

## Food and Beverages

# Feb quarter end earnings preview – LW, STZ, GIS, MKC & CAG

**Price Objective Change** 

### Feb Q end highlights: we expect most from LW & STZ

Over the next few weeks, we expect LW & STZ earnings to be most incremental given GIS, MKC and CAG all recently presented at the CAGNY conference at the end of Feb where all three reiterated FY24 outlooks (see takeaways here).

#### LW - Who's afraid of the ERP?

We raise 3Q24 adj. EPS to \$1.41 from \$1.39 (consensus \$1.46). Our higher 3Q estimate is driven by a higher gross margin, offset by lower volume. We now model total company volumes at -8% YoY which fully encapsulates a) ERP related headwinds in the NA retail channel and b) January weather related headwinds in foodservice channels. Despite this, we expect any headwinds to be largely behind the company at this point and maintain our 4Q estimate for positive volume growth, which will drive stock reaction on earnings.

### STZ – Lower 4Q depletions on weather; solid FY25 setup

We lower 4Q beer depletions forecast from +8% YoY to +6.5% (consensus +7%). Our lower estimate is driven by weather impacts in January. Since then, consumption has rebounded and we expect a better exit rate as we head into FY1Q25. For FY25 we expect STZ to guide earnings in-line with its long-term algorithm with beer segment and share repurchases offsetting weakness in Wine and Spirits. Key components to our model are: 1) beer sales +8.2% y/y and operating margins 38.8%. 2) W&S sales +1.5% and operating margin 22.8%. In this report we increase our PO from \$290 to \$300.

### **GIS - Pet Food trajectory in focus**

We maintain our 3Q24 adj. EPS estimate of \$1.09 (consensus \$1.05). We model North America Retail largely in-line with Nielsen data for the 12 weeks ending 2.24.24. at -1.5%. In Pet, volumes are also expected to be weaker in untracked (Pet Specialty) while also lapping the toughest compare in the prior year period. GIS expects a higher profit delivery in terms of EBIT dollars in 3Q relative to 4Q.

### MKC - Initial reads of NA price investment paying off

We maintain our 1Q24 adj. EPS of \$0.56 (consensus \$0.57). Total company organic sales estimate of -0.1% remains unchanged for the quarter, however, 1) In Americas Consumer, we raise our volume estimate to -4.5% from -5%, reflecting slightly better scanner data. 2) We lower our EMEA Flavor Solutions volumes to -6.5% from -5.5% to reflect recent commentary from MCD mentioning headwinds in Europe.

### CAG - Frozen remains a drag on portfolio growth

We maintain our 3Q24 adj. EPS estimate of \$0.62 (consensus \$0.64). On sales, maintain our total company 3Q organic sales estimate of -2.6% with price/mix at -1.1%, and total company volumes of -1.5%. We note that we shift some volume from Refrigerated & Frozen (now worse) to Grocery & Snacks (now better) to reflect Nielsen data for the latest 12-week period ending 2.24.24. It seems that CAG's January weather bump wasn't as needle-moving in the quarter for R&F as other packaged food companies, with December/February also looking weak.

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Refer to important disclosures on page 15 to 20. Analyst Certification on page 13. Price Objective Basis/Risk on page 12.

Timestamp: 18 March 2024 05:00AM EDT

#### 18 March 2024

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# **Key tables**

#### Exhibit 1: PO changes

We raised our PO on shares of STZ from \$290 to \$300

Ticker	Current PO	Prior PO
STZ	\$300	\$290

Source: BofA Global Research

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#### **Exhibit 2: Stocks mentioned**

See below for stocks mentioned in our report

Ticker	Share price	BofA Price Objective	Implied upside	Rating
LW	\$102.06	\$138	35.2%	Buy
GIS	\$66.76	\$68	1.9%	Neutral
MKC	\$68.17	\$82	20.3%	Buy
CAG	\$28.07	\$30	6.9%	Neutral
STZ	\$267.64	\$300	8.4%	Buy

**Source:** Bloomberg, as of close 3.15.24

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#### **Exhibit 3: BofA vs Visible Alpha Consensus**

See below for how our estimates compare to Visible Alpha consensus

		Upcoming quar	ter		This fiscal yea	r	Next fiscal year		ır	The following fiscal year		
Ticker	BofAe	Visible Alpha	Variance	BofAe	Visible Alpha	Variance	BofAe	Visible Alpha	Variance	BofAe	Visible Alpha	Variance
LW	\$1.41	\$1.46	-\$0.05	\$6.12	\$6.03	\$0.09	\$6.80	\$6.53	\$0.26	\$7.30	\$7.18	\$0.11
GIS	\$1.09	\$1.05	\$0.04	\$4.48	\$4.49	-\$0.01	\$4.53	\$4.63	-\$0.09	\$4.79	\$4.86	-\$0.07
MKC	\$0.56	\$0.58	-\$0.02	\$2.80	\$2.81	-\$0.01	\$3.00	\$3.02	-\$0.02	\$3.15	\$3.25	-\$0.10
CAG	\$0.62	\$0.64	-\$0.02	\$2.57	\$2.60	-\$0.03	\$2.63	\$2.69	-\$0.06	\$2.70	\$2.80	-\$0.09
STZ*	\$2.12	\$2.12	\$0.00	\$12.20	\$12.20	\$0.00	\$13.53	\$13.55	-\$0.02	\$15.23	\$15.24	-\$0.01

**Source:** BofA Global Research estimates, Visible Alpha

\*Excludes Canopy losses

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#### **Exhibit 4: BofA estimate changes**

We raise our 3Q24 adj. EPS for LW

	Up	coming qu	arter	T	his fiscal y	ear	Next fiscal year		The following fiscal year			
Ticker	Current	Prior	Variance	Current	Prior	Variance	Current	Prior	Variance	Current	Prior	Variance
LW	\$1.41	\$1.39	\$0.02	\$6.12	\$6.12	\$0.00	\$6.80	\$6.80	\$0.00	\$7.30	\$7.30	\$0.00

**Source:** BofA Global Research estimates

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### Nielsen data

The data below focuses on Nielsen scanner data in the enhanced AOD (Answers on Demand), which includes c-stores and AOC (all outlets combined plus C-store) channels for US packaged food and beverage companies for the 4 weeks ended 2/24/24. We look at volume, pricing and sales trends for both food and beverage companies.

Exhibit 5: Key packaged food company trends for latest 4, 12, 52 week periods for period ended 2.24.24

Sales were more down than up in the latest 4wk period across all packaged food companies. Sales were positive for BRBR, FRPT, HSY, and SOVO.

