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publisher's perspective



Fresh Departments Drive Category Trust



Grocery retailers are fighting for loyalty in a market where shoppers have more choices than ever, including delivery and online alternatives. New research from Logile, Inc., a global leader in AI-powered Connected Workforce solutions, shows that trust is still won or lost in the fresh aisle.

In the Logile 2026 State of Fresh Grocery Shopping Report, 91% of consumers surveyed said fresh departments strongly influence whether they trust a grocery store, pointing to produce, deli and bakery execution as the clearest signal of store quality.

The findings highlight a clear pattern: fresh is driving store loyalty and shaping how shoppers judge the entire in-store experience.

Key findings from the Logile 2026 State of Fresh Grocery Shopping Report include:

- 91% of respondents rated fresh departments as highly influential in determining whether they trust a grocery store, making fresh the leading signal of store reliability.
- 78% of respondents said they have shopped at a different grocery store because its fresh departments looked better, showing fresh quality is actively driving competitive switching.
- 84% said a poorly maintained produce or fresh section affects their perception of the entire store, meaning one department can reshape brand impressions.
- When two stores are equally convenient, 46% chose the store with better fresh departments over the 40% who chose the one with lower prices, challenging the assumption that price always wins.
- 74% agreed fresh food is a main reason they still shop for groceries in person rather than online, positioning fresh as a key advantage for physical retail.
- 85% said the appearance of produce is significant in their purchasing decisions, reinforcing that visual cues directly influence what goes in the cart.
- 68% said hot prepared meals would encourage them to buy from a store's deli or prepared foods section, pointing to potential for increased basket size tied to fresh execution.

The data suggests shoppers are making fast, sensory-based judgments about store quality and acting on them. Fresh departments are labour-intensive and perishable, but they are also becoming a powerful competitive advantage, shaping whether customers choose one store over another.

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Pattison Food Group Arrives on DoorDash, Bringing Western Canada's Grocery Staples Home

Save-On-Foods and five additional banners are now on DoorDash, offering in-store prices and member-exclusive pricing for More Rewards members.

DoorDash is partnering with Pattison Food Group, Western Canada's leading Canadian owned and operated grocer, to bring on-demand grocery delivery to more households. From urban cities to rural communities, consumers across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Yukon can now order on DoorDash from over 200 stores owned by Pattison Food Group.

Pattison Food Group's largest banner, Save-On-Foods anchors the new partnership, giving customers access to a full supermarket experience on demand — from fresh produce and bakery to everyday pantry staples and household essentials.



Alongside Save-On-Foods, five additional Pattison Food Group banners — including Urban Fare, Quality Foods, PriceSmart Foods, Nesters Market and Buy-Low Foods — bring even more choice to the platform, spanning value, premium, specialty, and neighbourhood formats across the region.

"For more than 110 years, we have been committed to helping Western Canadians feed their families and enjoy the moments that matter most," said Jamie Nelson, President of Pattison Food Group. "By partnering with DoorDash, we are meeting customers where they are at and making it even easier for them to shop for the quality products they know and trust from our stores, so they can spend less time worrying about their grocery list and more time with family and friends."

NUVO RETAIL GROUP CELEBRATES 10 YEARS!

This year, Nuvo Retail Group marks a decade of driving results for brands across Western Canada. Founded to bring hands-on, accountable field sales and merchandising to retailers from Victoria to Winnipeg, Nuvo has grown into a trusted partner for CPG brands navigating major grocery, mass, drug and C&G retail banners.

What sets Nuvo apart isn't complicated: reps who fix problems on the spot, build real relationships with store managers, and secure secondary placements before anyone has to ask. That mindset — with leadership as comfortable in the field as in the boardroom — has powered Nuvo's growth across BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

Ten years in, Nuvo's formula hasn't changed: show up, solve problems, sell more cases — one store at a time.



Calgary Co-Op Announces New CEO

The Board of Directors of Calgary Co-operative Association Limited have announced the appointment of Andrew Clarke as Chief Executive Officer.

"After a thorough search process, we're tremendously excited, proud and fortunate to have attracted someone of Andrew's caliber to the Calgary Co-op, a true leader who understands our cooperative principles" said Sandy Edmonstone, Board Chair, Calgary Co-op. "Andrew brings the right mix of drive to increase the bottom line and will lead our cooperative with passionate vision."

Spanning more than 30 years in retail, Clarke brings extensive experience on four continents and in more than a dozen countries. He also brings board and governance experience, giving him a strong appreciation for the partnership between boards and management. Throughout his career, his deep appreciation of his humble beginnings, as the son of an egg and cheese merchant, has shaped his leadership and he has never forgotten where it all started.

"I'm genuinely honoured to be joining Calgary Co-op," said Clarke, Chief Executive Officer, Calgary Co-op. "This is an organization with 70 years of history, built by members, for members. It's what makes Calgary Co-op unique. My job is to listen to what members want from their Co-op and then work with our teams to deliver it."

Clarke is a globally experienced retail leader, beginning his career at Marks & Spencer in the UK, through senior retail roles in Europe, the United States, and beyond. He brings deep expertise in retail strategy and operations, and a proven record of building high-performing teams and leading businesses through complex and consequential moments.



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CFIG Appoints Murray

The Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers (CFIG) has announced that Martha Murray has joined CFIG, effective August 11th, as Vice-President of Public Policy and Advocacy, a newly created role. “Martha brings a wide range of knowledge and experience that she has gained in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors to her new role at



CFIG. This new capacity reflects the desire of the CFIG Board of Directors to enhance our ability to advocate on behalf of our members on a number of important public policy issues” said Ron Welke, President and CEO of CFIG. Prior to joining CFIG, Martha Murray was Vice-President, Public Affairs & Advocacy for the Cement Association of Canada. Martha also served as a Chief of Staff in the Office of Ministers in the Government of Ontario. “We are very excited to have Martha as part of our team. I know she is looking forward to meeting with and getting to know our members in the months ahead” added Gary Sands, Senior Vice-President of Public Policy & Advocacy.



Fresh St. Market to Open 11th Location in Vancouver’s Hastings Sunrise

Fresh St. Market has announced plans to open its 11th location at 2585 E. Hastings Street in Vancouver’s Hastings-Sunrise neighbourhood in Fall 2027. Located in the Alba development, the new 21,452 sq. ft. store will bring Fresh St. Market’s fresh food destinations, chef-inspired meals, local products, and community-first market experience to one of East Vancouver’s most vibrant neighbourhoods.

“Hastings Sunrise has a deep sense of community and a strong appreciation for fresh, local food,” said Palle Knudsen, Vice President, Retail Operations and Marketing at Fresh St. Market. “Our 11th location and third in Vancouver, this store reflects our continued commitment to creating welcoming food destinations that make everyday shopping easier, more inspiring, and more connected to B.C. producers.”

The Hastings Sunrise store will offer the full Fresh St. Market experience in a convenient neighbourhood format, with locally sourced produce, Certified Angus Beef, fresh seafood, bakery, deli, grocery essentials, and chef-inspired prepared foods. Customers will also find signature in-store destinations including freshly made sushi, Peak Donuts, hot-off-the-plate cookies, a burrito bar, carvery, an expanded hot bar, and dedicated seating areas for quick meals and casual gathering.

The new location is expected to create local employment opportunities and strengthen Fresh St. Market’s partnerships with B.C. growers, producers, and suppliers.

Discovery Organics is Pleased to Introduce Daisy Ye

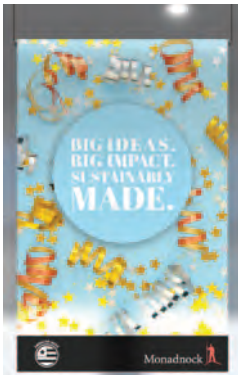
Ye is joining the Discovery Organics team as a key Senior Buyer, Purchasing Team. Ye has 5+ years of experience as the organic vegetable buyer at Pro Organics (UNFI Produce). She has extensive knowledge of the organic supply chain and connections throughout the organic grower community. At Discovery Organics, strong relationships are built through trust, transparency, connection, and stewardship. Those relationships are what matter most and Ye shares a deep appreciation for the growers, communities, and care behind the produce the company distributes.



Daisy Ye

BRINGING SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS TO RETAIL GRAPHICS

Retail environments are designed to evolve. Seasonal promotions, product launches, and brand campaigns continually reshape window graphics, in-store signage, and interior displays, with many programs updated regularly throughout the year.



But as those refresh cycles accelerate, a new question is emerging across the industry: What materials are we using for graphics designed to last only weeks or months?

For Innomark Communications, a full-service visual marketing and production partner supporting national retail brands, those challenges are a daily reality. The company produces a wide range of large-format graphics, signage, and environmental display materials used in retail environments, from large storefront windows to point-of-purchase displays to interior wall graphics.

As sustainability goals become more prominent across retail operations, more brands are looking beyond traditional vinyl and plastic-based substrates and asking their production partners to help them identify ways to reduce environmental impact across their operations.

“If a graphic is only intended to be up for a short period of time, brands are starting to question whether permanent plastic materials are really necessary,” said Josh Flohre, Senior Account Executive at Innomark Communications. “More customers are asking us to help them find alternatives that still perform from a print and installation standpoint.”

