

FOOD PROCESSING

Towards Sustainable Growth Opportunities



SECTOR PROFILE

**READY TO EAT /READY TO
COOK /READY TO DRINK**



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ABSTRACT

The Indian food processing sector has witnessed remarkable growth, surpassing a 9% average annual growth rate since 2014-15. The Gross Value Addition (GVA) in the food processing sector has shown a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 7.27% in the past five years. The sector contributes approximately 20% to the overall GVA at basic prices, highlighting its competitiveness and ability to cater to international markets. India's processed food exports have experienced a significant surge, reaching US\$13.07 billion in 2022-23. The Ministry of Food Processing Industries has provided support and incentives to the sector through its flagship schemes, such as the Pradhan Mantri - Kisan Sampada Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Formalisation Micro Food Processing Enterprises, and the Production Linked Incentive Scheme.

India is the second-largest producer of various agricultural products and has a rapidly growing consumer market and food sector. The convenience food sector, which includes RTE, RTC & RTS products, has experienced significant growth in recent years due to the increasing preference for convenient and easy-to-prepare food among the working population. The RTE segment has grown at a CAGR of 12% over the last decade, while the RTC segment has grown at a CAGR of 7%. Factors driving the growth of the RTE/RTC market in India include rapid urbanization, product innovation, rising disposable incomes, and booming e-commerce sector. The RTE/RTC & RTS market in India offers a wide variety of products such as biscuits, jaggery, breakfast cereals, wafers, dessert mixes, snack mixes, energy drinks, soups, pasta & noodles and curry making enablers. The growth of the sector in India is supported by a strong regulatory framework, research and development initiatives, and government schemes focused on the sector's development.

The document also provides insights into the global trends in the sector, highlighting that the sector also has significant export potential, with Indian RTE/RTC products gaining recognition in the global market. The popularity of ready-to-eat/ready-to-cook (RTE/RTC) food takeaways has been on the rise due to the ever-changing consumer preferences for packaged meals. People are now seeking higher-quality ingredients, increased variety, and faster delivery when it comes to their food choices. The country's export of RTE/RTC food products has shown significant growth, with biscuits, confectionery, jaggery, Indian sweets & snacks, papad, flours and milled products, and powder/starch being the major categories.

Overall, With India's position as a major food producer and its rapidly growing consumer market, the RTE/RTC & RTS sector presents attractive opportunities for investment and growth.

01. INTRODUCTION

India is second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, cotton, groundnuts, fruits and vegetable in the world. India is one of the fastest growing economies in Asia-Pacific and its rapidly growing consumer market along with a large food sector. Consequently, India has become the more dynamic destination for a wide range of international food companies.

Convenience food is a type of food that requires less time and effort to prepare, as it includes Ready-to-eat / Ready-to-cook products. These products are pre-washed, pre-cooked, processed, frozen, and can be consumed without requiring extensive food preparation.

The convenience food sector includes a wide variety of products such as :

RTE Category

- Biscuits and Confectionery: Includes cookies, biscuits, crackers, and other sweet treats that are pre-packaged and ready to eat.
- Jaggery: A traditional Indian sweetener made from sugarcane or date palm sap that is ready to eat without any further preparation.
- Breakfast Cereals: Includes packaged cereals such as cornflakes, muesli, and granola that can be eaten with milk or yogurt.
- Wafers: Thin and crispy snack that is ready to eat and comes in various flavours

RTC Category

- Dessert Mixes: Includes pre-packaged mixes for making desserts such as cakes, brownies, and puddings that require some level of preparation.
- Snack Mixes: Pre-packaged mixes that can be used to make snacks such as trail mix or chivda by adding other ingredients like nuts, dried fruits, or spices.
- Curry Making Enablers: Includes pre-packaged spice mixes, curry pastes, & other ingredients that make it easier to prepare curries & other Indian dishes at home.



In recent years, the RTE/RTC market has experienced significant growth in India. This growth is mainly driven by the increasing preference for convenience food among the working population in India. The busy lifestyles of individuals, higher disposable incomes, and growing number of nuclear families are some of the factors contributing to the growth of the RTE/RTC market in India.

This document highlights the global trends in RTC/RTE products, India's strength and opportunities, the supporting regulatory framework, R&D and skill development ecosystem and government initiatives to support the RTC/ RTE sector in the country.

2. GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF THE SECTOR

RTE/RTC foods segment is the largest segment globally in the overall conventional and non-conventional food industry owing to higher consumer acceptance of such foods¹. The global ready to eat (RTE) food market is expected to exhibit a growth rate (CAGR) of 4.6% during 2023-2028².



2.1 GLOBAL MARKET OVERVIEW

The shifting consumer preferences toward convenience foods represents the primary factor driving the market growth. In line with this, the implementation of lockdowns and social distancing norms amid the recent coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak has catalysed the demand for RTE foods due to their longer shelf life and convenience. Furthermore, the increasing working population and improving consumer lifestyles have enhanced the consumption of RTE food products across the globe. RTE/RTC food with portability is the ongoing trend, which is expected to support global market growth in the near future. The market is coming up with several new start-ups offering delivery ready-to-eat food. Manufacturers are launching innovative flavoured variants that are rich in functional ingredients to cater to the nutritional requirements. Hence, the global market size is expected to grow in near future.