	%	chg (4 wks)		%	chg (12 wks	)	% (	hg (52 wk	s)
	Dol	Vol	Price	Dol	Vol	Price	Dol	Vol	Price
COMPANIES									
BellRing Brands	20.7	16.8	3.3	36.9	39.5	-1.9	36.8	28.5	6.4
Campbell Soup Co	-1.8	-1.9	0.1	0.1	0.5	-0.5	1.2	-3.2	4.5
Conagra Inc	-3.6	-1.6	-2.1	-3.7	-2.0	-1.7	-1.8	-5.5	3.9
Dole plc	-7.2	-5.1	-2.2	-9.3	-6.0	-3.5	-6.1	-7.5	1.6
Freshpet	28.6	24.0	3.7	30.2	24.0	5.0	29.2	20.0	7.7
General Mills Inc	-2.0	-3.9	2.0	-1.3	-3.2	2.0	1.3	-5.1	6.7
Hormel Foods Corp	-2.6	-3.5	1.0	-1.8	-1.2	-0.6	-3.2	-3.2	0.1
The Hershey Co	0.2	-5.1	5.7	0.9	-4.9	6.0	3.6	-4.9	8.9
Kellanova	-3.9	-7.4	3.7	-4.2	-7.8	4.0	-0.9	-8.8	8.6
WK Kellogg Co	-1.5	-5.5	4.2	-2.5	-8.0	6.0	2.5	-8.7	12.3
The Kraft Heinz Co	-2.5	-1.8	-0.7	-2.0	-2.6	0.6	-1.0	-6.7	6.2
Lamb Weston	-6.2	-10.6	4.9	-8.7	-14.3	6.6	10.6	-3.4	14.5
Mondelez International Inc	-2.3	-2.7	0.4	-0.9	-1.6	0.7	4.2	-1.1	5.4
McCormick Co Inc	-1.7	-3.6	1.9	-2.1	-4.0	2.0	0.5	-3.7	4.4
J. M. Smucker	-0.2	0.4	-0.5	0.8	1.2	-0.4	4.4	-0.5	5.0
Sovos	19.9	16.8	2.7	23.9	18.7	4.3	21.8	16.5	4.5
Tyson Foods Inc	-3.9	-2.8	-1.2	-3.5	-1.2	-2.4	-0.6	1.1	-1.6

Source: NielsenIQ

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#### Exhibit 6: Year over year change in volume, price/mix and sales by company

Companies that saw price/mix and volumes increase for the latest 4 week period: STZ, TAP, NAPA, PEP salty snacks

		4 week			12 week			52 week	
Non-alcohol	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change
COCO - coconut water	2.3%	1.4%	3.8%	7.6%	0.6%	8.3%	11.7%	4.1%	16.2%
KDP - K cups	-2.4%	-3.4%	-5.7%	-5.8%	-2.1%	-7.9%	-7.0%	1.0%	-6.0%
KDP - refreshment	-4.7%	3.8%	-1.1%	-3.8%	4.4%	0.4%	-4.3%	9.7%	5.0%
KO - total beverages	0.6%	1.9%	2.5%	-1.4%	3.2%	1.8%	-3.4%	8.2%	4.5%
PEP - total beverages	-7.7%	5.9%	-2.2%	-8.1%	6.7%	-1.9%	-8.9%	12.6%	2.5%
Energy drinks	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change
Bang	-55.3%	7.8%	-51.8%	-58.5%	7.3%	-55.5%	-66.6%	8.5%	-63.8%
Celsius	82.0%	-4.1%	74.5%	90.5%	-3.1%	84.5%	120.8%	3.6%	128.8%
MNST X Bang	-0.7%	0.6%	0.0%	-0.4%	0.8%	0.4%	0.9%	5.6%	6.4%
Red Bull	-0.9%	4.9%	3.9%	-2.0%	5.2%	3.1%	0.3%	5.5%	5.7%
Beer/FMB/Cider	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change
ABI	-14.6%	1.0%	-13.8%	-14.4%	0.3%	-14.1%	-14.0%	2.8%	-11.6%
SAM	-3.2%	2.1%	-1.2%	-2.1%	2.2%	0.1%	-3.3%	4.0%	0.5%
STZ	6.6%	0.9%	7.6%	7.8%	0.8%	8.6%	7.3%	2.9%	10.5%
TAP	4.7%	1.6%	6.4%	4.7%	1.4%	6.2%	6.3%	3.8%	10.4%
Wine	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change
NAPA	3.9%	-0.7%	3.1%	4.4%	0.0%	4.3%	4.7%	1.3%	6.1%
STZ wine	-6.5%	0.7%	-5.8%	-6.3%	2.5%	-4.0%	-6.6%	3.7%	-3.2%
Spirits	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change
BF/B	8.2%	-4.6%	3.2%	6.7%	-3.5%	3.0%	11.2%	-5.4%	5.2%
Salty snacks	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change	Vol change	Price/mix change	Sales change
PEP (salty snacks)	-1.8%	2.2%	0.4%	-1.9%	3.0%	1.0%	-1.5%	8.2%	6.5%
UTZ (salty snacks)	2.5%	-0.1%	2.4%	5.1%	-1.0%	4.0%	0.2%	5.4%	5.6%

Source: NielsenIQ

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# Snapshot views by company

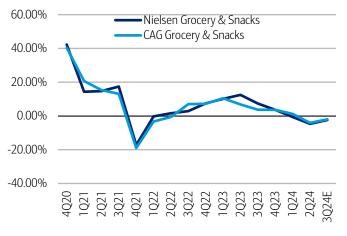
Below we offer our thoughts and expectations for our food and beverage coverage universe on the February end quarter, highlight where our view may differ from consensus (callouts), and provide a summarized thesis on each stock.

#### ConAgra (CAG), Neutral, reporting 3Q24, 4/4, before market

Thoughts ahead of the quarter: We maintain our 3Q24 adj. EPS estimate of \$0.62 which compares to Visible Alpha consensus of \$0.64. On sales, maintain our total company 3Q organic sales estimate of -2.6% with price/mix unchanged at -1.1% (price/mix deflation to accelerate relative to 2Q's -0.5%), and total company volumes of -1.5% (unchanged). We note that we shift some volume from Refrigerated & Frozen (now worse) to Grocery & Snacks (now better) to reflect Nielsen data for the latest 12-week period ending 2.24.24. We now model Grocery & Snacks (G&S) volumes of -1.0% (prior -2%) and Refrigerated & Frozen (R&F) volumes of -3.5% (prior -2.5%). It seems that CAG's January weather bump wasn't as needle-moving in the quarter for R&F as other packaged food companies, with December/February also looking weak. Particularly in frozen dinners & entrees (which makes up a large portion of the segment), volumes were negative for the month of January and down -4.4% in the quarter.

We remain ~40bps light of street gross margin or 3Q (27.2%) as CAG expects 2H gross margins to be "in line with to a little below 1H's 27.2%" per the 2Q conference call. We also model A&P spend to be ~20% higher vs 1H.

