

Alabama Grocer

2023, ISSUE 4

Alabama Grocers Association

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Chairman's Message

Wrapping up all we achieved in 2023.

President's Message

A year of gratefulness for our members, Board, staff and accomplishments.



AGA's Legislative & Regulatory Agenda

The voice of the grocery industry in Alabama.

2024 AGEF Scholarship Application Is Open!

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2023 Food Industry Finest & Clay Shoot Recap

Cultivating community within Alabama's grocery industry.

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ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION
The Voice of the Grocery Industry

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE WRAPPING UP THE YEAR



Bob Crawford
President
United-Johnson Brothers

HOW QUICKLY TIME PASSES!

I cannot believe we are closing out 2023. We have had a very busy and successful year at AGA. I want to take a minute to thank you, the members, and AGA staff for all you have done in 2023. I cannot remember a year with so many successful events:

We started with the AGEF Golf Outing in April, which was completely sold out with 95 golfers.

In July, the AGA Annual Show was a huge success with a sold out exhibit hall, great speakers at the business sessions, and fun had by all at the dinners.

The AGEF Clay Shoot in October surpassed our goal by 23% and had a record 81 shooters.

Wrapping up our events in late October, the Alabama Food Industry Finest Luncheon was a great success where we honored our year award winners, heard from outstanding speakers, and came

together to raise money for our political action fund.

Congratulations to Gerry D'Alessandro (Fresh Value CEO) for Retailer of the Year, Jeff Brown (Piggly Wiggly Alabama Distributing Co. Director of Retail Operations) for Wholesaler of the Year, and Mike Hanson (Milo's Director of Key Accounts) for Vendor of the Year.

Lt. Governor Will Ainsworth was awarded the AGA Spirit of Alabama Award for his dedication to the State's grocery industry.

Pat McWhorter was also honored for his 30 years of dedication to AGA.

Because of your commitment, we have awarded over \$1.4 million in scholarships.

In November, we held the 2023 Board Retreat and worked on strategic planning for the Convention, Legislative, Education and Benefits, and

Membership and Communications committees.

There were so many great ideas from the board for 2024. Again, thank you to the board for their hard work and continued support for all of our 315 AGA members.

Rounding out 2023, please make sure you take time to visit the website supported by the AGA on spirits ready-to-drink cocktails.

<https://www.spiritsunited.org/alabama-rtd-campaign/>

It is called Ready for Convenience and seeks legislation for these drinks to be sold in grocery and convenience stores.

Thank you for your support of AGA, and I wish you and yours a happy and safe holiday.

Best regards,

Bob

EXHIBIT HALL THEME

MARDI
GRAS Party



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so secure your booth today!



Annual Show
Bringing Grocers to the Table
JULY 30, 2024



ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION
The Voice of the Grocery Industry

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE YEAR OF GRATITUDE



Ellie Smotherman Taylor
President/CEO
Alabama Grocers Association

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR OUR MEMBERS, BOARD, STAFF AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

As we end 2023, my thoughts go to gratefulness for our many blessing and accomplishments as an association.

Grateful for our members – First and foremost, I am grateful for our members. We have over 315 wonderful members from all aspects of the industry – retailer, wholesaler, and vendor. All our members play a pivotal role in what we do as an association. Thank you for your belief in our industry and what you do as a cornerstone in your communities.

Grateful for our Board – I would argue we have one of the best boards of any grocery association in the country. They are engaged, focused on the needs of our industry, and truly want to move grocers forward. We are unique in that our Board represents the entire industry and all categories of AGA membership. Thank you to our Chairman Bob Crawford, Vice Chairman Wade Payne, Past Chairman Harold Garrett, and all our Board members for the incredible job they have done this year.

Grateful for our staff – We have an incredible staff. Stephanie Crabtree led our events, and we had record profits and attendance all year. The Annual Show is our largest fundraiser of the year, and Stephanie did an outstanding job coordinating all aspects of the show including bringing back our Best Bagger Contest. Tori O'Neal took our communications and social media to a new level this year creating a cohesive look and feel for all our members. We also made our membership goal of 27 new members. Congratulations to Patrick McWhorter who celebrated his 30-year anniversary as our legislative representative. Pat is well respected in Montgomery, and we are so lucky to have him as part of our team.

Grateful for our accomplishments in 2023 – AGA had one of the best legislative years in our history. We accomplished the partial removal of the grocery tax, something that we have been working on for over a decade. We also passed shoplifting and organized

retail crime legislation, so important to all our members. On the alcohol side, we passed new curbside legislation to allow to match the alcohol amounts allowed in delivery and liquor liability reform, which should help more insurance companies come into the current market and drive down liquor liability insurance rates. AGA met all our benchmarks in our 2023 Strategic Plan and had a successful Board Retreat for 2024. AGA is truly the voice of the grocery industry in Alabama.

Thanks to all of you for your support and membership! I am truly humbled to serve such an outstanding industry.

Thanks for letting me serve as your President/CEO.

Best regards,

Ellie

THE 2024 AGEF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM IS NOW OPEN!