¹ https://www.mofpi.gov.in/sites/default/files/detailed_skill_study_report_final.pdf

² www.imarcgroup.com/ready-to-eat-food-market

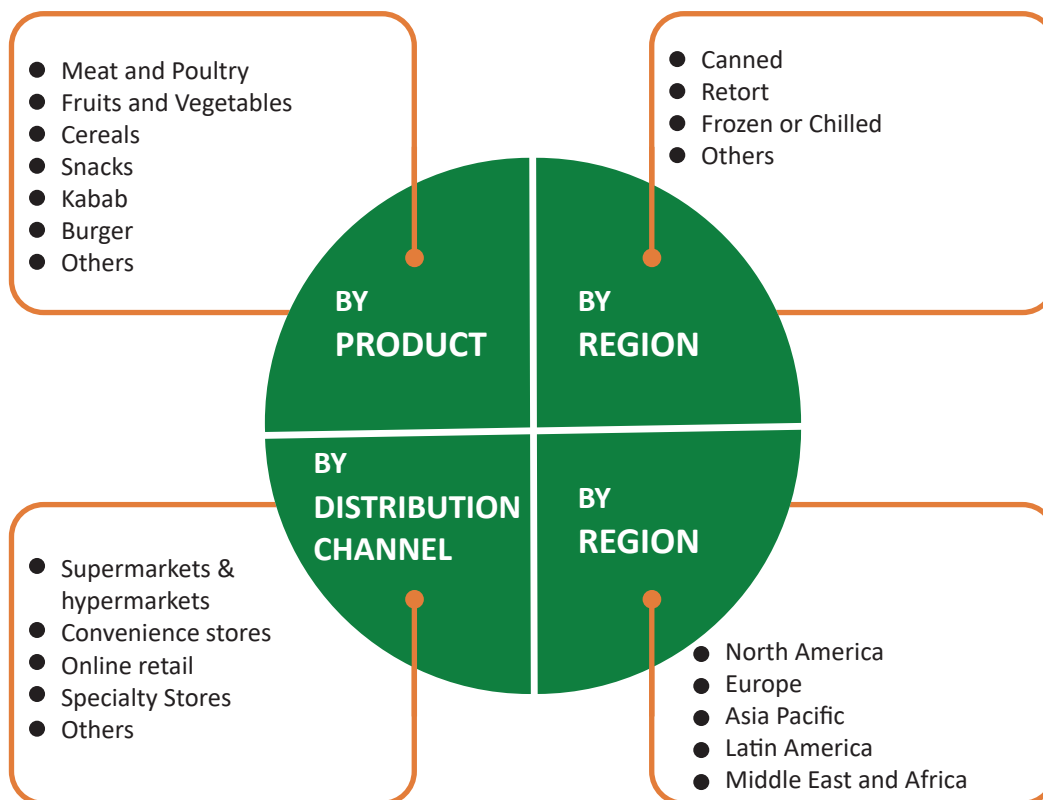
Key Points³ :

- The RTE/RTC market is fragmented due to the presence of many players, and manufacturers are focusing on product innovation to cater to the increasing demand for meal varieties within segments such as frozen, chilled, vegetarian, and vegan.
- North America dominates the global RTE/RTC market in terms of revenue, while the U.K. leads the way in Europe. Germany, the U.K., and France together account for half of the European region's sales of RTE/RTC products.
- The demand for convenience food products among consumers with busy lifestyles is driving the growth of the RTE/RTC market globally.
- The Asia Pacific market is projected to have the highest CAGR in the upcoming years, primarily due to the increasing adoption of ready-to-eat products and the consumption of ultra-processed food in the region.
- The transnational food and beverage corporations (TFBCs) are also targeting the Asian markets due to factors such as increasingly open markets, changing consumer preferences, young and growing populations, and high economic growth rates. All these factors are collectively fuelling the growth of the RTE/RTC food market across the Asia Pacific region.



2.2 GLOBAL MARKET SEGMENTATION

The global market has been segmented on the basis of product type, packaging type, distribution channel and region. Figure 1 depicts the classification of market on various basis⁴.



2.3 GLOBAL TRENDS

RTE/RTC food is one of the many trends that are symptomatic of the vibrant ecosystem of food consumption patterns evolved over the years. Consumer preferences for packaged meals are constantly changing as people are looking for higher-quality ingredients, more variety, and speedier delivery. This has boosted the popularity of RTE/RTC food takeaways.

Europe is expected to witness considerable growth in the coming years due to the introduction of innovative products. However, Asia Pacific is anticipated to be the fastest-growing regional market from 2022 to 2030 owing to the increasing target population in the region. Further, in Asia-pacific emerging economies such as India will have a major positive impact on the demand for RTE/RTC food.