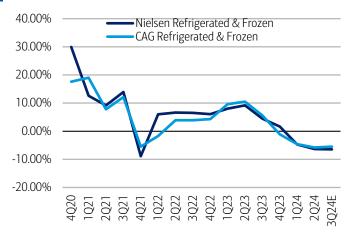
**Exhibit 7: Nielsen vs CAG reported Grocery & Snacks organic sales** We model 3Q24 organic sales in-line with Nielsen at -2.5% given the ~97% correlation between Nielsen and reported numbers



 $\textbf{Source:} \ \mathsf{CAG}, \ \mathsf{NielsenIQ}, \ \mathsf{BofA} \ \mathsf{Global} \ \mathsf{Research} \ \mathsf{estimates}$ 

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**Exhibit 8: Nielsen vs CAG reported Refrigerated & Frozen organic sales** In Refrigerated and Frozen, we model organic sales decline of -6% versus Nielsen's -6.5%



Source: CAG, NielsenIQ, BofA Global Research estimates

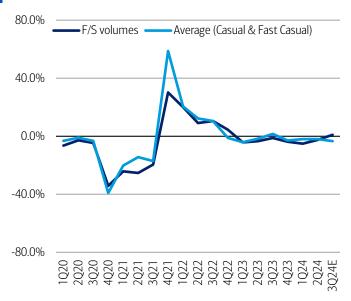
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Key considerations: 1) CAG reiterated its FY24 guidance at the Consumer Analyst Group of NY conference back at the end of February. However, scanner data in 3Q has continued to look weak, and if organic sales in the quarter comes in-line with scanner data, it begs the question of whether CAG will drive enough sequential volume improvement in 4Q and into FY25. In addition, as SNAP comps become easier in April, we begin to wonder what happens if there is no improvement, will there be further pressure to increase promotional spending? 2) CAG's Foodservice volumes have a ~94% correlation to Blackbox Casual Dining and Fast Casual data. Restaurant traffic in December was solid, January was weaker given unfavorable weather impacts and February got sequentially better. 2) Wheat prices have come down more since 2Q and the start of 3Q. Could we start seeing a slowing JV income contribution from Ardent? And if it does slow more, how much of this slowdown is incorporated in CAG's guidance?



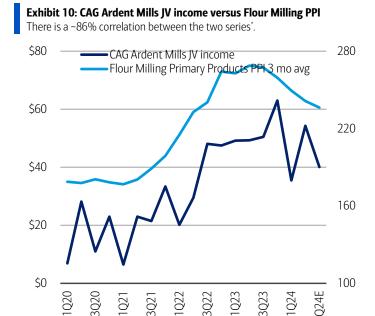
# Exhibit 9: CAG Reported Foodservice volumes vs Casual Dining/Fast Casual Blackbox data

There is a ~94% correlation between the two series'



Source: CAG, Bloomberg, BofA Global Research

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Source: CAG, Bloomberg, BofA Global Research estimates

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<u>Investment thesis</u>: We maintain our Neutral rating & \$30 price objective based on 11x our CY25 EPS estimate, which is below center-store peers given elevated leverage relative to the peer group and higher portfolio elasticity compared to its center store peers. This is offset by gross margin expansion as pricing more than offsets cost inflation.

#### Constellation Brands (STZ), Buy, reporting FY4Q24, 4/11, before market

Thoughts ahead of the quarter: Given unfavorable weather across the US in January & February (Midwest, CA, TX and Northeast) we are lowering our beer depletion forecast from +8.0% y/y to +6.5% (includes one extra selling day) compared to Visible Alpha Consensus of +7.0%. Our fiscal 4Q24 EPS estimate excluding Canopy losses remains unchanged at \$2.12 (\$2.09 including Canopy losses) and is in line with Visible Alpha Consensus. Key drivers behind our 4Q24 estimate include: 1) Beer depletions were negatively impacted during the weeks ending 1/13 and 1/20 by rainy/wintery weather in the Midwest, CA, TX and Northeast (See Exhibit 11). Since then, consumption has rebounded and we expect demand to continue to accelerate given easy year ago comparison in March, 2023 (+4.2% y/y). 2) **Beer sales** up +8.6% y/y with volumes +7.5% and price/mix +1.0% which is in line with Visible Alpha Consensus of +8.5% y/y. 3) Q4 beer gross margins are expected to be the lowest for FY24 (in line with seasonality) but should still see year over year growth. We are modeling 51.2% gross margins or up +30bps y/y. 4) Beer SG&A of \$271.3mm or up +5.1% y/y. 5) **W&S organic sales** down -7.5% y/y with volumes -9.5% and price/mix +2.0% which is slightly lower than Visible Alpha Consensus of -6.2% y/y. 6) **W&S margins** – gross margins of 48.7% (Consensus 49.0%) and operating margins of 27.2% (consensus 27.0%).



#### Exhibit 11: Year over year change in retail sales by channel for STZ

Retail sales during the weeks ending 1/13 and 1/20 were negatively impacted by rainy/wintery weather in the Midwest, CA, TX and Northeast

	1 w/e 12/09/23	1 w/e 12/16/23	1 w/e 12/23/23	1 w/e 12/30/23	1 w/e 01/06/24	1 w/e 01/13/24	1 w/e 01/20/24	1 w/e 01/27/24	1 w/e 02/03/24	1 w/e 02/10/24	1 w/e 02/17/24	1 w/e 02/24/24
Conv. channel	9.8%	12.2%	9.1%	12.6%	9.4%	1.2%	-4.7%	7.0%	9.7%	6.2%	3.3%	8.3%
xAOC	15.8%	14.7%	-0.8%	22.6%	31.1%	4.5%	5.0%	4.3%	10.9%	6.9%	10.0%	8.0%
xAOC + Conv.	11.7%	13.0%	5.4%	16.4%	17.8%	2.3%	-1.5%	6.1%	10.1%	6.4%	5.8%	8.2%

Source: NielsenIQ

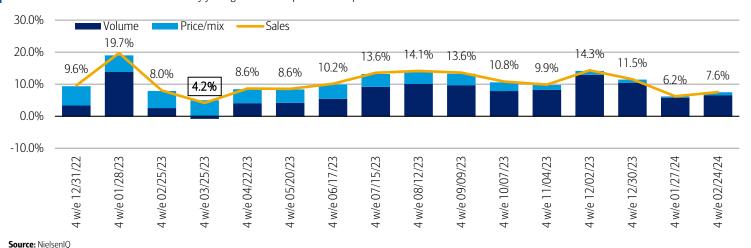
Conv. = Convenience channel

xAOC = extended all outlet combined and Includes Food/Grocery, Drug, Club and Dollar channels

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#### Exhibit 12: Year over year change in retail volume, price/mix and sales for STZ

With weather headwinds behind us and easy year ago March comparison we expect demand to continue to accelerate



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<u>Key considerations</u>: 1) FY25 outlook for beer shipments given that in FY24 STZ gained shelf space, benefitted from Modelo Oro and had better in stock availability. 2) STZ's appetite for share buybacks? 3) Beer depletion update for March and expectations moving forward. 4) Beer operating margins returning to algorithm? Key puts and takes – FX, COGS inflation and marketing spend. 5) Outlook for total wine and premium wine. <u>NAPA recently lowered its FY24 sales outlook</u> due to further softening of the luxury wine category and distributors taking on less inventory given softer market conditions for wine.

