

Alabama Grocer

2024, ISSUE 4

Alabama Grocers Association

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of Growth and
Success in 2024**
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**UNWRAPPING
SUCCESS**
2024 in Review



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AGA STAFF

Julie Owen <i>Event & Education Director</i>	Patrick McWhorter <i>Legislative Consultant</i>	Laura Brittain Stubblefield <i>Membership & Communications Director</i>
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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

A FLOURISHING YEAR OF GROWTH AND SUCCESS IN 2024



BOB CRAWFORD

President

United-Johnson Brothers of Alabama



AS WE WRAP UP AN EXTRAORDINARY 2024, IT'S A PROUD MOMENT TO REFLECT ON HOW FAR THE ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION HAS COME.

This year has been marked by tremendous fiscal success, substantial membership growth, and unparalleled advancements for our organization. It has been a privilege to serve as AGA's chairman during this transformative year, and the excitement for 2025 is already palpable.

2024 was a year of growth in our community. Membership participation in events like the AGA Annual Show and the Food Industry Finest Luncheon was exceptional.

These gatherings not only strengthened relationships across the grocery industry but also contributed to the financial and continued success of our association. The vibrant participation in these initiatives underscores the value members see in AGA and their trust in our leadership.

Being AGA's chairman in 2024 has been one of the most rewarding experiences. This year proved that AGA is more than just an organization—it's a thriving community committed to supporting the grocery industry in Alabama.

While 2024 has been a banner year, we are just getting started. Plans for 2025 are already underway, including our Tailgate Party-themed AGA Annual Show, which promises to bring even more innovation and collaboration to our members. I have no doubt that next year will be another landmark chapter for AGA.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this year's success. Your hard work and dedication have made 2024 an unforgettable year, and I look forward to seeing what we will achieve together in 2025! ■

Sincerely,

Bob Crawford



Annual Show

Bringing Grocers to the Table

**JULY 13-16, 2025
SANDESTIN
GOLF & BEACH RESORT**





PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

AS 2024 COMES TO AN END, AGA CONTINUES TO THRIVE



ELLIE TAYLOR

President/CEO

Alabama Grocers Association

AS WE APPROACH THE END OF 2024, I FIND MYSELF REFLECTING ON THE GRATITUDE I FEEL FOR THE MANY BLESSINGS AND ACHIEVEMENTS WE'VE EXPERIENCED AS AN ASSOCIATION.

Above all, I am thankful for our members. We are proud to have over 325 amazing members representing all facets of the industry, including retailers, wholesalers, and vendors. Each member plays a crucial role in our association's mission. Thank you for your commitment to our industry and for being a vital part of your community.

I believe we possess one of the finest boards among grocery associations nationwide. They are dedicated, attentive to our industry's needs, and genuinely strive to advance the interests of grocers. Our board's unique composition reflects the entire industry and all categories of AGA membership. Special thanks to our Chairman Bob Crawford and Vice Chairman Wade Payne, and all our board members for their exceptional contributions this year.

Our staff is truly remarkable. Under Stephanie Crabtree's leadership, our events achieved record profits and attendance throughout the year. The annual show, being our largest fundraiser, also set a new profit record. While we are sad to see Stephanie move on, we deeply appreciate the dedication and excellence she brought to her role. We warmly welcome Julie Owen and look forward to the amazing work she will do in 2025. Laura Brittain Stubblefield has excelled in communications and membership, and we are eager to see the outcomes of her efforts in 2025. We are immensely grateful to Patrick McWhorter for his invaluable contributions to our association in Montgomery. We truly wouldn't be the Voice of the Grocery Industry without him.

EVERY EVENT HOSTED BY AGA IN 2024 SET NEW RECORDS FOR BOTH ATTENDANCE AND PROFIT.

I cannot thank enough those who attended, sponsored, and assisted in planning and executing these events. Our Association continues to thrive and flourish. A significant legislative achievement this year was the approval of the 2025 Summer EBT funds, which will inject an additional \$62.7 million in SNAP dollars this summer.

