

# The changing fresh produce consumer

By Tom Karst

Despite the squeeze of inflation in recent months, most consumers responding to The Packer's *Fresh Trends 2023* survey said they have increased their consumption of fresh produce over time.

Deployed in mid-October, the *Fresh Trends* survey asked more than 1,000 shoppers if they were eating more produce than a year ago, and 66% said they were.

Asked to indicate whether they purchase more produce than five years ago, 68% said yes.

When consumers in the *Fresh Trends* survey were asked to explain why they were eating more produce now compared with five years ago, they listed these reasons:

- **Health reasons to get more nutrients in my diet: 72%**
- **Because my doctor suggested I do so: 25%**
- **Value, better bang for my buck: 32%**
- **Other: 4%**

## Long-term growth

Responding to the question, "Are you buying a larger variety of fresh produce today than you were 20 years ago?" 67% of consumers responded affirmatively, with 33% answering no.

Income appeared to be a big determinant for those answering yes.

For example, 76% of consumers earning more than \$100,000 per year said they purchase a larger variety of produce than two decades ago, compared with just 58% of those earning less than \$25,000 annually.

The same share (67%) of men and women shoppers said they purchase a larger variety of produce now compared with 20 years ago.

Seventy-seven percent of consumers with kids at home said they now purchase a wider variety of produce than 20 years ago, compared

with 59% responding yes among consumers with no kids at home.

By geographic regions, 70% of consumers in the South indicated buying a wider variety of produce than 20 years ago. That compares with 68% of consumers in the West, 68% in the Midwest and 60% of shoppers in the Northeast indicating a wider variety of produce purchases compared with two decades ago, according to *Fresh Trends*.

Consumers aged 60 and older were the least adventuresome in terms of saying they now buy a wider variety of produce than they did 20 years ago. For example, only 56% of consumers 60-plus years old indicated a wider variety of produce purchases, compared with 79% for those 30-39 years old.

There were no dramatic differences in responses based on the race/ethnicity of shoppers answering the question. Sixty-six percent of white/Caucasian consumers reported a wider variety of fresh produce purchases compared with 20 years ago, compared with 72% of Black/African American shoppers, 70% of Hispanic buyers and 61% of Asian consumers.

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## Rising stars

Consumers were asked to identify which of the following produce items they now purchase that they did not buy previously. Some of the top fruits and vegetables listed by consumers were:

- Avocados: 22%
- Asparagus: 20%
- Bananas: 17%
- Blueberries: 14%
- Broccoli: 14%
- Bell peppers: 14%
- Blackberries: 12%
- Apples: 12%
- Artichokes: 12%
- Apricots: 10%
- Asian pears: 10%
- Beets: 10%
- Specialty peppers (includes cayenne, poblano, jalapeno, Anaheim, habanero): 9%
- Brussels sprouts: 9%
- Cabbage: 9%
- Mangoes: 8%
- Cauliflower: 8%
- Salad mix (washed and prepackaged): 8%
- Tomatoes: 8%
- Grapes: 8%
- Strawberries: 8%
- Celery: 7%
- Cherries: 7%
- Sweet corn: 7%
- Cucumbers: 7%
- Garlic: 7%
- Kiwifruit: 7%
- Lemons: 7%
- Spinach: 7%
- Sweet potatoes: 7%

The *Fresh Trends* survey also asked consumers what factors made them more likely to purchase produce they had not purchased before. Retail promotions are a big reason why consumers try something new, according to *Fresh Trends*.

Answers included:

- Item on sale: 43%.
- Sampling: 35%.
- Word of mouth: 35%.
- Tried it at a restaurant: 31%.
- Advice from doctor: 19%.
- Media: 15%.
- I generally do not try new items: 8%.
- Other: 3%.