Investment thesis: We maintain our Buy rating and raise our PO to \$300 (previously \$290) that is now based on 20.0x (previously 19.8x) our CY25e EPS that excludes Canopy. We believe a higher multiple is justified given that consumption has rebounded and we expect a better exit rate as we head into FY1Q25. At 20.0x we value shares of STZ at the upper end of its valuation range over the past five years given our outlook for strong sales and earnings growth and expectation for more consistent capital allocation going forward.

#### General Mills (GIS), Neutral, reporting 3Q24, 3/20, before market

Thoughts ahead of the quarter: We maintain our 3Q24 adj. EPS estimate of \$1.09 which compares to Visible Alpha consensus of \$1.05. Modeling considerations to note include: 1) we model North America Retail (NAR) largely in-line with Nielsen data for the 12 weeks ending 2.24.24. at -1.5%. If untracked channels come in better than expected, there could be room for upside. 2) In Pet, we model a meaningful dislocation on volumes versus Nielsen as 3Q Pet volumes is expected to be weaker in untracked (Pet Specialty) while also lapping the toughest compare in the prior year period. 3) GIS expects a higher profit delivery in terms of EBIT dollars in 3Q relative 4Q—we model in-line and note that consensus is currently modeling higher profit delivery in 4Q vs 3Q. This is mainly driven



by higher YoY favorability in stock comp expense in 3Q vs 4Q. We currently model corporate expense \$150mm lower YoY in FY24 vs FY23.

#### Exhibit 13: GIS 3Q24E NAR & Pet vs Nielsen

We model a dislocation between Pet Reported and Nielsen volume data

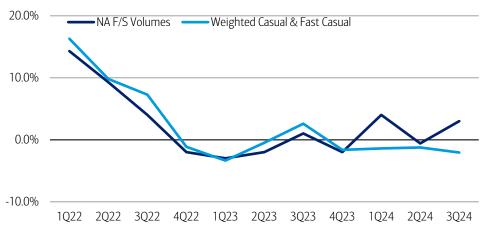
NAR	Organic Sales	Volume	Price
Reported	-1.5%	-4.0%	2.5%
Nielsen	<u>-1.2%</u>	<u>-3.4%</u>	<u>2.4%</u>
Delta	-0.3%	-0.6%	0.1%
Pet	Organic Sales	Volume	Price
Reported	-13.0%	-16.0%	3.0%
Nielsen	<u>1.6%</u>	<u>-1.5%</u>	3.2%
Delta	-14.6%	-14.5%	-0.2%

Source: GIS, NielsenIQ, BofA Global Research

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Key considerations: 1) We see a ~90% correlation between GIS North America Foodservice and a weighted average of Blackbox Casual Dining and Fast Casual data. Restaurant traffic in December was solid, January was weaker given unfavorable weather impacts and February got sequentially better. 2) Untracked channels could swing either way in NAR and Pet volumes. Particularly on Pet, GIS is exposed to Pet Specialty channels (untracked) which has continued to look weak (see BofA's Curtis Nagle's 4023 CHWY preview here) as consumers continue to seek value while GIS is also seeing positioning issues in its Wilderness brand. GIS noted when we hosted meetings in January that its focus is on re-positioning Wilderness, optimizing wet price points, and the value proposition for treats (see takeaways from investor meetings here). In tracked channels, the dog food category continues to see volumes stagnate at low-single digit declines compared to Blue which is seeing low-single digit volume growth.

Exhibit 14: NA Foodservice volumes vs weighted Casual & Fast Casual Blackbox data There is a  $\sim$ 90% correlation between the two series'



 $\textbf{Source:} \ \mathsf{GIS}, \ \mathsf{Bloomberg}, \ \mathsf{BofA} \ \mathsf{Global} \ \mathsf{Research}$ 

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<u>Investment thesis</u>: We maintain our Neutral rating & \$68 PO based on 15.0x our CY25E EPS. This is in-line to the center store peer group average which we think balances the near-term volume pressures with the positive medium term growth prospects across key geographies and categories.

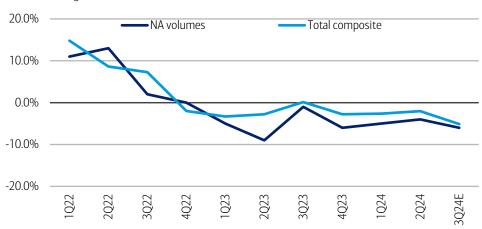
#### Lamb Weston (LW), Buy, reporting 3Q24, 4/4, before market

Thoughts ahead of the quarter: We raise our 3Q24 adj. EPS to \$1.41 from \$1.39 (consensus \$1.46) and adj EBIDTA to \$392mm from \$388mm (consensus \$396mm). Our full year estimate of \$6.12 remains unchanged as we tweak down 4Q24 gross margins slightly. Our higher 3Q estimate is driven by a higher gross margin estimate of 30.0% vs our prior 29.5%, offset by a lower volume estimate in both NA and Int'l. We now model total company volumes at -8% (prior -6%) with NA 3Q volumes at -6% (prior -4%) which



fully encapsulates a) ERP related headwinds in the retail channel, which has improved sequentially in recent weeks and b) January weather related headwinds in foodservice channels. Our North America composite, which includes NA QSR/Fast Casual (Blackbox), Casual Dining (Blackbox), and Retail data (Nielsen), derives a North America volume estimate of -5.1%. We model lower than this estimate as though the US Retail data (Nielsen) reflects ERP, but we estimate LW to report lower QSR/Fast Casual/Casual Dining results versus the Blackbox data given some ERP impact in these channels as well. Similarly, we now model International volumes -20% (prior -18%) closer to 2Q's -22% given we expect ERP had some impact on NA exports. For an updated copy of our NA mapping excel, please reach out.