Thank you all for your support and membership! I am truly honored to serve such an incredible industry. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of being your President/CEO. ■
Sincerely,



Annual Show

Bringing Grocers to the Table

EXHIBIT HALL THEME



TAILGATE PARTY

07.15.25

**SANDESTIN
GOLF & BEACH
RESORT**





LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

PASSING OF THE TORCH



PATRICK MCWHORTER

Legislative Consultant
The McWhorter Group

THE YEAR THAT JUST CONTINUES AS ONE WHICH WILL NOT SLOW DOWN, THE NEWS FINALLY HIT THAT SENATE PRESIDENT PRO TEM GREG REED OF JASPER WILL BE STEPPING AWAY FROM THE STATE SENATE EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1. THAT PRODUCED AN IMMEDIATE RACE TO SUCCEED HIM.

Reed is leaving to assume a new position as Senior Advisor for Workforce Transformation with Governor Kay Ivey’s office.

During the 2024 legislative session, lawmakers and Ivey approved the Working for Alabama legislation, which included converting the Department of Labor to the Department of Workforce. “Alabama is poised to chart a new path in workforce development and economic growth, and I am immensely grateful to Governor Kay Ivey for giving me the opportunity to be a part of her team as a senior advisor to workforce transformation,” Reed said in a written statement.

“I could not be more excited for this new journey, and I look forward to building on the monumental steps Alabama has taken to continue making our state the best place in America to live, work, worship and raise a family.”

While visiting with Reed at the recent Senate GOP Caucus fundraising event, Sen. Reed told Patrick McWhorter he was excited about his new role (he will become secretary of the new department once it is officially formed in 2025), and is most interested in ways this new endeavor can work with the AGA to broaden opportunities for those entering the grocery industry.

He pledged his strong support in any way to help improve opportunities in our industry.

As of now, GOP Senators are scheduled to meet December 3rd to elect a new President Pro Tem. The candidates are current Senate Majority Leader Steve Livingston of Scottsboro and Senate Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Development Committee Chair Garlan Gudger of Cullman.

“IT APPEARS THAT WE ARE SPLIT,” SEN. GREG ALBRITTON OF RANGE TOLD THE ALABAMA DAILY NEWS. ‘IT APPEARS THAT IF ONE OF OUR FINE GENTLEMAN HAS A MAJORITY, IT WILL BE AN EXTREMELY SLIM MAJORITY.’”

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Senator Jay Hovey of Auburn told ADN, “I think to give the decision the respect and due process it deserves, there was nothing wrong with trying to make sure everyone was comfortable with how we were going to do it, who the candidates were and what they brought to the table. We’ve got two great guys who want to lead the Senate, I think both have put in significant effort to be involved, engaged and build relationships within the caucus. It’s two strong candidates who want to lead our body — that’s a good thing.”

While some are painting this contest as establishment (Livingston) versus new blood (Gudger), Albritton said that’s not all of it. “It has to deal with political views, it has to deal with growing constituencies, it has to deal with, frankly, ambitions and it has to deal with disagreements, personal and political.” Several lawmakers said they did close the nominations, meaning no other names could be put forward now.

Once Reed’s resignation is effective January 1, Governor Ivey will call a special election to fill the Senate seat. If it’s a contest with candidates from both parties, the seat may be empty for much of the 2025 session. Immediately after his announcement became public, Rep. Matt Woods of Jasper announced he will be a candidate in the special election for State Senate District 5, which covers portions of Walker, Fayette, Lamar, Tuscaloosa and Jefferson Counties. Elected to the House in 2022, Woods has been a strong supporter of the grocery industry, authoring the Alabama Child Protection Act, helping lead the fight for the reduction of sales tax on groceries and co-sponsoring the elimination of income taxes on overtime wages.

In the continuing battle to implement Senator Chris Elliott’s 2023 legislation to allow online RVP (Responsible Vendor Program) training for the sale of adult beverages, the ABC staff has refused to agree to reasonable regulations. As a result, Sen. Elliott placed a hold on \$60 million worth of state contracts in an effort to pressure them into “doing the right thing.” And finally, they did. At their meeting on November 14th, ABC General Counsel read a short statement and recommended the Board approve new regulations drafted by Mindy Hanan, President of the Alabama Restaurant and Hospitality Association and supported by AGA, NFIB and many other business groups.

Participation in the RVP program has been woefully low due to the difficulty in keeping employees trained, but now you will be able to take advantage of the protections provided in that program by training your employees online. Call Ellie Taylor for details.