03. OVERVIEW OF THE RTC/RTE SECTOR IN INDIA

India is second-largest producer of food in the world after China. RTC/RTE segment has made the country more dynamic destination for a wide range of international food companies. With changing consumer behaviour due to various factors such as increasing income levels and hectic lifestyle, RTE/RTC food products are gaining popularity in the country.

3.1 MARKET OVERVIEW

Major Highlights :

- The RTE food products have grown at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 12% over the last decade, while RTC food products have grown at a CAGR of 7% over the same period.
- The production of RTE/RTC foods in India is expected to reach around ₹ 9,600 Cr. or 4.6 Lac MT by FY'30, indicating a CAGR of approximately 13%.
- The government of India has introduced various schemes and projects to boost the RTE/RTC sector.
- The RTE/RTC food market in India is primarily driven by young consumers, and the millennial population accounts for approximately 34% of the total population, indicating a significant potential for the sector in India.

In comparison to domestic market, demand for Indian RTE food products is more in the global market. The sector is anticipated to record the highest growth rates across all the food processing segments⁵ and thus, presents a lot of investment and growth opportunities for companies.

⁵ Ready To Cook Food Manufacturer in India - Fibro Foods » India's Preferred Contract Manufacturer, Private Label Manufacturer and Contract Packager for RTC, RTM, Millets and Functional Foods

Table 1 below depicts anticipated market size, employee generation and future growth rate by FY'30 :⁶

Table 1:

KEY INDUSTRY INDICATORS	DETAILS
Overall Market ('000 MT) (FY'20)	135
No. of registered units	716
Past Growth rate (CAGR) (FY' 15 – FY' 20)	15%
Overall Exports (FY'20)	₹ 5,775 Cr
Expected Market ('000 MT) FY' 2030	459
Future growth rate (FY' 20 – FY' 30)	13%

3.2 KEY GROWTH DRIVERS

Key growth of processed dairy products is driven by the following key drivers.

Rapid urbanization:

Rapid urbanization has resulted in the growth of the organized retail sector in India. These modern grocery and food stores are equipped with cold chain facilities which have led to the availability of a variety of frozen RTE/RTC food products in the market.

Product innovation:

New generation of customers are increasingly concerned about the quality of food and are willing to pay a little bit more if it means getting the greatest quality without sacrificing their health. So, Indian food producers are always working to develop new foods, and the ready-to-eat food sector is expanding significantly.

Rising Disposable Incomes:

Rising disposable incomes have driven the growth of the market. Moreover, India's working population is preferring convenient food products that offer less meal preparation time and ease of consumption.

⁶ https://www.mofpi.gov.in/sites/default/files/detailed_skill_study_report_final.pdf

Booming e-commerce sector:

India's booming e-commerce sector has further propelled the growth of the RTE/RTC market. The e-commerce platforms offer high product visibility, thereby facilitating greater market penetration of RTE/RTC products in India.

Growing Start-up Industry:

Big start-up brands have been warmly accepted by consumers. They are constantly innovating and are trying to offer new products to consumers. The industry players are rapidly integrating ready-to-eat food in their product portfolio to accommodate the changing palate of Indian consumers.

Global Demand due to longer shelf life:

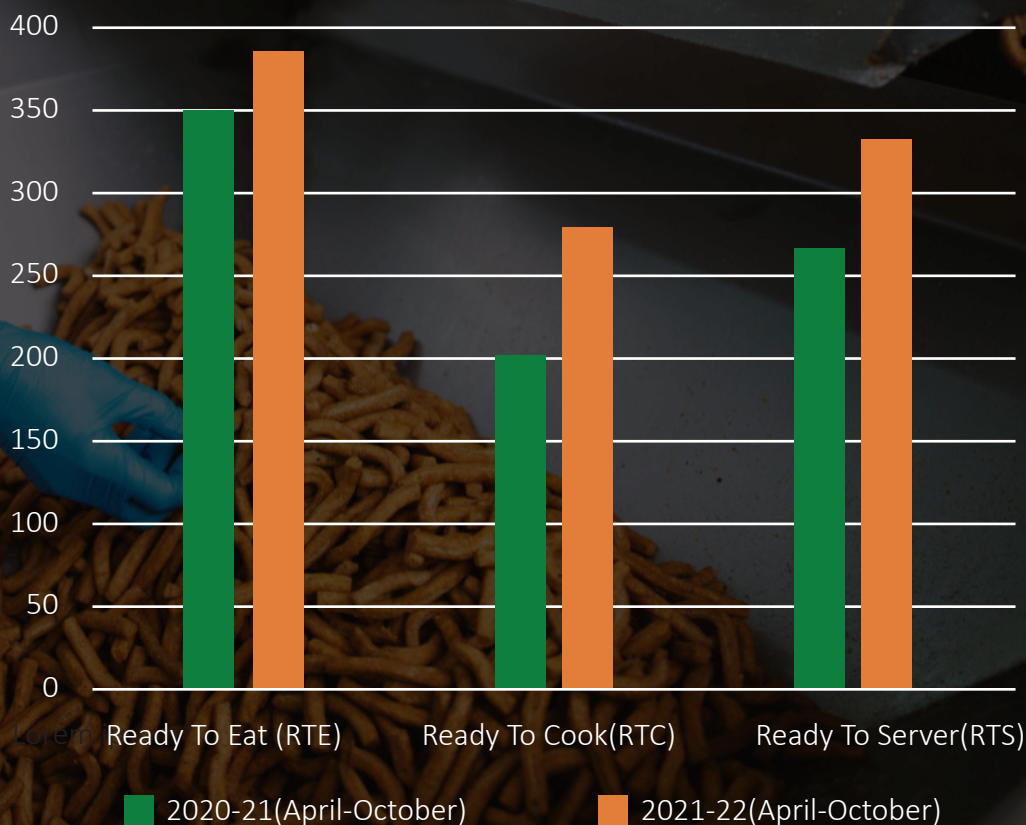
RTH (ready-to-heat) stands out from other segments in terms of its long shelf life and durable packaging. This provides an easy marketing advantage and enable the companies to sell it in markets outside of the nation of origin. Also, there is a rise in the demand for Indian processed food (due to various cuisines) in the international market. Thus, India's integration with the global economy is also one of the growth drivers for the industry.

