

Bottled, canned & frozen. Can it?

Bottled, canned and frozen products may seem very varied but, despite their differences, these products share many similarities in terms of convenience, market trends and consumer expectations.

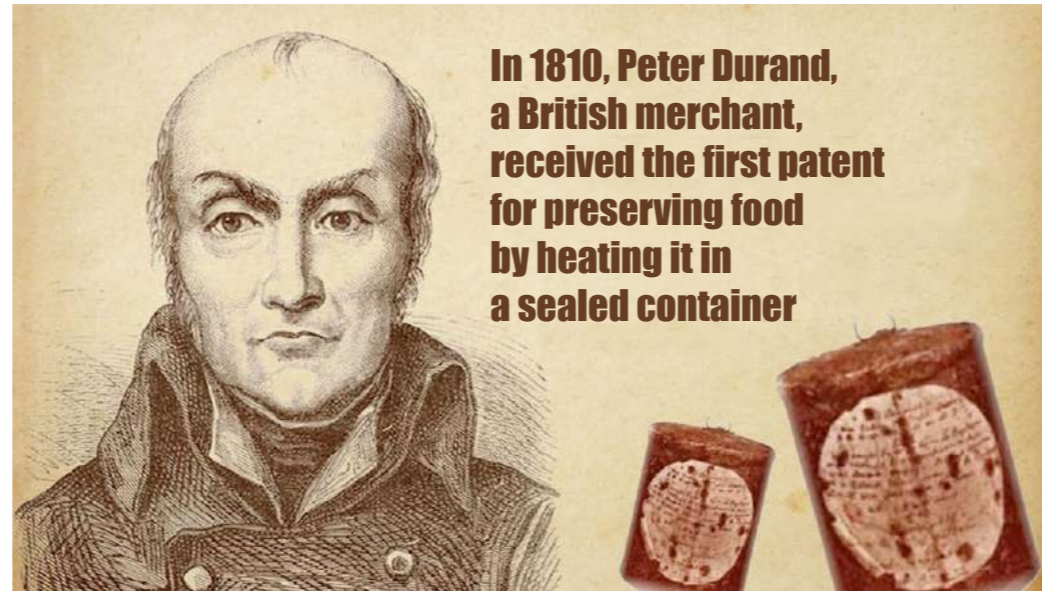
Both manufacturers and retailers need to stay up-to-date on the ever-changing needs of customers and the economic obstacles they encounter. It is crucial to have an understanding of shopper demographics, while keeping an eye on global trends, and maintain adaptability to swiftly respond to changes in market and consumer behaviour.



<https://nevsedom.com.ua/>

The truth behind canning

The South Africa Canned Food market is expected to grow in the upcoming years owing to the increasing urbanisation, busy lifestyles, and rising demand for the convenience of ready-to-eat meals according to a TechSci Research report. "The South



It took 15 years to invent the can. It took 100 more to invent a standard way to open it.



Credit: Musei del Cibo. <https://arstechnica.com/>

Africa Canned Food market stood at USD 120.10 million in 2024 and is anticipated to grow USD 198.72 million by 2030 with a CAGR 5.23%."

In 1810, Peter Durand, a British merchant, received the first patent for the idea of preserving food using tin cans. They have since been a staple in households, providing convenience, a long shelf life and affordability.

As time changes, consumer habits shift due to economic, environmental and health concerns, it