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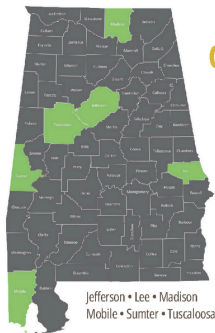


Members of the House and Senate have started filing legislation in advance of the 2025 legislative session which will begin on February 4th. This week, House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels of Huntsville announced he will file a bill in the 2025 session to make a temporary state income tax exemption on overtime pay passed in 2023 permanent. House Bill 217 by Daniels became law after the 2023 session, eliminating state income taxes on all overtime pay for Alabama hourly workers by excluding overtime, or any hours worked above 40 hours per week, from the state definition of gross pay.

The legislation was passed with broad Republican and Democrat support. The law went into effect on January 1, 2024 with a sunset date (expiration) of June 30, 2025. The legislature would have to approve extending the program before June 30, 2025, for the tax exemption to continue beyond that date. Most income in Alabama is subject to a 5% state income tax rate. We have seen reports that this law has returned as much as \$120 million to the pockets of working men and women in Alabama. It is a great incentive for grocers to encourage workers to accept overtime work. We are strongly supporting his efforts.

And finally, the Alabama State Board of Agriculture and Industries recently approved a \$22.1 million budget request for fiscal 2026, a \$560,000 increase over its 2025 budget largely to expand ongoing food programs. “It’s almost all food related,” Agriculture Commissioner Rick Pate told Alabama Daily News. “I do (think lawmakers will accept our request), they know we don’t go up there and ask for silly stuff.”

The department is asking for \$500,000 to fund the Hunger Solutions Institute at Auburn University’s Double Up Food Bucks program, which provides increased purchasing power for low-income Alabamians participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. The \$50,000 increase in the department’s request from the ETF was for the state’s Farm to School program, an initiative that began in 2021 that offers a \$0.20 reimbursement per meal to schools that serve meals containing an Alabama-grown product. ■



ECONOMIC IMPACT OF DOUBLE UP FOOD BUCKS ALABAMA

\$375,868

\$296,904
from **4** Independent Grocers

\$78,964
from **8** Farmers Markets

FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES PURCHASED FROM DOUBLE UP FOOD BUCKS ALABAMA RETAILERS

\$247,420
at Independent Grocers

\$56,403
at Farmers Markets

FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY OF DOUBLE UP FOOD BUCKS ALABAMA PARTICIPANTS

Participants spent an average of **\$26.61** (SNAP & DUFEB) on fruits and veggies at Farmers Market

Participants spent an average of **\$15.95** (SNAP & DUFEB) on fruits and veggies at Grocery Stores

On average, **21.4%** of fruits and veggies bought by participants were purchased with Double Up Food Bucks



AGA NEW MEMBERS



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INDUSTRY NEWS

ALABAMA LEADERS SET UP TO TAKE MORE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE LEGISLATION IN 2025



PAUL DEMARCO

AGA General Counsel
Parsons, Lee, & Juliano, PC

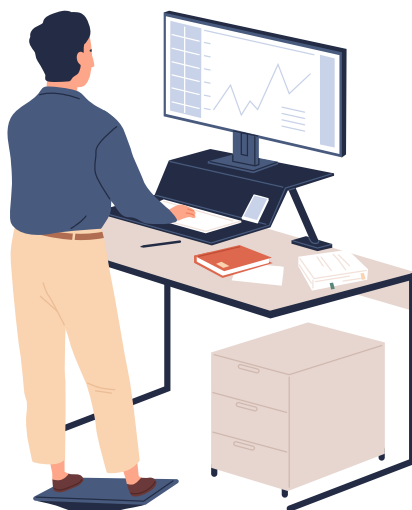
WITH THE ADVENT OF DECEMBER, WE ARE GETTING CLOSER TO YEAR END AND 2025 IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER.

The new year means the upcoming Alabama legislative session is also fast approaching and the talk of what bills will be taken up.

IF YOU LOOK AROUND THE COUNTRY, WHAT IS GETTING THE MOST ATTENTION FROM LAWMAKERS IS THE REGULATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI).

This is the next level of computing with the almost immediate search of infinite databases to generate requested content.

There is discussion at both the national and state level of focus on what AI means to both business and government operations. This past year, in state capitol buildings around the country there were almost 700 bills introduced of which 113 were enacted into law.