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\$750

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MILLION
AWARDED**

**Since the
Beginning**

\$1,000

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: ☎ 205.823.5498 ✉ SCRABTREE@ALABAMAGROCERS.ORG



ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION
The Voice of the Grocery Industry

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE LOOKING AHEAD



Patrick McWhorter
Legislative Representative
The McWhorter Group

2024 LEGISLATIVE GOALS FOR THE AGA

Things continue to be busy leading up to the end of the year. Legislators are already looking ahead to the 2024 Regular Legislative Session with five bills already pre-filed in the Senate, all “red meat” GOP issues. They will return to Montgomery February 6, 2024, and meet until mid-May.

The inaugural meeting of the Joint Study Commission on Grocery Taxation was held November 14th at the State House. Rep. Patrice McClammy passed House Joint Resolution 243 to establish this task force and serves as Co-Chair with Sen. Andrew Jones. The purpose is to review and approve financial statements to determine whether the Education Trust Fund has sufficient growth to allow the second one percent of grocery sales tax to be removed in 2025, as well as study the effect of complete removal of the state’s portion of sales taxes.

Legislative Fiscal Officer Kirk Fulford made a report to the task force members. He stated that to this point, there has been no way to determine where sales taxes come from. The Department of Revenue (DOR) simply reports the total amounts collected from the 4% state sales tax. Going forward with the beginning of the current fiscal year, DOR will now report to the Legislature those taxes collected under the 3% rate, giving us a good guide of the effect of the tax reduction on groceries. So legislators will have accurate numbers to review shortly after October 1, 2024. He also mentioned that this is the first time “food” has been defined in statute for sales tax purposes.

Currently, all sales taxes make up 24.9% of the total Education Budget, with income taxes making up the majority. At the end of Fiscal Year 2023 (9/30/23), total sales taxes collected grew 4.56%, but overall collections for the fund were only up 0.11%. Remember, the second tax cut will only take effect if the previous year total net receipts’ growth is at least 3.5% higher. Each additional one percent removed from groceries is estimated to cost \$152 million, although we firmly believe there will not be that great a reduction since those dollars will be spent elsewhere. We are hoping the Legislature might revisit the legislation to compare just sales tax collections when determining the reduction going forward. Other factors beyond our control will likely cause reductions in total education receipts for FY 2024; namely, overtime tax exemption, rebates to be distributed December 1st and the end of federal stimulus revenue.

Additionally, Sen. Arthur Orr has drafted a bill for 2024 that will remove all sales taxes from baby bottles, breast pumps and related equipment, and maternity clothing. Orr says, as a pro-life state, “We need to support families and those having children.” This proposal would take about \$10 million a year from sales tax revenue. Cities and counties would lose about \$13 million.

At the recent AGA Board Retreat, new chair Jay Mitchell led the Legislative Committee in developing a new agenda for the coming year. Fortunately, many of our previous priorities were met in 2023, and members were challenged to suggest new priorities that would make

substantial differences in our business. The one priority not realized in 2023 was to allow Ready To Drink (RTD) spirits based beverages to be sold in grocery and convenience stores, and it remains our number one priority. Second to that, members decided to make priority having regional meetings between AGA members and elected officials around the state to discuss grocery industry issues. This will connect us on a local level with decision makers and increase our effectiveness in Montgomery and beyond. Third priority is to continue working to remove the entire state sales tax on groceries, and to work with local governments to get rid of the local tax as well.

We will continue to prioritize the implementation of recently enacted crime legislation. Our organized theft shoplifting legislation will take effect in 2024, and we are working with the Alabama Office of Prosecution Services and Alabama District Attorneys Association to provide training in each judicial district across the state for enforcing the new law along with the online transparency legislation we passed in 2022. Training will be provided to store owners and managers as well.

Continued on page 9

Committee members prioritized passing legislation to limit frivolous lawsuits being experienced by our members relative to FDA labeling and Americans with Disability Act federal regulations. We hope to persuade legislators to provide more funding to the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, to possibly provide low interest loans and/or grants to help establish new stores in food deserts. And, members added the goal of privatizing all sales of alcohol in Alabama, allowing grocers and others to sell all lines of spiritous beverages in our stores, getting the state out of the retail business.

Of course, we will continue to maintain vigilance to protect SNAP benefits, monitor the effect of medical marijuana in the workplace, defeat onerous taxes and restrictive regulations, minimum wage increases, and licensing fees. House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter has announced his support for gambling legislation in the coming session and has appointed a task force chaired by Rep. Andy Whitt, who has been looking at the issue. As always, we take no position on the issues of gambling and lottery; our interest will be protecting retailers by

ensuring retailers receive a fair collection fee for selling lottery tickets.

Now that district maps have been finalized and qualifying with the parties has occurred, we know that thirteen Democrats and eight Republicans filed to run for the new congressional District 2 seat in the 2024 elections. The primary will be held on March 5 in conjunction with the presidential election, runoff on April 16, and general election November 5.

The deadline to qualify to run as a Republican or Democrat candidate for a variety of elected offices in Alabama was last month. Filed to run for the seat.