**Exhibit 15: NA reported volumes vs composite of US QSR/Fast Casual, Casual Dining, and Retail** We model NA volumes down -6% vs composite of -5.1% to account for some ERP impact in QSR/Fast Casual and Casual dining



Source: LW, Bloomberg, BofA Global Research estimates

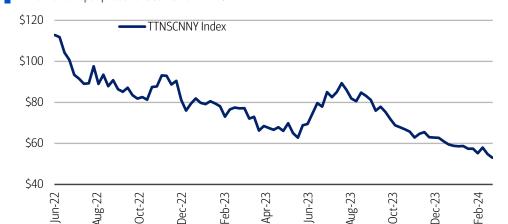
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#### Key considerations ahead of the quarter:

- 1) **ERP/Restaurant data**: As mentioned above, LW's ERP transition which began the week after Thanksgiving, and has improved each week since 2Q earnings the first week of January, likely had more impact in the quarter than we had initially modeled. Despite this, we expect any headwinds to be largely behind the company at this point and maintain our 4Q estimate for **positive volume growth**, which we believe will be the most important determinant of the upcoming earnings call and stock reaction. LW positioning screens more shorted than in prior quarters, with the bear case predicated on a) a 3Q volume miss and b) 4Q volume walkaway comment from "positive volumes". If these two headwinds are cleared, we see significant runway for the stock. Restaurant traffic was solid in December, but cold weather and a difficult lap in January was a headwind to traffic. In contrast, we note February improved versus January.
- 2) **Crop negotiations**: The North America Potato Market newsletter (NAPMN) reported in mid-January that the summer 2024 pricing negotiations on contracted potatoes in the Columbia Basin (1/3 of LW's COGS and 95-95% of crop needs) is down -2% to flat. Canadian grower are negotiating closer to down 1-2% for summer 2024 per NAPMN. In a downside scenario where price was down -2% and LW were to give back pricing to customers, it implies only a ~33bps headwind to total co price as it affects the legacy Global segment (~50% of total co) and ~1/3 of COGS. Mix will likely be more than a positive offset to this headwind. Acreage estimates for the summer 2024 crop are expected to be in the 15-16% range from a year ago in the Columbia Basin per NAPMN given the surplus crop for summer 2023 which will be usable well into summer 2024. The July crop estimates (~10-15% of total crop production) are

- expected to have acreage reductions of up to 25% with growers having started planting in the Basin in Mid-March.
- 3) **Canola oil prices**: Canola oil spot prices have become more favorable since the beginning of LW's fiscal year. We look to see if this materializes into any margin benefit as we estimate the commodity to be ~10% of LW's COGS basket.

# **Exhibit 16: Canola Oil spot prices (\$USD/lb)**YTD canola oil spot prices have come down ~-4%



Source: Bloomberg

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4) Capacity announcement NA is small: A European potato processing company, Agristo, is planning on building a frozen processing plant in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. The \$40-50mm plant is expected to purchase 10-20k acres of potatoes from Wisconsin farmers. Though the timing is unclear, the plant likely wouldn't start up until late 2026 at the earliest and is likely small in the overall context of a NA market that is approaching 14bn lbs of capacity.

<u>Investment thesis</u>: We maintain our Buy rating & \$138 PO based on a 19.5x P/E multiple on our CY25 EPS estimate. This is a premium to the packaged food index at 17x. We believe a premium is warranted as LW is poised to approach pre-COVID levels with upside potential to improving demand trends and margin potential in FY24.

#### McCormick & Co. (MKC), Buy, reporting 1Q24, 3/26, before market

Thoughts ahead of the quarter: We maintain our 1024 adj. EPS of \$0.56 which compares to Visible Alpha consensus of \$0.58. Though our total company organic sales estimate of -0.1% remains unchanged for the quarter, two elements of the build have changed. 1) In Americas Consumer, we raise our volume estimate to -4.5% from -5% which in hand raises our Consumer segment volumes to -3.3% from -3.7%. Our raised estimate reflects slightly better scanner data in the latest 12 week period ending 2.24.24 than our prior model. Our volume estimate also includes a 2pt headwind from MKC's DSD exit (El Guapo) for Q1 and ~7% growth in private label spices/seasoning which we estimate accounts for ~15% of Americas Consumer volume (Exhibit 17). Following 1Q24, the DSD exit should no longer be a headwind. 2) We lower our EMEA Flavor Solutions volumes to -6.5% from -5.5% which in hand lowered our Flavor Solutions segment volumes to -1.6% from -1%. We view MCD's International Operated Markets as a strong read-through for EMEA flavor solutions (~97% correlation), with recent commentary from the company mentioning headwinds in Europe (Exhibit 19) (which MKC has also been flagging for a few quarters now). Our EMEA Flavor Solutions volume estimate also includes the ~1-2pt headwind from discontinuing the private label product line. Our estimates for Asia remained unchanged (see more below) - boycotts in SE Asia QSR's likely continued to have some impact, while in China, Lunar New Year traffic/travel appeared to be at least



solid. Outside of sales, we make no other changes to our model, including gross margin of 36.5% which is in-line with consensus.

#### **Exhibit 17: MKC Americas Consumer volumes vs Nielsen**

We contemplate a 2pt headwind from MKC's DSD exit (El Guapo)

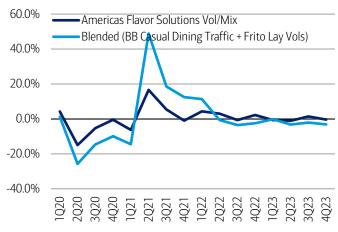
1yr stack	Feb-23	May-23	Aug-23	Nov-23	Feb-24
Vols % chg YoY	<b>1Q23</b>	2Q23	<b>3Q23</b>	<b>4Q23</b>	1Q24E
Nielsen syndicated	-4.8%	-2.8%	-1.7%	-4.9%	-4.0%
Private Label Spices/Seasonings vol growth	8.2%	5.7%	4.3%	4.7%	6.9%
Blended (15% PL weighting)	-2.8%	-1.5%	-0.8%	-3.4%	-2.3%
MKC Americas Consumer volumes	-4.5%	-3.5%	-2.3%	-6.3%	-4.5%
MKC Americas Consumer volumes (excl one-time impacts)	-4.5%	-1.5%	-0.7%	-2.8%	-2.5%

Source: MKC, NielsenIQ, BofA Global Research

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# Exhibit 18: AMRS Flavor Solutions vs Blended Casual Dining traffic and Frito Lay volumes

The two data series' have a 91% correlation

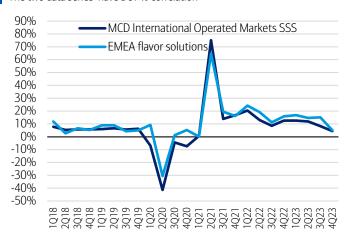


Source: MKC, PEP, Bloomberg, BofA Global Research

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# Exhibit 19: EMEA Flavor Solutions vs. MCD International Operated Markets SSS

The two data series' have a 97% correlation



Source: MKC, MCD, BofA Global Research

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#### Exhibit 20: MKC 1Q24E sales estimates by segment and geography