In 2024, the Alabama Legislature passed a new law that would prohibit the creation of artificially generated images an individual without their consent. A second bill that became law banned the creation of digitally created child pornography. Finally, Alabama State representatives and senators enacted a bill to prohibit of AI produced materially deceptive materials for political campaigns.

From sales to marketing to logistics, AI is being incorporated into every aspect of business. The grocery industry is no different and thus how government leaders evaluate how they are going to regulate the new technology is critical in this new frontier.

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey established by executive order a task force on generative artificial intelligence earlier this year to provide recommendations to state government. The commission is set to provide a final report on policies and procedures that should be adopted for the use by the state agencies.

So we can expect more legislation next year to deal with the future of artificial intelligence in Alabama. ■

THE 2025 AGEF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



DO YOU OR YOUR DEPENDENT NEED SCHOLARSHIP MONEY?



SCAN HERE TO APPLY!

\$750

Student Scholarship

\$1.4 MILLION AWARDED

Since the Beginning

\$1,000

Parent Scholarship

The Alabama Grocers Education Foundation (AGEF) is dedicated to enriching education and career development in the grocery industry.

APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN 11.01.24 THROUGH 02.15.25

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



THE GREATEST STORIES NEVER TOLD



MICHAEL SANSOLO

Retail Food Industry Consultant

ITS LITTLE WONDER WHY AMERICANS ARE SO FOCUSED ON FOOD PRICE INFLATION.

As we all know, people shop for food every week, if not multiple times each week. So the prices at the shelf are front and center repeatedly.

In contrast, even during the pandemic when used car prices skyrocketed, it likely impacted far fewer families unless they happened to be in the market for a car at that very moment.

And the central nature of food prices to our lives is why (as Alabama retailers know well) politicians in an election year always point out any spikes. After all, there's nothing to be gained politically by explaining that egg prices are up because of bird flu or that many staples are being impacted by a war in Ukraine. It's a lot easier to simply blame the industry every family knows and visits regularly.

It's simply easier for one side to claim the price hikes are due to profiteering and the other to claim inflation has never been worse. (Incredibly, both sides get it wrong because the more nuanced story is something politicians never tell.)

BUT THERE'S ANOTHER PART OF THE STORY OF FOOD PRICES THAT NEEDS GETTING TOLD BUT RARELY GETS ANY ATTENTION: THAT FOOD IN THE UNITED STATES IS AN INCREDIBLE BARGAIN BOTH HISTORICALLY AND GLOBALLY.

People may not believe that when they see the price of milk increase a few cents, but it's true.

I was born in 1955 at a time when the typical American spent 22 percent of their disposable income on food, more than they spent at that time on housing, health care or transportation.

It would probably shock many shoppers to realize that today food takes up a smaller share of the family budget than any of those other costs. And let's not forget that back in the 1950s no one was spending money on cable television, internet services or cell phone contracts, not to mention pumpkin spiced lattes.

The food industry's story is actually pretty amazing. Thanks to myriad advances in supply chain management, agriculture and more,

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Americans enjoy an incredible bargain when they buy food either at supermarkets or even in restaurants.

Americans pay a smaller share of their income for food than citizens in any other country and in some cases the gap is staggering.

A recent study by the Washington Post found that French citizens, on average, spend twice as much on food as Americans and not because their diets are so different. Keep in mind that France, like all of Western Europe, is a well-developed economy like the United States, so the difference shouldn't be so extreme. In contrast, in poorer and less developed countries, people spend the vast majority of their income on food.

The story of the industry's efficiency and effectiveness needs a public relations effort and that can start in the simplest of ways.

Certainly your shoppers won't want to hear or simply won't accept a story about industry efficiency when they are angered about rising egg or milk prices.



But it might help your cause if you more regularly communicated the cause of such changes, posting signs or using your social media accounts to explain why a bird flu outbreak caused a reduction in hens and therefore some supply issues and price increases for eggs.

Likewise, we need communicate better when weather problems (droughts or floods, for example) impact crops causing shortages or quality issues in all manner of products. We need remember that most American are blissfully unaware of the source of their food and need some education on the challenges of agriculture. Again, it may not soothe their anger, but it might make them more accepting.