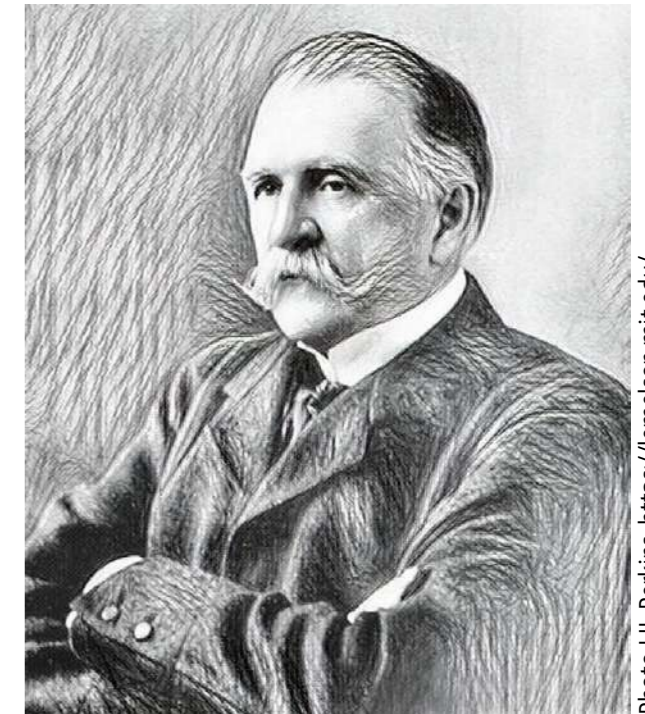


Photo: HL Perkins. <https://lemelson.mit.edu/>

The bully beef can opener, popular in the mid-19th century, resulted in many lost fingers.

William Painter patented 85 inventions, including the common bottle cap, the bottle opener, a machine for crowning bottles, a paper-folding machine, a safety ejection seat for passenger trains, and also a machine for detecting counterfeit currency.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/>

becomes essential to examine the sustainability, demographics, health implications, what drives purchasers and emerging trends.

The advantages of canned foods are numerous

Long shelf life. Canned foods can last for years, reducing food waste and ensuring food security.

"Canned food can endure indefinitely – or at least several years past the date on the label," according to Bryan Quoc Le, Ph.D., food scientist and author.

"Generally, high-acid foods (like tomatoes) will maintain their quality for 18 months after the

'use by' or 'sell by' date. Low-acid items (like meat, beans, and vegetables) will stay at their peak for two to five years."

Convenience. Easy to store, transport, and prepare, making them ideal for busy lifestyles.

Affordability – Often cheaper than fresh produce and less perishable, making them accessible to lower-income households. The cost of canned vegetables can be as low as 50% of the cost of frozen and 20% of the cost of fresh, with virtually no sacrifices in nutritional quality.

Nutrient retention. Canned foods can be just as nutritious as fresh and frozen foods because canning preserves many nutrients. "The amount of minerals, fat-soluble vitamins, protein, fat and carbohydrate remain relatively unchanged by the process of canning," Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Availability. Canned goods ensure year-round access to seasonal foods, reducing dependency on fresh supply chains.



One of the world's most bizarre canned foods is toothy herring. It's hard to tell if you would eat this food, or if it would eat you! Russian herring is basically stewed fish heads with the sharp teeth intact ... chew with caution. Englishrussia.com. TheDailyMeal.com



Smoked rattlesnake, an exotic gourmet wild game meat, is considered a delicacy in the USA's southern states, where rattlesnakes roam free. www.a.ubuy.com



Canned live rattlesnake is, hopefully, a gag. <https://www.flickr.com/>

Though there are a few disadvantages

Nutritional concerns. According to Healthline, salt, sugar and preservatives are sometimes added during the canning process. This may not be a problem for everyone but, with the move to healthier eating, people are demanding healthier options. The high heat destroys microorganisms and inactivates enzymes to preserve the safety and quality of the food. For example, water-soluble vitamins such as vitamin C and many B vitamins. BPA (bisphenol-A) used in can linings may pose health risks, though many manufacturers are moving to BPA-free alternatives.

Taste and texture changes. Some foods lose their original texture and flavour during the canning process.

Environmental Impact. While cans are recyclable, not all end up being recycled, The energy-intensive canning process and waste generation raise sustainability concerns.

Demographics and consumer trends

Urban consumers prefer the convenience of canned foods due to a fast paced lifestyle, it is much easier to combine canned foods with fresh foods for a hastily cooked meal. The elderly appreciate the ease of preparation and long storage life. People in the rural areas depend on canned goods where fresh food supply chains are inconsistent, if not non-existent.

Drivers for purchasing canned foods

Economic pressures and rising food prices push consumers towards budget friendly and non perishable foods. While food security is also becoming important amongst consumers as worries of pandemics, conflicts and natural disasters increase. Consumers in cities and urban areas, with limited storage space opt for more for non-perishable foods.

