

Alabama Grocer

2025, ISSUE 3

Alabama Grocers Association

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Communities
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Empower
Independent
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Show Recap
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CULTIVATING COMMUNITY



Associated Wholesale Grocers, Inc.



WIN TEAM



TO BE PART OF A WINNING TEAM PLEASE CONTACT:

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Associated Wholesale Grocers, Inc., 5000 Kansas Avenue, Kansas City, KS 66106

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President's Message

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2025 AGA Annual Show Recap

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

KEEPING GROCERS AT THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITIES



WADE PAYNE

Director Retail Operations
Food Giant/Mitchell Grocery Corp.

WELCOME TO A NEW CHAPTER FOR THE ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION.

I am Wade Payne with Food Giant/Mitchell Grocery. I am honored that the board chose me to lead this great organization for the next two years. I have been in the grocery business all my life, and Food Giant was a charter member of AGA. When we joined Mitchell Grocery in the early 1990s, it was great to be part of another Alabama grocery family. We have gotten so much from our membership in AGA.

I would like to thank Bob Crawford for his leadership over the last two years. We accomplished so much, and I hope to continue working on the things Bob and the board started. We have a great board and a great staff at AGA, and they all work tirelessly to help the grocery industry in Alabama. Without AGA, we would not be as successful as we are.

Growing up in the grocery business, you realize how important the local grocer is to a community—not just to supply food, but sometimes as the community center. It's where we meet friends, and for many of us, a grocery store was our first job. Over the next two years we will continue our work on government regulation and provide the information we need to keep growing in a changing business model. But

**FINDING WAYS TO KEEP OUR
SPOT AS THE CENTER OF OUR
COMMUNITIES IS ESPECIALLY
IMPORTANT TO ME.**



I am excited to help keep things on track. We have already been working. Ellie and her team have managed to get our convention next year moved back a day, which will help us all attend more easily. We have also been to Montgomery, working to educate our leaders about SNAP and what changes to the program really mean for the people of Alabama and for us.

We have the Clay Shoot on October 9th and the Food Industry's Finest Luncheon on October 29th. Please try to attend these great events—it will be worth your time. ■

Sincerely,

Wade

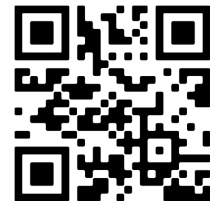
Join
-US-



AGEF CLAY SHOOT

10.09.25

Selwood Farm



BENEFITING





PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ALABAMA'S GROCERY TAX REDUCTION & NEW EXEMPTIONS ON ESSENTIAL ITEMS: A MEANINGFUL STEP FORWARD FOR FAMILIES



ELLIE TAYLOR

President/CEO
Alabama Grocers Association

I AM PLEASED TO SHARE THAT ALABAMA FAMILIES WILL SEE IMMEDIATE RELIEF AT THE CHECKOUT LINE WITH THE LATEST REDUCTION IN THE STATE'S GROCERY TAX—FROM 3% TO 2%.

While a one-percent decrease may seem small at first glance, the savings add up significantly over the course of a year. Each percentage point equates to an estimated \$125 in annual savings, meaning this reduction will allow households to keep approximately \$250 more each year compared to just a few years ago, when the grocery tax stood at 4%.

Groceries are among the most consistent and necessary expenses for every family. Rising food costs in recent years have placed increasing pressure on household budgets.

BY LOWERING THE TAX BURDEN ON ESSENTIAL FOOD ITEMS, ALABAMA IS TAKING A DIRECT AND MEANINGFUL STEP TO SUPPORT FAMILIES ACROSS OUR STATE.

This relief is especially impactful for working families and those living on fixed incomes, who feel the effects of inflation most acutely.

Beyond groceries, another important change takes effect on September 1, when the state

fully eliminates the sales tax on feminine hygiene products and baby items. These are not luxuries—they are basic necessities that families purchase regularly. Removing the state tax on these products acknowledges their essential nature and provides further relief for households across Alabama. Together with the grocery tax reduction, these changes reflect a strong commitment to helping families meet their most fundamental needs.



photo courtesy of Getty Images



AGA PROUDLY OFFERS ITS GROUP HEALTH PLAN!



BENEFITS & COVERAGE

We offer medical, dental and vision coverage for single, employee + spouse, employee + child(ren), and family plans.



OPEN ENROLLMENT

Open Enrollment is
February - March, 2025.



SMOOTH TRANSITION

Members on an existing health plan are eligible to participate in the AGA Health Plan. Open Enrollment is a qualifying event to change coverage.



WEBSITE

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



In-network deductibles:

Single - \$500, Family - \$1,000 **Out-of-pocket maximum:**

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



SCAN ME!