In addition, the entire industry needs to do a better job talking to shoppers about all the ways the system improves and betters their lives. Consider some of the easy stories you could probably communicate right now:

- Virtually every refrigerated and frozen food case in use currently has LED bulbs inside, which are incredibly energy efficient and a vast upgrade from the fluorescent bulbs of the recent past. But that story is never explained to shoppers.
- Even the use of energy-efficient bulbs for lighting produces both savings and environmental benefits, but again, these improvements are rarely highlighted for shoppers.
- Local supermarkets do a wonderful job of supporting neighborhood charities and also hire people from all demographic groups including the elderly, teenagers and even people with developmental differences.
- Virtually every supermarket is part of a network that contributes to food banks to help the less fortunate.

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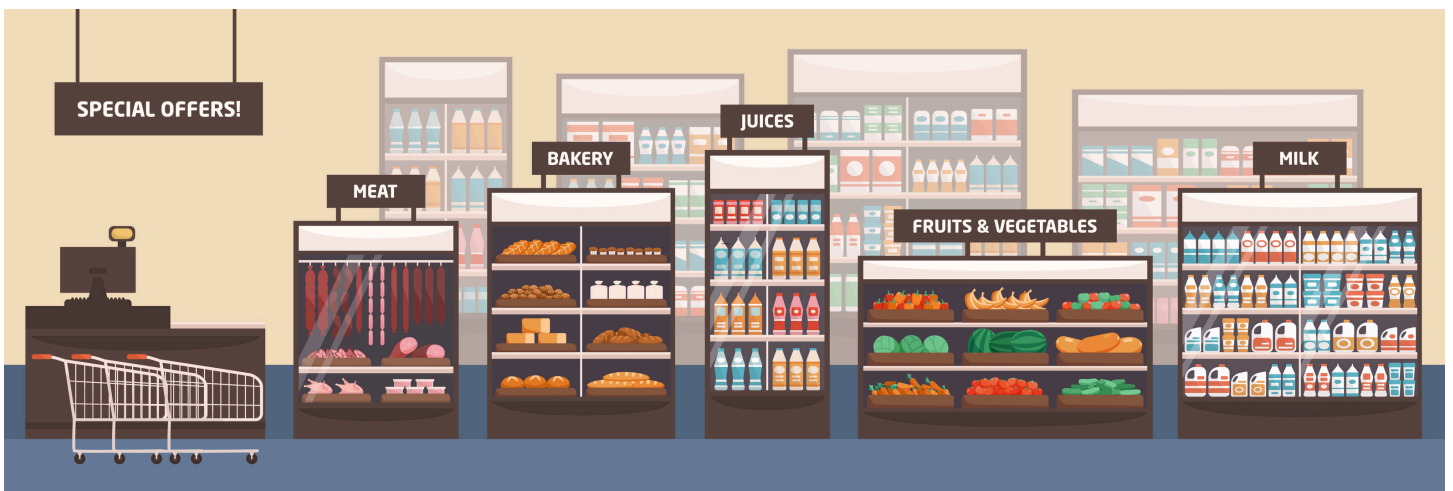
Yet as an industry we fail to shine a light on these and countless other positive efforts. And many of these efforts are done in concert with or with support from manufacturers. That partnership needs special attention as well.

The bottom line is simple: the industry actually has a terrific story to tell but we don't always think to tell it.

During the pandemic, shoppers rightfully applauded their local supermarkets for being open and having most, if not all of the products they were seeking. For a brief moment, shoppers became aware of how incredible and how fragile the supply chain is and they actually seemed to genuinely appreciate the incredible miracle supermarkets create constantly by having shelved fully stocked with glorious choices of items.

And despite temporary price increases, Americans get to fill their pantries and refrigerators at a cost that's the envy of the world.

It's a wonderful story but only if you tell it. ■





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ZERO CALORIE COLA

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ORIGINAL TASTE
Delicious & Refreshing

Proud Partner





INDUSTRY NEWS

GROCERY SHOPPING TRENDS FOR THE HOLIDAYS AND RETAIL FOODSERVICE



JENNIFER HATCHER

Chief Public Policy Officer
Food Marketing Institute

CONSUMERS FEEL CONFIDENT MANAGING THEIR GROCERY BUDGETS AHEAD OF HOLIDAY MEAL SEASON AND MORE SEEK PREPARED FOOD ITEMS FOR HYBRID MEALS.

