

Streamlining microwave packaging

BY SANDY PARLIN

Hurried consumers want convenience, simplicity, speed, and quality in heat-and-eat entrées. And no mess, please!

With the economy capricious and everyone pressed for time, suppliers seek ways to improve heat-and-eat technology. Time-starved consumers want packaging that improves preparation and cleanup and adds simplicity to heat-and-eat entrées. That means products designed for one-handed opening, quick heating, and no-spill disposal.

Consumers want to avoid slitting or puncturing plastic covers and other activities that require time, implements, and decisions. (Do I need a paring knife or a scissors?

How hot is this container? Will it leak in the microwave or on the trip to the table or trash?).

Associated Packaging Technologies, based in Jupiter, FL, provides packaging for microwavable meals. John L. Giordani, vice president of sales, marketing and technical sales in Exton, PA, for Associated Packaging, says the current trend in heat-and-eat entrées is toward improved meal quality and faster delivery to the consumer's table. He attributes this to the continued expansion of two-income families, workforce reduction, and people working longer hours. Giordani

notes that Nestle, ConAgra, and Pinnacle use proprietary crystalline polyethylene terephthalate (CPET) trays supplied by APT for entrées that can be consumed right from the packaging.

At Cryovac Food Packaging Division, Sealed Air Corp. in Duncan, SC, Jay Wilson, marketing director for Smoked & Processed Meats, also sees consumers' needs for convenience, preparation, and cleanup because of their busy lives. He hasn't seen much recent change in this area.

Sealed Air Corp., based in Saddle Brook, NJ, is a leading global manufacturer of a wide range of

protective, presentation, and fresh-foods packaging materials and systems. Cryovac/Sealed Air developed a revolutionary heat-and-serve package to give consumers convenience without compromising quality. Unlike other heat-and-serve formats that can require handling and cutting open a hot and steamy package, Cryovac® Simple Steps™ heat-and-serve package permits customers to complete product preparation in three simple steps: They remove the tray from its outer packaging, heat for the designated time (usually about four minutes) and let cool, pull the easy-open tab to remove the film, and serve. Simple Steps eliminates the need to punc-



Photo courtesy of Cryovac/Sealed Air Corp.