

# Who shops for groceries today? More couples are divvying up the duty

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Move over, baseball.

Grocery shopping, according to Food Marketing Institute Vice President David Fikes, has become the new national pastime.

Gone are the days when mom did all the grocery shopping for her husband and 2.4 children, he said during a recent webinar about the institute's 2016 Grocery Shopper Trends survey. Today, 90 percent of women—and 79 percent of men—are pushing a shopping cart along the grocery aisles.

Couples began dividing up grocery shopping duty as more and more women started working outside the home. But that doesn't mean they see it just as a matter of necessity or gender equality, added Laurie Demeritt, CEO of the Hartman Group, which conducted the survey.

In an age when it seems that everyone is posting shots of their latest meal on Facebook and Instagram, shopping for the ingredients is also seen as fun—and a way to meet personal needs, she said. When one spouse craves steak and the other is a strict vegetarian, for example, sharing the shopping duty can be a means of self-defense.

Food Marketing Institute, a food and beverage trade group based in Arlington, has been tracking grocery shopping trends for more than 40 years. It's seen shopping habits shift, and finally decided to delve more deeply into what's going on this year.

The reason, Fikes said, is that the food retail industry needs to better understand today's customer in order to customise their shopping experience and maintain store loyalty.

The 2016 survey found that 85 percent of adults said that they have at least half the household responsibility for grocery shopping. FMI divides them into four categories: "shared shoppers," "co-shoppers," "self shoppers" and "sole shoppers."

Shared shoppers are adults who split grocery shopping evenly. They account for 22 percent of all grocery shoppers, and Fikes pointed to a couple identified in the survey as Robert and Italia as the "poster children" for this group.

He shops and cooks for two weeks. Then she does the same for the next two weeks. The couple also take into account the number of times they eat out, and they give each other a "get-out-of-jail free card" for days when their schedule is disrupted.

"They have as clear and clean a division of labor . . . as anyone I've spoken with," Fikes said.

Co-shoppers are part of a team of shoppers for a household with varying degrees of labor sharing. They account for 36 percent of all grocery shoppers. Self shoppers, who live in a single-person household, form

24 percent of all grocery shoppers; and sole shoppers, who are the sole grocery shopper for a single-parent household or a multi-adult household, make up the remaining 18 percent.

The study, which interviewed about 2,000 people and followed them as they shopped, found that who does the cooking plays a major role in who does the shopping. If one person in a couple is the primary cook, they're more likely to be the primary shopper.

As Dan, a 36-year-old survey participant put it: "I can never ask my wife to pick up my steaks, spices and sauces. I'm the cook of the family and she doesn't know what I'm looking for. It's not something that I can write on a shopping list to pick up."

While the FMI survey found that the food-shopper base has broadened, the mission of grocery shopping trips has narrowed. People are choosing different types of grocery providers for different needs.

As a result, full-service grocery stores are seeing their market share continue to slide. It dipped below 50 percent this year, which is the first time that's happened since FMI began tracking where people grocery shop.

Superstores such as Walmart saw sales rebound a bit in this year's survey, and stores such as Aldi that carry a limited assortment of groceries have seen sales bounce back to where they were during the recession in 2009 and 2010, Fikes said.

That trend has played out in the Fredericksburg area as well. Food Lion was king of the local grocery market until four years ago when it was dethroned by Walmart. And Aldi, a relatively new entrant here, saw sales at its five stores increase nearly 4 percent in Food World magazine's 2016 market share survey for the Mid-Atlantic region compared to the previous year.

Shoppers are also stocking up on snacks, pet food and produce at other venues, such as dollar, drug, discount and convenience stores. In addition, 5 percent of shoppers regularly buy groceries online. Not surprisingly, 7 percent of grocery shoppers shop at so many different places that they can't name a single primary store, Fikes said.

They're also increasingly relying on digital tools. They may look up a recipe on a grocery retailer's app as they shop for dinner, for instance, and then use digital coupons to cut the cost of ingredients. Millennials, especially, are going this route, followed by Gen Xers and then baby boomers, the survey found.

Grocery retailers that want to ensure store loyalty need to understand how households share shopping and figure out how to meet their differing needs, the survey said. Those that do will be better able to meet evolving needs.