Historically, many large-format retail graphics, particularly window displays and hanging banners, have relied on PVC vinyl or other synthetic materials. While those materials provide durability and opacity, they also introduce challenges for retailers seeking to reduce plastic use across store environments. Increasingly, fiber-based materials are emerging as a viable solution for many retail graphics applications.

Fiber-based substrates provide a practical alternative, particularly for applications where visual impact, print quality, and reliable in-store performance are essential.

One of the most visible examples is storefront window graphics, which often serve as the focal point of a retail campaign.

Storefront installations often span nearly 8 feet tall and 8 feet wide, transforming the entire window into a single promotional display. Traditionally, graphics at this scale require multiple printed panels, a process that can introduce alignment challenges and visible seams.

Monadnock’s Ultrahide PC 100 Blockout Poster allows printers to produce these grand format graphics as a single piece. Available in rolls up to 96.5 inches wide, Ultrahide provides a double-sided printable blockout surface designed specifically for large window applications.

Because Ultrahide is manufactured using 100 percent post-consumer recycled fiber, it also enables retailers to transition away from PVC and other synthetic signage materials while maintaining the opacity and image quality required for high-impact window campaigns.

As retailers continue exploring ways to reduce environmental impact across their operations, in-store signage and graphics are becoming a more practical place to make change.

“Retail signage is designed to change,” Flohre said. “If you can deliver the same visual quality and installation performance with a material that aligns better with a brand’s sustainability goals, that’s meaningful improvement.”



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GET READY FOR MOBILE
“STORES ON WHEELS”

As retailers increasingly embrace artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and autonomous vehicles, a new retail model is beginning to emerge: mobile stores that drive directly to customers instead of waiting for customers to come to them.

New research published in the INFORMS journal Manufacturing & Service Operations Management finds that retailers operating fleets of mobile “stores on wheels” can outperform traditional fixed-location stores by continuously relocating to areas of highest demand while simultaneously learning where future demand is likely to occur.

The study examined how retailers can solve the challenge of deciding where to position mobile stores when customer demand is uncertain, constantly changing and influenced by factors such as weather, population density and neighborhood activity.

Using a case study based on Toronto retail data, the researchers found that adaptive mobile stores increased profits by 2.56% compared with conventional location strategies simply by repositioning themselves in response to changing demand patterns.

The study, “Online Facility Location: Running Stores on Wheels with Spatial Demand Learning,” was authored by researchers from the University of Texas at Austin and McGill University.

Unlike traditional brick-and-mortar stores, mobile retail units can relocate quickly to high-demand areas, operate with lower labour and real estate costs, and allow retailers to test new markets without committing to permanent locations. Companies such as



Robomart, Nuro and Neolix have already begun deploying variations of these mobile retail concepts.

“The future of retail isn’t simply autonomous stores — it’s autonomous stores that know where they should be,” said the researchers. “Retailers don’t have to choose between exploring new markets and maximizing today’s profits.

With the right analytics, they can do both at the same time.”

The researchers developed a mathematical framework that enables retailers to determine where mobile stores should operate while simultaneously improving their understanding of consumer demand over time. Rather than relying on fixed operating plans, the model continuously updates store placement decisions as new information becomes available.

Mobile retail does face practical challenges. Customer demand is initially unknown and constantly evolving, while limited onboard inventory means stores must balance serving customers with making costly trips to replenish stock. The study demonstrates how retailers can account for both challenges simultaneously.

“A mobile store has an advantage only if it knows where demand is moving,” said the study authors. “Mobility creates the opportunity, but learning creates the value. The retailers that continuously adapt will have the greatest competitive advantage.”

The findings suggest retailers considering mobile stores should adopt adaptive, data-driven location strategies rather than static operating plans. By continuously balancing what they know with what they still need to learn about consumer demand, retailers can improve profitability while reducing the risks associated with expanding into new markets.

As autonomous technology continues to mature, mobile retail stores could become an increasingly common part of urban commerce. The research suggests their success will depend not only on advances in self-driving technology, but also on the analytics that determine where those stores should go next.

Walmart’s Kathleen McLaughlin
and SC Johnson’s Fisk Johnson
Named Sustainable Leaders of the Year

The Retail Council of Canada (RCC) has announced Kathleen McLaughlin, Executive Vice President and Chief Sustainability Officer, Walmart Inc., and Fisk Johnson, Chairman and CEO, SC Johnson, as the first-ever recipients of the Sustainable Leaders of the Year Award.

The award recognizes leaders who have advanced measurable environmental progress across the retail value chain, from supply chain transformation and product innovation to public health and environmental impact. McLaughlin and Johnson have each developed sustainability strategies that have influenced how their organizations operate and helped advance the broader conversation around sustainability in retail.

Kathleen McLaughlin leads sustainability strategy for Walmart Inc. across jobs, sourcing, supply chain, and community resilience. Under her leadership, Walmart engaged more than 5,900 suppliers through Project Gigaton, an initiative to cut a gigaton of greenhouse gases from product value chains by 2030. Walmart hit that target in 2024, six years ahead of schedule. McLaughlin chairs the Walmart Foundation Board and spent more than a decade as its president, building philanthropic programs



Kathleen McLaughlin

that scale alongside the business. She sits on the boards of the World Wildlife Fund and World Resources Institute. In 2026, the NRF Foundation named her to its List of People Shaping Retail’s Future, and Sustainability Magazine ranked her first on its Top 250 Women in Sustainability list. Before Walmart, she spent more than 20 years at McKinsey & Company, where she led its Retail Practice.

Fisk Johnson has served as Chairman and CEO of SC Johnson since 2004, after joining the company in 1987. Trained in science and business, Johnson pushes for practical paths forward on plastic waste reduction, renewable energy, carbon reduction, green chemistry, and ingredient transparency. He has advocated for stronger plastic regulation, including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policy to improve recycling infrastructure, and testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on EPR for consumer packaging in March 2024. He backs an ambitious global treaty to end plastic pollution, now under negotiation among more than 170 countries. Johnson and SC Johnson have won numerous awards for environmental leadership, including the Presidential Green Chemistry Award and the EPA’s Lifetime Atmospheric Achievement Award. In 2023, the United Nations Foundation honoured him with its Leadership for a Better World Award.



Fisk Johnson

“This is the first time we have presented this award, and we set the bar high,” said Kim Furlong, President & CEO of Retail Council of Canada. “Kathleen McLaughlin turned an ambitious climate commitment into measurable results across thousands of suppliers. Fisk Johnson has brought SC Johnson’s work on plastic waste and chemical transparency into the policy arena. Both demonstrate the kind of leadership that can translate sustainability commitments into meaningful action and help move the retail industry forward. Retail Council of Canada is proud to recognize them as the inaugural Sustainable Leaders of the Year.”

EAIGLE and Loblaw Expand Partnership to Strengthen Supply Chains
with AI-Powered Gate Automation

EAIGLE and Loblaw Companies Limited are expanding their partnership to improve gate operations at Loblaw distribution centres. The expanded rollout of AI-powered gate automation technology is designed to improve efficiency and visibility across yard and distribution operations. Loblaw Companies Limited is scaling EAIGLE’s Vision AI across multiple yards and distribution centers, building on early results in reducing processing times, enhancing the driver experience and increasing data accuracy at the gate and in the yard.

EAIGLE’s AVAC technology helps automate routine gate processes, improving visibility and supporting more efficient movement of vehicles through distribution centres.

Supply chains today face increasing pressure to operate with precision, speed, security, and resilience. Gate operations play a critical role in maintaining that balance. EAIGLE’s approach applies vision AI to automate vehicle access control, capture critical data, and enable real-time decision-making while reducing operational disruption and keeping essential goods flowing for Canadians.

“This is about scaling what works in real operations, a practical and measurable use of applied AI in supply chain,” said Amir Hoss, Chief Executive Officer at EAIGLE. “It should strengthen existing workflows, not replace them. What we’re seeing with Loblaw is a clear example of how Vision AI can be deployed at scale to improve consistency, throughput, and visibility across facilities.”

The collaboration also highlights the joint commitment to strengthening Canadian supply chains through innovation. For Loblaw, the expanded partnership reflects its ongoing focus on finding practical ways to improve efficiency, visibility and



the movement of goods across its distribution network.

EAIGLE’s platform uses advanced computer vision to validate vehicles and capture freight data in real-time. This tech-first approach integrates seamlessly with existing WMS, TMS, YMS and ERP systems, turning the distribution gate into a source of live intelligence rather than a point of delay. This collaboration highlights the strength of the Canadian tech corridor in developing world-class AI solutions for global infrastructure challenges.

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Keurig Dr Pepper Names Canadian Leaders for Future Global Coffee Co. and Beverage Co.

As Keurig Dr Pepper advances its planned separation into two independent companies, Keurig Canada ULC and Canada Dry Mott's Inc., collectively doing business as Keurig Dr Pepper Canada ("KDP Canada"), have announced the executives who will guide the next chapter of its coffee and refreshment beverage businesses. In their new roles, Iannick Melançon will oversee the Canadian business for Global Coffee Co., while Ryan Bahadur will lead Beverage Co. across Canada and Europe.