Democrats who filed to run are: James Averhart, State Rep. Napoleon Bracy (Prichard), State Sen. Merika Coleman (Birmingham), House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels (Huntsville), Shomari Figures (Mobile), Brian Gary, State Rep. Juandalynn Givan (Birmingham), State Rep. Jeremy Gray (Opelika), Phyllis Harvey-Hall, Willie Lenard, Vimal Patel, Larry Darnell Simpson, and Darryl Sinkfield.

Republicans who filed to run are: State Sen. Greg Albritton (Atmore), Former State Sen. Dick Brewbaker (Montgomery), Caroleene Dobson, Karla DuPriest, former Alabama football player Wallace Gilberry, Hampton Harris, Stacey Shepperson, and Belinda Thomas. The incumbent 2nd District Congressman Barry Moore was moved into the 1st District and is running against that incumbent, Jerry Carl.

Prognosticators say the leaders in the 2nd District primaries are House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels as a Democrat, who has deep ties to Bullock County in the district, and former state Sen. Dick Brewbaker as the Republican, who has deep ties in Montgomery County. That should make for an interesting race in November, but don't count Wallace Gilberry out of the Republican primary yet. He had a great announcement message, and could attract minority votes to the GOP side.

Please review the 2024 AGA Legislative & Regulatory Agenda on pages 10-11.





2024 LEGISLATIVE & REGULATORY AGENDA

ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION

1. Work with all interested parties to come to a consensus on a bill to allow off-premise licensees, including supermarkets and convenience stores, to sell spirits-based ready-to-drink products of at least 6-10% ABV.
2. Set regional meetings in September/October to bring grocers and legislative leaders at the federal, state and local levels together to discuss grocery industry issues.
3. Work to complete the state grocery sales tax removal. Now with high inflation and rising food prices, Alabamians need this relief more than ever. Encourage local counties and cities to also remove the tax.
4. Work with industry partners including the District Attorneys Association and Attorney General to complete the implementation of INFORMS, Organized Retail Theft and Shoplifting laws and ensure enforcement. Organized retail theft rings steal billions of dollars of merchandise each year, victimizing retailers, endangering the safety of retail employees, and raising the price of consumer goods.
5. Work on legislation to add federal language regarding FDA regulations enforcement.
6. Work with national partners on legislation that would protect retailers from frivolous Americans with Disabilities Act lawsuits.
7. Privatize alcohol sales in Alabama.
8. Rewrite and increase funding on Healthy Food Financing Initiatives for the expansion of supermarkets into underserved areas of Alabama. The grocery industry has established that they are essential businesses for our communities.
9. Work on both the federal and state levels on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Ensure that we are preserving choice, staggering benefits, and eliminating fraud and improper payments without increasing the burden on the retail community. Ensure that benefits are preserved in a retail format, consumers are given flexibility in their shopping choices, and Alabama receives the maximum benefits allowable for their consumers. Prevent bills that deter benefits for Alabama consumers.
10. Work with other business organizations in the state regarding the testing and regulation of the use of medical marijuana in the workplace, how it relates to workers compensation, and health insurance rates and coverages.



2024 LEGISLATIVE & REGULATORY AGENDA

ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION

11. Prevent additional regulation from government on retailers, suppliers and wholesalers at the state and federal levels.
12. Defeat legislation that would increase new taxes on industry products such as tobacco, candy and soft drinks, which are oftentimes easy targets.
13. Resist local restrictions, taxes and fees on the grocery industry through preemption at the state level.
14. Work at both the federal and state level on labor regulations. Oppose federal and state mandates for minimum wage increases, employee leave, paid family leave, predictive scheduling, employment discrimination, and other labor issues.
15. Defeat legislation that would require liquid goods tax and/or create bottle bills/consumption taxes at both the state and local level. In addition to just the tax, prevent retailers from having the burden of collecting and storing bottles for recycling purposes.
16. Defeat legislation that would put increases on licensing fees through Alabama regulatory agencies such as the Alabama ABC Board, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, Alabama Department of Revenue, Alabama Department of Labor, and Alabama Department of Public Health.
17. AGA will remain neutral on any lottery or gambling legislation. However, AGA will ensure that retailers who will be collecting any funds be given a fair collection fee and fee for any winnings at their locations across the state.
18. Work at both the state and federal levels on Department of Transportation issues that are both burdensome and costly to the industry such as insurance and driver hour regulations. Continue to collaborate with the Governor's office when there is a State of Emergency to ensure that DOT hours are waived.

THE VOICE OF ALABAMA'S GROCERY INDUSTRY



INDUSTRY NEWS

THE NEW AND DIFFERENT WORLD OF STAFFING



Michael Sansolo
Retail Food Industry Consultant

DO NOT RISK COMPLACENCY AND THE IRRELEVANCY THAT COULD FOLLOW

It's hard to believe there was ever a time when retailers didn't struggle with the issues of attracting, recruiting and retaining staffers. Whether unemployment rates are low or high, or whether the economy is great or awful, this is one issue that always seems to be a problem, and, in fact, I've written about it here before.

But as one retail executive recently told me, the problem is somehow different in 2023, and the industry has got to find a different way to deal with an age-old problem. And that means understanding a vast series of changes that have hit the workforce in just the past few years that have ramifications for the entire industry for years to come.