We model Americas consumer organic sales of -4% which reflects Nielsen and expected DSD exit headwind

eographic sales trends	1Q24E
onsumer Segment	
Constant currency	-3.5%
Volume/Mix	-4.5%
Price	1.0%
Acquisition/Divestiture	0.0%
FX impact	<u>-0.5%</u>
Americas	-4.0%
Constant currency	4.0%
Volume/Mix	-4.0%
Price	8.0%
FX impact	<u>3.0%</u>
EMEA	7.0%
Constant currency	6.0%
Volume/Mix	4.0%
Price	2.0%
FX impact	<u>-4.0%</u>
Asia/Pacific	2.0%
Constant currency	-1.3%
M&A	0.0%
FX impact	<u>-0.5%</u>



#### Exhibit 20: MKC 1Q24E sales estimates by segment and geography

We model Americas consumer organic sales of -4% which reflects Nielsen and expected DSD exit headwind

Geographic sales trends	1Q24E
Total consumer segment	-1.8%
lavor solutions Segment	
Constant currency	1.0%
Volume/Mix	-1.0%
Price	2.0%
Acquisition	0.0%
FX impact	<u>-0.5%</u>
Americas	0.5%
Constant currency	1.5%
Volume/Mix	-6.5%
Price	8.0%
Acquisition/Divestiture	-3.0%
FX impact	<u>3.0%</u>
EMEA	1.5%
Constant currency	3.0%
Volume/Mix	-2.0%
Price	5.0%
FX impact	<u>-4.0%</u>
Asia/Pacific	-1.0%
Constant currency	1.4%
M&A	-0.5%
FX impact	<u>-1.0%</u>
Total flavor solutions segment	-0.1%
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**Source:** BofA Global Research estimates

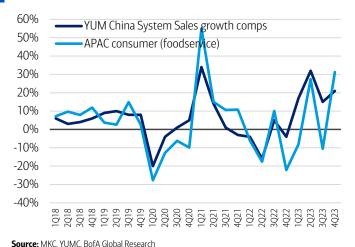
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Key considerations: 1) Cold weather drove improvement in scanner data for January while core spices/seasonings improved sequentially in February, potentially an early indication that MKC's investment in price gap management for core SKUs are delivering the results it intended to do. These two combined could mean some upside in Consumer results this quarter. 2) Recall that APAC Consumer will be lapping low-double digit volume declines from the prior year's quarter. However, we note that China's underlying sales could face a tough backdrop. YUMC, noted on its 4Q23 earnings call that a late Chinese New Year and an extra day (leap year) could impact positively on February sales but potentially be offset by unfavorable weather, as mentioned by BofA's Chen Luo (see his takeaways here). 3) Outside of China, we look to hear whether boycotts in some QSRs (MCD) in Southeast Asia (Indonesia/Malaysia) related to geopolitical events that MKC saw in 4Q23 have continued into 1Q24. MKC's expectation was for the softness in these customers' volumes to continue into 2024, and we note that MCD also noted on its 4Q23 earnings call that they are seeing these boycotts impact volumes.



# Exhibit 21: APAC Consumer (foodservice) vs YUMC System sales growth

There is an 78% correlation between the two data series'



Jrce: MKL, YUML, BOTA GIODAL RESEATCH

# Exhibit 22: APAC flavor solutions vs YUMC system sales growth (in MKC fiscal quarters)

There is a 68% correlation between the two data series'



Source: MKC, YUMC, BofA Global Research

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Investment thesis: We maintain our Buy rating & \$82 PO for MKC shares based on a CY2025e P/E multiple of 27x, within its five-year historical valuation range of 19x-42x and in-line with average of 29.5x. In our view, MKC deserves to trade in-line to its 5 year average multiple given continued China recovery, initiatives to improve Americas Consumer volumes and improved cost outlook and margin trajectory.

### Price objective basis & risk

#### Conagra Brands, Inc. (CAG)

Our \$30 price objective is based on 11x our CY25 EPS estimate, which is below centerstore peers given elevated leverage relative to the peer group and higher portfolio elasticity compared to its center store peers. This is offset by gross margin expansion as pricing more than offsets cost inflation.

Upside risks: 1) inflation tapering quicker than expected, helping margin strength moving forward, 2) share gains in its respective categories and 3) service level improvement to pre pandemic levels.

Downside risks: 1) a high interest rate environment persisting longer than expected, 2) inflation to persist longer than anticipated, 3) more price elasticities and trade down to private label as consumers continue to tackle an inflationary environment.

#### **Constellation Brands (STZ)**

Our \$300 price objective is based on 20x our CY25e EPS that excludes Canopy. At 20x we value shares of STZ at the upper end of its valuation range over the past five years given our outlook for strong sales and earnings growth and expectation for more consistent capital allocation going forward.

Upside risks to our PO: 1) Modelo's beer brands continue to grow above current trends. 2) Corona's new products resonate with consumers and drives sales growth. 3) Investment behind certain wine & spirit brands accelerates sales growth and operating margins.

Downside risks to our PO: 1) Hard seltzers cannibalize growth from STZ's beer portfolio. 2) STZ's investment in Canopy takes longer than anticipated to be accretive to EPS than we forecast. 3) Remaining wine & spirits business does not achieve investors' expectations.



#### General Mills (GIS)

Our price objective of \$68 is based on 15.0x our CY25E EPS. This is in-line to the center store peer group average which we think balances the near-term volume pressures with the positive medium term growth prospects across key geographies and categories.

Upside risks to our PO are lower volume elasticity, better retention rates of household gains related to COVID-19 that will benefit center of the store categories in North America, better-than-expected price elasticities as GIS announces additional actions, as well as upside to market share gains for Blue Buffalo.

Downside risks to our PO are consumers trading down to private label, higher-than-expected commodity cost inflation, stalled momentum in pet food, and weaker-than-expected sales in international/emerging markets.

#### Lamb Weston Holdings Inc (LW)

Our \$138 PO is based on a 19.5x P/E multiple on our CY25 EPS estimate. This is a premium to the packaged food index at 17x. We believe a premium is warranted as LW is poised to approach pre-COVID levels with upside potential to improving demand trends and margin potential in FY24.

Potential upside risks: demand rebounds faster than expected, overall category growth remains above 2-3% allowing for tight industry supply to continue in the medium to long term. Tight industry supply allows for further price increase across both global and foodservice customers. Potato costs and cooking oils moderate.

Downside risks: 1) higher-than-expected potato costs for CY23, 2) inability to push through additional pricing to cover inflation and restore margins, 3) influx of new industry capacity, 4) slowdown in on-premise activity if the consumer has less spending power.