3.3 EXPORTS ANALYSIS⁷

Over the past ten years, India's export of Ready to Eat (RTE) and Ready to Cook (RTC) food products has experienced significant growth. The export of final food products falling under the categories of RTE, RTC, and RTS has risen at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 10.4% from 2011-12 to 2020-21, and in 2020-21 alone, India exported more than \$2.14 billion worth of such products. During this period, the share of RTE and RTC exports in the total food processing industry has also increased, from 2.1% to 5% and from 1.8% to 2.7%, respectively. In the last three financial years (2018-19 to 2020-21), India exported final food products worth USD 5,438 million, including RTE, RTC, and RTS items. A comparative analysis of RTE/RTC and RTS for April-October (2021-22) against previous years for the same periods is placed in figure 2.

⁷ www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1793666 , Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Figure 2: Comparative analysis of RTE/RTC and RTS



The share of RTE (Ready to Eat) and RTC (Ready to Cook) food products in India's total food processing exports has been increasing steadily, with RTE products accounting for 5% and RTC products accounting for 2.7% in 2020-21. India exported final food products, including RTE, RTC, and RTS (Ready to Serve), worth USD 5,438 million in the last three financial years (2018-19 and 2020-2021).

Biscuits and Confectionery and Indian Sweets and Snacks make up a significant portion of the RTE food product category, with a share of 89% in RTE exports in 2020-21. The top ten importing countries for RTE products in 2020-21 included the USA, which was the top importing country for four categories of RTE products, followed by the UAE, Nepal, Canada, and Australia.

¹⁷ Indian Dairy Vision-2022. National Action Plan for Dairy Development.

¹⁸ Euromonitor 2022

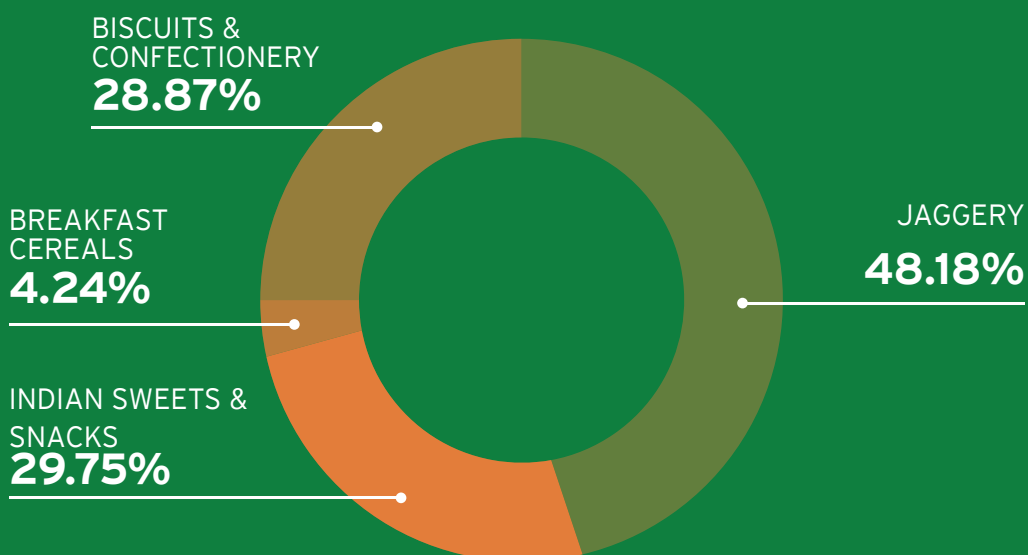
¹⁹ Ibid.

The RTC food product category has been growing at a CAGR of 7% in the last ten years, with ready-to-cook, papad, flours and milled products, and powder and starch being the major categories of food products covered under RTC. In 2020-21, the USA was the largest importing country for RTC products, followed by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Canada.