Luckily, an entirely new look at this problem will be available soon in a report being released shortly by the Coca-Cola Retailing Research Council of North America. The report, which can be downloaded for free at www.cccrc.org, should be online by the start of 2024.

Let's start by considering what's different about the labor situation today that is seemingly making the shortage of workers more critical than ever before. Unfortunately, there are many reasons and many of them are beyond any company's ability to solve.

First, the pandemic took a special toll on retail workers who were on the front line of customer service at one of the most difficult times imaginable. Many companies and stores reported endless instances of confrontations with customers frustrated by the shortage of products or even the simple request to wear a face mask for safety.

Even worse, once the pandemic faded, the accolades given to retail workers during the pandemic faded even quicker. Many retailers say in the months since a sense of normalcy returned, customer interactions have been angrier than ever.

The pandemic and its aftermath impact retail staffers in two very different ways. First, older workers, who were most at risk from Covid-19, left front line retail jobs to protect their own health and have been slow to return. That's a bigger problem than usual given the burgeoning size of the older population thanks to the enormous and aging post World War II baby boom generation.

In addition, workers of all ages have been impacted by increasingly confrontational shopper attitudes and the rise of various crimes (from shop lifting to random shootings), all of which make retail jobs less attractive than ever.

The pandemic also supercharged the growth of at-home shopping and services such as Uber Eats, Door Dash and, of course, Amazon. Many of those companies created jobs that are now part of the gig economy, in which staffers have the flexibility to choose their hours and days to work.

Clearly there are downsides to those jobs, but as some retailers have reported, they are extremely attractive for workers looking to control their schedules like never before. Traditional retail jobs have many advantages over these gig jobs, such as stability, but as one retailer told me, "what 17-year-old wouldn't want to be able to choose their own hours and basically be their own boss."

These new challenges make clear that retailers need to think differently about how to position jobs and how to better manage front line staffers to minimize turnover as much as possible. Luckily, in this area there are many ways companies, stores and even individual managers can fight back and win the battle for staffers.

Continued on page 13

As our new study finds, there are many keys to retaining staffers including ensuring the pay levels are competitive and finding ways to allow staffers as much flexibility in scheduling as possible.

However the biggest improvement companies can make is in better training front line managers as many staffers say, as has long been known, that their individual manager is usually the top reason for them to either leave or stay.

A key step to improving front-line management skills is simply offering more training to those very managers who, more than ever, are dealing with heightened complexity with the diversity of their team, the diverse demands of shoppers, greater competition and even new technologies. Companies need remember that even veteran managers are faced with an array of challenges today that might strain their ability to cope.

For managers themselves, research has shown that many of the keys to improved performance start with better communication to their staffers. More than ever, today's workers are versed in rapid-fire communication thanks to

smartphones and social media apps. Managers need remember that in this new environment, staffers want clear, consistent and relevant information.

That can include proving more regular feedback on job performance and certainly sharing important information on new programs, schedules or anything else that helps them in their job. It's also important for managers to make certain the same message is getting through to all staffers so that no one feels like they are unimportant.

Successful retailers and even fast food operators do a strong job of mentoring staffers to help them best handle their jobs. That could include teaching them how to work new machinery or understand customer demands specific to their store or their department. Some operators say mentoring programs help both the staffer receiving insights as well as making mentors themselves feel valued as experienced parts of the team.

And some companies go so far as to help instruct new hires in career paths so that they might see the benefits in remaining with the company for years to come and making retail a career instead of simply

a part-time job during high school, college or retirement.

The total picture is unquestionably more complex than ever thanks in large part to the impact of the pandemic and its lingering impact on workers. And, of course, new wrinkles in the work force, such as the gig economy, create even more new complexity.

So in many ways, companies and individual managers need understand this new world to better surmount these new challenges. But in many other ways, long-standing problems, such as better training front-line managers in ways to guide, mentor and nurture new staffers, remain a key solution that more than ever needs to be used.

Note: When the new study is available online, I will alert your Alabama Grocers' team. In addition, a companion study about the distinct and unique challenges facing convenience store operators on recruiting and retention will become available at almost the same time.

ALABAMA GROCERS EDUCATION FOUNDATION



GOLF OUTING APRIL 4, 2024 TIMBERLINE GOLF CLUB





ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION
The Voice of the Grocery Industry

INDUSTRY NEWS

2024 ELECTION YEAR



Paul DeMarco

Alabama Grocers Association Partner
Parsons, Lee & Juliano, PC

GET READY FOR 2024 TO BE A BUSY ELECTION YEAR HERE IN ALABAMA

The qualifying deadlines for those Alabama candidates who want to run on the Republican and Democratic tickets in 2024 officially closed last month. We are now three months to the 2024 Alabama Republican and Democrat Party primary elections on March 5th.

While the Presidential race will grab the most headlines, there are numerous Congressional races we are watching as well.