Ryan Bahadur

Together, these leaders will help shape two purpose-built organizations, each positioned to pursue their own growth agenda with greater focus, agility and strategic clarity.

Iannick Melançon brings more than 25 years of experience in the consumer goods industry, with senior leadership roles spanning Canada, Europe and global markets. As General Manager, Melançon will lead the Canadian operations of the future Global Coffee Co.

Ryan Bahadur brings more than 30 years of business and leadership experience, including nearly a decade with KDP Canada. As General Manager, Canada & Europe, Bahadur will lead the company's operations and teams across both regions, building on their strong foundations to accelerate momentum and compete with greater focus and agility across the refreshment beverage market.



Iannick Melançon

Ravyx Becomes Certified Toshiba ELERA Solution Provider, Modernizing Retail Software for Grocers

Ravyx, a leading provider of retail technology solutions across North America, has been officially certified by Toshiba Global Commerce Solutions to sell and support the ELERA Commerce Platform, a cloud-native retail platform designed to help grocers modernize operations and build more connected, flexible stores. This certification equips Ravyx's teams in the U.S. and Canada, to help retailers evaluate, implement, and maximize ELERA within their unique technology environments.

ELERA provides retailers with a modern technology foundation designed to support evolving retail operations, greater connectivity, and continued innovation. For independent grocers, the platform offers flexibility and a foundation for future growth. For enterprise retailers, its scalable architecture supports complex, multi-location environments and evolving technology strategies.



"We're in a unique time for our industry. There hasn't been a truly new, ground-up retail solution built on modern architecture specifically for grocers in more than 20 years," said Nick Sarpolis, Account Manager, Ravyx. "With Toshiba's ELERA, we can experience what's at the forefront of retail technology and the innovation that comes with it. ELERA has the potential to fundamentally change how grocers use their systems

today, while blurring the lines between eCommerce and brick-and-mortar retail to the point where we simply think of it as 'commerce.' That's a win for retailers, and most importantly, a win for their customers."

Adding ELERA expands Ravyx's portfolio of retail software solutions while reinforcing its commitment to providing tailored technology rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. With a broad portfolio spanning point of sale, electronic shelf labels, self-checkout, back-office solutions, eCommerce, and integrations, Ravyx works with retailers to identify the technology that best fits their individual business needs.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Retail Sustainability Conference

October 27-28, 2026

North Building,
Metro Toronto Convention Centre
Toronto, ON
www.rccretailsustainability.ca

Grocery Innovations Canada

October 27-28, 2026

North Building,
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The NGA Show

January 31-Feb 2, 2027

MGM Grand Conference Centre
Las Vegas, NV
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Grocery & Specialty Food West

April 20-21, 2027

East Building, Vancouver Convention Centre
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Deck the Aisles

HOLIDAY MERCHANDISING

By Carolyn Camilleri

Help your customers make memories through food with these festive merchandising tips

The holiday season is one of the busiest and most profitable times of the year for grocery retailers. During the peak holiday season, grocery retail spending increases by 15% to 20% overall compared to an average month, with foot traffic and sales surging by up to 27% to 50% during peak holiday weeks. Food and beverages consistently rank as one of the highest priorities for consumers, making grocery budgets the least likely area to face spending cuts even during tight economic years.

Teresa Spinelli, president of Italian Centre Shop, understands the magic of the holiday season and how much it means to customers at her Calgary, Edmonton, and Sherwood Park stores.

"The holiday season is one of the most exciting times of the year at Italian Centre Shop," she says. "For many of our customers, food is at the heart of their family traditions, and we are honoured to help them celebrate, whether they are continuing customs brought from Italy or creating new traditions of their own. Since we carry the best known European products, our celebrations continue with the

Orthodox calendar, too."

Spinelli's stores epitomize the festive spirit with abundant displays featuring traditional Italian holiday favourites, such as panettone, pandoro, torrone, chocolates, specialty cookies, and beautifully packaged imported products. They also highlight entertaining essentials — antipasti, olives, cheeses, cured meats, fresh pasta, sauces, bakery items, and ingredients for traditional Christmas meals. And their gorgeous gift baskets are especially popular with customers who want to share a taste of Italy with family, friends, employees, and business associates.

Then there are the events.

"One of our Italian suppliers sends us a 10kg panettone — most weigh up to 1kg — and we do a marketing event by cutting the giant panettone then giving away samples," she says. "We also do a Reggiano Parmesan cutting of the wheel, where we get our customers involved in the cutting. It's always fun and draws a lot of attention. Santa shops at the Italian Centre, too, and we often have choirs singing Christmas songs."

Teresa Spinelli,
president
of Italian
Centre Shop.



Spinelli says to help customers during this busy season, they try to merchandise around complete occasions rather than individual products. For example, panettone with coffee, spreads, and sparkling non-alcoholic wine; pasta with sauce, cheese, and olive oil; and charcuterie meats alongside cheeses, olives, crackers, and preserves. “Thoughtful merchandising saves them time and can increase the size of the basket without making the experience feel like a sales pitch,” says Spinelli.

Clear signage and knowledgeable staff also help customers discover unfamiliar products and understand how they can be served.

“We often do the Reggiano or Padano cheese with truffle honey or dried strawberries,” she says. “This type of cross-merchandising gives customers ideas while helping them quickly gather everything they need.”



“We also do a Reggiano Parmesan cutting of the wheel, where we get our customers involved in the cutting. It’s always fun and draws a lot of attention,” according to Spinelli.



“One of our Italian suppliers sends us a 10kg panettone – most weigh up to 1kg – and we do a marketing event by cutting the giant panettone then giving away samples,” says Spinelli.

That convenience is so very important at Christmas. “Shoppers are often entertaining, attending gatherings, and looking for gifts, all while managing very full schedules,” she says. “We create displays that offer simple solutions, such as everything you need for an antipasto board, hostess-gift ideas, ready-to-serve foods, and products grouped at different gift price points.”

Spinelli’s top merchandising advice for the holiday season: make displays generous, inspiring, and easy to shop.

“Abundance creates excitement, but organization is equally important,” she says. “Keep high-demand items well stocked, place complementary products together, and anticipate what the customer may have forgotten.”

Most importantly, says Spinelli, holiday merchandising should tell a story.

“At Italian Centre Shop, that story is about family, culture, generosity, and gathering around the table,” she says. “For Italians, delicious, bountiful meals are a way of life and the dinner table is where we bond. It’s where families come together, friends are found, and memories are made. No better time than the holidays. We exist to create community through food and cultural experiences. We are not simply selling products — we are helping our customers create celebrations, give meaningful gifts, and make memories through food.”

MAKING THE SEASON SIMPLE AND EASY WITH KRAFT HEINZ

Kraft Heinz is approaching festive programming differently this year.

“Last year, our approach was more traditional, with a strong focus on holiday entertaining and recipe inspiration to help drive purchase,” says Jeanette D’Souza, director of omnichannel for Kraft Heinz. “This year, we’re evolving that approach to make it more meaningful for shoppers.”

For Kraft Heinz, that means linking festive programming more directly to values like generosity, connection, and community.

“Through our longstanding partnership with Food Banks Canada, we’re committed to helping Canadians gain access to food,” she says. “While it’s still important to make the holiday season approachable and shoppable, we understand that a stronger emotional connection with shoppers is possible when there is an authentic purpose that they can participate in.”

That’s an important shift for retailers as well, she adds, because it allows shoppers to feel part of something that matters, while still making the season easy and relevant to shop.

“Looking ahead to 2026/2027, we see the biggest opportunity in programs that remove barriers for shoppers to engage and are easy for retailers to execute well,” says D’Souza. “The programs that will stand out



Kraft Heinz is approaching festive programming differently this year. That means linking festive programming more directly to values like generosity, connection, and community.

are the ones that combine strong seasonal relevance with a clear reason for shoppers to connect.”

Great festive merchandising starts with making the season simple and easy to shop around clear shopper needs — entertaining, holiday meals, gifting, or everyday moments that feel more special during the season. The fundamentals still matter most: organize displays around clear seasonal occasions; make products easy to find and easy to shop; use cross-merchandising to help

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Quick Tips

Placing high-demand seasonal items in high-traffic areas and creating themed cross-displays can really help to boost total sales. Here are some ideas:

- Cross-merchandise recipe ingredients, such as pie crusts with pumpkin puree, marshmallows, and spices.
- Place eggnog next to nutmeg, cinnamon, and festive mugs, and group wine and beer with cocktail napkins, crackers, and cheese boards.
- Use end-of-aisle displays for limited-time holiday products, like seasonal cookies and treats.
- Fill front-end displays with small impulse items like candy canes, chocolates, and stocking stuffers.
- Build feature blocks for turkeys, hams, and fresh holiday produce near the meat and vegetable departments.
- Stock floral and houseware sections with pre-made holiday bouquets, festive candles, and cookie platters.
- Offer complete holiday dinner bundles with all the sides and trimmings in one package.

shoppers build a full basket; and make sure the creative message and in-store execution feel tightly connected.

“When this all comes together, you create a solutions-based destination in the store that is not only convenient to shop but also an opportunity to elevate the shopper experience, driving greater loyalty and trust,” says D’Souza.



