By Mhlengi Thabethe
S&R staff writer

Pantry staples

Boxed, bottled, canned, chilled & frozen foods

If you think innovation only belongs to digital technology or AI, you need to think again. Advancements are reshaping the frozen, boxed, bottled, canned and chilled food sectors. Urbanisation, tighter budgets, and changing dietary choices are fuelling a rise in convenience foods. According to 6Wresearch, the South African frozen food market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 6.8% from 2025 to 2031.

Consumers are leaning toward pantry staples for their long shelf life and ease of preparation. For many, cooking at home is a luxury, making ready-to-eat (RTE) options essential. With rising health awareness, demand for nutritious, high-quality food – frozen or fresh – continues to grow. Retailers and manufacturers must therefore stay relevant, balancing consumer needs with economic pressures. A key operational challenge remains cold-chain management, strained further by South Africa's inconsistent electricity supply and rising costs.

Rise of frozen products

Once considered a backup option, frozen foods have become integral to modern South African diets. Busier lifestyles, constrained budgets, and evolving health priorities are driving demand.

www.conveniencestore.co.uk/

Despite 80% of South Africans believing fresh food is 'five times better' than frozen (YouGov Profiles), perceptions are changing as technology bridges the quality gap.

Modern freezing methods, like flash-freezing, preserve nutrients, texture and taste, thus helping frozen fruits, vegetables and proteins oppose their 'fresh' counterparts. Brands that communicate these benefits can strengthen trust and reposition frozen food as a reliable, everyday choice.

Globally, the frozen foods market is expected to grow at 6% annually, with countries like Argentina, Brazil and Mexico showing similar momentum. South Africa's market, valued at USD 252 million, is projected to reach USD 323 million by 2028 (R4.35 billion to R5.57 billion).

Frozen and future-ready

Recent studies show that frozen foods may retain more nutrients than fresh produce due to improved freezing technologies. This perception shift is vital for long-term industry growth. Continued investment in refrigeration systems and cold-chain logistics is strengthening retail infrastructure. However, affordability remains a constraint.

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Therefore frozen products often cost more than fresh, limiting accessibility for lower-income groups.

The frozen foods landscape reflects a connection of convenience, technology and shifting demographics. A standout trend is the rise of ready-to-eat meals, driven by younger, time-pressed consumers. Their preference for quick, convenient options fuels the growth of new RTE producers and online delivery platforms offering frozen alternatives.

The growth in fast-food chains and food delivery services mirrors this youth-led convenience culture. Brands like KFC and McDonald's have rapidly expanded to meet demand, while frozen food manufacturers target the same market with online platforms and direct-to-consumer models that lower operational costs. This evolution reinforces the shift toward fast, nutritious, and accessible meal options.

Major poultry companies in South Africa include Astral Foods, the nation's largest integrated poultry producer. Astral owns several household brands, including Goldi Chicken, County Fair and Festive, which market a variety of fresh, frozen and value-added poultry products to a diverse consumer base in both South Africa and other selected African countries.

Goldi Chicken: This brand is known for offering a variety of frozen and fresh poultry options and emphasises value and convenience for families. Products include Individually Quick Frozen (IQF) single drumsticks and wings, frozen mixed portions, chicken patties, cordon bleu (dish consisting of a meat cutlet [traditionally veal, but often chicken] wrapped around cheese and ham, which is then breaded and pan-fried or deep-fried), and a crumbed range including nuggets and burgers. They also produce polony and items suitable for braais (barbecues).

A Chickenfeed shop in George Town, Tasmania. Chickenfeed was chain of discount variety shops in Tasmania, now defunct. Photo by Gary Houston, https://commons.wikimedia.org/

County Fair: County Fair provides a wide range of fresh chicken pieces, such as breasts, drumsticks, thighs, and giblets. Their offerings extend to convenient options like pre-packaged, chilled braai packs and various frozen crumbed items, including chicken strips (made from tender breast fillet), nuggets and burgers. The brand is widely available in retail stores, including Checkers.

Festive: They focus on fresh poultry products, widely available across wholesale and retail sectors. Their product lines include fresh chicken breast fillets, thighs, wings, drumsticks and chicken burgers, often sold in 'stay-fresh' tray packs.