#### McCormick & Co. (MKC)

Our \$82 PO for MKC shares is based on a CY2025e P/E multiple of 27x, within its five-year historical valuation range of 19x-42x and in-line with average of 29.5x. In our view, MKC deserves to trade in-line to its 5 year average multiple given continued China recovery, initiatives to improve Americas Consumer volumes and improved cost outlook and margin trajectory.

Downside risks to our price objective are 1) slower-than-expected category growth, 2) a loss of a major customer, 3) increased competitive activity and expanding price gaps from private label, 4) strengthening of the US dollar, 5) lower-than-expected cost savings/debt paydown, 6) disruption from implementation of the company's new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.

Upside risks to our price objective: 1) faster-than-expected category growth, 2) rational competitive activity from private label, 3) lack of rotation from growth/momentum stocks to value stocks, 4) a weaker US dollar positively impacting reported international results, 5) greater-than-expected cost savings through its Comprehensive Continuous Improvement (CCI) program.

### **Analyst Certification**

We, Bryan D. Spillane and Peter T. Galbo, CFA, hereby certify that the views each of us has expressed in this research report accurately reflect each of our respective personal views about the subject securities and issuers. We also certify that no part of our respective compensation was, is, or will be, directly or indirectly, related to the specific recommendations or view expressed in this research report.



### **Special Disclosures**

BofA Securities is currently acting as Financial Advisor to Conagra Brands in connection with its proposed sale of 51.77% stake in Agro Tech Foods Limited to funds advised by Convergent Finance LLP and Samara Capital, which was announced on 29 Feb 2024.



#### **US - Consumables Coverage Cluster**

Investment rating	Company	BofA Ticker	Bloomberg symbol	Analyst
BUY				
	BellRing Brands Inc	BRBR	BRBR US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Coca-Cola Europacific Partners plc	CCEP	CCEP US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Colgate-Palmolive Company	CL	CLUS	Bryan D. Spillane
	Constellation Brands	STZ	STZ US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Coty Inc.	COTY	COTY US	Anna Lizzul
	e.l.f. Beauty	ELF	ELF US	Anna Lizzul
	Freshpet, Inc.	FRPT	FRPT US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Kenvue Inc.	KVUE	KVUE US	Anna Lizzul
	Keurig Dr Pepper	KDP	KDP US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Kraft Heinz Company	KHC	KHC US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Lamb Weston Holdings Inc	LW	LW US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	McCormick & Co.	MKC	MKC US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	Mondelez International	MDLZ	MDLZ US	
		MNST	MNST US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Monster Beverage Corporation			Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	PepsiCo	PEP	PEP US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Philip Morris International	PM	PM US	Lisa K. Lewandowski
	Pilgrim's Pride Corp.	PPC	PPC US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	The Coca Cola Company	KO	KO US	Bryan D. Spillane
	The Procter & Gamble Company	PG	PG US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Utz Brands	UTZ	UTZ US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
NEUTRAL				
	Altria Group	MO	MO US	Lisa K. Lewandowski
	Celsius Holdings Inc	CELH	CELH US	Jonathan Keypour
	Church & Dwight	CHD	CHD US	Anna Lizzul
	Clorox	CLX	CLX US	Anna Lizzul
	Conagra Brands, Inc.	CAG	CAG US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	Estee Lauder Companies Inc.	EL	EL US	Bryan D. Spillane
	General Mills	GIS	GIS US	Bryan D. Spillane
	JM Smucker Company	SJM	SJM US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	Kellanova	K	KUS	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	Molson Coors Beverage Company	TAP	TAP US	Bryan D. Spillane
	The Hershey Company	HSY	HSY US	Bryan D. Spillane
	The Vita Coco Company, Inc.	COCO	COCO US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Tyson Foods, Inc.	TSN	TSN US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	WK Kellogg Co	KLG	KLG US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
UNDERREDEARM	With choose co	NEG	NEG 05	recer i. daibo, er i
UNDERPERFORM	Decree Farman Communities	DED	DE /D LIC	Drawer D. Calillana
	Brown-Forman Corporation	BFB	BF/B US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Campbell Soup Company	CPB	CPB US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	Canopy Growth	YWEED	WEED CN	Lisa K. Lewandowski
	Canopy Growth	CGC	CGC US	Lisa K. Lewandowski
	Cronos Group	YCRON	CRON CN	Lisa K. Lewandowski
	Cronos Group	CRON	CRON US	Lisa K. Lewandowski
	Dole plc	DOLE	DOLE US	Bryan D. Spillane
	Herbalife Ltd	HLF	HLF US	Anna Lizzul
	Hormel Foods Corp.	HRL	HRL US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA
	Kimberly-Clark	KMB	KMB US	Anna Lizzul
	The Duckhorn Portfolio, Inc.	NAPA	NAPA US	Peter T. Galbo, CFA

# **Disclosures**

# **Important Disclosures**



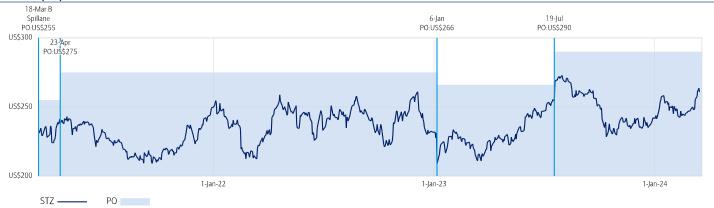
#### Conagra (CAG) Price Chart



B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

The Investment Opinion System is contained at the end of the report under the heading "Fundamental Equity Opinion Key". Dark grey shading indicates the security is restricted with the opinion suspended. Medium grey shading indicates the security is under review with the opinion withdrawn. Light grey shading indicates the security is not covered. Chart is current as of a date no more than one trading day prior to the date of the report.

#### **Constellation (STZ) Price Chart**



B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

The Investment Opinion System is contained at the end of the report under the heading "Fundamental Equity Opinion Key". Dark grey shading indicates the security is restricted with the opinion suspended. Medium grey shading indicates the security is under review with the opinion withdrawn. Light grey shading indicates the security is not covered. Chart is current as of a date no more than one trading day prior to the date of the report.

#### General Mills (GIS) Price Chart

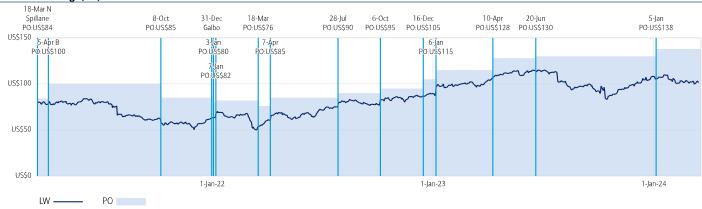


B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

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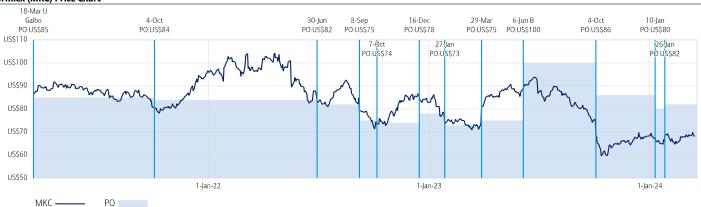
#### **Lamb Weston Holdings (LW) Price Chart**



B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

The Investment Opinion System is contained at the end of the report under the heading "Fundamental Equity Opinion Key". Dark grey shading indicates the security is restricted with the opinion suspended. Medium grey shading indicates the security is under review with the opinion withdrawn. Light grey shading indicates the security is not covered. Chart is current as of a date no more than one trading day prior to the date of the report.