In conclusion, RTE and RTC food products have become an increasingly important part of India's food processing exports. RTE products are dominated by biscuits and confectionery and Indian sweets and snacks, while RTC products cover a wide range of food categories, including ready-to-cook, papad, flours and milled products, and powder and starch. The USA is the top importing country for both RTE and RTC products.

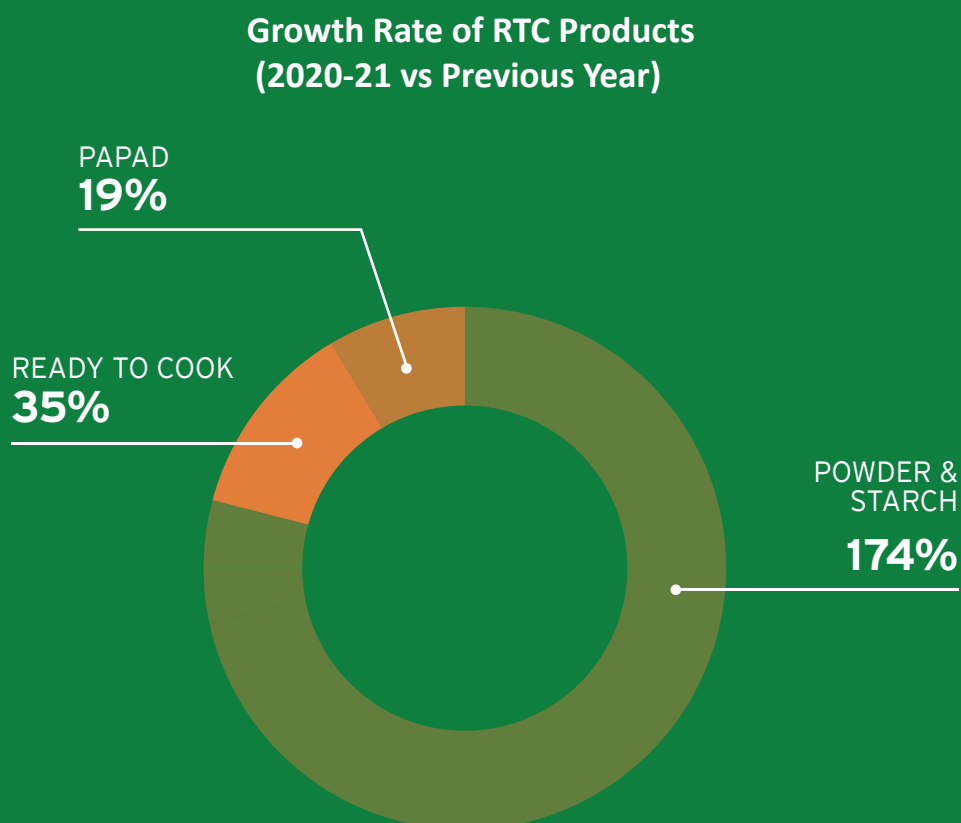
Illustration : The given data shows the growth rate of four different categories from 2020-21 compared to the previous year

Growth Rate of RTE Products (2020-21 vs Previous Year)



- The category of Jaggery has shown the highest growth rate of 48.18%, which is a significant increase from the previous year. This indicates that there has been a substantial increase in demand for Jaggery in the market.
- Biscuits and Confectionery also show a strong growth rate of 28.87%, which is also a considerable increase from the previous year. This suggests that there has been a significant increase in the consumption of Biscuits and Confectionery products.
- Indian Sweets and Snacks have also shown a high growth rate of 29.75%, indicating an increase in demand for these products.

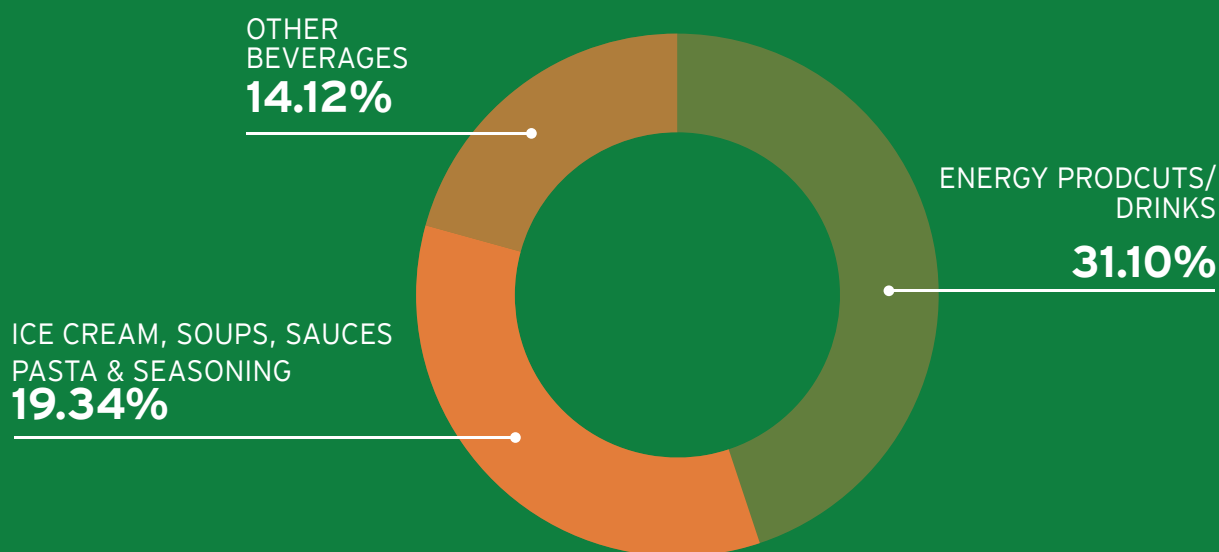
Illustration : The given data shows the growth rate of three different RTC (Ready-to-Cook) categories from 2020-21 compared to the previous year.