Another major player in this space is Rainbow Foods, among South Africa's largest chicken producers. Since 1960, Rainbow has been an integrated broiler leader, focusing on innovation, customer-centricity and market adaptability. Their success reflects how producers must align brand heritage with future-ready strategies, combining efficiency with insight into consumer trends.

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South Africa's new energy drink is a global first.

Shesha is made from fresh, hand-harvested, high-quality sugarcane stalks that are peeled and crushed to form the base of this naturally sweetened, fortified energy drink. No other energy drink in the world is produced this way.

Kiki Mzoneli
Sugarcane grower from KwaZulu-Natal and board member of SA Canegrowers.

"This is more than just an energy drink, it's a story of South African ingenuity and resilience. Every can of Shesha supports local jobs, sustains families, and strengthens rural economies in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga."

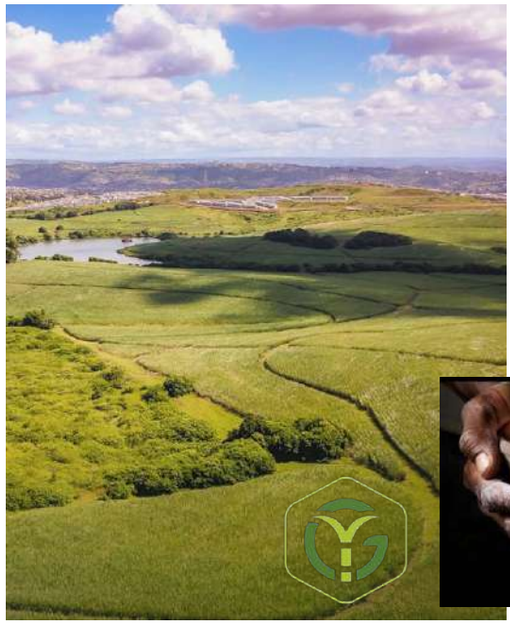
The launch comes at a time when consumers are seeking smarter, healthier energy solutions. Shesha supports rural jobs and communities, giving consumers a delicious drink that fuels performance while aligning with conscious consumption.

Sugarcane is rich in antioxidants, minerals and vitamins, making Shesha more nutritious than regular energy drinks. Shesha also contains 50% less caffeine than other energy drinks.

Higgins Mdluli
Sugarcane grower from Mpumalanga, and chairman of SA Canegrowers.

"Shesha is about doing something new and exciting with a crop we've known for generations. It's proof that innovation can start right here at home – turning sugarcane into something fresh, relevant and proudly South African."

Shesha is produced by Womoba, a subsidiary of the not-for-profit SA Canegrowers. Profits from Shesha will enable projects in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga to stimulate job creation and economic opportunity through the activities of SA Canegrowers. As the sole shareholder in the initiative, SA Canegrowers – which represents all 24 000 small-scale and 1 200 large-scale South African sugarcane growers – is driving efforts to diversify the industry beyond traditional sugar production. The launch of Shesha marks a key step in this strategy to create new, sustainable revenue streams for growers and rural communities alike.



The future of South Africa's sugarcane industry is in your hands

The world is looking for greener alternatives to plastic – and sugarcane could be part of the solution. In countries like India and Thailand, sugarcane is already being used to make polylactic acid (PLA) – a biodegradable, recyclable material that's helping reduce reliance on traditional plastics. With the right investment and policy support, South Africa's sugar industry could follow suit – unlocking new markets, reducing environmental impact, and creating jobs across the value chain. Help safeguard these opportunities and support over 24 000 small-scale growers by pledging to only buy local sugar!

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Chilled for convenience

Closely related to frozen products, chilled foods offer a shorter shelf life, but are perceived as fresher and less processed. These products appeal to health-conscious consumers seeking natural texture and appearance. As 'people eat with their eyes', visual appeal, taste and freshness are critical purchase drivers.

While chilled foods encourage perceptions of freshness, they also pose logistical challenges. Some vegetables, such as cucumbers or potatoes, do not retain texture when chilled. Retailers must therefore balance freshness perception against waste and cost.

Technological and packaging innovations have enhanced this category. Vacuum sealing, modified atmosphere packaging (MAP), and smart labels extend shelf life by preventing oxygen exposure, bacterial growth and spoilage. Chilled foods typically last 3–14 days, requiring accurate forecasting and rapid distribution. Retailers must maintain temperatures between 0°C and 5°C to preserve quality and safety.

