

Generic labels add variety

by Monine Stebbins

What roared into the supermarkets like a lion and has now gentled down like a lamb? Generics! In the late 1970's the consumer was introduced to these very plain food labels. No fuss, no frills, no advertising, lower cost and acceptable quality. All this was supposed to add up to big savings for the consumer. But sales of generics have been disappointing. Some kinds of generic foods are more available than others. Some, like frozen orange juice, have been well accepted. But the share of the market is now staying the same or shrinking instead of the growth that was predicted.

Some supermarket chains are trying to dress up the label. This becomes a little tricky when the selling point is that they're supposed to be plain. They're doing this with a band of color or something very simple to give their generics a distinctive look. Generics are often packed specifically for a supermarket chain, so there can be differences between the generics in one store and in another. With the look alike labels, though, you can't really tell where a particular food product came from if you do like it and want to try that one again.

Another way for grocery chains to make their budget items more distinctive has been to create a new private label. In other words, you may choose from nationally advertised brands, regional advertised brands, store or house brands and now a new economy store brand.

Generics, whether sold plain or as a budget house label, are usually C quality. This is according to the government's A to C grading system. The A grade is usually sold under the national brand and the B under the store's house brand. A lower quality grade in food does not reflect lower safety standards or lower nutritive value. The quality standards are based on appearance of the product, uniformity of size and/or shape. Broken pieces or color may be a factor also. In my experience, the broken pieces in canned fruit may be related to the ripeness when it is canned. I like the flavor of fully ripe fruit, but it is difficult to work with when canning. When I purchased canned pears of all three levels of labels—national, house and generic—the generic ones looked the least uniform but tasted the best.

In most products, 80 percent of sales come from national brands and 20 percent come from a combination of house brand and generic, with generic seldom taking even 6 percent of that. Frozen foods are the one exception. Shoppers are choosing 71 percent of their frozen vegetables under the store label, 26.5 percent as national brands and 2.5 percent in generics. Frozen fruits (67 percent) and juice (44 percent) are also popular under store brands.

Here are a couple of recipes that feature fruits and vegetables that are often sold under generic labels. The fruit cobbler is one I entered in a contest at a fair nearly twenty years ago and won the grand prize. My favorite fruit to use in the recipe is canned apricots.

FRUIT COBBLER

- 2 cups canned fruit, including juice
- ¼ cup sugar (optional)
- 1 tbs. butter or margarine
- 1 cup flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ cup shortening
- 1 egg yolk
- ¼ cup cold water

Place canned fruit and sugar, if desired, into an 8 x 8 inch baking dish. Dot with butter or margarine and place in 375° oven to heat. Make the pastry by combining the flour, baking powder and salt. Cut in shortening. Combine egg yolk and water and then add to flour mixture. Blend well. Pat out this mixture into about an 8 x 8 inch square, cut into one inch strips and lay criss-cross over the heated fruit. Sprinkle with one tablespoon sugar. Bake at 350° for about 30 minutes. Serve warm either plain or with ice cream.

DEE'S CREAMED SPINACH

- 1 package frozen chopped spinach
- 8 ounces sour cream

- ½ package dry onion soup mix
- 1 egg

Cook spinach and drain well. You can squeeze water out of it by putting it in a clean cloth and twisting. Combine spinach, sour cream, egg and soup mix in a blender or food processor and process until smooth. Bake uncovered in a 350° oven for about 20 minutes, or until set.

Potatoes star in main dish salad

Good news! Salads aren't just for side dishes anymore. Now, these adaptable menu favorites are teaming up with a variety of popular protein sources to serve as simple—and simply delicious—main dishes. That's really good news for the summer eating scene ahead and so is Alpine Potato Salad.

