Meat Might

The Power of Meat 2021 report looks at the meat retailing industry through shoppers' eyes.

Meat consumers' behaviors, perceptions and demands meet science in the 16th annual Power of Meat report, which explores shopper trends for both fresh and processed meat and poultry. The 2021 edition reflects on one of the biggest years in food retailing history. The pandemic prompted many meal occasions to move to at-home, and the meat dollar along with it.

Leveraging 15 years of trend lines, the 2021 Power of Meat was conducted in January and designed to understand industry changes and what the meat industry may expect in the future. Here are the top 10 findings from the report.

1 The pandemic showed us just how popular meat and poultry still are.

With consumers cooking at home during the pandemic, meat department dollars increased 19.2% and volume 11%. This was due to more meat trips and greater spending per trip, while household penetration remained high, at 98.4% (IRI)†.

2 The pandemic brought more home-cooked meals with meat, with the shopper's eye turning to convenience and variety.

An important silver lining of the pandemic is greater meat preparation knowledge, which is likely to benefit the retail meat industry for years, if not generations, to come. But the initial cooking enthusiasm is making way for a quest for variety and convenience. Value-added meat/poultry sales grew based on greater household engagement and increased frequency of use.

3 More than three-quarters of shoppers changed something about their meat purchases during the pandemic.

Driven by lunch and dinner, 43% of shoppers bought more meat and poultry, greatly impacted by the work-from-home trend. Additionally, four in 10 shoppers bought differently, whether different types (42%), cuts (40%) or brands (45%).

4 Online meat shopping increased during the pandemic.

While supermarkets easily remained the biggest outlet for meat, 56% of shoppers purchased groceries online in 2020. Up from 19%, 31% of shoppers ordered meat online in 2020, and those that ordered meat did so more often.

5 Consumers look for meat sales/deals more often, but fewer sales were made on promotion during the pandemic.

More shoppers looked for promotions across stores (68%) or at their primary store (78%) as they shifted to buying in bigger quantities to freeze and use over time. The digital circular gained big, but in-store signage remained the most popular way to research meat specials.

6 Consumers' perception of case-ready reaches a study high 81% favorability.

Shoppers have a positive impression of case-ready with 26% believing it is better than meat that is cut/packaged in-store and 55% believe it is equally good.

7 Better-for-you gains appeal as shoppers focus on health and nutrition.

Food has become more than just fuel and shoppers look for meat/poultry items they believe are better-for-me/their family. Many (71%) are putting effort into choosing nutritious and healthful meat and poultry choices. High interest in these areas expresses itself in vastly different protein choices, including purchasing claims-based meat, blends, alternatives and eating a little less of it.

8 Environmental sustainability is a rising platform driving dollars across categories, including meat/poultry.

Many (49%) consider sustainability factors when making meat purchases including better for the planet (34%), the worker/rancher (29%) and the animal (27%). Sixty percent of shoppers try to do their part for the environment and 43% believe that ranchers take steps to protect the planet. The 37% share of consumers who are unsure about environmental measures taken signal an important education opportunity for the meat retailing industry.

9 Animal welfare remained important during the pandemic and is a multi-faceted concept in the eyes of the consumer.

Fifty-five percent of shoppers say having information about how and where the animal was raised and processed is important. Consumers' definition of animal welfare involves many aspects of animal living, feeding and care conditions, including how animals are handled during slaughter (60%), access to outdoors (60%) and the amount of living space (58%). More people believe the meat they buy came from humanely-treated animals (44%) but 40% are simply unsure.

10 Plant-based meat alternatives grew 83.9% but remain just 0.6% of combined meat/alternative dollar sales.

At $475 million, refrigerated plant-based meat alternatives experienced robust growth. Just shy of 10% of households bought alternatives in 2020, but 40% did so only once (IRI)[†]. Vegetable/meat blends, such as mushroom burgers, have greater appeal, and can be a bridge between continued meat consumption and providing benefits people look for in plant-forward eating. HW

Editor's note: This Power of Meat 2021 report is prepared by 210 Analytics, LLC, on behalf of the Annual Meat Conference. The report is published by FMI — the Food Industry Association and the Foundation for Meat and Poultry Research and Education. The report was made possible by Sealed Air Food Care Division/Cryovac®. For study information/questions, please contact Anne-Marie Roerink, principle, at aroerink@210analytics.com.

Footnote: [†]In addition to the Power of Meat shopper survey data, IRI provided numerical overlay of the trends highlighted in the survey using point-of-sale and household panel data. References to this data are indicated by the use of the "IRI" citation.

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