In late October, FMI released our U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2024: Holiday Season report, which explores how consumers are maximizing their grocery dollars amid an environment of continued elevated food prices, particularly as they make plans for their holiday celebrations.

The good news?

DESPITE ONGOING CONCERNS ABOUT FOOD PRICES, SHOPPERS FEEL CONFIDENT IN MANAGING THEIR GROCERY BUDGETS AHEAD OF THE HOLIDAYS.

These findings are further supported by our newly released Power of Foodservice at Retail report, which found that retail foodservice purchases continue to play a key role in shoppers' meal preparation efforts.

Weekly grocery spending has remained relatively consistent this year, with an average of \$158 per week. Shoppers are sticking to strategies like deal-hunting, choosing store brands and buying fewer items. Many shoppers are also prepared to manage holiday-related expenses strategically, focusing their spending on special meals and holiday essentials while being mindful of budget constraints. These actions underscore a budget-conscious approach, with a clear focus on maximizing every dollar while still preserving the quality of their holiday celebrations.

Against this backdrop, consumers report a strong sense of excitement and enthusiasm for the holiday season despite concerns about rising prices, with 73 percent of those celebrating holidays feeling very or somewhat excited.

Furthermore, with 85% of shoppers reporting at least some control over their grocery expenses, shoppers are feeling more prepared to tackle holiday shopping this year.

The “hybrid” approach to meal preparation – which integrates retail foodservice items like deli-prepared foods into weekly grocery shopping – is also increasingly popular, with shoppers reporting they prepared and ate more dinners at home in 2024 than at any time since 2020.



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Shoppers recognize that semi- or fully-prepared items from their food retailer are valuable, budget-friendly options to supplement or even stand in for a meal cooked from scratch at home.

Consumer behavior is a significant driver behind the growth of retail-prepared foods, as evolving work patterns, health interests, and the need for convenience shape purchasing habits. The shift to hybrid work has had a direct impact on meal choices, with more people turning to retail foodservice for lunch and dinner. Lunch in particular has seen the largest net increase as shoppers seek convenient solutions when working both remotely and on-site.

Health and nutrition are also top of mind for consumers. While nearly two-thirds of shoppers say they prioritize nutritious choices when buying prepared foods, only 26% are “very” satisfied with the options currently available. This gap presents an opportunity for retailers to meet a clear demand for more nutritious options.

And of course, convenience continues to be a critical factor, especially for time-strapped shoppers. Together, these trends underline the growing role of retail foodservice as a solution for modern meal planning, providing options that are accessible, customizable, and increasingly aligned with consumer health goals.

These shifts not only highlight what consumers are looking for, but also reveal exciting opportunities for retailers to meet those needs more effectively.

These include increased meal-planning support, grab-and-go breakfast items, emphasizing the value proposition relative to dining out, providing online menus, and the ability to order ahead, and personalized marketing through digital tools.

Our research demonstrates that consumers are incredibly resilient and adaptable in finding affordable and creative solutions offered by the food industry in order to feed their families, increasingly from foodservice at retail. Food retailers that provide shoppers with a wide variety of options can demonstrate to customers that they are valued partners in helping them identify convenient solutions to feed their families delicious, nourishing meals this holiday season. ■





INDUSTRY NEWS

EDUCATION DRIVING THE EXCITEMENT AT THE 2025 NGA SHOW



GREG FERRARA

President & CEO
National Grocers Association

INDEPENDENT GROCERS ARE A DEDICATED BUNCH. FOR MANY, TIME AWAY FROM THEIR BUSINESS IS TIME WASTED, AND VACATIONS ARE CERTAINLY NOT A HIGH PRIORITY.

NGA understands that your time is precious. That's why The NGA Show is designed to help you make the most of your time, with an education-centric program built around what you need to know to move your business forward.

As I've stated many times, sometimes you need to take time away from your business to work on your business, and The NGA Show – Feb. 23-25, 2025, at the Caesars Forum Convention Center in Las Vegas – has the tools you need to fine-tune your business all year long.