RESTAURANT-QUALITY DISHES AT HOME WITH ITALPASTA

During the holiday season, consumers are drawn to meal solutions that feel special without stretching their budgets — and pasta is perfect for that.

“Pasta remains one of the most affordable ways to create impressive, restaurant-quality dishes at home, making it a go-to choice for festive entertaining and family gatherings,” says Angelo Boras, executive vice president of Italtasta. “Italtasta’s Artisan pasta collection elevates the experience with a variety of distinctive shapes inspired by Italian tradition and crafted with Canadian expertise.”



Made using traditional bronze-die technology and 100 per cent Canadian wheat, Artisan pasta features a textured surface that captures sauces beautifully.

Angelo Boras, executive vice president of Italtasta.

Made using traditional bronze-die technology and 100 per cent Canadian wheat, Artisan pasta features a textured surface that captures sauces beautifully, delivering exceptional flavour and an authentic pasta experience in every bite.

“Whether serving a simple weeknight dinner or a holiday showstopper, the Artisan range offers an easy way to bring premium quality to the table,” says Boras.

“For holiday shoppers looking for inspiration, Italtasta’s website features an extensive collection of recipes designed to help home cooks create memorable meals with minimal effort,” he adds. “From elegant entertaining dishes to comforting family favourites, these recipes make it easy for anyone to look like a star in the kitchen while spending less time preparing and more time enjoying the occasion.”

Italtasta’s baked pasta assortment is also a perennial favourite for holiday entertaining, combining convenience with crowd-pleasing appeal. With options including lasagna, cannelloni, manicotti, and jumbo shells,

- ✓ Convenient meal inspiration
- ✓ Family-friendly recipes
- ✓ Digital engagement that drives purchase

The Dinner Question Never Stops. Neither Does Demand for Meal Solutions.

Italtasta’s 15 Minute Meals make mealtime easier with quick, pantry-friendly recipe inspiration that engages shoppers across digital, social and in-store channels, helping drive more pasta purchases throughout the week.



* Registered Trademark of Italtasta Ltd.



Canadians can serve hearty, impressive meals that are simple to prepare and perfect for sharing with family and friends.

To help maximize seasonal sales, Boras says retailers should merchandise Italpasta products in secondary display locations and alongside complementary ingredients such as sauces, cheeses, proteins, and fresh produce. Cross-promotional opportunities can inspire meal ideas, encourage larger basket sizes, and reinforce pasta as an affordable yet elevated solution for holiday dining.

WALKER'S SHORTBREAD: A KEY STAPLE OF ANY CANADIAN CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

At a time where everything seems to be more expensive than ever, Christmas remains a top spending season in Canada, says Lisa Zdunich, Canadian sales and marketing manager at Walkers Shortbread Ltd.

"Comfort foods, gifting, and general entertaining products remain go-to's for many Canadians," she says. "Shoppers

are saving where they can but are still splurging on seasonal treats that make them feel good. Walker's Shortbread is, as always, a key staple of any Christmas program in Canada."

And sales figures back this up.

"Q4 has always been a key selling period for Walker's Shortbread — not only with incremental sales driven by our seasonal offerings, but within our core everyday lines as well," says Zdunich. "Consumers buy more cookies and snacks over the holidays as kids are off, family is visiting, and generally people are looking for feel-good snacks as they decompress over the holidays."

With this in mind, Zdunich encourages retailers to create a seasonal destination in store and include variety in their Christmas assortment to inspire multiple purchases — gifts, take home snacking items, and stocking stuffers for family and friends. It makes shopping easy for customers and saves



Lisa Zdunich, Canadian sales and marketing manager of Walker's Shortbread encourages retailers to create a seasonal destination in store and include variety in their Christmas assortment to inspire multiple purchases.



them time during a busy season if they don't have to go looking for products.

"Create a dedicated seasonal section in store that is robust and easy to spot," says Zdunich. "Build dynamic displays with all sorts of entertaining items to make it easier for shoppers to find what they need as well as encourage multiple purchases as they find other 'impulse items' they didn't know they needed!"

And don't forget to include your seasonal offerings in your online assortment as well, she adds. ●

by Robin Brunet

Building on Trust

Dereck Hein discusses guiding Associated Grocers to new strengths

Veteran grocer Dereck Hein has recently assumed the role of Vice President, Wholesale & B2B Partnerships at Associated Grocers, a division of Pattison Food Group. The former vice-president of retail operations for Buy-Low Foods is excited about his new role, and Western Grocer asked him what it entails.

What do you bring to the table?

I've worked in a variety of roles within the grocery industry. I started as a part-time clerk and worked my way up to store manager before beginning greater leadership roles. That progression has given me a unique perspective on the business and a deep understanding of what it takes to succeed in this highly competitive and rapidly evolving marketplace.

One of the highlights of my career has been working for Buy-Low Foods and Nesters Market: watching the company grow from a relatively small operation to nearly 50 locations and knowing I played a part in that journey. I've learned that success comes from working together as a team, making the right decisions for our customers and retail partners, and building strong relationships based on trust, respect, and a clear understanding of their needs.

What are your duties as vice president, wholesale & B2B partnerships?

My responsibilities include working closely with our wholesale, merchandising, procurement, and business development teams to ensure we're delivering the products, programs, and services our members need to remain competitive in today's marketplace. A key part of my role is building and strengthening relationships with our retail partners and suppliers. I believe strong partnerships are the foundation of a successful wholesale business, and it's important that we understand our partners' challenges and work collaboratively to identify opportunities for growth.

What is your vision for Associated Grocers?

I see it continuing to evolve beyond being just a wholesale supplier: our opportunity is to become an even stronger business partner for our members by providing the products, services, programs, insights and marketing support they need to compete in their local markets.



Veteran grocer Dereck Hein has recently assumed the role of Vice President, Wholesale & B2B Partnerships at Associated Grocers, a division of Pattison Food Group.

Another opportunity lies in helping independent retailers embrace innovation while preserving the local identity that sets them apart. Whether it's introducing new merchandising strategies and product lines or connecting them with our dedicated sales teams who work across Western Canada, we're helping retailers adapt to changing customer needs while staying true to what makes them successful.

Most importantly, I want Associated Grocers to remain the partner of choice for independent retailers. By helping our members thrive in an increasingly competitive marketplace, we'll continue to strengthen our business alongside theirs.

What are your thoughts on how independents in general can thrive today?

I believe their success will come from leaning into the advantages that make independents different rather than trying to compete head-to-head with the largest national chains.

Consumers continue to be more value-conscious than ever, but value isn't just about having the lowest price. Shoppers are also looking for convenience, local products, community connection, and a better overall shopping experience. That's where independents have a real advantage.

Also, unlike larger organizations, independent operators can react quickly to local market needs, tailor their assortment, support local suppliers, and make decisions that reflect the unique preferences of their communities. ●



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It's a G'Day for Aussie Lamb



Why Canadian Shoppers Are Saying G'Day to Australian Beef and Lamb

This summer, Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) partnered with Canadian retailers to execute a coordinated approach that connected consumers with Australian beef and lamb throughout their purchase journey. Rather than relying on a single promotional tactic, retailer programs, consumer advertising and influencer partnerships were designed to work together, reinforcing the Australian story at every touchpoint.

The strategy began by building awareness before consumers ever entered a store. Digital consumer campaigns generated more than 933,000 impressions and 7,751 clicks, while influencer partnerships drove over 476,000 engagements by showcasing Australian beef and lamb in approachable, everyday meal occasions such as burgers, skewers and summer grilling recipes. The strongest-performing content demonstrated that Canadian consumers are eager for meal inspiration and receptive to learning more about Australian red meat.

That awareness was then reinforced at retail through strategic partnerships with leading grocery banners including Loblaw and Sobeys. Digital displays, recipe content, in-store media and dedicated merchandising activations ensured shoppers encountered Australian beef at the point of purchase. At Loblaw, the integrated campaign generated more than 3.1 million impressions, approximately 3,000 clicks, over \$690,000 in attributed sales and more than \$792,000 in halo category sales, demonstrating the impact of connecting consumer demand generation with in-store activation.

A key component of the strategy was providing retailers with ready-to-use tools that made activation simple and scalable. MLA's Australian Beef & Lamb Summer

Promotion Toolkit includes digital assets, merchandising materials, shelf signage, recipe inspiration and promotional content designed specifically for Canadian shoppers. Retailers can access the toolkit directly through MLA's retail resource centre: Australian Beef & Lamb Summer Promotion Toolkit. The toolkit forms part of MLA's broader Retail Activation Kit, which supports retailers with consumer insights, educational resources, seasonal campaigns and category-building programs tailored to the Canadian market.

Importantly, retailer interest in these resources continues to grow. MLA's Canadian retail-focused digital campaign drove more than 5,700 visits to the retailer toolkit landing page, indicating strong industry interest in resources that help communicate the Australian beef story and drive sales at retail.

"The most successful programs are those that connect the dots between awareness and purchase," says Kirsty McCormack, Market Development Manager, Canada, for Meat & Livestock Australia. "When consumers discover Australian beef through media, recipes or influencers and then encounter it again through retailer promotions and merchandising, it creates familiarity and confidence. That's when we see the strongest results."

