranges in the market," he says, citing Kabuli and Desi chickpeas, multiple lentil types (red split, whole green, whole brown, Eston and Laird) and more than a dozen bean varieties including sugar beans, white kidney beans,

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black beans and adzuki beans. "Each variety serves a different functional and nutritional purpose."

For retailers, pulses offer several advantages:

- Long shelf life reduces shrink.
- Bulk packs appeal to large households.
- Private label performs exceptionally well due to the commodity nature of many varieties.
- Cross-merchandising with spices, stocks and fresh vegetables helps build basket size.

Convenience-driven formats such as pre-cooked beans and pouched lentils continue to grow, especially as younger consumers seek quick, nutritious meal fix solutions.

Miller emphasises that quality differentiation matters in this space. AGT's canned pulses, for example, are positioned on ingredient integrity: "We use premium-grade raw pulses, and our canning is done according to FSSC 22000 food-safety standards with clean-label processing. Because we source, clean, mill and process ourselves, traceability is guaranteed from farm to final can." For retailers building trust in private label or value ranges, this kind of upstream control is increasingly important.

Pasta: Consistent volume driver with category depth

Pasta continues to be one of the most dependable and versatile basket drivers. It is affordable, quick to prepare and universally appealing. While core formats like spaghetti and macaroni still dominate, there is strong growth in speciality options – whole-wheat, high-protein, gluten-free and artisanal cuts.

https://alittleandalot.com/

The pasta category offers retailers several strategic advantages:

- High household penetration ensures repeat purchases.
- Strong promotional responsiveness makes pasta an ideal leaflet driver.
- Clear opportunities for premiumisation through imported or craft products.
- Meal-solution pairings with sauces, cheese, frozen vegetables and proteins reliably expand basket size.

Innovation is also emerging from pulse-based pasta alternatives. Miller highlights AGT's Veggipasta – a pea-based pasta increasingly used by retailers and manufacturers. "South Africa's response has been very positive," he notes. "It appeals to health-focused shoppers, families, vegans, athletes – and it performs extremely well in frozen and ready-meal applications because it holds its texture." Retail interest in private-label versions of high-protein pasta formats is steadily rising.

Shelf-stable gnocchi, microwaveable pasta cups and pre-cooked noodles present additional opportunities as convenience continues to reshape meal planning.

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Rice: A multicultural staple with broad appeal

Rice remains one of the most dependable staples in the South African grocery basket, forming the foundation of meals across cultural and socioeconomic groups. From long-grain parboiled rice to basmati, jasmine, brown rice and microwave-ready cups, the category continues to diversify as shoppers seek both value and convenience.

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Key advantages for retailers include:

- Bulk pack sales accelerated by economic pressures.
- High-frequency replenishment makes rice a steady traffic driver.
- Differentiated value tiers support every shopper segment.
- Premium aromatic varieties offer margin growth.

Microwave-ready rice in particular aligns well with smaller households, students and time-starved consumers seeking speed without compromising a meal's starch component.

Beyond staples: Flours and oats support category expansion

Retailers expanding their staple aisles beyond the basics are seeing fresh traction – particularly in oats, alternative grains and flour formats.

Miller notes that AGT supplies raw oats, oat ingredients and retail-ready formats to several well-known brands – often behind the scenes. Differentiation in oats, he explains, comes from "origin and milling quality, functional diversity and retailer alignment," including growing demand for gluten-free certification and private-label customisation.

Flour diversity is also rising across baking, wellness and gluten-free categories. "It's driven by consumers, retailers and functional performance," says Miller. Chickpea, lentil, pea, linseed, buckwheat and teff flours meet the needs of manufacturers and shoppers wanting higher protein, unique textures or allergen-friendly options. With in-house milling, suppliers can produce almost any flour from any grain or pulse, supporting retailers looking to broaden their wellness and allergen-free assortments.

Forage Sorghums are erect, annual summer grasses that bring versatility and strength to farming systems. They are widely adapted to different environments, but truly flourish in hot climates – making them a vital crop across South Africa.

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Retail strategy: How to maximise performance of staple categories

1. Optimise shelf layout and navigation
Group by cooking time, grain type or use-case. Clear signage reduces friction for hurried weekday shoppers.

2. Strengthen private label
Pulses, pasta and rice are ideal for high-trust, high-value private-label ranges – especially when suppliers guarantee traceability and consistency.

3. Promote meal solutions, not just products
Cross-merchandising with sauces, spices, chutneys, frozen vegetables and proteins drives basket inflation.

4. Offer bulk, mid-pack and single-meal formats
Bulk supports value-driven shoppers; microwavable and ready-to-serve options support convenience-driven ones.

5. Use promotions wisely
Pasta and rice are highly responsive to deals. Pulses deliver consistent margin even without deep discounting.

6. Leverage cultural and seasonal moments
Heritage Month, Ramadan, Eid, Diwali and festive periods all boost demand for pulses, rice and flour formats.

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Meeting tomorrow's pantry needs

As household budgets tighten and cooking trends evolve, pantry staples such as pulses, pasta and rice remain central to meal planning. Miller emphasises that food education will play a bigger role in the future, especially across the African continent. "Pulses provide affordable, sustainable protein. They support soil health, use far less water, and can significantly improve nutrition," he says. Strengthening consumer understanding of basic food categories and nutrition can have long-term public-health and food-security benefits.

For retailers, the opportunity is clear: curate wide assortments, invest in convenience innovations, partner with suppliers offering technical and milling capability, and align promotions with real consumer needs. Done well, these humble staples can become some of the strongest drivers of footfall, loyalty and basket value. **SR**

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Creative Cooking boosts air fryer accessory sales with smart CDU solution

As air fryers continue to gain traction in the South African market, retailers are seeing increased demand for compatible accessories, particularly disposable air fryer liners. However, packaging across the category has created a merchandising challenge. Most liners are supplied in flat clam-shell packs intended for hook shelving. While suitable for hanging displays, these packs become almost invisible when stocked upright near air fryers or other high traffic locations — exactly where retailers want them to drive attachment sales.

Importantly for retailers, the CDU has shown strong performance on gondola ends, side panels, and promotional islands.

These high-traffic zones typically suffer when products cannot stand and face the customer. By solving this visibility issue, the Creative Cooking CDU enables more effective cross-merchandising with air fryers, boosting impulse purchasing and driving incremental sales.

Creative Cooking, a widely distributed local kitchenware brand, identified this issue across multiple store formats and developed a practical solution: a custom-designed cardboard counter display unit (CDU). The CDU holds the liner pack in a permanently forward-facing position, ensuring strong on-shelf visibility whether placed on a peg, shelf, side panel, or promotional feature.

The unit features the brand's signature green colour, vertical side panels for quick identification, and a cut-away front that presents the product clearly from a distance. Key details such as size, shape, and pack count are highly visible, supporting quick shopper decision-making.

Retailers report improved Sales throughput, cleaner displays, and reduced merchandising time thanks to the CDU's ready-to-place format. As the air fryer category continues to grow, Creative Cooking's solution offers a simple, effective way for stores to maximise both visibility and sales.

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