

Steaming while nuking is hot food trend

Food processors are coming up with an array of new products, both frozen and fresh, that are intended to be steamed in the microwave.

Products from several major food companies use packaging that allows steam to build up during microwaving. This is usually done through vents or tiny perforations, in either the film or rigid components of the packaging, that allow steam generated by the product's moisture to build up and escape gradually.

New steamed products include:

- **Steamfresh from Birds Eye Foods.** This line of 17 frozen vegetables sold \$100 million after its introduction last year—a figure Birds Eye expects to more than double this year. A spokesperson



Steaming product in the bag is an increasingly favored strategy for frozen food processors.

called it "our biggest new product innovation in 25 years."

- **Café Steamers from ConAgra Foods.** Scheduled to be introduced this summer, this line of 12 frozen dinners under ConAgra's Healthy Choice label uses a tray-in-tray format to steam different components of the meal at varying levels. The sauce compartment has tiny holes to let the steam rise through the meal in the perforated top tray.

- **Green Giant Simply Steam vegetables from General Mills.** These boxed frozen vegetables have an interior bag that allows the product to steam in the microwave. General Mills rolled out two varieties of Simply Steam last summer and added eight more this year. In addition, **Green Giant Fresh**, a General Mills licensee operated by Scholl

Group II, unveiled Freshtables, a line of fresh vegetables in a vented flexible bag designed to steam in the microwave, at this year's Food Marketing Institute (FMI) show.

- **Steamers from McCormick & Co.** Two extensions of McCormick's spice/steam bag combo, which was brought out last year for vegetables, were unveiled at FMI: Potato Steamers, for cubed or whole new potatoes, and Seafood Steamers, for fish fillets, shrimp and other seafood products.