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

Alabama has historically been one of only a handful of states to apply a full sales tax to groceries. With this reduction and the elimination of taxes on feminine and baby products, Alabama joins a growing list of states making significant strides to lessen or eliminate taxes on essentials. These actions not only provide relief for families but also enhance Alabama's competitiveness by aligning our policies with states that prioritize affordability and economic well-being for their citizens.

While we celebrate this progress, we must also recognize that more work remains. Families

will benefit greatly from these reductions, but the ultimate goal should be the complete removal of the sales tax on groceries. Eliminating this tax would represent a bold, long-term investment in the health and financial stability of Alabama's citizens.

These changes highlight the importance of listening to our communities and responding with meaningful action. From the grocery tax reduction to the elimination of taxes on feminine and baby items, Alabama is taking significant steps to ease the financial strain on families. For households across our state,

these measures will provide real savings that can help cover other essentials—from school supplies to utility bills. As we look ahead, we remain committed to advocating for policies that strengthen families, improve quality of life, and move Alabama forward. ■

Sincerely,

Ellie



photo courtesy of Alliance Images

FOOD INDUSTRY FINEST LUNCHEON

OCT. 29, 2025
11:30 AM - 1:30 PM
THE CLUB



**RETAILER
OF THE YEAR**

Eric Bruce
Bruce's Foodland



**WHOLESALE
OF THE YEAR**

Jay Mitchell
JMBL/Mitchell Grocery
Corporation



**VENDOR
OF THE YEAR**

Bubba Lindley
EDLINCO





LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

SILLY SEASON IS HERE!



PATRICK MCWHORTER

Legislative Consultant
The McWhorter Group

BEFORE SAYING TOO MUCH ABOUT THE UPCOMING ELECTION SEASON, I DO WANT TO POINT OUT THAT WE ARE BLESSED THAT ALL OUR STATEWIDE ELECTIVE OFFICES SERVE FOUR- OR SIX-YEAR TERMS.

In Georgia, the entire state House and Senate are up for election every two years. So, it could be worse.

I DO NOT REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE HAD SO MANY OFFICES UP FOR GRABS.

Our Governor, Lt. Governor, Agriculture & Industries Commissioner, and Attorney General offices are all currently filled with persons who are prohibited from running for a third term. So, they are wide open. And we have the rare occasion of an open U.S. Senate seat, since Sen. Tommy Tuberville has decided to run for Governor rather than seek re-election. And the dominoes keep falling. U.S. Rep. Barry Moore is leaving his congressional seat to run for the Senate. The current Secretary of State is leaving that office to run for Lt. Governor. And State Auditor Andrew Sorrell is giving up that seat to run for Secretary

of State. Confused enough yet? Let's take them one at a time and see if we can make some sense of this mess.

Governor

Sen. Tuberville cleared the field when he decided to seek this office. Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth had been assumed to be Gov. Ivey's replacement, but he quickly decided he did not want to try to take on the Coach. So, there are no other serious Republican challengers, and thus far no Democratic challengers have come forward. There was talk that former Sen. Doug Jones would run, but he has made clear he does not intend to do so. AGA was the second business group to endorse Sen. Tuberville.



photo courtesy of Yellow Hammer News

Lt. Governor

Ainsworth will be out of office because he has served the two terms he is allowed. Ag Commissioner Rick Pate is running to replace him, and AGA has endorsed his campaign. Pate has been an excellent Ag Commissioner and definitely a great friend to the grocery industry. His opponent in the Republican primary will be Secretary of State Wes Allen. Pate spent 30+ years managing his turf-grass business in Lowndesboro before getting into politics. Allen served as Pike County Judge of Probate, then represented his county in the House of Representatives before being elected Secretary

2026 AGEF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



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SCAN HERE TO APPLY BEGINNING NOV 1ST

\$750

**Student
Scholarship**

**\$1.5
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 OPEN 11.1.25 AND ARE DUE BY 2.15.26

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

of State. This will be a hotly contested race.

Agriculture & Industries Commissioner

With Rick Pate having to leave the office, there is another wide-open race, and we have one of our own, Corey Hill, running for the office as the AGA endorsed candidate. Mayor of the city of Douglas in North Alabama, Corey grew up on a farm and still currently farms, but his day job is a grocery store, a poultry farm, and a cattle farm. Opposing Corey is state Senator Jack Williams of Mobile County and Christine Woerner McGinnis of Baldwin County. Williams has raised more in campaign contributions, and McGinnis is using her personal wealth, but Corey stands an excellent chance due to his extensive grassroots network.