From a business perspective, chilled products boost inventory turnover and repeat purchases, supporting the 'fresh convenience' trend. They allow retailers to offer premium pricing due to perceived quality, even as production and logistics remain cost intensive. With food inflation and complex cold-chain requirements, chilled products occupy a premium yet profitable niche.

www.amazon.de/

Goodness packed in a bottle

Globally, the bottled beverage market is undergoing a wave of packaging innovation shaped by convenience, sustainability and health trends. Bottled water remains dominant, with still, sparkling, flavoured, and enhanced waters gaining traction. Packaging has evolved to be more user-friendly, functional, and eco-conscious, reflecting consumer lifestyles focused on mobility and hydration.

Meanwhile, water brand aQuellé has introduced tethered bottle caps, a first in South Africa. These caps remain attached to the bottle after opening, reducing litter and simplifying recycling – a small but significant step toward sustainability and compliance with global packaging trends.

For years, plastic has dominated the bottled beverage space due to its affordability and versatility. However, sustainability pressures are shifting the landscape. Glass bottles are resurging, particularly in premium segments such as wine and craft beverages. South Africa's Cape region, known for its vineyards, has driven strong demand for glass packaging. Yet glass recycling presents environmental challenges, which had glass ranking just behind plastic due to higher gas emissions during recycling.

Brands like All Gold demonstrate how packaging diversification can enhance accessibility and convenience with their latest offering – a jam that doesn't come in a can as usual, but in a squeeze bottle, a Skweezi Mixed Fruit Jam. Their sauces, jams and juices are now available in both glass bottles and squeeze plastic bottles, offering ease of use while maintaining brand quality.

On Heritage Day, All Gold tomato sauce brought all the goodness in a series of interactive and entertaining games for friends and family of all ages.

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Fresh out of the box

Boxed foods and beverages, known for durability and long shelf life, have evolved with new design and safety innovations. Although sometimes criticised for being overly processed, they remain a cost-effective, lightweight and transport-friendly packaging solution.

Box packaging offers major advantages: food safety, freshness and long shelf life. Technologies like tamper-evident seals help detect unauthorised access, reassuring consumers and protecting brand reputation. Boxed goods also align well with sustainability initiatives since many materials are biodegradable or recyclable.

Customisation is another upside, because boxes can be printed with high-quality branding, graphics and information – boosting shelf visibility and consumer appeal. Their flexibility in shape and size allows creative design while maintaining product protection.

However, boxes are vulnerable to moisture and physical damage if mishandled. Proper storage that is cool, dry and away from sunlight is essential. Common boxed products include cereals, pasta, bakery items, snacks and beverages like milk and wine. For retailers, box packaging offers practicality and marketing value, but it requires strict quality control and handling procedures.

Fleur Leach, the General Manager of Marble Gold, when asked what makes their boxed juice range a reliable pantry staple for households, says "the product benefits, nutritional and dietary claims. The formulation following strict dietary requirements within the healthcare sector, plus12-month shelf life at room temperature, with no refrigeration required."

When it comes to ensuring consistent quality and freshness, she said it is all about "full traceability of all raw materials from supplier to production. The UHT process sterilises the raw material at 93-97°, ensuring all microorganisms are eliminated. A process called Aseptic filling is used. This is where sterilised products are packaged into pre-sterilised containers within a sterile environment to prevent microbial contamination. Microbiological laboratory tests are done prior to dispatch of final product."

https://stockcake.com/i/grocery-shopping-cart

Marble Gold has recently implemented many of the innovations and developments in the food and beverage industry. Leach went on to state that "added recycling education for the consumer on the pack enables our product to stand out amongst competitive brands in supporting environmental friendliness. The packs also display all accreditations and product benefits: Sugar & Preservative free, Halaal, Kosher, Heart & Stroke Foundation accredited, Proudly South African and an additional language – Portuguese – for export purposes."

Asked which flavours or ranges of boxed beverages are most popular with South African consumers right now? Leach confidently said "the 200 ml Nutri Fruit top KPI Apple leads the race, in 2nd place we have Fruit Cocktail and in 3rd place Mango Orange."

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Canned and proud

Canning has a fascinating history, invented by French chef Nicolas Appert. Food preservation was first used to feed Napoleon's troops. The modern tin can, followed decades later, revolutionising food storage. Using airtight metal containers to protect contents from light, air and contamination, offering long-term preservation.