The success of this summer's programs demonstrates that Australian beef is more than a sourcing opportunity. By combining consumer marketing, influencer advocacy and retail activation, retailers can build awareness, drive trial and ultimately grow category sales. As Canadian consumers continue seeking quality proteins backed by a compelling story, Australian beef is proving that success comes not only from being on shelf, but from creating demand before shoppers ever reach the meat case.

For more information or to learn how to participate in these marketing campaigns please reach out to Kirsty at kmccormack@mla.com.au

Premium Experiences Take the Cup

COFFEE STILL DOMINATES THE HOT BEVERAGE CATEGORY, BUT IT'S EVOLVING, AS IS ITS COUNTERPART, TEA

Consumers may be pinched at the gas pump and the meat counter, but don't expect them to give up their favourite beverage any time soon. Coffee and tea are staying strong and whether it's the "same old, same old," an upgrade to an at-home premium option or something to help with a specific health need, shoppers are dedicated to their beverages.

These consumers want more. More sustainability, more flavour, more health, more value, more options. Brands are responding and are delivering a range of choices. Shillpa Khandelwaal, senior director, insights, North America with Keurig Dr Pepper (KDP) Operating Unit says the hot beverage category is shifting, but remains resilient.

She says 71 per cent of Canadians consume coffee and dollar sales of the category are up by 18 per cent.





Stacey Toews, communications and social impact with Level Ground Trading has seen an increase in Canadians drinking specialty coffee, saying 56 per cent of consumers are seeking that type of experience compared to 10 years ago at 37 per cent.

“Consumers continue to invest in small everyday treats in coffee,” Khandelwaal says. “They are elevating their at-home coffee experiences.”

There is some polarization however. While some consumers are upgrading their at-home experience, she says others are increasingly price conscious.

Stacey Toews, communications and social impact with Level Ground Trading has seen an increase in Canadians drinking specialty coffee, saying 56 per cent of consumers are seeking that type of experience compared to 10 years ago at 37 per cent. The growth supports the vision Level Ground has always had.

“It’s going to serve the economic benefits of producer regions,” he says. “It’s always the higher end food items that can open the door and create an opportunity to get more of what would be described as a living wage.”

Consumer knowledge about sustainability in producing regions, the nuances of different types of coffee and appreciation of countries of origin is becoming commonplace according to Robert Carter, president of the Coffee Association of Canada. This goes hand-in-hand with more elite coffee-making equipment at home.

“There’s a lot more focus on small-lot, micro-roasters. Consumers are looking for that unique bean, that unique flavour,” he says. “They are willing to pay for that higher quality aspect as well. You can have a pretty detailed conversation with a consumer now around the nuances of the bean. They understand what quality looks like.”

Toews thinks a desire for premium coffee combined with something perceived to be healthier has led to the increased uptake of Level Ground Trading’s Swiss water decaf, which he says is outpacing the growth of other products.



Robert Carter, president of the Coffee Association of Canada.

He also says 60 per cent of Canadians changed their coffee purchasing behaviour because of tariffs.

“Our coffee has never touched the states, when it comes to us, in our 30-year history,” he says.

That includes the new Trailhead dark roast blend launched at the start of 2026.

Decadent flavours have been the focus for KDP’s new launches that include Van Houtte Toasted Marshmallow and Espresso Martini K-cup pods as well as McCafe Salted Caramel K-cup pods. This builds on “today’s scroll culture,” and the constant desire for novelty and surprise, says Khandelwaal. But it also means that some offers and flavours will be short term to maintain the excitement.

While growth is happening in the at-home premium segments, she says consumers are definitely looking for deals.

“They are shopping in more value channels,” she says. “This shift is reshaping how we look at how we want to pitch our products. It’s reinforcing the role of value, much more than it used to be.”

What’s hot isn’t always hot. Sometimes it’s cold and

Carter says younger consumers, like Gen Z, are migrating to cold coffee and creating a strong growth trend.

“We’re seeing a lot of the growth driven from cold coffee over the last three to five years,” he says. “Even in the ready-to-drink category, we’re seeing these types of cold coffee beverages perform stronger than the hot beverages overall.”

But coffee alone is not enough for some. The ritual of beverages may include creamers and milk products to personalize them. Monica Moskalyk, business manager at Medallion Milk, says consumers are taking control of their beverages at home, no longer willing to let the barista be the sole creator.



Monica Moskalyk, business manager at Medallion Milk.

“We are seeing greater interest in flavoured coffee, cafe-style drinks made at home and products that work in both hot and iced beverages,” she says. “Consumers are also paying closer attention to ingredients. They want convenient products, but they also want to understand what is going into their cup.”

She says creamers and milk products help with that personalization and flavoured options that have familiar ingredients with less additives are leading the way. It’s the ideal opening for Canadian-milk, shelf-stable Medallion Milk products. Beyond the dairy lineup, the company recently launched Medallion Lemonade Powder to offer a warm-weather, family choice with the same cup-at-a-time convenience.

Like coffee, tea is also seeing a polarization according to Shabnam Weber, president of the Tea and Herbal Association of Canada. And the polarization runs somewhat parallel to coffee, highlighting the consumer demand for healthier, as well as premium, options.

“On one end, functional and wellness-positioned tea is pulling in a younger, health-conscious shopper who might otherwise reach for a supplement,” she says. “On the other end, premiumization is real: single-origin, loose leaf, ceremonial-grade matcha and specialty blends are commanding meaningfully higher price points and shoppers are willing to pay them, the same way they have with coffee over the last decade.”

Matcha has grown mainstream and consumers are blending it with plant-based milks as well as traditional milks and creamers. She says low and no-sugar iced-teas are also taking the category by storm.

“Tea in Canada is a healthy, steadily growing category, generally cited in the mid to high single digits annually, with black tea still the largest segment by volume but herbal, functional, and specialty blends growing fastest,” says Weber.

However, the focus for supportive beverages is definitely



Shabnam Weber, president of the Tea and Herbal Association of Canada.

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Shelley Moore, Canadian sales manager with Traditional Medicinals.

leading the pack according to Shelley Moore, Canadian sales manager with Traditional Medicinals.

“The strongest growth is in everyday benefit-led herbal routines,” she says. “Convenience and clarity matter as much as the benefit itself. Shoppers want to quickly understand what a tea is for, what it tastes like and when to drink it. Simple benefit communication, recognizable ingredients, and easy shelf navigation are becoming increasingly important in the category.”

Bagged-tea sales reached more than \$260 million in the 52 weeks from August 2025 to 2026, which is up two percent in dollar sales, says Moore. However, the unit sales were flat. Herbal tea is up six per cent in dollars and wellness tea is up three per cent.

“This is where retailers have the strongest opportunity to meet consumers seeking a specific benefit or an everyday wellness ritual,” she says. “More often, [consumers] shop by need: ‘I need help with digestion,’ or ‘I want something calming’ or ‘I need something to support a good sleep.’”

The recent introduction of Organic Stress Soother Tension Relief Tea is an example of delivering consumers a product that targets their needs while making the benefit obvious at the moment of purchase.

Consumers want more out of their hot (and cold) beverages. Whether it’s a new flavour, a premium option or a specific benefit, retailers can deliver on these demands by staying aware of trends and catering to the polarization in the categories. ●



The recent introduction of Organic Stress Soother Tension Relief Tea is an example of delivering consumers a product that targets their needs while making the benefit obvious at the moment of purchase.



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Back to Basics

Discovery Organics resumes its foundational vision by partnering with an organic farm in Mexico



Carlos Cámara
- Fresh
Performance

As Western Canada's trusted source for certified organic and fair trade produce, Vancouver-based Discovery Organics has always worked directly with organic farmers in other countries to bring the best and freshest produce to its customers.

However, the pandemic lockdowns made it unfeasible for Discovery to order directly from all farms — a practice essential for ensuring optimal freshness — rather than relying on brokers. That's why president and lead purchaser Stefan Misse, along with purchasing manager Brody Irvine, are excited by a relationship they recently established with a 350-hectare organic farm in Guanajuato, Mexico.

While consumers' desire to purchase food from countries other than the U.S. due to the tariff wars supports this relationship, Misse prefers to regard his association with Carlos Cámara of Fresh Performance farm as "returning to the roots of our company that were established by founders Randy Hooper and Annie Moss."

Re-focusing on Hooper and Moss's original vision for Discovery Organics began as soon as the lockdowns were lifted. "We reached out to the farms we had done business with prior to Covid, but their shipping volumes had changed, and they had formed relationships with other buyers," Misse says.

Irvine describes coming into Cámara's orbit as serendipitous. We used to do business in the Guanajuato region; Carlos, who had converted to organic farming about 10 years ago, learned about us through the agricultural community, and he contacted me via LinkedIn to see if we were interested in buying from him."

Ironically, Cámara in his 20s had lived in North Vancouver, and following a series of online conversations Cámara's wife Adriana who had been living in Burnaby BC

offered to tour Discovery Organics' warehouse. "By then we knew this partnership would work," Misse says. "Not only was Carlos's farm located in a region well suited for agriculture, it also had all the necessary cooling and packing facilities on site, which was a huge bonus. Carlos even mixes his own fertilizers and tailors them to specific crops."