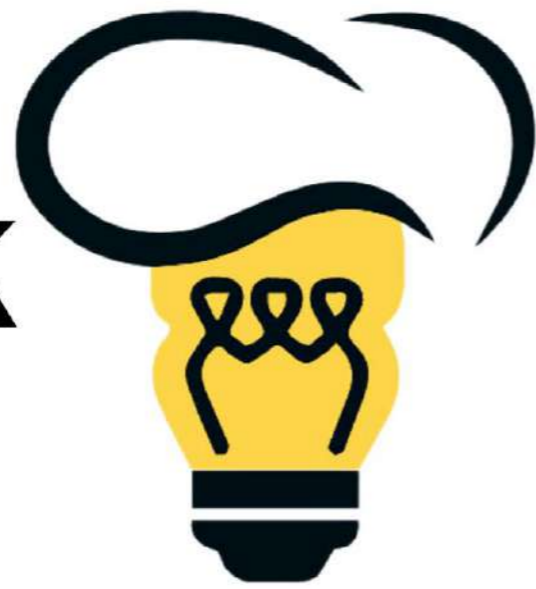
Luxury canned items

According to Spherical Insights, "The market for canned foods in South Africa is growing quickly due to rising disposable income. As consumers'



Because of the rarity and unique flavour, yak meat and milk are more expensive than those of ordinary cattle so that yak products have been counterfeited for profits. There is an urgent need to develop a series of techniques to realise the traceability and authenticity of yak meat and milk. www.sciencedirect.com/

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KEY PRODUCT ADVANTAGES

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- *Quick and easy to make.*
- *Cost effective - No milk required.*
- *Sets quickly - around 1 hour.*
- *Lacto-Vegetarian friendly.*
- *Rich chocolate flavour.*



purchasing power rises as a consequence of their increased financial stability, there is a strong demand for convenient and shelf-stable food options.”

Some firm favourites are Moroccan Style Chickpea and Chicken Soup and Gigantes Plaki (Giant Beans in Tomato Sauce) from Woolworths, a can of Asparagus from Pot o’ Gold. And on the extreme, imported Mountain Yak from Russia or Ristoris Eggplant (a mere R1 370 on Takealot). Canned foods cover multiple demographics, it is the ease and shelf life that makes it indispensable.

Trends

Suppliers are seeing the trend for more exciting and easier to use canned products, like Rhodes Quality Chickpea and Lentil Casserole Veggie Bowl, Terra Madre South African Seasoning.

Plant-based canned foods. Increased demand for vegan and vegetarian canned meals. Like ...

Locally sourced ingredients. South African brands are highlighting locally grown ingredients to support sustainability and local economies.

Tech-driven canning innovations. Smarter packaging, QR codes for traceability, and improved canning processes to retain nutrients.

Innovations in canned goods

Smart cans. Embedded sensors and QR codes allow consumers to check freshness, sourcing, and nutritional information.

BPA-free and eco-friendly packaging. Reducing harmful chemicals while ensuring recyclability.



Smart packaging involves incorporating digital and electronic technologies into packaging materials to add value beyond traditional functions. For metal cans, this means integrating features that can communicate with users, track products, and provide real-time data. Smart packaging improves product safety, enhances consumer experiences, and optimises logistics and supply chain operations. It also helps brands differentiate themselves in a competitive market.

NFC (Near Field Communication) technology enables communication between devices over short distances. In metal cans, NFC tags can be embedded to provide consumers with instant access to product information by tapping their smartphones.

For further information, go to: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/innovations-smart-packaging-metal-cansguangdong-coltd-sophia-hu-rc5be/>

Fermented and functional foods. Canned probiotics, fermented vegetables, and nutrient-enhanced options are on the rise.

Advanced preservation techniques. New methods that reduce the need for artificial preservatives while maintaining freshness.

Canned goods remain a crucial part of South African food markets, as they offer convenience, affordability, and food security. With innovations in packaging, health-conscious formulations, and shifts in consumer behaviour, the industry is evolving to meet modern demands. As economic pressures and sustainability challenges with initiatives like the South African food loss and waste voluntary agreement and Extended Producer Responsibility regulations. Canned foods will likely remain a staple, adapting to new consumer expectations and technological advancements.

Keeping it frozen

The South Africa Frozen Foods Market Size has witnessed steady growth over the past few years and is poised to continue expanding with a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.7% from 2025 to 2034.

Frozen foods would include ready made meals, fruit, vegetables, dairy, low calorie ranges, pastries, meats, snacks, baby meals and pets. As with canned foods, frozen foods have also become increasingly popular.



Got leftovers from the braai? Debone every last morsel and serve in wraps with all the crunchy trimmings the next day.

Drivers for purchasing frozen foods

Convenience: Allowing consumers to quickly prepare a wide range of meals without the need for extensive preparation or refrigeration. This is especially beneficial for busy South African households.

