

Mealtimes

Fresher, healthier, more convenient and always affordable

One of the fastest growing departments of South Africa's largest privately owned supermarket group, Food Lover's Market, is the Home Meal Replacement (HMR) offering. HMR are fully, or partially, prepared foods that solve fast-growing consumer needs – such as a lack of time, lack of skill, or lack of desire to prepare food.

The Food Lover's Market Group, which includes Food Lover's Market, FreshStop and Food Lover's Eatery, first started offering basic HMR when they made the transition from Fruit and Veg City to Food Lover's Market in 2012 at their Hillfox store in Johannesburg. They wanted to be known as a 'Theatre of Food' and having an HMR department was an obvious choice in building that reputation and creating an environment synonymous with a market-feel shopping experience.

Restrictions, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, saw Food Lover's Market experiencing a decline in the need for HMR during 2020 and part of 2021, but with the restrictions now lifted and more people returning to the office, HMR sales have picked up as consumers are once again becoming more time deficient.



“As more and more South Africans opt for prepared meals that save time and satisfy their appetites, HMR is gaining momentum.”

Sandro Gastaldi, General Manager for Specialty Foods, FLM.



The retailer constantly innovates its offering by finding inspiration through HMR trends on the international scene. Senior management regularly spends time in the United States and Europe, gaining insight into fresh ideas that can be translated for the South African consumer. Some innovation that was brought back includes poké bowls – a no-brainer for the retailer as they were already selling sushi.

Gastaldi adds, “HMR isn't only about offering customers ease and convenience in making delicious food. It's about understanding the market and being willing to innovate by catering to diverse tastes and diets.”

Food Lover's Market has spent a great deal of time raising the bar on HMR to make sure that it's healthy, convenient, affordable and fresh.

The retailer constantly





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HOME MEAL REPLACEMENT (HMR)

Another is offering a slew of healthy salad options in the Food Lover's Eatery outlets. These salad options, which include cut and washed greens, proteins, whole grains and more, enable the consumer to construct a brand new salad every day for almost a year, without any repetition of a recipe.

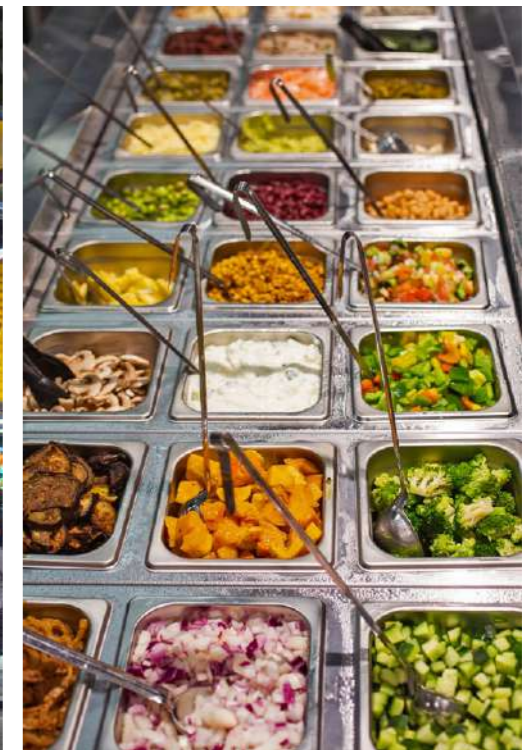
The demand for HMR

In South Africa, we are seeing more and more people going back to work full time or in a family situation, both parents going back to the office. These consumers no longer have the time on their hands that they did during the lockdown to prepare meals. HMR's are a convenient way to get a nutritious meal on the go.

Says Gastaldi, "We offer food that people can take home so that they don't have to cook, or they can choose to bring part of the meal home and cook the other part themselves."

This ensures that the consumer can make up a complete and healthy meal without spending too much time in the kitchen. The HMR offering also caters to singletons and couples and the salads, Pie Oh My, Bubs' Fish and Chips, Crispy Chicken and Fresh Society are perfect for quick smaller meals.

Food Lover's Market caters to all the needs of HMR consumers in the sense that they offer whole meal offerings such as roast chicken with a family-sized salad, bakes, and stews. Or in the form of side dishes, such as mash, rice or roast potatoes that would be served with a protein that the consumer





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would cook themselves, i.e. bringing part of your meal home.

The retailer also found that more shoppers are looking for fresh and healthy options these days and that is why they have such a wide variety of health-focused HMR products. Especially those that include vegetarian and vegan options. "This really follows our ethos – fresh is best," says Gastaldi, adding, "We also have access to fresh produce and a fantastic supplier network to ensure we can offer the freshest healthy meals in-store daily to cater to all shopper requirements."

What sets Food Lover's Market apart in terms of its HMR offering?

The conventional offering in the marketplace does not give the consumer the options that you would find in Food Lover's Market stores with the mixing and matching. When you buy at conventional retailers, you are bound by their smaller offerings.

Another important feature that sets Food Lover's Market apart is the fact that each store prepares its HMR's in-house, daily, from salads to sushi and stews. They also offer a much wider range of hot and chilled foods that people can mix and match. As an example, you can choose a roti for your Thai Green Curry instead of regular rice, or an assortment of carbohydrates to go with your stew, instead of just one option, like pap.

"Supplying the consumer with the choice for individual needs, dietary requirements, as well as the taste of their family is something we strive for," says Gastaldi.