Today, canned goods are household staples in South Africa. Popular products include baked beans, corn, tomatoes, pilchards, tuna, canned fruits and meats. Canned foods have exceptional shelf stability, lasting months or even years – making them indispensable for both consumers and retailers. Their durability and packability simplifies storage and transportation, while retaining nutrients through modern heat-treatment and sterilisation processes.

Canned and tinned foods are readily available in South Africa, with popular brands like KOO, Lucky Star, Heinz and Rhodes offering a wide variety of products. You can find options ranging from staple vegetables like baked beans, corn and tomatoes, to fish like tuna and pilchards, as well as soups, jams and meat products. These leading products dominate supermarket shelves, providing affordable, reliable options across the country. For retailers, canned goods ensure inventory longevity and consistent supply, especially in regions facing logistical or refrigeration constraints.

We also have premium foods that come in a can. Produced on a working farm, Babylonstoren's acreage is divided between fruit orchards and vineyards, with wheat fields and even a rice paddy. The heart of the farm is a magnificent formal fruit and vegetable garden, eight acres of abundance. Babylonstoren offers all kinds of pantry staples, from hummus to olive and canola oils – all in a can. They have agrumato oil and tapas, to almonds and fresh macadamia offered in a very easy to open can.

Napoleon's logistical achievements were based on traditions created 150 years earlier by François Michel Le Tellier, Secretary of State for War under Louis XIV. Together with his father, the king's chancellor, he set up a depot and magazine system, and revolutionised the bureaucracy by requisitioning supplies for the royal army, arguably creating the first modern logistical defense network. Napoleon expanded Le Tellier's warehouse system into friendly foreign territory. He adapted the requisitioning systems by issuing state credits to suppliers along the path of the army, keeping his supply chains growing, sympathetic, and intact. In enemy territory, he sent advance troops to set up depots, and he elevated his transport units into an independent force, several battalions strong. www.facebook.com/TimeGhostHistory

Conclusion

For retailers and manufacturers, the growing demand for frozen, chilled, boxed, bottled and canned foods represents a major opportunity to redefine variety, logistics and value creation. This evolving sector merges technology, packaging innovation and shifting consumer behaviour to reshape what convenience means in South Africa's modern food economy.

Consumers now prioritise convenience, health and sustainability; hence pressuring businesses to deliver efficient cold-chain systems, eco-friendly packaging and transparent sourcing. Success depends on balancing cost with freshness, perception and environmental responsibility. Those who adapt quickly will secure customer loyalty and long-term growth.

Moving forward, efficient supply chains, smart packaging and data-driven demand forecasting are essential for profitability and sustainability. The transformation of pantry staples into innovation-driven categories highlights the sector's potential for growth across all retail channels.

Ultimately, this evolution signals more than a shift in consumer preference – it marks a strategic realignment across the entire retail value chain. Nutrition, safety, convenience and sustainability now drive purchase decisions. Businesses that embrace innovation, agility and environmental accountability will not just survive – they will define the future of South Africa's food landscape. **SR**