There is a new district in south and central Alabama that has drawn multiple candidates to the race. The campaign for the new 2nd Congressional District drew a record number of candidates with a total of 20 hopefuls who want to head to Washington DC. Twelve Democrats and eight Republicans will fight out in their respective party primaries this upcoming March 5th. With this many candidates running, each party is sure to have run-offs to choose the final nominee. This district goes all the way from Mobile to Phenix City, Alabama, and encompasses portions of the Black Belt and Wiregrass.

Another Congressional race to watch is the new first district which will be historic, as two incumbent representatives will fight for the GOP nomination and that does not happen often in Alabama politics. Congressman Jerry Carl and Barry Moore will fight it out to represent a district that stretches from the Gulf Coast to the Wiregrass. Baldwin County is now the most populous area of the district, but southeast Alabama is also a very strong conservative base that will eagerly get out to vote.

Another important race is the campaign for the Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court. Incumbent Justice Tom Parker is retiring, leaving open the seat. Current Supreme Court Justice Sarah Stewart, former Alabama Senator Bryan Taylor and attorney Jerry Blevins are running for the Republican nomination. Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge Greg Griffin is the only candidate for the Democratic Party. Being the Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice is an important role in ensuring that the court system operates fairly and efficiently to carry out justice.

However, below the radar but of significance are several races for seats on the Alabama School Board. One of those seats will be due to the retirement of State School Board member Stephanie Bell who has served on the school board for 30 years. Bell represented a district that stretched from Montgomery to the suburbs of Birmingham and is one of the most conservative in the state. Three candidates have qualified for the Republican Party Primary for what will be a very competitive race.

And with the debate on the future of public education these campaigns will make a lot of headlines. Lawmakers will be taking up bills in the upcoming session that will address funding students as opposed to schools and other efforts to provide more options for parents on where to educate their kids. Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on public education to the tune of \$6 billion in Alabama. And while the Alabama Legislature may appropriate the education dollars, the state school board sets important academic policy.

Continued on page 15

In addition to these high-profile races, there are dozens of other local elections as well that will be on the ballot.

There will be a lot to watch as these campaigns get up and running. Then once we get past the party primaries, there will be a long marathon race to the general election in the fall of 2024.

There will be hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on these campaigns, so gear up for some highly competitive races in the coming weeks.

Paul DeMarco is a former member of the Alabama House of Representatives, serves as general counsel of the Alabama Grocers Association and can be found on Twitter @Paul_DeMarco

Planning ahead? Join us for the
AGA ANNUAL SHOW
Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort

JULY
28-31
2024



JULY
13-16
2025

Bringing Grocers to the Table



ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION
The Voice of the Grocery Industry

INDUSTRY NEWS

END OF 2023



Jennifer Hatcher

Chief Public Policy Officer & Senior Vice President of Government Affairs
Food Marketing Institute

GROCERY SHOPPERS EXHIBIT CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM AT YEAR'S END

As we head into the final stretch of 2023, Americans are preparing more meals at home as they cut back on spending to manage ongoing inflationary and economic pressures.

According to the fifth and final installment of our 2023 consumer research, U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends, Holiday Season, shoppers are optimistic about their financial situations and are finding ways to feed their families and meet their needs at the grocery store.

To set the stage, it's important to recognize that consumers are demonstrating resilience and flexibility in the face of higher prices. Prices for food from grocery stores worry shoppers more than any other consumer expenditure, with 72% being very or extremely concerned, up from 69% in August 2023. Two-thirds of shoppers express concerns about rising gas prices, while half are concerned about restaurant prices. Nevertheless, shoppers are being prudent and tactical with purchases to stay within their household budgets, shopping for short-term needs rather than filling their pantries.

Cooking at home continues to be a key tactic used by shoppers to manage their expenses, with 31% saying they are preparing meals at home more often, and more than half are planning to cook and eat more of their meals at home in

the coming year. Alternatively, 60% of shoppers say they are eating out less, and just 14% of shoppers say they plan to dine out more in 2024.

Interestingly, one in five shoppers say they are actually buying more groceries as a way to contain their food spending, which helps explain why the average weekly grocery spend per household is currently \$155/week. While that is higher than the \$148/week shoppers were spending in October 2022, it is a decrease from the \$164/week from February of this year.

Even given these economic challenges, Americans are excited to celebrate the end-of-year holidays. To manage their budgets, consumers tell us they intend to shop ahead, seek deals and explore more food options to help them continue to make the holidays special.

In fact, 47% say they will make at least some adjustments to the way they cook over the holidays. Thirty percent of shoppers say they will be seeking more deals, 24% will be preparing more dishes at home, and 17% will have others contribute to holiday meals. Another 18% report they will be substituting products for more affordable options. Americans have also reported shopping earlier for the holidays, but there appears to be less focus on this

tactic than last year. For the end-of-year holidays, 31% plan to shop further in advance than usual, down slightly from last year.

In most cases, these strategies are considered by shoppers fairly equally regardless of household income, although there are some differences based on age, where younger shoppers are typically more active shopping strategists.

Interestingly, consumers are also taking advantage of expanded food service options at their local grocer. Shoppers are increasingly enjoying "hybrid" meals that pair food made at home alongside semi- or fully-prepared items from the grocery store. This hybrid approach can offer shoppers tremendous value during this hectic season by offering convenience and affordability for any holiday meal celebration.