Attorney General

Current AG Steve Marshall is also term-limited and has declared for the open U.S. Senate seat. His Chief Counsel, Katherine Robertson, is running with his endorsement, and State Supreme Court Justice Jay Mitchell resigned

that position to run for AG. The race will likely be the hottest in terms of the most money raised, and that has caused a great deal of controversy. Mitchell has already been endorsed by the Business Council of Alabama and the Rural Electric Co-ops of Alabama and leads in fundraising at this point. Ninety-nine percent of his money comes from the state of Alabama. Robertson, on the other hand, received contributions of \$1.1 million from a dark money group in Tennessee, and in Mitchell's statement, he says she received \$150,000 from "Florida billionaire Hugh Culverhouse Jr.—a donor with a well-documented history of pro-abortion funding and public contempt for the state of Alabama." And it was just announced that she is having a fundraiser in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Blount County District Attorney Pamela Casey is also running, but lags far behind in fundraising, although she just loaned her campaign \$500,000.

U.S. Senate

This race will generate a great deal of interest from Washington. As mentioned, current AG Steve Marshall is leading the race right now, but U.S. Rep. Barry Moore from Enterprise just announced as a

candidate. There are two other minor candidates in the race. Moore is known to have been the first elected official in the United States to endorse Donald J. Trump in 2015, and both are trying to attract the President's endorsement. Prior to becoming Attorney General, Marshall served as Marshall County District Attorney. Moore was a businessman and served in the state House of Representatives.

Secretary of State

This will be another interesting race. Auditor Andrew Sorrell thought he would have a clear shot at the office, but then Caroleene Dobson, who was the Republican nominee for the Second District U.S. House of Representatives seat in South Alabama, loaned her campaign \$500,000 and entered the race.

And I haven't gotten to the 140 House and Senate races that will be happening next year. We have had a high number of resignations and retirements, so there will be many open and competitive seats. Once those races become clearer, we will provide a breakdown of the candidates. ■



photo courtesy of Getty Images



INDUSTRY NEWS

ALABAMA ECONOMIC GROWTH KEY INDICATORS REMAIN STRONG IN 2025



PAUL DEMARCO

AGA General Counsel
Parsons, Lee, & Juliano, PC

A RECENT POLL CONDUCTED BY THE BUSINESS COUNCIL OF ALABAMA SHOWED THAT ECONOMIC ISSUES WERE THE TOP PRIORITY FOR REPUBLICAN VOTERS.

Those issues included reducing regulations, lowering taxes and increasing job opportunities.

The good news is that according to the Alabama Department of Workforce, the state's unemployment rate is at 3.0 percent, which is below the national average. Most importantly the number of those employed in the state is at 2.3 million people, a new record high.

To add to the good news, the labor force participation rate continues to increase and there were 28,000 new jobs added in the state.

In Alabama, there is no question agriculture is king, and the state relies on farmers and the food industry as one of the backbones of the economy. But you must add manufacturing as a major employer of the state's citizens.

Mercedes-Benz selected Alabama as its only US assembly plant in 1993 to begin production of its SUV models. With that investment, other automotive companies such as Honda, Hyundai, and Mazda-Toyota have come to the state. All of which has attracted a growing network of auto parts suppliers across the four corners of Alabama making the state in the top 5 nationally for automotive production and number one for auto exports. And it continues to grow, Mercedes has just revealed it is going to add another line of SUVs to its Tuscaloosa plant in 2027.

But cars and trucks are just part of the story, with the aeronautics and aviation industries continuing to expand in the state. Many companies, such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin have a strong presence in the state. The Airbus production facility in

Mobile has also just met a major milestone with the delivery to a customer of the 100th A220 aircraft manufactured in Alabama. And that all is within five years of coming to the state.

MANUFACTURING IN ALABAMA IS GROWING AND SO IS THE STATE'S REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE BEST PLACES FOR COMPANIES TO CALL HOME.



photo courtesy of Getty Images

The state was just again ranked in the top 10 in multiple categories for its business climate. The state appears to be fully back from the setbacks of the pandemic, and the economy is in full swing. Yet, there is still more to do to continue to make Alabama an attractive place to do business.

As we approach the next election cycle, candidates need to address their intentions for even more growth in the future. In addition to manufacturing, most importantly incentivizing small business owners to expand and grow in Alabama must be part of the plan. Other neighboring states are reducing their income taxes and regulations to continue to work to put monies back in the pockets of their citizens.

Alabama leaders must take the positive economic news and push forward to make our state the most attractive to do business in the Nation. ■

Paul DeMarco is a former member of the Alabama House of Representatives and serves as the General Counsel for the Alabama Grocers Association.

INDUSTRY NEWS

GOVERNOR IVEY DECLARES SEPTEMBER AS FAMILY MEALS MONTH

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey has officially proclaimed September as Family Meals Month, recognizing the vital role that shared meals play in strengthening families and communities.