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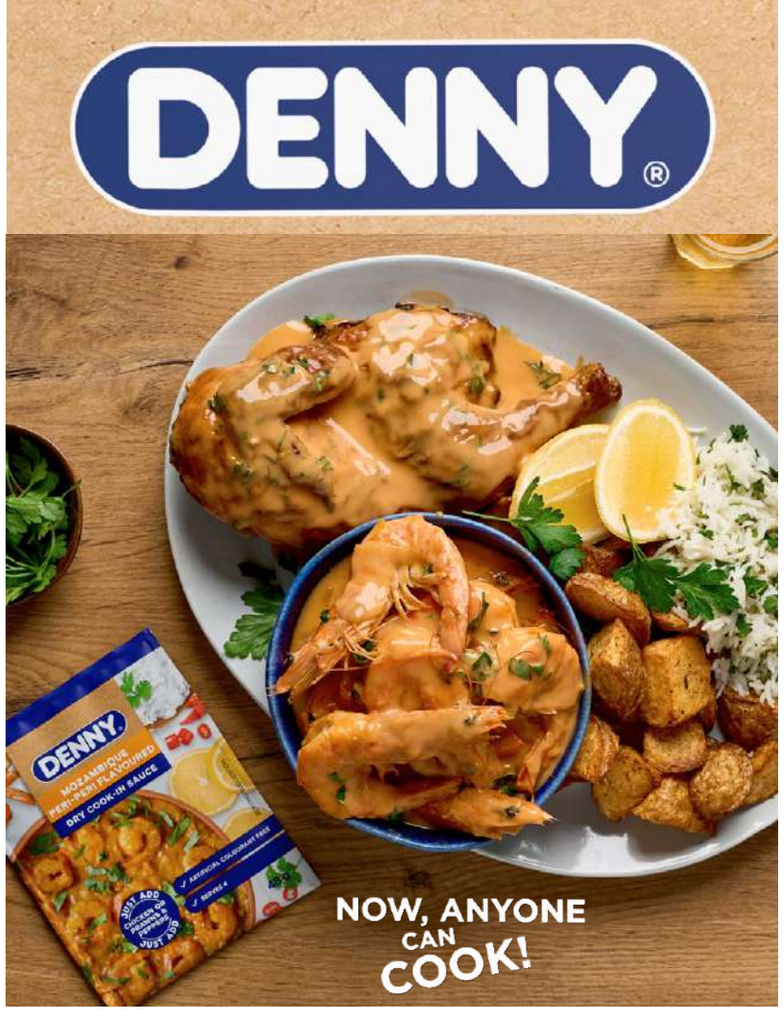


Pantry innovation heats up as South Africans embrace bold, convenient cooking

South African consumers are reimagining their approach to home cooking, with flavour and convenience taking centre stage. WhyFive's BrandMapp data reveals that 68% of South Africans keep dry stock as a pantry staple, a clear indication of the growing preference for shelf-stable, flavour-packed solutions that offer value, versatility, and convenience in challenging economic times.

Responding to this evolving demand, DENNY®, one of South Africa's most trusted food brands, has introduced a new range of dry cook-in sauces, pasta sauces, and stock powders. Designed for today's busy households, the range combines robust flavour with practicality, offering long shelf life, simple preparation, and affordability without compromising on taste.

Affordable, flavourful, and easy to prepare

With retail pricing under R20 for dry cook-in and pasta sauces, and under R35 for stock powders in ready-to-use sachets, the new range provides accessible solutions for families seeking convenient, flavour-rich cooking options.

From creamy pasta sauces to hearty Trinchado, the dry formats are tailored to South African cooking habits, allowing home cooks to elevate vegetables, stretch proteins, and create comforting meals with minimal effort.

Each product is free from artificial colourants, packaged in recyclable materials, and requires only a few fresh ingredients and water to create satisfying, home-cooked dishes.

South Africans' appetite for tasty sauciness

Rich, saucy meals are at the heart of South African cooking. From curries and casseroles to braai marinades and hearty stews, sauces and condiments are central to how the nation cooks and connects. They bring flavour, comfort, and creativity to everyday meals, making South Africa, quite fittingly, a saucy nation.

"We're seeing a clear shift in how South Africans approach everyday cooking,"

Lisa Croecamp
Head of Marketing and Innovation.

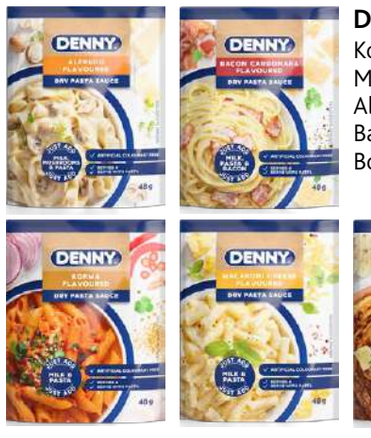
Wet condiments – Ambient products, Libstar

"Consumers want to prepare wholesome, flavourful meals at home more often, but they also value convenience and affordability. This DENNY® range is designed to make that easier, delivering great flavour with minimal effort."

Supported by a national digital and in-store awareness campaign, the launch highlights flavour, simplicity, and affordability as key purchase drivers in today's market. Rolling out to all major retailers nationwide, DENNY's dry sauce and stock ranges include bold flavour variants and versatile stock options.

Dry Cook-In Sauce range
Butter Chicken
Beef Trinchado
Mozambique Peri-Peri

Dry Stock variants
Vegetable
Chicken
Beef
Mushroom



Dry Pasta Sauce range
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