In summer, their lighter offerings include healthy family salads, rotisserie chicken, and new additions such as Cob Salad, Southern Fried Chicken Salad, and a festive Cranberry and Goat's Cheese salad. Says Gastaldi, "Launching into summer, we have also been expanding our sushi range which now includes various Poké Bowl selections and Asian Noodle Meals. These are available



What is the retailer doing well?

Food Lover's Market is setting the bar for offering a wide variety of unique menus that change seasonally. In winter you will find an assortment of hearty soups, and a large variety of curries, from local flavours, such as Durban to more exotic, such as Thai, and nourishing stews. Along with these, you have the option to choose your side dishes which include rice, mash, bread, and warm roasted vegetables to name just a few.



all day, every day, freshly made in-house – using sustainably sourced fish. We like to make sure that new items are being offered every season."

They are also pushing the envelope by boasting fully equipped on-site kitchens staffed by skilled personnel who undergo continuous training on new developments, innovations, and recipes. The retailer possesses an internal innovation department that assists with recipe development, which is shared across the group for consistency.

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In terms of the design of each department – they evolve with the development of every new store striving to meet the local consumer needs. Food Lover’s Market has transformed their traditional brick-and-mortar space into an emporium to delight the senses by employing various animatronics and digital screens to keep the customer informed, entertained and engaged while shopping.

The consumer will find on offer, the following departments ...

● **Standard Food Lover’s Market Hot Foods (food on offer in the bain-marie’s)**

In this department, you will find a variety of meats such as chicken, beef, pork (in the non-Halaal stores), and lamb. These are available as whole roasts or in pieces. This is where you will find the many offerings of hot soups, stews and curries – all of which are made on-site. Hot side dishes are also available in this department, for example, roast potatoes, individual and mixed vegetables, and other carbohydrate offerings. “The idea here, is that you can create a whole meal, which is fresh, affordable and convenient from the hot food offering,” says Gastaldi.

Included in the hot food range are the popular Golden Pocket samosas, spring rolls, corn dogs, rissoles, quiches, and Mexican pies.

The cold foods offering is also included in this department. Here you will find Food Lover’s Market’s sizeable range of seasonal salads from conventional potato to the more exotic quinoa



and couscous. New additions include a Marinated Vegetable Salad, A Middle Eastern Salad, a Luxury Bean Salad, as well as a mouth-watering Roasted Butternut, Onion, and Chickpea Salad.

If you are looking for lunchbox snacks or fillers for yourself or your children, you will also find an array of scrumptious treats in this department. Burgers (beef, chicken, and rib), mini burgers, mini meatballs (frikkadels) mini sausage rolls, cheese viennas, mini hotdogs, filled pancakes and filled vetkoek will take lunchboxes to the next level. All these snacks are complimented by our ever-popular take-home pizzas that you just pop in the oven and are ready in minutes. Or as an alternative, buy a pack of three pizza bases for you to test your creativity at home.

Also falling under this department are the chilled sides – these refer to a range of either oven-ready or microwavable sides to accompany any meal, including pasta meals. These heat-and-eat dishes have all been developed for the convenience of the consumer.

● **Bubs’ Fish & Chips**

Bub’s Fish and Chips offer all things seafood from battered fish fillets, to calamari, fish bites, baby hake, and snoek with an option of chips for takeaway. This department is not available in all stores as a stand-alone, but in those without it, battered fish and chips are available in the Hot Foods Section.





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● Crispy Chicken

A fast-growing department which is also available at FreshStop Stores. "Crispy Chicken has become increasingly popular in our FreshStop stores, therefore we decided to offer it in our supermarket space too," says Gastaldi. Here you can find a range of crispy fried chicken pieces, portions, strips, burgers, and chips.

● Pie Oh My

Pie Oh My is an offering of gourmet family-sized pies that range from your traditional chicken or pepper steak to more adventurous, venison. This department also offers a full range of individual gourmet pies for one.



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● **Fresh Society**

This is the department for the more health conscience consumer. On offer, there is a range of freshly cut fruit as well as smoothies, healthy breakfast cups, and a variety of take-home fruit salads. The health wraps are vegan-friendly (using beetroot and cauliflower wraps) and include vegan-friendly ingredients.

Here you will also find filled ciabatta rolls and bagels. Healthy meals such as containers with chicken strips and salad and dressing are ready for any on-the-go consumer. "I would say that one of the features of Fresh Society that we are most proud of is the selection of fresh pressed juices available, that we make on-site, using fruit and vegetables from within the store's fresh produce department," says Gastaldi.

How is FLM handling the logistics of running successful HMR departments?

Food Lover's market is very fortunate that technically there are no actual logistics involved as all the products are in-store. Says Gastaldi, "All the ingredients for our HMR offering are available in-store – i.e., butchery, grocery, fresh produce, bakery, and fish department. We don't have to worry about bringing ingredients in. They are all fresh and on-site." This factor is also what makes their HMR so affordable.

According to Gastaldi, "To run a successful HMR department, you must get the science behind it right." That is why Health and Food Safety audits are carried out regularly by independent service providers to ensure that all food safety criteria are met at all Food Lover's Market stores.

Why become involved in HMR?

Food Lover's Market realised that there was a growing demand for healthy, affordable, and convenient food that is freshly prepared daily. "This is who we are. It reflects our overall offering of being an outlet that focuses on fresh affordable products. Our HMR departments are another expression of Food Lover's Market striving to offer what the consumer wants and being the best in fresh," says Gastaldi. **SR**



HMR editorial provided by Jean Harket – Storybook Communications for Food Lover's Market



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