Continued on page 16

Looking ahead into next year, shoppers see increased enjoyment from cooking and eating in 2024, and plan to save money, exercise, and spend more time with friends and family in the New Year. Shoppers tend to expect that both their nutrition and their enjoyment from eating will improve over the course of 2024, with 61% of shoppers feeling their enjoyment from eating will get better, and 53% believe their diet and

nutrition will get better. When it comes to household finances, 35% of shoppers feel that those will improve for them one year from now. Similarly for affordability, 30% of shoppers feel that their ability to buy the food they need will improve a year from now.

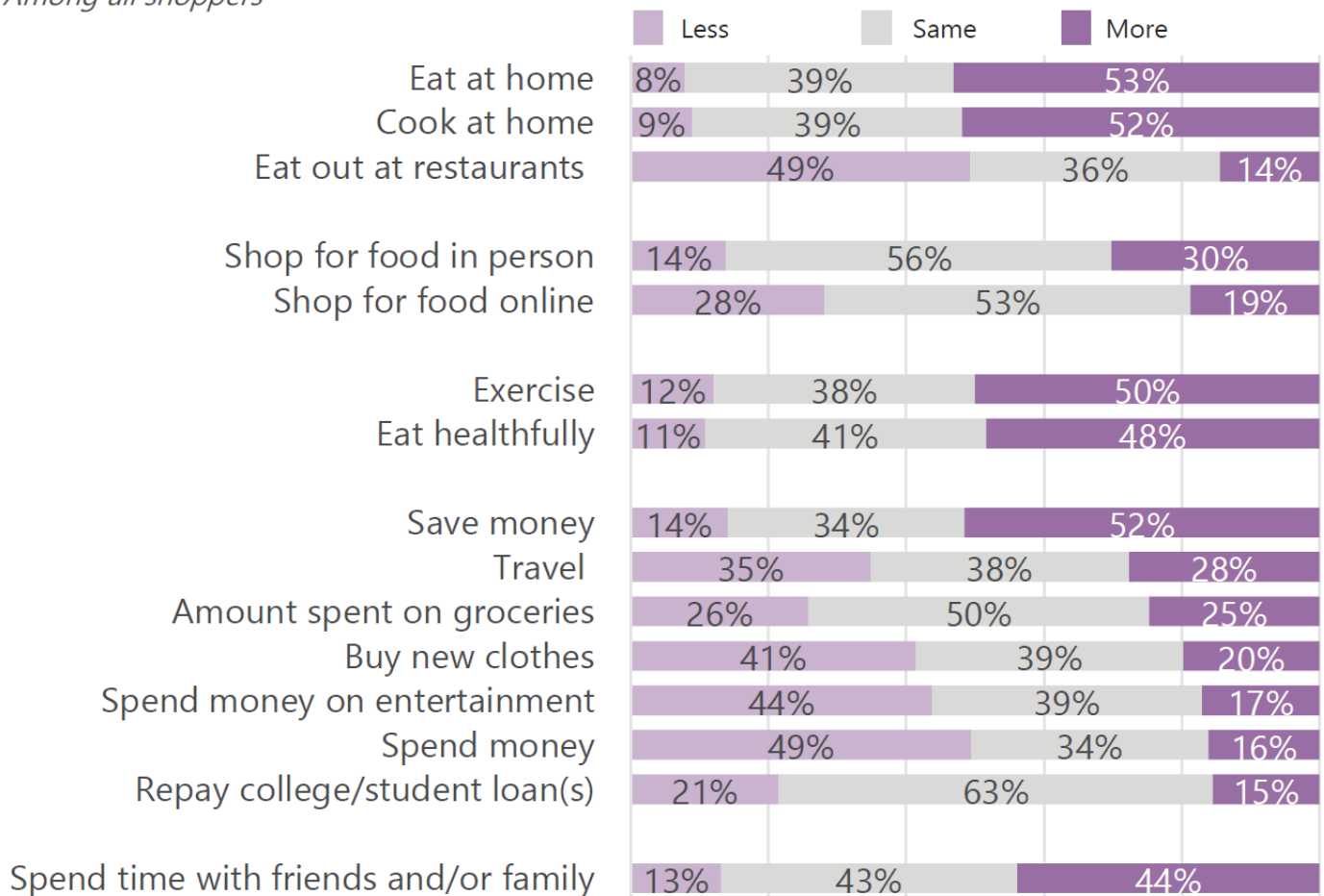
Retailers that are able to emphasize deals, increased private brand offerings, food service meal solutions and product

pairings that meet consumers' health and nutrition aspirations will be better positioned to foster customer loyalty in the New Year.

To download the U.S. Grocer Shopper Trends, Holiday Season report and to sign up to receive updates on future, visit www.FMI.org/GroceryTrends.

CHART 7: WHAT CHANGES DO YOU ANTICIPATE MAKING IN THE YEAR AHEAD (2024)

Among all shoppers



FIAE 2023 CONVENTION

The Food Industry Association Executives Convention provided many opportunities to enhance our communication skills, cultivate our leadership, and engage in collaborative discussions at the roundtable sessions. These nationwide leaders inspire us in the food industry.



