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## Seafood keeping US stores afloat

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SEAFOOD is helping to keep many main street food retailers in the United States afloat in the face of increasing competition from the internet.

According to the 2017 US Grocery Shopper Trends report published by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) and The Hartman Group, one in four consumers now shop at online-only outlets. As a result visits to the stores are declining.

But the report has found that despite the rise in e-commerce popularity, particularly among the coveted Millennial age group (those born between 1982 and 1997), fresh seafood has helped traditional retailers hold steady. The FMI's findings show that even the highly digitised Millennials prefer to shop for items such as fresh seafood at brick-

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and-mortar locations.

It's a preference that echoes the results of Mintel's Fish and Shellfish US 2016 report, which found that frequent seafood customers trend to purchase fresh options as opposed to frozen counterparts. The fresh sector is also perceived as "inherently healthier" according to the study.

Sales increased by 7.2 per cent between 2014 and 2016, while fresh fish, both farmed and wild caught, and shellfish generated \$10 billion in sales during this time.

The report adds: "Some frozen brands have leveraged the nutrition and flavour benefits from flash freezing. However, brands must realize the category's most frequent consumers will nevertheless seek the freshest options."

But the results are less positive on the frozen side of the coin. The report says this sub-sector has grown at a slower rate with performance increasing by only two per cent over the same period. Frozen seafood sales finished more than \$5 billion behind their fresh counterparts over this stretch. The report thinks this may be due in part to the perception that grocery stores are more reliable when it comes to ensuring food safety. These days US consumers are more wary about the way some foods are processed. But the FMI pointed out that these beliefs are merely perceptions and not actual projections of risk.



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