#### McCormick (MKC) Price Chart



B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

The Investment Opinion System is contained at the end of the report under the heading "Fundamental Equity Opinion Key". Dark grey shading indicates the security is restricted with the opinion suspended. Medium grey shading indicates the security is under review with the opinion withdrawn. Light grey shading indicates the security is not covered. Chart is current as of a date no more than one trading day prior to the date of the report.

#### Equity Investment Rating Distribution: Beverages - Alcoholic Group (as of 31 Dec 2023)

Coverage Universe	Count	Percent	Inv. Banking Relationships R1	Count	Percent
Buy	22	61.11%	Buy	15	68.18%
Hold	6	16.67%	Hold	4	66.67%
Sell	8	22.22%	Sell	2	25.00%

#### Equity Investment Rating Distribution: Beverages - Soft Drinks Group (as of 31 Dec 2023)

Coverage Universe	Count	Percent	Inv. Banking Relationships R1	Count	Percent
Buy	11	78.57%	Buy	6	54.55%
Hold	0	0.00%	Hold	0	0.00%
Sell	3	21.43%	Sell	1	33.33%

#### Equity Investment Rating Distribution: Food Group (as of 31 Dec 2023)

Coverage Universe	Count	Percent	Inv. Banking Relationships R1	Count	Percent
Buy	33	49.25%	Buy	16	48.48%
Hold	17	25.37%	Hold	10	58.82%
Sell	17	25.37%	Sell	8	47.06%

#### Equity Investment Rating Distribution: Global Group (as of 31 Dec 2023)

Coverage Universe	Count	Percent	Inv. Banking Relationships R1	Count	Percent
Buy	1895	53.62%	Buy	1083	57.15%
Hold	832	23.54%	Hold	454	54.57%
Sell	807	22.84%	Sell	383	47.46%

R1 Issuers that were investment banking clients of BofA Securities or one of its affiliates within the past 12 months. For purposes of this Investment Rating Distribution, the coverage universe includes only stocks. A stock rated Neutral is included as a Hold, and a stock rated Underperform is included as a Sell.

FUNDAMENTAL EQUITY OPINION KEY: Opinions include a Volatility Risk Rating, an Investment Rating and an Income Rating. VOLATILITY RISK RATINGS, indicators of potential price fluctuation, are: A - Low, B - Medium and C - High. INVESTMENT RATINGS reflect the analyst's assessment of both a stock's absolute total return potential as well as its attractiveness for investment relative to other stocks within its Coverage Cluster (defined below). Our investment ratings are: 1 - Buy stocks are expected to have a total return of at least 10% and are the most attractive stocks in the coverage cluster; 2 - Neutral stocks are expected to remain flat or increase in value and are less attractive than Buy rated stocks and 3 - Underperform stocks are the least attractive stocks in a coverage cluster. An investment rating of 6 (No Rating) indicates that a stock is no longer trading on the basis of fundamentals. Analysts assign investment ratings considering, among other things, the 0-12 month total return expectation for a stock and the firm's guidelines for ratings dispersions (shown in the table below). The current price objective for a stock should be referenced to better understand the total return expectation at any given time. The price objective reflects the analyst's view of the potential price appreciation (depreciation).

# Investment rating Total return expectation (within 12-month period of date of initial rating) Ratings dispersion guidelines for coverage cluster<sup>R2</sup>

 Buy
 ≥ 10%
 ≤ 70%

 Neutral
 ≥ 0%
 ≤ 30%

 Underperform
 N/A
 ≥ 20%

INCOME RATINGS, indicators of potential cash dividends, are: 7 - same/higher (dividend considered to be secure), 8 - same/lower (dividend not considered to be secure) and 9 - pays no cash dividend. Coverage Cluster is comprised of stocks covered by a single analyst or two or more analysts sharing a common industry, sector, region or other classification(s). A stock's coverage cluster is included in the most recent BofA Global Research report referencing the stock.

Price Charts for the securities referenced in this research report are available on the Price Charts website, or call 1-800-MERRILL to have them mailed.

BofAS or one of its affiliates acts as a market maker for the equity securities recommended in the report: Conagra, Constellation, General Mills, Lamb Weston Holdings, McCormick. BofAS or an affiliate was a manager of a public offering of securities of this issuer within the last 12 months. Conagra Foods, Constellation, Genl Mills, McCormick & Co.

The issuer is or was, within the last 12 months, an investment banking client of BofAS and/or one or more of its affiliates: Conagra Foods, Constellation, Genl Mills, Lamb Weston Holdings, McCormick & Co.

BofAS or an affiliate has received compensation from the issuer for non-investment banking services or products within the past 12 months: Conagra Foods, Constellation, Genl Mills, Lamb Weston Holdings, McCormick & Co.

The issuer is or was, within the last 12 months, a non-securities business client of BofAS and/or one or more of its affiliates: Conagra Foods, Constellation, Genl Mills, Lamb Weston Holdings, McCormick & Co.

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BofAS or an affiliate expects to receive or intends to seek compensation for investment banking services from this issuer or an affiliate of the issuer within the next three months: Conagra Foods, Constellation, Genl Mills, Lamb Weston Holdings, McCormick & Co.

BofAS together with its affiliates beneficially owns one percent or more of the common stock of this issuer. If this report was issued on or after the 9th day of the month, it reflects the ownership position on the last day of the previous month. Reports issued before the 9th day of a month reflect the ownership position at the end of the second month preceding the date of the report: Conagra Foods, Constellation, Genl Mills, Lamb Weston Holdings.

BofAS or one of its affiliates is willing to sell to, or buy from, clients the common equity of the issuer on a principal basis: Conagra, Constellation, General Mills, Lamb Weston Holdings, McCormick

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BofA Global Research personnel (including the analyst(s) responsible for this report) receive compensation based upon, among other factors, the overall profitability of Bank of America Corporation, including profits derived from investment banking. The analyst(s) responsible for this report may also receive compensation based upon, among other factors, the overall profitability of the Bank's sales and trading businesses relating to the class of securities or financial instruments for which such analyst is responsible.

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