INDUSTRY NEWS

STEP OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE



Greg Ferrara
President & CEO
National Grocers Association

SUCCESS MAY LIE OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

I've said many times that the events hosted by the National Grocers Association are opportunities to take time away from your business – as busy as I know you all to be – in order to spend some time working on your business.

But perhaps it's also an opportunity to step outside your comfort zone – to explore new ideas, new opportunities, new methods of doing things that may help push your business to that next level of growth and success.

As most of you read this, we're just about three months away from a chance to do just that, at the 2024 NGA Show, to be held March 10-12 at Caesars Forum Convention Center in Las Vegas. In its 42nd year, this annual three-day show produced by NGA and Clarion Events offers independent retailers, wholesalers, industry executives, food CPG manufacturers and service providers a chance to learn, to network and to recharge your batteries after another busy holiday selling season.

I'm excited about who we have lined up to help drive your enthusiasm for the business. Leading the way as our opening keynote speaker, sponsored by The Kraft Heinz Company, is celebrity chef and author Carla Hall. A dynamic entrepreneur and leader, Carla's tremendous positive energy, her love

of food and her experiences pushing outside of her comfort zone to tackle her fears are sure to resonate with you.

And I'm excited about how the NGA Show continues to grow, with new attendees, new exhibitors and new speakers offering new actionable insights at every turn.

With momentum building since our 2023 event, which experienced the largest attendance numbers since 2017, the show's speaker lineup will include experts, analysts and observers from all corners of our business: retailing, wholesaling, distribution, manufacturing, brand development, technology and finance.

Here's just some of what we have in store for show attendees:

- More than 100 speakers encompassing general and breakout sessions over three days.
- More than 40 sessions and workshops on the latest trends and best practices, with strategies to increase profits and drive the bottom line.
- More than 300 exhibitors in the show's exhibition hall representing a diverse range of product categories focusing on innovations, solutions and new products to drive customer satisfaction.
- The return by popular demand of

our Technology Summit as well as the Financial Symposium.

- Excitement as finalists from across the country compete to be the 2024 Best Bagger Champion.
- Our Creative Choice Awards program, showcasing best-in-class marketing and merchandising campaigns.
- Presentation of the annual Peter J. Larkin Community Service Award, Thomas K. Zaucha Entrepreneurial Excellence Award, and the Women Grocers of America (WGA) Woman of the Year Award.
- Co-location with Indoor Ag-Con, the premier event covering the technology of growing crops in indoor systems, using hydroponic, aeroponic and aquaponic techniques, as well as the IGA Rally.
- Plus, plenty of networking time to reconnect with old friends and make new ones.

But don't take my word for it – here's what some 2023 attendees had to say about their experiences at the NGA Show:

Continued on page 19

“Events like this are extremely valuable because they give retailers the opportunity to have education, see innovation and to be inspired. If you have all that in one place, you walk away with that wow factor.” - Michelle Mendoza, VP of marketing and customer experience, Associated Supermarket Group

“The NGA Show provides us the time to actually get face-to-face time with retailers. It’s critically important for us to make those connections and relationships, and The NGA Show allows us to build those. Loved the set up and layout of the show, and attendance was phenomenal this year!” – Meagan

Nelson, senior director of retail and distributor of growth, SPINS

“As a first-time exhibitor, our participation at the NGA Show has exceeded our expectations. Beyond all of the tremendous sales opportunities for our products, we’ve enjoyed networking with all sorts of potential new partners, from retailers to wholesalers and everyone in between.” – Graham Sorkin, co-founder and chief of staff, The Functional Chocolate Company.

If you want to keep up with the constant changes and innovations in our dynamic industry, the NGA Show is a must-attend event.

To register, and to find the latest information on speakers and the education lineup, visit www.theNGAshow.com.

And if you’re not already an NGA member, we hope you’ll consider joining – learn more about the categories and benefits of membership at <https://www.nationalgrocers.org/membership/>.



PWADC FOOD SHOW

Thank you, Piggly Wiggly Alabama Distributing Company, for letting us attend your 2023 Food Shows. We enjoyed seeing familiar faces and meeting new friends!



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AGEF CLAY SHOOT

The Alabama Grocers Education Foundation (AGEF) held their annual Clay Shoot on Thursday, October 12, 2023, at Selwood Farm in Alpine, Alabama. The event raised over \$34,000 for the AGEF to provide scholarships to employees and children of employees of Alabama Grocers Association (AGA) member companies.

This year, the AGEF awarded 52 scholarships valued at over \$50,000. To date, AGEF has awarded over \$1.4 million dollars because of the tremendous support of our members at our events.

The winners of the Clay Shoot were as follows. First Place Team: EDLINCO Team. Second Place Team: Byars | Wright Team. Third Place Team: Piggly Wiggly Alabama Distributing Company Team One.