Serves: 2
Preparation time: 5 minutes
Cooking time: 12 minutes

INGREDIENTS

3 red chilli, chopped
1 onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
2cm ginger, grated
15ml masala, roasted
15ml garam masala
45ml tomato paste
15ml sugar
5ml turmeric
250ml chicken stock
30ml oil
300g chicken pops
1 bread loaf
carrot pickle, to serve



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Ideal for a family meal

CHICKEN-POP BUNNY CHOW

For a quick lunch or dinner, you can't go wrong with these chicken-pop bunny chows!

Method:

Blend the chilli, onion, garlic, ginger, masala, garam masala, tomato paste, sugar, turmeric and stock until smooth.

Place in a pot over low heat and cook for 10 minutes.

Add oil to a pan and place over medium-low heat.

Fry the chicken pops until cooked through. Pour the spice blend over the pops.

Slice the bread in half and hollow out each halve.

Spoon the pops into the bread and serve with carrot pickle.



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Longer shelf life: Frozen foods have a longer shelf life compared to fresh produce, reducing food wastage and allowing consumers to stock up on items for future use.

Nutritional value: Freezing helps preserve the nutritional value of food, making it a healthy choice. In fact, frozen fruits and vegetables often retain more nutrients than those stored in refrigerators for extended periods.

Esther Ellis in eatright.org. explains, "Fruits and vegetables are picked at peak ripeness and often frozen within hours, locking in nutrients and flavour. Generally, frozen foods retain their vitamins and minerals and there is no change to the carbohydrate, protein or fat content."



Esther Ellis

“ In some cases, frozen foods have more vitamins and minerals compared to fresh because fresh foods lose vitamins and minerals over time while freezing preserves nutrients. ”



Diverse selection.

The frozen food segment offers a diverse selection of products, including fruits, vegetables, meats, seafood, and ready meals.

This variety allows consumers to choose their preferred options without compromising on taste or selection.



www.freepik.com/

Drawbacks to frozen food

Despite promising growth potential, the South African frozen foods market faces several impediments ...

Energy costs. One pressing issue is the steep energy costs, which significantly drives up the expense of keeping frozen foods. To mitigate these costs, manufacturers and retailers are having to invest in efficient technologies.

Loadshedding. With loadshedding and unreliable power, many consumers are finding that food spoils and is a huge waste of expense and also unwanted food wastage.

“Frozen foods will remain frozen for about 48 hours, again if the freezer door is kept closed. If any perishable foods start to thaw for whatever reason, they CANNOT be re-frozen and should be cooked as soon as possible,” says Dr Anelich, speaking about loadshedding in South Africa.

Storage. Maintaining the quality of frozen foods also relies on proper storage and logistics. Inadequate facilities and logistical challenges, especially in rural areas, can slow market expansion.

Fresh food demand. While there is a still demand for frozen options, many South Africans still prefer fresh produce – particularly in rural regions where it is more readily available. Changing consumer perceptions towards frozen foods may be a gradual process.

Sustainability. Concerns about the environmental impact of packaging have been raised, specifically regarding plastic materials.

While there is an increasing trend towards eco-friendly alternatives, this shift may encounter resistance due to higher costs.

Many companies, like McCains, claim they “grow food responsibly, reducing our carbon footprint, supporting the communities where we operate and ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come. We have implemented Resource Efficiency Action Plans at all of our facilities.”

The growth in awareness of healthy eating, especially of frozen fruits, vegetables and low-calorie meals creates opportunities for the frozen food industry. Also, there is greater market access with the expansion of retail networks around South Africa.

Some challenges could be supply chain issues, maintaining integrity throughout the supply chain requires significant investment infrastructure which result in higher prices.



Serves: 4
Preparation time: 20 minutes
Cooking time: 20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

16 chicken nuggets
Spicy mayonnaise

1/2 cup mayonnaise
1 tsp Sriracha sauce

Pickled cucumber

1 cup water
1/3 cup vinegar (apple cider or white)
3 tbsps sugar

Bao-bun filling

8 frozen bao buns
10g coriander leaves picked off whole
Small handful of radish, finely sliced

Serve. Seal. Repeat



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Don't expect leftovers!

Method:

Cook the chicken nuggets according to the packaging instructions. Mix the mayonnaise and Sriracha sauce in a bowl and side aside until serving.

To make the pickled cucumber, peel the cucumbers into ribbons. De-gorge the ribbons by putting them into a colander over a bowl with a generous sprinkle of salt to draw out the water from the cucumber. Leave for 15 minutes.