Sealing the deal was the fact that Fresh Performance was planning on working with Pfennings Organic Farms of New Hamburg, Ontario. "They're like our eastern counterpart and very reputable, so we started planning our first shipments last year," Misse says.

That first series of shipments, which were transported by bonded reefer truck beginning in November, included broccoli bunches, celery, cauliflower, kale, rainbow chard, and other produce. "We maintained shipping procedures that had been established by Randy, and as a result it took only six days on average for the produce to get here," Irvine says.

Trials of butternut squash, carrots and cabbages have since been organized, and for shipments beginning this October, Misse says the crop list will change somewhat, with enhancements such as parsley and radishes added to the mix.

Irvine is excited that a relationship borne from serendipity has enabled Discovery Organics to carry on Hooper and Moss's foundational vision. "Our retailers are very appreciative, as are consumers," he says. "We couldn't be happier." ●



Left to right: Carlos and Adriana - Fresh Performance, Kira Gerwing - Sacha Investments, Brody Irvine - Discovery Organics and Paul Sandhu - Country Grocer.



Fresh Performance temperature controlled packing shed.



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The Limited-Time Fall Feature Collection 🍁



Banana Chocolate Nut Scone



Apple Pie Scone



White Chocolate Pumpkin Spice Scone



Apple Cinnamon Bread

BAKERY & DELI

By Karen Barr



Checking Out

Savoury and Sweet Trends

For many grocery shoppers, the deli and bakery are more than convenient stops along the way to the checkout. Instead, each department is a destination. The aroma of freshly baked bread draws the customer closer. Ready-to-go deli foods encourage customers to grab the breakfast they missed at home this morning, or a lunch away from the office.

What's trending when it comes to deli and bakery items? How can these items be merchandised for maximum shopper appeal?

On the Savoury Side

Prepared meals and the deli segment have expanded significantly in the past few years. Over 60 percent of

Canadians purchased prepared entrees such as fried chicken, sandwiches/wraps, and sushi at the grocery store as of February 2025. The revenue in the ready-to-eat meals segment of the food market in Canada was forecast to continuously increase between 2025 and 2030 by 34.21 percent reaching over \$10 billion U.S. dollars. The Canadian deli meat market maintains a steady compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of roughly 2.8%, tracking toward a projected revenue of US\$12.2 million.

Retailers like Country Grocer have been capitalizing on these trends.

"We like to buy local and support local not only in our deli, but throughout all of our stores," says Mike Wadsworth, director of deli operations, Country Grocer, with 11 locations on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Wadsworth says the grab-and-go section is filled with



Products available across Canada. For more information, contact us directly at **250-546-0311** or **info@okfrozendough.com**



comfort foods like lasagna, cabbage rolls, perogies and curries. “We have a successful sandwich program in store that customers really love. Some of the breakfast sandwiches include bacon and egg or sausage and egg. Plans to expand the panini program are underway, and top sellers right now include roast beef and triple cheese with ham. Another popular sandwich is the turkey and Havarti croissant.”

What’s Selling

For more than 65 years, Brandt Meats has been proudly creating artisan-quality deli meats in the European tradition. It all started in 1958 when Gerhard and Ida Brandt began crafting their traditional sausages and deli meat products in Canada. “Our top three selling items at Brandt are our Kolbassa lineup, including our Original, Extra Lean and Turkey; our Black Forest Ham; and Salami, both the German and Hungarian,” says Melissa Brandt, vice president of sales and marketing at Brandt Meats, in Mississauga, Ontario.



Melissa Brandt, vice president of sales and marketing at Brandt Meats

A classic European favourite, the Kolbassa is crafted from lean cuts of ham and seasoned with a blend of garlic, pepper and select spices. Next, it is naturally hardwood smoked for a rich, traditional flavour. The Extra Lean version contains extra-lean ham, while the Turkey is made using select lean turkey. Brandt Meats’ Black Forest Ham is crafted from naturally hardwood-smoked select ham. The German and Hungarian Salamis are made by blending seasoned beef and pork, then dry-curing and naturally hardwood-smoking. The German variety uses an original family recipe from 1958.

When it comes to deli favourites, Ritesh Patel, Director of Operations at Elman’s Food Products Ltd in Winnipeg, Manitoba, says. “Pickles remain the heart of Elman’s business. Our whole garlic dill pickles and various cuts remain among our most successful items because they



deliver the classic deli experience customers expect — crunch, garlic, and balanced flavour. Our unpasteurized sauerkraut, which is rich in probiotics and fibre, is also performing exceptionally well. We’ve also seen a resurgence in traditional deli products like pickled eggs, horseradish, and pickled herring as consumers seek authentic, familiar flavours.”

When it comes to sandwiches, Patel says, “The pickle is often one of the most overlooked components of a sandwich. While the focus is usually on meat, sauces, and bread, the pickle provides the essential contrast that prevents a sandwich from tasting flat. A good pickle resets the palate. Whether paired with smoked meat, fried chicken, brisket, or a rich cheese sandwich, its acidity and crunch keep every bite as enjoyable as the first. Without this balance, even a well-crafted sandwich can feel heavy.”

Merchandising the Deli

Salads also play a big role at Country Grocer. Some of the top sellers Wadsworth points to include classics like Greek or Caesar, but Santa Fe chicken salad and the Thai sesame salad are equally enjoyed.

Michael Meyers, merchandising lead at Country Grocer, talks about deli merchandising. “We place the



Retailers like Country Grocer like to buy local and support local not only in their deli, but throughout all of our stores.

Colour and packaging design is everything. “I’m always drawn toward colour, especially for deli,” says Meyers. Fruits can be a great way to add vibrancy to those displays holding meat and cheese as well.

cheeses in the cheese boat open coolers, and there are displays on top to give customers an idea of how to pair them with other foods. We’ll showcase various jellies, jams and breads to go with.”

“Cheese is an expanding category for us, especially global and artisanal cheeses,” says Meyers. “We’ve added about 15 new varieties. It’s a mix of everything from grass-fed cheeses from New Zealand to cheese shaped like various fruits such as pears. The deli also has three new types of Mexican quesos, which customers like.”

Colour and packaging design is everything. “I’m always drawn toward colour, especially for deli, to add vibrancy to displays holding meat and cheese. Graphics make a huge difference too. I might have three colourful boxes of crackers facing front, above a cheese display, with enough room for a fourth box turned sideways. The graphics on the side of the box need to be just as exciting as the front to make the display work.”

The deli has recently been rejuvenated with wooden pallets, white bowls, and rectangular white plates. Meyers says, “We decided to go for a more earthy farm-to-table look. The white colour makes everything look clean and refreshed.”

As for tricks of the trade, Meyers says the old merchandise adage, “pile them high and watch them fly,” works. He implements risers to achieve this look. “We bought new, wooden slanted risers so that even if displays are only two products high, the upward tilt makes the display look more abundant.”

Wadsworth is exceptionally proud of the company’s in-house sushi program. “We have California rolls, and tempura rolls, but the Tofino smoked salmon rolls are my personal favourite.”

From Bread to Sweet Treats

Sales of baked goods in 2025 were \$10,996 billion Canadian in retail value. Not surprisingly, bread topped the list with nearly \$6.5 billion in sales. Future growth is expected to slow to 3.9% annually, but health-positioned baked goods are forecast to accelerate at 8.9% CAGR, reaching \$1.4 billion by 2029. Among supermarket perimeter departments, bakery sales had the highest growth, rising 6.7% last year. To give perspective, fresh produce had only 2.2% growth.

One of the best companies to explain trending in the bakery is OK Frozen Dough, in Spallumcheen, British Columbia. Channce Fuller, CEO, at OK Frozen Dough says “Our grocery customers are looking for products that help differentiate them from their competitors. Beyond the core, everyday SKUs, they’re looking for unique items that give consumers a reason to choose their bakery over others. Having something different or exclusive is becoming increasingly important. From

a product selection perspective, the biggest trends we’re seeing right now are variety, premium offerings, and fibre.”

For new customers, Fuller suggests starting with the top 10 SKUs in the OK Frozen Dough lineup. “These are our highest-volume products. Since these tend to be the more traditional offerings, we also encourage rounding out the assortment with a few specialty items. For breads, we suggest carrying staples such as white bread, whole wheat bread, multigrain bread, rye bread, and French





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Seasonal favourites from OK Frozen Dough, such as the white chocolate pumpkin spice cookie also perform well in the market.

bread. From there, adding specialty products like cheese bread and cinnamon raisin bread helps create a more complete and appealing selection.”

The same philosophy applies to buns. Fuller says, “We recommend carrying core items such as hot dog buns, hamburger buns, Kaiser buns, dinner buns, Portuguese buns, Vienna rolls, and our other consistently high-volume SKUs. Grocery store customers can then complement those with seasonal or specialty offerings, such as Hot Cross Buns and golden sweet rolls.”

OK Frozen Dough’s new cookies and scones have been receiving exceptional feedback. “Our top-selling cookie varieties are the classics. Chocolate chip, peanut

butter chip and oatmeal raisin,” says Fuller. “Very close behind are our seasonal favourites, such as the white chocolate pumpkin spice cookie. On the scone side, it’s hard to compete with our cinnamon chip scone. It consistently outsells every other flavour we make in that category.”