The AGEF Clay Shoot would not be as successful without the many companies that sponsored this event and contributed their goods. The Presenting Sponsor for this event was Coca-Cola Bottling Company UNITED, Inc. Additional sponsors of the AGEF 2023 Clay Shoot included A & R Super Markets; AGA Health & Welfare Trust; Alabama Power; Associated Grocers of the South; Associated Wholesale Grocers; Autry Greer & Son's; Blue Bell Creameries; Buffalo Rock/Pepsi; Bunzl Distribution; Byars | Wright; Don Francisco's Coffee; EDLINCO; Federated Insurance; Ferrara; Keurig Dr Pepper; Merrill Lynch; Mitchell Grocery Corporation; Mt. Olive Pickles; Piggly Wiggly Alabama Distributing Company; Red Diamond; Retail Data Systems MidSouth; Reynolds American; SelleEthics; Sunset Farm Foods; UNFI; United-Johnson Brothers; and UTZ/Golden Flake.

Continued on page 25





"Today, the AGEF Clay Shoot united all corners of the grocery industry to impact the lives of deserving college students," said Jake Sim, Vice President of A & R Super Markets and Vice Chairman of the AGEF Board of Trustees. "We are thankful for each attendee and sponsor as their generosity paved the way for furthering education and career development in the grocery industry."



Thank you to the companies that donated their products for the goody bags and beverage cart. Thank you to Autry Greer & Son's for sponsoring our lunch and Bunzl Distribution for sponsoring our goody bags.

A special thanks to AGA Chairman Bob Crawford of United-Johnson Brothers and his team for cooking lunch, AGA Vice President Jack Carlile of UNFI for sponsoring and running the beverage cart, and AGEF Trustee Jim Cetrulo of Don Francisco's Coffee for sponsoring and providing the breakfast.



"Since its inception, we have awarded thousands of scholarships to help college students pursue higher education," said Ellie Taylor, President/CEO of the Alabama Grocers Association. "We are proud to invest in the future generations of our industry."



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SPIRIT OF ALABAMA AWARD

The Alabama Grocers Association (AGA) presented Lieutenant Governor Will Ainsworth its esteemed Spirit of Alabama Award, recognizing his commitment to the Alabama grocery industry.

At the annual Alabama Food Industry Finest Luncheon on Thursday, October 26, 2023, Lieutenant Governor Ainsworth addressed more than 120 people at The Club to discuss the accomplishments attained in the 2023 Legislative Session and his continued efforts for the future.

Ellie Taylor, President and CEO of the Alabama Grocers Association, and Bob Crawford, President of United-Johnson Brothers and Chairman of the AGA Board of Directors, presented Lieutenant Governor Ainsworth with this award.

The Spirit of Alabama Award recognizes Ainsworth's service as an Alabama legislator, actions taken to repeal the state's sales tax on groceries, and his commitment to protecting hardworking Alabamians.

"The Spirit of Alabama Award is a high honor, but it is one that I share with each legislator who sponsored and supported the bill and all who worked to repeal the grocery tax before me," Ainsworth said. "We must finish the job of eliminating the state grocery tax altogether, but with Alabama's historically strong economy and record low unemployment, I am confident that full relief from food taxation is on the horizon."

Lieutenant Governor Ainsworth exemplifies the zeal, the concern and the commitment that make the state of Alabama and our country great. AGA is honored to present him this award.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR WILL AINSWORTH



Congratulations 30 YEARS



Patrick McWhorter
AGA Legislative Representative



FOOD INDUSTRY FINEST *Luncheon*

The Alabama Grocers Association (AGA) held their annual Food Industry Finest Luncheon on Thursday, October 26, 2023, honoring their industry award winners. Lieutenant Governor Will Ainsworth was the guest speaker.

More than 120 people attended the event at The Club to discuss the work of the AGA in 2023 and those in the food, beverage, and grocery profession here in Alabama. The AGA honored the following individuals with their year awards:

The Retailer of the Year Award was presented to Gerry D'Alessandro, CEO of Fresh Value.

"It was such an honor to be nominated and selected to win the AGA Retailer of the Year," said D'Alessandro. "It was very humbling, and I really appreciate all of my peers that recognized me and voted for me to win this award."

The Wholesaler of the Year Award was given to Jeff Brown, Director of Business Development of Piggly Wiggly Alabama Distributing Company.

"It is an honor to receive this award, but it's not me," said Brown. "It is the organization. We have over 600 associates here, and I am just a small part of it."

The Vendor of the Year award recipient was Mike Hanson, Director of Key Accounts of Milo's.

"As far as the award is concerned, I appreciate this being given," said Hanson. "I am accepting it on behalf of Milo's, but there are many people that are responsible for this award."

"Each of these fine individuals exemplify leadership and excellence in Alabama's grocery industry," said Ellie Taylor, President and CEO of the Alabama Grocers Association. "We are thankful for the opportunity to honor them and their commitment today."

The food retail industry in Alabama provides over half a million jobs with over \$2.5 billion in annual wages paid. Grocers pay over \$1.1 billion in state taxes and have a total economic impact on the state's economy of over \$12 billion. AGA has been honoring professionals who are making an impact in the grocery industry with these awards since 1996.





ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION
The Voice of the Grocery Industry

ASSOCIATION NEWS

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