Mix the water, vinegar, sugar and salt in a small bowl. Stir until the sugar has dissolved. Add the cucumber, making sure it is all covered in the brine, and let it rest in the fridge until you are ready to serve.

Cut out small squares of grease-proof paper to go under each bao bun. Steam the bao buns in a vegetable steamer on the hob. Add a little water to the base pan and then place the bao buns onto the steaming rack above with a fitted lid. Steam for about 7 minutes.

To assemble the buns, add the mayonnaise to the bottom bun and top with coriander leaves, chicken nuggets and radish. Use a cocktail stick to spear the top of the bun with a folded pickled cucumber ribbon.



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Bottled

Driven by a growing demand for packaged items resulting from the rapid growth of urban areas and an expanding middle-income group, the market is primarily controlled by plastic packaging companies in South Africa.

The current trend is towards both solid and adaptable packaging options, with a notable inclination towards flexible pouches due to their cost-efficiency and convenience. Polyethylene and polypropylene plastics are the preferred materials, valued for their sturdy nature and reasonable cost. The leading consumer sector is food and beverages.

A shift towards sustainable solutions and urbanisation, with plastic bottles dominating the market due to cost-effectiveness, but facing pressure from glass and other materials. For convenience, bottles take centre stage. Within the retail market the appetite for beverages, particularly ready-to-drink mixes, is driving the demand for plastic bottles in South Africa.

“Insights from the Liquor License Authority revealed that the strong consumer inclination toward the ready-to-drink segment encouraged producers to diversify their offerings, fuelling market growth. Moreover, the rising demand for fruit juices with varied flavours and formulations is significantly boosting the country’s plastic bottle consumption,” explains Mordor Intelligence.

The South Africa Plastic Bottles Market size is worth USD 57.97 million in 2025, growing at an 5.54% CAGR and is forecast to hit USD 75.91 million by 2030.



Black caviar is one of the most elite delicacies as well as the most expensive canned and bottled product in the world. Europeans are willing to pay up to €5 000 per kilogram for the ‘food of kings’. Because of commanding such high prices, caviar is not available to the vast majority of Russians, despite the fact that Russia is one of the few exporters of this premium product. The high price of the product is mainly due to the reduction of the number of sturgeon in the Caspian Sea every year. Because of this, in 2003, Russia officially banned commercial production of black caviar. Today, the country has artificial breeding sturgeon farms which are now the main suppliers of this elite product. They extract the eggs, which they are allowed to sell legally. <https://choppasenoel.blogspot.com>

Bottled market trends and drivers

Growing demand. Urbanisation and a burgeoning middle class are fuelling demand for packaged goods, especially food and beverages, leading to increased demand for both plastic and glass bottles.

Plastic dominance. Plastic bottles are the dominant packaging choice due to their cost-effectiveness, versatility, and durability, but this is starting to change as sustainability is becoming more of a factor.

Plastic bottles are seeing a continuous growth, particularly in the food and beverage sector, while glass bottles are gaining traction as a sustainable alternative, especially in premium and luxury markets. In South Africa, renowned for its world class vineyards, the Cape region generates

significant demand for premium wine bottles. These are used locally and internationally.

Sustainability concerns. Increasing awareness of environmental issues and government regulations on recycling and sustainability are driving the demand for sustainable packaging solutions, including glass and alternative materials. Surprisingly glass bottles were placed 4th in the list of recycling, just behind plastic at 3rd, because there are more gas emissions when recycling glass.

E-commerce and retail. The growth of online retail platforms and e-commerce are also contributing to the demand for packaging solutions, including plastic bottles.

Recycling initiatives. There are initiatives to improve recycling rates and promote circular economy principles in the plastics industry. The SA Plastics Pact aims to drive circularity in the plastics industry, with initiatives focused on redesigning packaging for greater recyclability, and promoting alternative packaging materials. The Glass Recycling Company (TGRC), situated in Johannesburg, has a clear mandate to increase glass recycling and collaborates with government bodies and stakeholders to achieve these goals.

A significant amount of waste ends up in landfills, highlighting the need for improved recycling infrastructure and consumer behaviour. The rise of sustainable packaging solutions, including glass and paper, poses challenges. Improving recycling infrastructure and promoting responsible consumer behaviour are crucial for addressing waste and promoting a circular economy. **SR**



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