From the high-powered general sessions to the laser-focused breakouts to the expo floor education theaters, The NGA Show's multi-track education lineup is designed to set grocers up for success. Retailers and industry insiders lead most sessions, while the on-floor Thought Leadership Theater features vendor-led sessions that showcase new and innovative tools, techniques, technologies and strategies to grow sales and improve operational efficiency.

This year, we're privileged to welcome Adm. William H. McRaven, retired U.S. Navy four-star admiral, celebrated author and former chancellor of the University of Texas System, as our opening keynote speaker, generously sponsored by The Kraft Heinz Co. In addition to commanding U.S. Special Operations Forces at every level, McRaven has authored several books based on his leadership experiences. Attendees are sure to be motivated by his lessons that draw on more than four decades of service.

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THE nga SHOW 2025

where GROCERS gather

2025	CONFERENCE FEB 23-25	LAS VEGAS, NEVADA
	EXHIBITION FEB 24-25	CAESARS FORUM CONVENTION CENTER

We'll have the Best Bagger Competition, sponsored by PepsiCo, with the top grocery baggers from across the country competing for the \$10,000 grand prize. The Creative Choice Awards, sponsored by Kellanova and Unilever, will recognize excellence in marketing and merchandising. And the industry's future leaders will offer innovative solutions for real-life challenges facing grocers in the Student Case Study Competition, sponsored by UNFI. This year's student topic: "Path to Sustainable Success," making the business case for grocery sustainability and how best to communicate its benefits.

BUT AT ITS CORE, THE NGA SHOW IS ABOUT EDUCATION, AND OUR PROGRAM IS DESIGNED TO KEEP YOU ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING OUR INDUSTRY, WITH TRACKS ON TECHNOLOGY, CONSUMER TRENDS, TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION, OPERATIONS, MARKETING, THE ECONOMY, AND PUBLIC POLICY.

Back again to open the show on Sunday, the Tech Innovation Summit will focus on accessibility and practicality, with a special emphasis on improving and empowering the customer experience. Among the companies represented onstage will be Instacart, GroceryShopii, Flashfood, Birdzi, Sifter, Recall InfoLink, Shook Kelley and King Retail Solutions.

More tech content is on the lineup over the following two days, including sessions on harnessing AI for price optimization, shifting to digital marketing, best practices for e-commerce and multiple sessions on retail media networks.

FMS Solutions returns to lead our Financial Symposium, on the heels of the latest NGA/FMS Independent Grocers Financial Study, which explores grocers' strategic responses to moderating inflation, shifting consumer behavior and rising operational costs.

Some highlights of the annual study: Despite inflation easing, elevated prices and more cautious shopper spending led to a slowdown in inventory turns. Same-store sales edged up by 1.8%, driven more by inflation than unit sales. To remain competitive, independent grocers invested in their operations, primarily on remodels, loyalty programs and digital marketing. The symposium will reveal more details and expert-driven insights.

Subsequent breakouts will focus on boosting operational excellence in waste reduction, driving differentiation with private brands, and maximizing assortment for competitive advantage.

There are also sessions on talent recruitment and retention, increasing sales in rural markets, prepared foods merchandising, digital ad spending, traceability and FSMA 204 compliance, leveraging AI for personalized marketing, and solutions for driving sustainability. Looking forward to seeing you at The NGA Show! ■





AGEF 2024 CLAY SHOOT

The Alabama Grocers Education Foundation (AGEF) held their annual Clay Shoot on Thursday, October 10, 2024, at Selwood Farm in Alpine, Alabama. The event raised over \$54,000 for the AGEF to provide scholarships to employees and children of employees of Alabama Grocers Association (AGA) member companies.

This year, the AGEF awarded 51 scholarships valued at over \$49,000. To date, AGEF has awarded over \$1.4 million dollars because of the tremendous support of our members at our events.

“This event was a phenomenal success, allowing our community to connect and come together for a good cause,” said Jake Sim, Vice President of A & R Super Markets and Vice Chairman of the AGEF Board of Trustees. “I am proud to be involved in the Alabama Grocers Association and witness firsthand their unwavering dedication and hard work in supporting the grocery industry.”

The winners of the Clay Shoot were as follows: First Place Team - EDLINCO Team; Second Place Team - United-Johnson Brothers Team Two; Third Place Team - Post Consumer Brands Team

“At AGA, we are deeply committed to supporting education and career development in the grocery industry. Our scholarship program is a testament to this mission, providing opportunities for future leaders to grow, innovate, and make a lasting impact,” said Ellie Taylor, President/CEO, Alabama Grocers Association. “Our association is thrilled to be supporting higher education efforts of Alabama’s youth and can think of no better investment.”