- The category of Powder and Starch has shown the highest growth rate of 174%, which is a substantial increase from the previous year. This indicates that there has been a significant increase in the demand for Powder and Starch RTC products in the market.
- Ready to Cook products have also shown a healthy growth rate of 35%, indicating that there has been an increase in demand for these products. This suggests that there has been a trend towards convenience in cooking, as consumers look for easy-to-prepare RTC options.
- Papad has shown a lower growth rate of 19%, which is still a reasonable increase from the previous year. This suggests that there is a stable demand for Papad RTC products in the market, but the growth rate may not be as high as other categories.

Illustration : The given data shows the growth rate of three different RTS (Ready-to-serve) categories from 2020-21 compared to the previous year.

Growth Rate of RTS Products (2020-21 vs Previous Year)



- The category of Powder and Starch has shown the highest growth rate of 174%, which is a substantial increase from the previous year. This indicates that there has been a significant increase in the demand for Powder and Starch RTC products in the market.
- Ready to Cook products have also shown a healthy growth rate of 35%, indicating that there has been an increase in demand for these products. This suggests that there has been a trend towards convenience in cooking, as consumers look for easy-to-prepare RTC options.
- Papad has shown a lower growth rate of 19%, which is still a reasonable increase from the previous year. This suggests that there is a stable demand for Papad RTC products in the market, but the growth rate may not be as high as other categories.

3.4 KEY RTE/RTC PRODUCTS IN DOMESTIC MARKET

RTE food manufacturers are increasingly focusing on meeting evolving demands of consumers by launching different RTE categories in the India RTE/RTC food market. The India RTE/RTC food market is segmented on the basis of product, source, and distribution channel. The major category of products under RTE/RTC segment widely used in India are listed below:

The products covered under RTE category, includes

- Biscuits and Confectionery
- Jaggery
- Breakfast Cereals
- Wafers
- Indian Sweets and Snacks

The major products covered under RTC category are

- Non-vegetarian
 - Kabab
 - Pizza and Burger
 - Rice and Curry
 - Fried Meat
 - Pasta and Noodles

- Vegetarian
 - Rice and Curry
 - Dal
 - Mix Veg.
 - Pizza and Burger
 - Papad
 - Powder and starch
 - Flours and Milled Products

3.5 KEY INDUSTRY PLAYERS

Around 23 companies produce ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook food in India. Table 2 lists the major players in the RTE/RTC food sector.

Table 2:

KEY INDUSTRY PLAYERS ⁸	
Bikanervala Foods Private Limited	Venky's (India) Limited
McCain Foods India Private Limited	Nestlé India Limited
Haldiram Foods International Private Limited	Gits Food Products Private Limited
MTR Foods Private Limited	ADF Foods Limited
ITC Limited	Tasty Bite Eatables Limited

⁸ <http://foodprocessingindia.gov.in/sectors/RTE-RTC>

04. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Government has taken several initiatives to boost the sector by introducing various schemes and projects.

4.1 GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

The details of the schemes Introduced by Ministry of Food Processing Industries are mentioned below:

A.

PRODUCT LINKED INCENTIVES FOR FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES (PLIFPI):

Government of India approved Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry including Mozzarella Cheese. The aim of the scheme is to create global processing champions from India by improving competitive strength of Indian companies vis-à-vis their global counterparts in terms of output, value addition, linkages etc.

The scheme has an outlay of ₹ 10,900 Cr to be implemented over a six-year period from 2021-22 to 2026-27.

Under the PLI scheme, Mozzarella processing plants with a cumulative annual capacity of over 42.5 tons is being set up in Gujarat (Kheda, Banaskantha) and Maharashtra (Pune).

B.

PM FORMALIZATION OF MICRO FOOD PROCESSING ENTERPRISES (PMFME):

The PMFME is a centrally sponsored scheme with an outlay of ₹ 10,000 Cr to be implemented over a period of five years from 2020-21 to 2024-25. The scheme provides financial, technical and business support for existing micro food processing enterprises. As of 2023, a total of 67 RTE/RTC units got support from the scheme to the tune of ₹ 4 Cr across the country⁹.

