



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TOP CHEF MICHAEL CHIARELLO SERVES UP TIPS FOR FAMILIES CRAVING QUICK YET AUTHENTIC ITALIAN MEALS AT HOME

Marie Callender's® Pasta al Dente Extends Top-selling Line of Steamed Frozen Entrées with Four Robust New Varieties that Bring the Taste of Italy to the Table in Less Than Five Minutes

OMAHA, Neb., Oct. 5, 2009 – American palates have been enamored with the tastes and flavors of Italian meals for years. In fact, when asked to name their favorite ethnic cuisine, American consumers have consistently named “Italian” as one of the top choices, according to the Institute of Food Technologistsⁱ. Marie Callender’s knows that an authentic Italian meal requires more than simply putting pasta on a plate so just in time for National Pasta Month, the brand has teamed up with award-winning Italian-American chef, Food Network host and *Top Chef Masters* contestant Michael Chiarello to help Americans create a full, authentic Italian dining experience at home.

A recent survey revealed that seven out of 10 Americans have a taste for authentic, home-cooked Italian meals, but nearly half don’t have the time or energy to prepare oneⁱⁱ. Now, busy consumers desiring a taste of Italy can enjoy a variety of bona fide Italian meals that are both fresh and flavorful – from the freezer, to the microwave, to the table in less than five minutes with the popular new Marie Callender’s Pasta al Dente line from ConAgra Foods. Marie Callender’s, which launched the line with six meals in March, is introducing four new varieties.

“Whether you’re preparing a homemade Italian meal from scratch or enjoying the convenience of Marie Callender’s Pasta al Dente varieties, a few simple tricks can transform your home into the Italian countryside for an evening,” said Chiarello. “Gourmet hors d’oeuvres, colorful sides, a mouthwatering entrée, decadent desserts, wines and lots of ambiance can really round out the Italian experience.”

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With that in mind, Chiarello offers these tips to help consumers fully experience the Italian meal:

- Match the shape of the pasta to the texture of the sauce. A smooth sauce is great with long, thin noodles while chunkier sauces are perfect with a hollow noodle.
- Cooking your pasta “al dente,” or firm, is a must for authentic Italian meals. Always cooked to perfection, with the right textures to hold their sauces, such dishes as *Chicken Carbonara* can be a daily delight.
- Think beyond the meal. Set the mood with Italian music, such as Pavarotti, and serve wine in casual tumblers, along with your *Tortellini Romano*.
- When pressed for time, try steaming your pasta in the microwave and heating the sauce separately. Then, when you have extra time, make the sauce by hand and savor the experience!
- Family-style antipasti on oversized rustic platters add to the flavor of the experience around your table. For classic and simple antipasti platters, start with a variety of easy-to-find cured meats, Italian cheeses, marinated vegetables and olives, and tomato steaks.
- Serve your bread hot and crispy from the oven, topped with olive oil, sea salt, and a mixture of ground Parmesan cheese and dried herbs.
- Surround your pasta dishes with foods from your region. Local produce served in fresh salads, antipasti, and fresh-fruit desserts are the backbone of *Cucina Italiana*.

Real Ingredients, Real Flavor; Steamed to Perfection

In recent years, breakthrough innovations have brought consumers back to the frozen aisle. In fact, according to NPD Group data, sales of frozen foods were expected to increase by 4.5 percent in 2008 and remain strong throughout the recession.ⁱⁱⁱ ConAgra Foods saw a major opportunity to deliver a truly groundbreaking product in the frozen aisle with Marie Callender’s Pasta al Dente.

“We conducted extensive research prior to launching Marie Callender’s Pasta al Dente to find out what consumers were looking for in a frozen meal. We learned they were disappointed in the quality of many frozen pasta meals, which were often soggy or mushy. Consumers wanted something better, so we created Marie Callender’s Pasta al Dente to meet that need,” said Rob McCutcheon, vice president and general manager, Marie Callender’s. “We’re so confident that these meals will shatter consumers’ expectations of what frozen meals can be that we’re backing it up with our Perfect Pasta Promise – your meal steamed perfectly every time, or your money back.”

All Marie Callender’s Pasta al Dente varieties utilize a patented SteamCooker™ technology, which separates the ingredients from the sauce with a two-tray, steam-cooking system that steams the meals in your microwave in five minutes or less. The innovative technology used to prepare Marie Callender’s

Pasta al Dente entrées is the same method used in Healthy Choice® Café Steamers™, recognized as the best-selling new food product in 2008 by Information Resources, Inc. (IRI).

The line of 10 Marie Callender’s Pasta al Dente meals was developed from classic Italian recipes and traditions that use fresh Italian herbs and spices and include:

- **(New) Penne Chicken Piccata** with lemon and white wine butter sauce, spinach and capers
- **(New) Chicken Carbonara** with uncured bacon and peas
- **(New) Chicken Pesto Parmesan** with Roma tomatoes, broccoli, and Parmesan cheese
- **(New) Beef Bolognese Rigatoni** with hearty vegetables and rich Parmesan cheese
- **Rigatoni Marinara Classico** with meatballs and Italian sausage
- **Tortellini Romano** with fresh basil and real Parmesan cheese
- **Penne Garlic Chicken** with chunks of artichoke hearts and Roma tomatoes
- **Creamy Basil Chicken** with crushed pesto and fresh zucchini
- **Fettuccini Chicken Balsamic** with crimini mushrooms and balsamic vinegar from Modena, Italy
- **Shrimp Rigatoni** with shrimp in lobster cream sauce

Marie Callender’s Pasta al Dente meals are available at grocery stores nationwide with a suggested retail price of \$3.49 for a 10- to 11-ounce meal. For more information about each dish and the Perfect Pasta Promise, visit www.mariespasta.com.

ABOUT CONAGRA FOODS

ConAgra Foods, Inc., (NYSE: CAG) is one of North America's leading food companies, with brands in 97 percent of America's households. Consumers find *Banquet*, *Chef Boyardee*, *Egg Beaters*, *Healthy Choice*, *Hebrew National*, *Hunt's*, *Marie Callender's*, *Orville Redenbacher's*, *PAM*, *Peter Pan*, *Reddi-wip* and many ConAgra Foods brands in grocery, convenience, mass merchandise and club stores. ConAgra Foods also has a strong business-to-business presence, supplying potato, other vegetable, spice and grain products to a variety of well-known restaurants, foodservice operators and commercial customers. For more information, please visit us at www.conagrafoods.com.

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ⁱ Institute of Food Technologists, State-of-the-Industry Report: *What, When, and Where America Eats*. January, 2006. <http://members.ift.org/NR/rdonlyres/65A7B82E-0AFF-4639-95B2-733B8225D93A/0/0106americaeats.pdf>

ⁱⁱ These findings are based on a survey conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation among a sample of 1,000 U.S. adults 18 years of age and older. The Caravan Omnibus study is conducted twice a week among a demographically representative sample of U.S. adults. Interviewing for this survey was completed April 17-20, 2009. SOURCE ConAgra Foods, Inc.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mintel Oxygen Reports, *Mintel Identifies Recession-Proof Food and Drink Markets*. April 2009. <http://www.mintel.com/press-release/Mintel-Identifies-RecessionProof-Food-and-Drink-Markets?id=342>