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 2024 Clay Shoot included A & R Super Markets; AGA Health & Welfare Trust; Alabama Crown; Alabama Power; Associated Grocers of the South; Associated Wholesale Grocers; Autry Greer & Son's; Blue Bell Creameries; Buffalo Rock/Pepsi; Bunzl Distribution; Byars | Wright; DCR; Don Francisco's Coffee; EDLINCO; Federated Insurance; Keurig Dr Pepper; Merrill Lynch; Mitchell Grocery Corporation; Piggly Wiggly Alabama Distributing Company; Post Consumer Brands; Publix Super Markets, Inc; Red Diamond; Retail Data Systems MidSouth; Reynolds American; RTD Products; SellEthics; Smithfield Foods; Sunset Farm Foods; T. Marzetti; Trend Sales; UNFI; United-Johnson Brothers; UTZ/Golden Flake; and Walmart.



Thank you to the companies that donated their products for the goody bags and beverage cart. Thank you to Associated Grocers of the South, Autry Greer & Son's, and Blue Bell Creameries 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 and AGA Director Charles Weathington 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.



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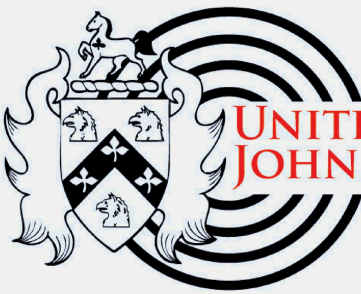
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FOOD INDUSTRY FINEST

Luncheon

The Alabama Grocer's Association (AGA) held their annual Food Industry Finest Luncheon on Wednesday, October 30, 2024, honoring their industry award winners. Senator Bobby Singleton and Representative Anthony Daniels were the guest speakers.

More than 120 people attended the event at The Club to discuss the work of the AGA in 2024 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 Kamal Constantine, Owner and President of Piggly Wiggly Gulf Coast.

"Being a member of AGA gives you a larger family," said Constantine. "AGA has worked very hard to give us the resources we need all while being our biggest cheerleaders. I cannot thank them enough for their support."

The Wholesaler of the Year Award was given to Charles Weathington, Market Development Manager at UNFI.

"There are many areas of value as far as being a part of AGA," said Weathington. "There is no reason you should not be a part of AGA."

The Vendor of the Year award recipient was Don Richardson, Key Account Manager at Coca-Cola Bottling Company, UNITED.

"I believe that the greatest value in being a member of the AGA is knowing that all of us have an advocate within the association who is working on our behalf every day," said Richardson. "The AGA has meant so much to me in being able to form new friendships and bonds."

"We are so honored to recognize these deserving individuals," said Ellie Taylor, President and CEO of the Alabama Grocers Association. "Their dedication to the grocery industry and the customers they serve is so incredibly important and truly embodies excellence in our industry."

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.



2023 AGA YEARLY SPONSORS

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BelleHarvest	Holten Meats	Sale Fish
Bengal Products	Hometown Market	Sargento Foods
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Dutch Farms	Post Consumer Brands	

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ASSOCIATION NEWS

AGA WISHES TO RECOGNIZE OUR DIAMOND AND FOUR STAR SPONSORS FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE 2024 ANNUAL SHOW

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Single - \$500, Family - \$1,000

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Single - \$2,800, Family - \$5,600

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Open Enrollment is
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WEBSITE

For benefit information, frequently asked questions, how to enroll and more, visit www.AGABenefits.com



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Scan the QR code to be take directly to the AGA Benefits website.



ASSOCIATION NEWS

UPCOMING EVENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

**ALABAMA GROCERS
EDUCATION FOUNDATION
CLAY SHOOT
OCTOBER 10, 2024**

**October 29, 2025
The Club
Birmingham, AL**

RETAILER OF THE YEAR	WHOLESALE OF THE YEAR	VENDOR OF THE YEAR
Eric Bruce Bruce's Foodland	Jay Mitchell JMBL/Mitchell Grocery Corporation	Bubba Lindley EDLINCO

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