C.

PRADHAN MANTRI KISAN SAMPADA YOJANA (PMKSY)::

This scheme envisages development of cold storage infrastructure in the country. Support is provided in developing Mega Food Park, Developing Infrastructure for Agro-processing clusters, Development of Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure etc, that will be instrumental in supporting RTE/RTC.

⁹ PMFME Scheme Division, MoFPI.

05. GOVERNANCE AND REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

The following are the regulatory bodies concerned with the formulation and implementation of the policies for the food processing industries:

5.1 MINISTRY OF FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES

MOFPI, set up in the year 1988, is a ministry of the Government of India responsible for formulation and administration of the rules and regulations with a view to develop a strong and vibrant food processing industry. The Ministry acts as a catalyst for bringing in greater investment into this sector and creating a conducive environment for healthy growth of the food processing industry. The goals of MOFPI are:

- Facilitate better utilization and value addition of dairy products among other agricultural produce with a view to enhance the income of farmers
- Minimize wastage at all stages in the dairy processing including food processing value chain, by development of infrastructure for storage, transportation and processing of dairy and agro-food produce
- Induct modern technology into the dairy and food processing industry from both domestic and external sources
- Encourage R&D in dairy and food processing for product and process development and improved packaging
- Promote export of processed dairy as well as food products

5.2 FOOD SAFETY AND STANDARDS AUTHORITY OF INDIA

In 2008, FSSAI was established under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) to enforce the provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006. Some of the key regulatory objectives of FSSAI include:

- Framing regulations to lay down food standards and guidelines
- Laying down procedure and guidelines for accreditation of laboratories for food testing
- Providing scientific advice and technical support to the Government in areas that have a direct or indirect bearing of food safety and nutrition
- Collating data regarding food consumption, contamination, identification of emerging risks, introduction of a rapid alert system etc.
- Disseminating information and promoting awareness about food safety and nutrition in India
- Contributing to the development of international technical standards for food, sanitary and phytosanitary standards



To further enable it to meet its objectives, FSSAI enacted the Food Safety and Standards Rules, along with several other regulations as listed below

FOOD SAFETY AND STANDARDS REGULATIONS IN INDIA

PROCEDURAL REGULATIONS

Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulation, 2011

Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulation, 2011

Food Safety and Standards (Laboratory and Sampling Analysis) Regulation, 2011

Food Safety and Standards (Food Recall Procedure) Regulation, 2017

Food Safety and Standards (Import) Regulation, 2017

FOOD STANDARDS

Food Safety and Standards (Food Product Standards and Food Additives) Regulation, 2011

Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulation, 2011

Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulation, 2011

Food Safety and Standards (Food or Health Supplements, Nutraceuticals, Foods for Special Dietary Uses, Foods for Special Medical Purpose, Functional Foods and Novel Food) Regulation, 2016

Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Food) Regulation, 2016

Food Safety and Standards (Organic Foods) Regulation, 2017

5.3 THE STANDARDS OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES ACT, 1976

The Act came into force to establish standards of weights and measures, to regulate trade or commerce in weights. It was passed by the Parliament to ensure country wide uniformity in the enforcement procedures of the modern system of weights and measures and also in the scope and coverage of legal control on weights and measures. Any person who is not an itinerant vendor, should get himself registered before using any weight or measure in any transaction.

5.4 EXPORT INSPECTION COUNCIL

The Export Inspection Council (EIC) is a regulatory body in India that is responsible for inspecting and certifying various products that are exported from India. The RTC and RTE (Ready-to-Cook and Ready-to-Eat) products are among the items that fall under the EIC's purview.

The EIC's main objective is to ensure that exported products comply with the regulations and standards of the importing countries. In the case of RTC and RTE products, the EIC is responsible for checking that they are safe for consumption and meet the required quality standards.

To export RTC and RTE products from India, manufacturers must obtain a certificate of inspection from the EIC. This certificate confirms that the products have been inspected and comply with the necessary regulations and standards.

5.5 BUREAU OF INDIAN STANDARDS (BIS)

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is another regulatory body in India that is responsible for formulating and implementing standards for various products, including RTC (Ready-to-Cook), RTE (Ready-to-Eat), and RTS (Ready-to-Serve) products.

BIS develops standards for the quality, safety, and performance of these products and ensures that manufacturers comply with them. BIS certification is mandatory for certain RTC, RTE, and RTS products before they can be sold in the Indian market.

The BIS certification process involves testing and evaluation of the products to ensure that they meet the relevant standards. The certification is valid for two years and must be renewed periodically to ensure that the product continues to comply with the standards.

06. R&D AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM FOR RTE/RTC SECTOR

India hosts numerous technical institutes, universities, centres of excellence etc to support the food processing industry in adopting latest processing technologies, promote IPR registrations for products as well as process, ensure skill development etc. Some of the key institutions forming the backbone of R&D ecosystem in India are listed below.



