

# At the Supermarket: WHAT'S TRENDING?

## EXPLORE DRIVING FACTORS BEHIND FOUR FADS

By Esther L. Ellis,  
MS, RD, LDN

With the help of consumer surveys and annual sales data, registered dietitian nutritionists can keep up with the most recent supermarket trends that affect people's health and wellness.

### Private Label Products

Private label products display the retailer's logo instead of the manufacturer's emblem. In 2017, sales of private-label products tripled the sales of branded products. Data show this category grows in sales by about 3 percent each year.

Private label products are becoming brands in their own right; about 46 percent of consumers say these items influence where they shop. Retailers recognize this and are increasing their private label offerings. Generation X is the largest driver in sales of private label products, followed by older millennials and younger baby boomers.

This age range typically includes families, who may be more likely to gravitate toward less-expensive private label items, especially since nearly one-third of U.S. families struggles to pay for groceries. An increase in available private label products also gives customers a larger selection of items from which to choose, increasing their buying power.

### Meal Kits

Meal kits are groupings of pre-packaged ingredients, sold together and used to make a featured recipe. While they originated from notable online companies featuring home delivery, grocery stores are jumping on the trend. In 2017, meal kits generated nearly \$155 million in retail sales. Of the 25 percent of Americans who say they purchased meal kits last year, 17 percent purchased one at a supermarket.



This trend is driven largely by millennial men and families with children. Most meal kit consumers believe they are healthier than prepared food options in the supermarket and that they save time shopping, planning and preparing meals.

Meal kits may persuade shoppers to try new recipes and they allow for easier recipe modification compared to restaurant foods or other prepared foods. Although consumers believe meal kits are healthier, that may not always be true: Many can be high in calories, sodium or saturated fat and often include sauces high in added sugars. RDNs can encourage clients to review the package labels before purchasing a meal kit. If nutrition facts aren't available, review the ingredients or ask store personnel for help in obtaining such information.

### Online Ordering, Home Delivery and Store Pickup

While online companies have changed the competition for brick-and-mortar retailers, most online purchases are health, beauty and pet products. By 2024, it is estimated that more than 70 percent of consumers will be purchasing some form of food and beverage online. This means grocery stores still have an advantage when it comes to providing food (especially fresh items), but it doesn't minimize the need to evolve to accommodate shopper trends related to convenience.



To compete with online sales, many retailers offer home delivery and curbside pickup through in-house services or by partnering with third-party businesses. One survey found a 67-percent increase in the use of curbside, a service where consumers purchase items online and collect it later at the store. This trend is most popular among consumers 25 to 44 years old. Fresh foods such as produce and milk are the most common purchases.

Home delivery and store pickup may offer a time-saving convenience and help shoppers save money by reducing the opportunity for impulse buys. However, many home delivery services come with additional fees and they can reduce customers' ability to choose their own items.

### Local

Sales of local foods are expected to reach \$20 billion by 2019, up from \$5 billion in 2008.

Shopping local is trending overall, but fresh items — especially produce — are driving the trend. Local produce sold twice as much compared to overall produce, with a 10-percent lift in sales in 2017. Shoppers who purchase local items say they believe these goods are of higher quality, fresher and better for the environment.

Buying local may reduce foods' processing and travel time, which could equate to a fresher product with more nutrients. Purchasing local products also may mean more money goes back into the local economy. Reduced

distances may lessen fuel and emissions, contributing to increased sustainability. Caution clients that the term "local" is defined in many ways, which could be misleading. The USDA's vague definition of local — "the direct or intermediated marketing of food to consumers that is produced and distributed in a limited geographic area" — does not provide a specific distance or radius. Shoppers should investigate their store's definition of local.

Take note as supermarket trends come and go to better educate clients and patients on how to make smart, healthful purchases.

Find Esther on our Stone Soup blog.