

Slideshow: Packaged convenience driving fresh produce sales

Consumer demand for fresh and local fruits and vegetables in convenient formats is increasing.

FoodBusinessNews.net, 6/28/2016

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CHICAGO — Consumer demand for fresh products is driving the produce department of many supermarkets. At \$61 billion in annual sales and growing at about 4% annually, grocery baskets containing fresh produce average nearly \$30 more than baskets without. This is according to the second Power of Produce consumer study from the Food Marketing Institute (F.M.I.), Arlington, Va.

Results from the study were shared with FMI Connect attendees on June 22 in Chicago, which took place alongside United Fresh.

“The nation’s food retailers fully understand the clout of the perimeter, and when it comes to their fresh strategies, it’s imperative that we continue to track shopper behavior to help them monitor and respond to consumers,” said Rick Stein, vice-president of fresh foods for the F.M.I.

The study found that nearly one-quarter of shoppers switch outlets when purchasing fresh produce versus the bulk of groceries, primarily to full-service supermarkets, farmers’ markets/produce stands and specialty organic stores.



[Slideshow: Innovations at United Fresh](#)

Anne-Marie Roerink, principal of 210 Analytics L.L.C., San Antonio, who prepared the study, cautioned that younger generations are drawn to alternative channels, which she deemed “a red flag for traditional retailers as losing the produce basket may result in losing additional spending in center store.”

The Power of Produce shopper survey was supplemented by Information Resources, Inc. and the Nielsen Perishables Group point-of-sales data. The report reveals shopper habits regarding fruits and vegetables pre-trip, in-store and at home, as well as hundreds of shopper suggestions on how to improve the produce department.

The study explored several significant trends in produce, most notably the demand for local, with 61% of shoppers

wanting their produce department to stock more local items. However, shoppers’ definition of local is rapidly tightening to sourcing within a certain mile radius or simply inside state lines.



The demand for local is on the rise, with 61% of shoppers wanting their produce department to stock more local items.

Notably, consumers are placing increased value on transparency — how and where the crop was grown — as evidenced by how support for the local farmers/economy overtook perceived freshness as the top reason for buying locally grown. This shopper sentiment also applies double-digit sales gains for organic fresh produce and an expressed need for “free-from” products. Still, organic remains a niche segment to date, reflecting 8% of total produce sales, with usage skewing to the more affluent shoppers and families with children.

Convenient innovations

Recently introduced produce innovations showcased at

United Fresh include Mann's Nourish Bowls from Mann

Packing Co., Salinas, Calif. The line of single-serve meals contains fresh vegetables, grains and sauce. Developed by a panel of chefs, Mann's Nourish Bowls feature such trending vegetables as butternut squash, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, sweet potatoes and sugar snap peas. The four varieties are: Monterey risotto, sesame sriracha, smokehouse brussels and Southwest chipotle.

The bowls are suited for all day parts and may be eaten as a meal or side dish. They are microwavable and ready in three to four minutes. The product retails for \$3.99 to \$4.99 and has a 16-day shelf life.



Lorri Koster, chairman and c.e.o. of Mann Packing Co.

"Healthy bowl-based meals are very popular in food service, so it's natural to bring a product like Nourish Bowls to retail," said Lorri Koster, chairman and chief executive officer. "We fully expect this new line to do for the cut-veg category what single-serve salad bowls have done for the salad category. Sales performance during our initial roll-out has far exceeded our projections. Consumers are loving these products."

On the snacking side of the produce department, Good Foods, Pleasant Prairie, Wis., introduced Grab & Go snack cups, each containing dip and bite-size tortilla chips. The four varieties are: artichoke jalapeño, avocado tomatillo salsa, guacamole and salsa.



Mandy Bottomlee, marketing director for Good Foods

"At Good Foods, we're passionate about making really good foods to satisfy the needs of on-the-go, health-conscious consumers ... because we're all moving at the speed of life," said Mandy Bottomlee, marketing director. "Our grab-and-go line offers a trifecta of benefits: exceptional taste, mindful nutrition and convenience."

These consumer desires are reinforced by recent Hartman Group research showing that modern snacking trends increasingly are supported by health and wellness cues in on-the-go, single-serve formats and orient to specific attributes. These include fresh, less processed (but packaged), free-from foods, health neutral, rapid-hand-to-mouth snacks and lower-sugar-content energy foods.

Good Foods Grab & Go packs are made with Hass avocados that are high-pressure processed to capture the flavors and to maintain freshness. The 3.38-oz single-serve, ergonomically friendly cups

have a suggested retail price of \$2.49.

Convenience is trending in the produce department. Edmonton, Alta.-based The Little Potato Co., makes potatoes easier to prepare with pre-washed, microwave-ready trays of creamer potatoes with seasoning packet. Most recently three cheese (cheddar, Parmesan and Romano) joined garlic parsley and savory herb.

Creamer potatoes are a special variety harvested before fully mature to keep them small and tender. They are generally either Yukon Gold potatoes or Red potatoes, called gold creamers or red creamers respectively, and measure about an inch in diameter. Creamers are naturally fat-, gluten- and cholesterol-free. Their thin skins add to both the nutritional density and convenience because they don't need to be peeled, which preserves vitamins and minerals that may be discarded with larger potatoes. One serving of creamers delivers more potassium than a banana, according to the company.

Fresh Express, a subsidiary of Chiquita Brands L.L.C., Charlotte, N.C., is introducing organic salad kits. Classic Caesar features romaine lettuce with traditional Caesar dressing and toppings, while pomegranate cranberry contains a blend of tango, romaine and radicchio. The pomegranate hibiscus dressing is sweetened with cranberries, with the kit including toppings of crisped quinoa and salted pita chips.

The sweet Dijon onion kit starts with a nutrient-dense blend of baby kale, baby spinach and rainbow chard. After pouring on the sweet Dijon onion dressing, the consumer sprinkles on a crunchy mix of pumpkin seeds, herb-seasoned chickpeas and chia seeds.

Green Giant Fresh by Growers Express, Salinas, Calif., is all about vegetable blends with its new globally inspired line. The 12-oz bags of washed and chopped vegetables make quick, healthy meals a snap. The Asian blend features broccoli, cabbage, carrot, celery, cilantro and green onion. The Italian blend contains broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrot, celery, kale and onion. The southwest blend includes cabbage, carrot, celery, cilantro and green onion.