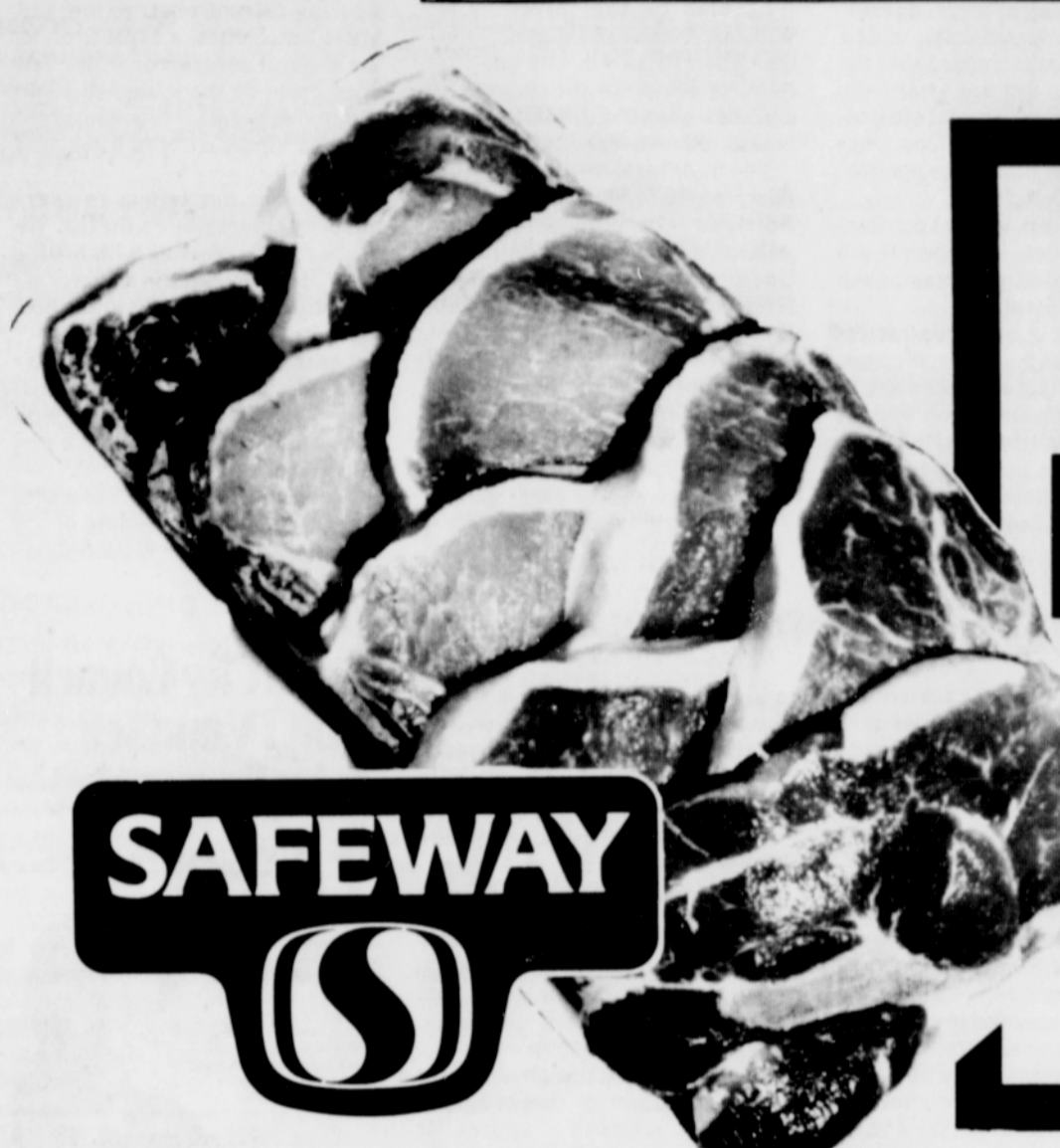
- 1½ qts. quartered cooked new potatoes
- 2 cups shredded red cabbage
- 2 cups ham strips

- 1 cup celery slices
- ¼ cup green onion slices
- ¼ cup Italian dressing
- 1 tablespoon pure prepared mustard
- 8 ozs. natural Swiss cheese, cut into strips

Combine potatoes, cabbage, meat, celery and onion. Add combined dressing and mustard; mix lightly. Chill. Add cheese just before serving; mix lightly. 8 to 10 servings.



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