

In the **final installment** of a three-part series covering **Tyson Foods' Prepared Foods Challenge**, four Chicagoland families use their newfound knowledge of prepared foods to put fresh meals on the table.



## PREPARED FOODS INSIGHTS

Lisa Schnurr and her son, Scott, use store-prepared meatballs to simplify a pasta dinner.



# For Inspiration's Sake

Connecting with consumers in meaningful ways can enrich their experiences with retail prepared foods.

If retailers really want to build loyalty, redefine the deli as a store destination and capitalize on increased demand for fresh prepared foods, they need to get consumers on board.

Springdale, Ark.-based Tyson Foods recently conducted an experiment that suggests retailers can create a more effective shopper's journey with communication and education tactics that inspire consumers to use the benefits of the entire store for their convenient meal solutions.

"We need to focus on consumers and what makes sense to them," concluded Eric Le Blanc, director of marketing for Tyson Foods. "We need to move away from product-centric thinking and move toward shopper-centric thinking and meal-centric thinking. Focusing our efforts on educating and inspiring the consumer is the most important thing we can do and the execution of that is critical."

### The Path to Inspiration

Tyson Foods' and Redwood City, Calif.-based marketing firm Green Bear Group's "Prepared Foods Challenge" called upon four Chicagoland families to exclusively use prepared foods from their local supermarkets to assemble seven consecutive family dinners.

On days one through three of the Challenge, no help or advice

was given to the Keeley, Ramirez, Schnurr and Gebien families, leaving them frustrated and disappointed by what they considered an overall lack of product variety, freshness and quality in the prepared foods department.

Charlie Baggs, executive chef and president of Charlie Baggs Culinary Innovations, visited the families on days four, five and six of the Challenge and quickly changed their perceptions, educating and inspiring them to use prepared foods in new ways and to enjoy the benefits of the supermarket in its entirety.

Among other tips, Baggs offered advice on planning ahead for shopping excursions, the best ways to navigate a grocery store, using prepared foods for multiple meals as a cost-saving measure, and taking advantage of what's available in other store departments to enhance prepared foods and create more complete, cohesive meals.

"I'm not here to teach them how to become a chef, but I may be able to teach them how to use prepared products to their advantage and how to complement a prepared food item with other fresh ingredients," said Baggs.

By day seven the four families were on their own again, this time equipped with what they learned about fresh prepared foods on days four, five and six.

“It was sink or swim time, and I’m not sure my family had the highest confidence in me,” said mom June Keeley, as she embarked on the seventh day of the Challenge. “Normally I would dread going to the store on a Saturday, but I had direction. I had motivation. I actually felt happy. I felt like a winner.”

Keeley organized her shopping cart following Baggs’ instructions, separating the protein from carbohydrates, and purchased prepared salads and other ingredients for Italian beef sandwiches. At home, she encouraged her family to participate in the meal prep to liven up the dinner experience.

The Schnurr and Gebien families, meanwhile, made pasta and their own sauce, but added store-prepared meatballs as a time saver. The Gebiens further supplemented garlic tomato bread with produce from their home garden.

Ebony Ramirez, a wife and mother of five, said she felt more confident entering the store on day seven because she took Baggs’ advice and developed a purchase plan. Moreover, she had a clearer understanding of how to use the whole supermarket to meet her family’s mealtime needs.

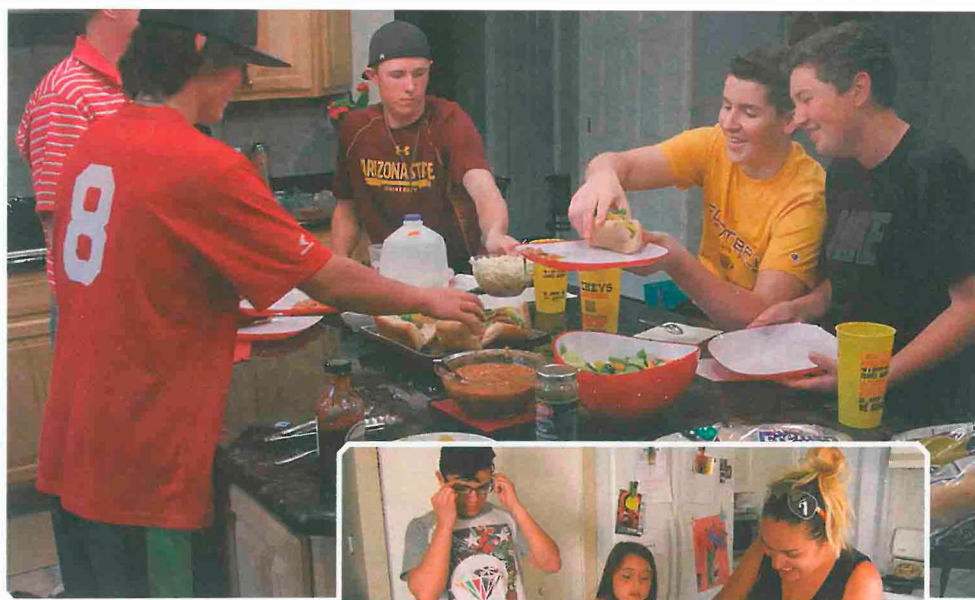
**“Today, even though I was using prepared foods, dinner felt like homemade to me.”**  
— **Ebony Ramirez**

I know it’s not from scratch but when I’m putting it together it feels like I’m making it from scratch. Today, even though I was using prepared foods, dinner felt like homemade to me.”

### Communication is Critical

Tyson’s Le Blanc stressed that the four families’ success in the aftermath of Chef Baggs’ visits demonstrates the importance of educating and inspiring consumers. Communicating the full benefits of retail prepared foods in the context of the entire store was key.

“To start any revolution you must change the conversation,” said Le Blanc. “Once we change the conversation what we find is that the real challenge in prepared foods is a communication



The Keeley and Ramirez families wrap up the “Prepared Foods Challenge” with meals that combine retail prepared foods and other fresh ingredients.



challenge. It’s a shopper marketing challenge. How do we find a way to speak to the target consumer before they even enter the store, and how do we deliver the right message to activate their purchase intent?”

As a first step, Amber Langston, a channel marketing manager for Tyson Foods, suggested that retailers use their existing digital infrastructures, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, websites or on-line advertising, as low-cost, low-investment options for consumer education and inspiration.

“We’ve noticed that many retailers are underutilizing their digital infrastructure to communicate about the prepared foods department in any way,” Langston said. “And if they are, they certainly are not educating and inspiring the consumer.”

Channel marketing manager Brad Bennett added that retailers haven’t scratched the surface in terms of marketing and enriching the shopper’s experience using retail prepared foods. He pointed to department signage, co-marketing opportunities, stronger integration of existing loyalty plans and use of a chef by appointment only as potential tactics to inspire consumers.

Le Blanc insisted that retailers’ focus on new equipment, products and store design is misplaced.

“All the bells and whistles that we see everyone trying to add to what they do, that’s not where loyalty is won or lost,” he said. “The answer goes back to communication. It’s critical we communicate with the shopper both inside the store and outside the store. We have to not only tell consumers what to do, we need to inspire them to do it.” ■

## TIMELINE PREPARED FOODS CHALLENGE

DAYS 1-3

Families make dinner on their own using prepared foods from local supermarkets.

DAYS 4-6

Chef Charlie Baggs educates the families on prepared foods and how to make the most of them.

DAY 7

Families are on their own to make dinner, this time using what they learned about prepared foods and the supermarket as a whole.