Fuller says, from a premium standpoint, demand continues for higher-end products and premium formats. “Consumers appear willing to pay more when they perceive added value through quality, ingredients, or presentation. And they may be paying for the experience as much as the product itself.”

A 2025 Mintel survey of in-store bakery customers found that 41% are extremely interested in enjoying the aroma of freshly baked goods; 40% are extremely interested in trying in-store sampling; and 35% are extremely interested in enjoying warm offerings, such as cookies.

Meyers says the grab-and-go glass cases in the bakery at the Country Grocer locations now have contemporary chrome and wire racks as an eye-catching refresh. “We use a lot of nesting tables for bakery displays, and bakery racks for the fresh-baked appeal. The bakery is one of the areas we like to incorporate flowers from our floral



A 2025 Mintel survey of in-store bakery customers found that 41% are extremely interested in enjoying the aroma of freshly baked goods.

department to add pops of colour. Home décor also works well here, like rows of cookie jars above cookie selections.”

Meyers and the team really enjoy bakery cross-merchandising. “We’ll put blueberry pies in the produce department beside containers of fresh blueberries. At checkout, we sell a lot of impulse items, like candy, as other grocery stores do. But we wanted to add some alternatives. We change it up with fruit, a six-pack of homemade cookies, or a four-pack of muffins.”

Together, the deli and bakery departments offer grocery retailers an opportunity to deliver something shoppers can’t get from a shopping list alone. It’s about the experience of enjoying convenience, inspiration and engaging the senses. From prepared meals, fresh-baked products and indulgent treats, these departments can turn everyday grocery shopping trips into reasons to explore and, ultimately, reasons to come back. ●



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We support our grocery and pharmacy retail partners in their efforts to foster a community for Canadians who want to feel their best.

By: Lynsey Walker, VP Marketing & Communications, CHFA

Making Wellness Easier to Shop

Merchandising by Goals

Strength, Energy & Recovery

Protein powders, shakes and snacks alongside creatine, electrolytes, magnesium and recovery products. This expands protein beyond the gym to active aging, energy and everyday strength.

Gut Health

Fibre-rich foods, prebiotics, probiotics, fermented products and digestive support. Protein products with added fibre or gut-health benefits could bridge both goals.

Better Sleep & Stress Support

Magnesium, herbal teas, calming supplements, functional beverages, aromatherapy and bedtime snacks.

These examples aren't about promoting individual brands. They're about demonstrating how retailers can create cross-category solutions that mirror the way consumers actually think about wellness.

Trust Turns Products into Solutions

Curating products around wellness goals is only half the opportunity.

The other half is helping consumers feel confident they're making the right choices.

CHFA's latest research, Triple Exposure: Trust, Transparency & Trade-Offs shows Canadian consumers are becoming increasingly discerning in their wellness purchases. Product quality, effectiveness and value remain primary purchase drivers, while transparency and credible information play an increasingly important role in building confidence. Consumers aren't simply looking for more options — they're looking for reasons to believe.

For retailers, that changes the role of merchandising.

A Gut Health destination shouldn't simply group related products together. It should answer the questions customers are already asking:

- * Why these products?
- * How do they work together?
- * Who are they designed for?
- * What makes them different?

Educational shelf talkers, QR codes linking to trusted resources, knowledgeable staff and curated wellness guides all help transform a product display into a trusted solution.

In an era of overwhelming choice, trust has become a merchandising strategy.

For decades, retail has been organized around product categories. Supplements lived in one aisle. Functional foods in another. Personal care in a different section entirely. Consumers were expected to connect the dots themselves.

Today's shoppers think differently.

Whether they're looking for better digestion, more energy, healthier aging or improved sleep, consumers are increasingly shopping with an outcome in mind — not a product category. They're not asking, "Where are the probiotics?" They're asking, "What will help me feel better?"

According to WGSN's Retail Strategy 2027: Health & Wellness, wellness is no longer a silo but an ecosystem. Rather than merchandising individual products, retailers are encouraged to curate connected solutions that support consumers' long-term wellness goals across food, supplements, personal care and lifestyle.

That shift presents one of the biggest opportunities for natural, organic and wellness retailers.

The goal isn't simply to stock more wellness products. It's to make wellness easier to navigate and becoming trusted partners in consumers' wellness journeys.



Lynsey Walker, CHFA, VP,
Marketing & Communications





From Transactions to Trusted Guidance

Leading retailers around the world are already embracing this evolution.

WGSN highlights examples such as Boots' dedicated wellness zones supported by trained advisors, Olive Young's integrated wellness retail concept and Holland & Barrett's shift toward personalized wellness guidance. Together, these examples reflect a broader move from transactional retail to relationship-driven wellness experiences.

Canadian independent retailers have a distinct advantage.

Personal service, knowledgeable staff and community relationships have always been hallmarks of the natural products channel. Organizing products around wellness outcomes — and supporting those assortments with credible education — builds on those existing strengths.

Three Merchandising Moves to Try This Fall

1. Build wellness destinations, not category displays. Create cross-category assortments around outcomes such as gut health, recovery, sleep or healthy aging.
2. Add education where decisions happen. Shelf talkers, QR codes and staff recommendations help shoppers understand why products work together, reinforcing trust and confidence.
3. Merchandise routines, not individual products. Group complementary products around everyday rituals—from morning energy to post-workout recovery—to encourage discovery and increase basket size.

Looking Ahead

Consumers aren't asking retailers for more products. They're asking retailers to make wellness easier.

By organizing around wellness goals and supporting those solutions with trusted education, retailers can simplify decision-making, strengthen customer loyalty and demonstrate the expertise that has always set the natural products industry apart. ●



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OHME! Expands Snack Town with Three New Freeze-Dried Snacks



Vancouver-based OHME! is expanding its freeze-dried snack lineup with three new products designed to make fruit-forward snacking more interesting: Apple Fries, Crunchy Banana Organic, and Passion Fruit Protein Crunch.

Apple Fries transform real apple into light, crispy bites (no dipping sauce required), while Crunchy Banana Organic gives naturally sweet banana an airy new texture.

Passion Fruit Protein Crunch pairs bright, tangy passion fruit flavour and yogurt, blended together to create a satisfying crunch. Each bag has under 80 calories and 6 g of added protein, proving that a functional snack can still lead with flavour.

For more information: www.ohmefoods.com

Uncle Hemmy Expands with Two New Sauces

Alberta-based Uncle Hemmy BBQ has expanded its lineup with two new sauces, joining its award-winning collection of seasonings.

Garden of Eatin' Apple Butter BBQ Sauce combines apple, vanilla and cinnamon with vinegar, ancho and chipotle for a sweet, tangy and smoky finish.



Cluck Around & Find Out Jamaican Jerk Marinade brings together Jamaican-inspired herbs and spices, citrus, garlic and jalapeños for bold Caribbean flavour with approachable heat.

Both products made their debut at the Calgary Stampede this summer and have already been getting great feedback from customers. They're now available for wholesale ordering and are gluten free!

While BBQ is where Uncle Hemmy started, the brand has always been about more than the grill. The full lineup of seasonings, sauces and marinades is made to work just as well for weeknight dinners, air-fryer meals, vegetables, pasta and everyday cooking as it does for backyard BBQ.

For more information: www.unclehemmybbq.com

BeRegular Prebiotic Fibre & Probiotic Blend by KidStar Nutrients

Gut health is a concern for all ages. Tummy troubles like constipation, bloating, excess gas, diarrhea, and conditions like IBS are common. Most Canadians are not getting enough dietary fibre to support a healthy gut, which plays a key role in mood, digestion, regularity, immune and hormone health, sleep and overall well-being. Busy lifestyles and diets lacking in fruits and vegetables can make it difficult to get enough fibre from food alone. Taking a special prebiotic fibre supplement that includes probiotics every day is an easy way to help support a healthy gut. BeRegular has only two ingredients and contains 5 grams of prebiotic fibre and 8 billion active probiotics per scoop. Prebiotic fibre is food for healthy gut bacteria. Get a daily boost of gentle and low FODMAP fibre without gas or bloating. BeRegular is unflavoured and dissolves completely in water with no grit or glop.



For more information: kidstarnutrients.com



New Sichuan Pepper Oils

Youjia, a Montreal-based Canadian pantry brand, is introducing Sichuan Pepper Oil and Green Sichuan Pepper Oil.

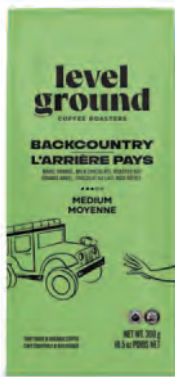
The oils can be used on eggs, noodles, dumplings, vegetables, soups, meats and dressings. They create a retail opportunity beyond the increasingly familiar chili-crisp category. The broader range includes Chili in Oil, Scallion Oil Sauce and five ready-to-use cooking sauces.

Youjia manages its own growing, flavour development, packaging facilities and production line in China rather than sourcing private-label products.