INSTITUTIONS	DESCRIPTION
Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI)	CFTRI is a national R&D institution under the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). It specializes in research related to food science and technology and offers various services and technologies related to food processing, including RTE and RTC foods.
Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology (IIFPT)	IIFPT is a national-level research and education institution under the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India. It offers various programs related to food science and technology and conducts research in various areas, including RTE and RTC foods
National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management (NIFTEM)	NIFTEM is a deemed university under the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India. It offers various undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs related to food science and technology and conducts research in various areas, including RTE and RTC foods.
Defence Food Research Laboratory (DFRL)	DFRL is a laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) that specializes in research related to food science and technology for the Indian armed forces. It also conducts research related to RTE and RTC foods for the civilian market.
Mysore-based Central Institute of Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology (CIPHET)	CIPHET is a national R&D institution under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). It specializes in research related to post-harvest engineering and technology, including food processing, and offers various services and technologies related to RTE and RTC foods.

07. UNLOCKING POTENTIAL IN RTE/RTC SECTOR IN INDIA

The global trends in RTE/RTC Sector and overview of RTE/RTC products in India discussed in earlier sections, analysed parallelly brings into light immense opportunities the sector beholds. The newly acquired growth for the RTE and RTC categories is positive and long-term in both global as well as domestic market. The increase in gross family income and the concept of nuclear families are pushing the growth of this sector manifold. All these lead to several attractive opportunities within the Sector. The following sectors within RTC/ RTE Food show promising potential.



7.1 POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES :

Technological advancements

- **Processing technology:** RTE/RTC food products tend to lose the freshness of taste or aroma over time. Further, authentic Indian food items are complex and require high-quality ingredients sourced from the region to which the dish belongs. Thus, technological advancement and intelligent manufacturing processes would need to be deployed by the tech companies to enable the new labels to enter the market. and cover this gap. Thus, processing machinery and equipment for heat treatment, preservation of food and testing etc also has high potential in Indian market.
- **E-commerce growth:** The growth of e-commerce in India is making it easier for consumers to access a wider range of food products, including RTE and RTC products. Online sales channels offer a significant opportunity for companies to expand their reach.
- **Export potential:** India's RTE and RTC products have a significant export potential. With India's growing reputation as a source of high-quality and healthy food products, the export market for RTE and RTC products is likely to grow in the coming years.

7.2 PACKAGING SOLUTIONS

Sustainable Packaging is fuelling the market growth all over the world. With high growing consumer sensitivity to environment-friendly packaging, the packaging industry is continuously coming up with fresh ideas to boost the growth and hence shows immense potential in global market. Packaging of the products plays a key role in the RTE/RTC market as hazards will cause product deterioration and the conditions to which the packaged product will be subjected throughout its shelf-life. Thus, packaging requirements of the products vary for the different category of the RTE/RTC products. While in the normal practice, the ready-to-eat food are consumed in a short span of time, However, with the advancement in packaging technology, it would be possible to produce these items commercially and to extend the shelf-life up to a few years. Thus, innovative and cost-effective packaging solutions for RTE/RTC Products exhibits great potential in India.

7.3 FORTIFIED / FUNCTIONAL FOODS

Ready to eat functional foods with traditional ingredients is a product segment with high potential, especially with rising health awareness among consumers. Ready to eat processed foods fortified medicinal plants that have anti-inflammatory properties are also picking up demand in the domestic market owing to the increased awareness of preventive health post COVID 19 pandemic.

08. CONCLUSION

The ready-to-eat/cook market in India offers a sizable window of opportunity for expansion and improvement. In India, there is a growing need for quick-to-consume food and beverage options due to changing lifestyles and hectic schedules of customers. The government's initiatives and assistance have been crucial in fostering the expansion of this industry.

The Indian government has aggressively encouraged investment, given regulatory oversight, and facilitated market access for the ready-to-eat/cook/drink sector through programmes like the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and numerous government schemes. These measures have emphasised protecting food safety, upholding quality standards, and encouraging industry innovation.

Regulations governing food safety and labelling are upheld thanks to the governance and regulatory environment in the ready-to-eat/cook/drink industry. Standards and guidelines are developed by organisations like the FSSAI and other regulatory agencies to ensure customer safety and encourage the manufacture of high-quality products.

Robust government policies prioritising investments in technology and infrastructure, and putting a priority on product diversity are all necessary to realise the ready-to-eat, cook, and drink sector's future potential in India. For the industry to expand, it is imperative to strengthen supply chains, enhance packaging and labelling procedures, and support research and development.

Additionally, helping small and medium-sized businesses, establishing a positive business climate, and encouraging innovation and cooperation among industry stakeholders can all help the sector succeed in the future. Adopting digital technologies, e-commerce platforms, and successful marketing techniques can help expand consumer and market reach.

In conclusion, the government's assistance, regulatory support, and industry initiatives are positioned to accelerate expansion in the Indian ready-to-eat, cook, and drink industries. India can unleash the full potential of its ready-to-eat/cook sector through consistent efforts and collaborations between the government, industry stakeholders, and consumers, assuring sustainable growth and addressing the changing demands of a dynamic market.

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