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Milliken's Heat-resistant NX™ UltraClear Packaging Material Drives Top Grocery Fresh-to-Go Foods Trends

Spartanburg, S.C. - Today's busy, health-conscious consumers want to eat freshly prepared meals and snacks without sacrificing convenience. This trend is driving strong growth in the fresh prepared foods sector. In fact, according to the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA), sales for supermarket fresh prepared foods are estimated to more than double by the year 2025 with annual growth of 7.5 percent.¹ A particularly hot area is in-store dining, where supermarkets compete directly with full-service and quick-serve restaurants. Acosta Sales & Marketing reports up to 52 percent of grocery store shoppers have eaten prepared foods in the grocery store dining area and 45 percent have eaten in a convenience store dining area.²

Alternatively, for consumers who are not dining in, but still demand new levels of convenience and portability, grocery stores are also providing the option to purchase fresh prepared items and reheat them in the office break room or at home. Businesspeople can enjoy a high-quality lunch, and families can gather around the dinner table for a relaxing meal - without the time and effort required to cook after a busy day away from home.

To meet these consumer needs, supermarkets, convenience stores and their suppliers are adopting new food strategies - from chef-inspired dishes to a focus on the latest culinary influences. In addition to creative food preparation, use of the right packaging has also had a significant effect on the growth of this fresh-to-go foods segment. Consumers want to see what they're buying before they buy it, which has contributed to the growth of clear packaging in this sector. But until recently clear packaging could not be used for hot food or reheating cold food.

Milliken & Company's breakthrough packaging material - NX™ UltraClear polypropylene (PP) - is the first plastic to combine glass-like clarity for improved aesthetics with heat resistance for heating and reheating. Unlike traditional clear plastics such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), NX UltraClear PP is engineered to handle hot-fill applications, warming under heat lamps and microwaving, so consumers can reheat foods or heat semi-prepared items without transferring them to a different container. This versatile material is equally well suited for packaging cold foods such as salads and fresh deli items.

"Consumers across multiple age groups, from Millennials through Baby Boomers, are looking for ways to eat healthier without giving up convenience," said Emily Blair, business development manager, Milliken. "Our NX UltraClear PP helps supermarkets and c-stores make fresh prepared foods more appealing at the point of purchase and easier to reheat and consume at home or on the go. Crystal-clear containers made from our material reinforce the message of health, purity and quality. As an added benefit, NX UltraClear PP is easily recycled to meet industry and consumer demands for greater sustainability."

NX UltraClear PP is the only high-clarity plastic that delivers high-temperature performance up to 250° F degrees, depending on the food being heated. The material's heat resistance also allows containers to be cleaned in the dishwasher and reused, if desired.

NX UltraClear PP offers exceptional recyclability and delivers a lower carbon footprint than other plastics, and it overcomes limitations of PET, polylactic acid (PLA) and polystyrene (PS) for thermoformed packaging.

For more information, please visit www.NXUltraClearPP.com

¹ "What's in Store: Fresh Trends to Help You Manage Shopper Outcomes." IDDBA. 2016. <https://www.iddba.org/wis.aspx>

² "The Why Behind the Dine." 1st Ed. Acosta Sales & Marketing. <https://www.iddba.org/pdfs/wis/Acosta-The-Why-Behind-the-Dine.pdf>

About Milliken

Milliken is an innovation company that has been exploring, discovering, and creating ways to enhance people's lives since 1865. Working from our laboratories, application and development centers around the world, our scientists and engineers create coatings, specialty chemicals, and advanced additive and colorant technologies that transform the way we experience products from automotive plastics to children's art supplies. With expertise across a breadth of disciplines that also includes floor covering and performance materials, the people of Milliken work every day to add true value to people's lives, improve health and safety, and make this world more sustainable. For more information, visit www.millikenchemical.com or www.milliken.com.

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PHOTO: Milliken's NX™ UltraClear Polypropylene (PP) Combines Glass-like Clarity and Heat Resistance for Food Packaging

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High resolution photography is available by contacting Amy Godfrey at agodfrey@ahminc.com.