For more information: <https://youjiaflavors.com/>

Level Ground launches Backcountry

Following on the success of spring's Trailhead dark roast, Victoria's Level Ground Coffee Roasters is launching their new medium roast Backcountry at CHFA Toronto. A delicious organic craft blend, enjoyed hot and cold, this versatile coffee hits all the right notes, whether it's from the comfort of your kitchen or exploring the backcountry. Celebrating their 30th anniversary next year, Level Ground Coffee Roasters grew from a small start to one of Canada's trusted names in Fair Trade coffee. You can sample it at CHFA Toronto (#2300) or at Grocery Innovations Canada (#236).



For more information: levelground.com

New Fall Launch Collection from Okanagan Frozen Dough



Okanagan Frozen Dough is rolling out a limited-time lineup of irresistible fall favourites!

- White Chocolate Cranberry Sourdough Boule
- Banana Chocolate Nut Scone
- Apple Pie Scone
- White Chocolate Pumpkin Spice Score
- Apple Cinnamon Bread
- White Chocolate Pumpkin Spice Cookie

Crafted for effortless back-of-house execution, these premium items deliver incredible texture and bakery-fresh aroma straight from your oven to your display case.

For more information: www.okfrozendough.com

Organika Takes Electrolytes Beyond the Powder Aisle With New Sparkling Electrolytes

Organika has launched Sparkling Electrolytes. The launch builds on Organika's fast-growing powdered hydration business. Sparkling Electrolytes' formula is designed to help maintain water and electrolyte balance and contribute to muscle function; it combines 290 mg of electrolytes per 355 mL can, including magnesium (from magnesium glycinate), potassium and sodium, plus Fibersol® prebiotic fibre. Sparkling Electrolytes launches in three refreshing flavours: Raspberry, Lemon Lime and Pineapple Passion Fruit, with zero sugar, no caffeine, no artificial sweeteners and only 10 calories.



For more information: ornella.sinigaglia@organika.com

Little Northern Bakehouse Launches New Gluten-free Sourdough Line

Little Northern Bakehouse, a leader in gluten-free and plant-based breads, is expanding its lineup with two new Sourdough Wide Slice Loaves debuting at Natural Products Expo West 2026. Made with a house-crafted gluten-free sourdough starter and sprouted ancient grains, these loaves bring authentic sourdough character to full-sized, gluten-free sandwich bread designed for everyday eating.

The new gluten-free sourdough lineup includes: Classic Sourdough Wide Slice and Multigrain Sourdough Wide Slice.



For more information: tmackay@silverhillsbakery.com

Elmhurst 1925 Brings Clean Protein to Canada

Following a successful U.S. launch, Elmhurst 1925 is bringing Clean Protein to Canada in convenient 4-packs, giving retailers a differentiated new option in the fast-growing protein beverage set. The line has already earned industry recognition, including a 2026 NEXTY Award and a Good Housekeeping 2026 Snack Award, where Pistachio Crème was named Best Protein Drink.

Each ready-to-drink shake delivers 27g of high-quality plant protein, with 4g of sugar or less and no gums, seed oils, artificial

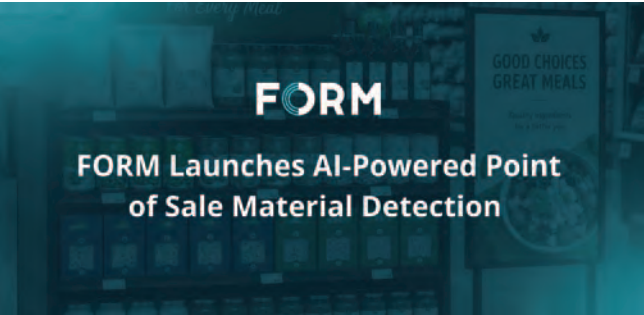


sweeteners or artificial flavours. Clean Protein will launch in four creamy flavors: Pistachio Crème, Sea Salt Chocolate, Vanilla Bean and Strawberries & Cream.

Made for shoppers seeking convenient nutrition without compromising on taste or ingredient quality, Clean Protein brings together strong nutritional credentials and craveable flavour in an easy-to-shop 4-pack format. For Canadian retailers, the launch offers a proven U.S. innovation with award-winning momentum and clear appeal for today's protein-focused consumer.

For more information: CGoss@elmhurstmilked.com

FORM Expands GoSpotCheck AI Image Recognition Platform with Point-of-Sale Materials Capabilities



FORM, the retail execution software company behind GoSpotCheck, has unveiled new AI-powered point-of-sale materials (POSM) image recognition capabilities that automatically detect, classify and extract in-store marketing compliance, campaign, and price data during store visits. The new capabilities give CPG brands and retailers real-time visibility of in-store materials, displays, and promotions, so they can ensure their marketing investments are executed as planned.

"CPG brands and retailers invest billions on trade spend and POSM production, yet most organizations lack a reliable way to confirm whether those materials are deployed in stores, correctly placed, or even present during a campaign's most critical moments," said Alexander Zagvazdin, Chief Product Officer, FORM. "Our new POSM Recognition capability changes that, turning every field image into structured, actionable intelligence without adding friction to existing workflows."

POSM Recognition particularly benefits sectors where in-store display compliance has the highest business stakes, such as beer, wine and spirits (BWS), which typically have large-scale seasonal activations across thousands of accounts; quick service restaurants (QSR) with limited time offers; grocery retailers verifying private label and own-brand promotional execution; snacks and confectionery, as well as personal care brands with contractually defined display compliance obligations tied to retailer agreements.

For leaders, the capability enables real-time campaign verification, faster identification of execution gaps, and POSM waste reduction by identifying materials that never reach the shelf. Also, it connects execution data to trade spend ROI, giving organizations the proof-of-performance they need to optimize future investment decisions.

For more information: www.form.com

Good Protein Launches Clear Protein with Electrolytes

Known for their delicious plant-based protein shakes, Good Protein is entering a brand-new category with its first-ever clear protein formula, bringing together functional hydration and protein in one refreshing drink. Featuring 10g of protein and 520mg of electrolytes per serving, the new formula taps into the growing demand for beverages that do more than just hydrate, supporting everyday wellness whether it's post-workout, on the go, or throughout a busy day.

The product is available in Peach Rings, Pink Lemonade, and Watermelon Candy.

For more information: <https://goodprotein.ca>



Doritos Roll'd Rolled Tortilla Chips Rolls into Canada with Three Intense Flavours and Amplified Crunch

The Doritos brand is turning the traditional tortilla chip on its side, and rolling it up, with the launch of Doritos Roll'd tortilla chips, featuring a distinctive rolled format available exclusively in Canada. Doritos Roll'd chips are launching in three new flavours, each bringing something different to the snack aisle: Nachos Supreme; Fiery Lime and Dill Pickle Blast.

Whether snackers reach for cheesy, spicy or tangy, all three flavours combine intense flavour with the distinctive rolled format and satisfying crunch Doritos fans know and love.

For more information: www.pepsico.com



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A Q&A with Angelo Boras, executive vice-president of Italtasta

Western Canada is an increasingly important market for Italtasta. Can you please describe the marketing efforts currently underway and how you are working with retailers to advance the program?

Western Canada represents a significant growth opportunity for Italtasta, so we've increased our focus and investment in the region over the past year. Our goal is simple: build awareness of the brand and convert that awareness into sales at retail. We're supporting that effort through a mix of consumer marketing, social media, public relations, influencer partnerships, and on-the-ground activations that put the brand directly in front of shoppers. At retail, we're working closely with our partners on programs that help drive visibility in-store, including features, displays, and promotional support during key selling periods.

We see our retailer relationships as true partnerships, and we're focused on creating programs that not only grow the Italtasta brand but also help drive overall pasta category growth.

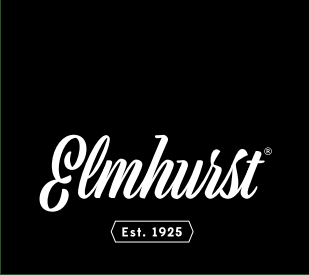
Specifically, how are you making an impact during National Pasta Day?

This National Pasta Day, Italtasta is helping answer one of the most common questions facing Canadian families every day: What's for dinner tonight? By connecting with consumers during the afternoon commute, when meal planning is often top of mind, Italtasta is serving up simple, delicious 15-minute meal ideas designed to make dinnertime easier for busy households. The activation will be supported by social media, influencer content, and digital advertising to remind consumers that we know they already have enough on their plate. We're also working with retail partners to capitalize on the increased consumer attention around National Pasta Day through in-store support and promotional activity. Ultimately, the campaign is designed to generate excitement around the category while introducing more Western Canadian consumers to Italtasta.

Can you describe the type of long-term commitment you are making to the western market?

Our commitment to Western Canada goes well beyond a single campaign or promotional period. We are making sustained investments in marketing, consumer engagement, and retail partnerships to build the Italtasta brand over the long term. We will continue to support our retail partners with programs that drive traffic, encourage trial, and help grow the category. As a proudly Canadian company, we're committed to investing in markets where we see strong potential, and Western Canada is an important part of our future growth strategy. Our objective is to become a more familiar and trusted choice for Western Canadian shoppers while delivering strong results for our retail partners. ●

As a proudly Canadian company, we're committed to investing in markets where we see strong potential, and Western Canada is an important part of our future growth strategy.



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