Research shows that families who eat together regularly enjoy stronger connections, improved academic performance for children, and healthier eating habits overall. Shared meals also help reduce risky behaviors among teens and create space for meaningful conversation.

We thank Governor Ivey for highlighting this important initiative and encourage everyone to take part in the Family Meals Month campaign. Whether it's breakfast, lunch, or dinner, gathering around the table offers lasting benefits for every member of the family.

This September, we challenge you to make family meals a priority and celebrate the powerful impact of time spent together. ■



Learn more at www.FMI.org/family-meals-movement.



INDUSTRY NEWS

STRONGER TOGETHER: HOW NGA AND AGA EMPOWER INDEPENDENT GROCERS



GREG FERRARA

President & CEO

National Grocers Association

INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY GROCERS ARE AMONG THE MOST DETERMINED AND RESOURCEFUL BUSINESS OWNERS IN AMERICA.

Their success doesn't come from going it alone, but from building strength together. That spirit of unity is at the heart of the National Grocers Association (NGA) and the Alabama Grocers Association (AGA), two organizations that bring independents and wholesalers together and amplify their collective voice. By working side by side, NGA and AGA transform locally owned stores into a powerful coalition shaping the direction of food retail.

The impact of independent grocers is impossible to ignore. Individually, they serve their neighborhoods one customer at a time. In Alabama, AGA unites grocers under one roof, offering shared resources and representation that strengthen the industry statewide. Together, NGA and AGA provide independents with the leverage they need to be heard at every level of government,

ensuring that Main Street supermarkets remain a cornerstone of the American economy.

This critical advocacy work is carried out in Montgomery and Washington, D.C., alike. Decisions on issues like antitrust enforcement, SNAP benefits, labor policy, or credit card swipe fees have real and lasting consequences for independent grocers. NGA serves as the industry's national champion, fighting to ensure a level playing field, hold dominant chains accountable, and protect independents in supplier and policy negotiations. AGA works tirelessly in the Alabama State House, tracking dozens of bills each session and pressing for practical policies that safeguard grocers' ability to thrive.

At the forefront of our advocacy work are engaged members like newly installed

AGA Chairman Wade Payne, who has consistently been one of the industry's strongest voices. Wade has regularly met with lawmakers during the annual NGA Fly-In for Fair Competition, where he has been instrumental in making the case for fairer policies that support independents. He has also not shied away from speaking out on issues that are important to him and his community, ensuring that the public and policymakers alike understand the unique challenges independent grocers face. His leadership reflects the commitment of NGA and AGA to keeping independent supermarkets competitive and essential to their communities.

But advocacy is only part of the story. Membership in our two associations also unlocks invaluable opportunities to learn, network, and adapt to constant changes in the retail environment. NGA's share

groups, for instance, give executives a peer-to-peer forum to tackle challenges, exchange strategies, and uncover growth opportunities. AGA complements this with scholarships, industry resources, and events that build skills and foster long-lasting connections for members and their teams. Whether it's navigating new technology, complying with complex regulations, or responding to consumer trends, NGA and AGA provide tools and support systems that independent grocers rely on to stay resilient.

This collaborative spirit is on full display at The NGA Show,

the leading annual event for the independent grocery industry. With more than 350 exhibitors and dozens of education sessions, The NGA Show is where innovation meets inspiration. Attendees discover the latest in digital tools, merchandising strategies, and operational efficiencies—resources they can put into practice the moment they return home. For many, the Show isn't just about finding solutions; it's about re-energizing their vision for the future of grocery.

For independent retailers, joining NGA and AGA is more than a membership—it's an investment in longevity and

strength.

OUR TWO ASSOCIATIONS EQUIP GROCERS WITH ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, INNOVATION, AND COMMUNITY, ENSURING THEY CAN WITHSTAND CHALLENGES AND SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES.

Most importantly, they demonstrate that while independent grocers may compete in individual towns, together they form a powerful, united network that keeps Main Street grocery stores strong, competitive, and indispensable to American families. ■

ASSOCIATION NEWS

AGA NEW MEMBERS



Bryan Herdman

Monster Brewing

bryan.herdman@monsterbrewing.com



ARE YOU OUR NEXT MEMBER?
**ALABAMA GROCERS
ASSOCIATION**

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INDUSTRY NEWS

MEALTIME IN THE AGE OF AI



MICHAEL SANSOLO

Retail Food Industry Consultant

THIS IS A SCENARIO THAT IS LIKELY TO BE A REGULAR PART OF FOOD SHOPPING ALL OVER ALABAMA IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE, ASSUMING IT'S NOT ALREADY HAPPENING:

A busy mom with a job outside the home, two children, and a husband sits down on a Saturday to plan out shopping needs for the week ahead, starting with menu ideas. Only the task has become harder of late as one of her children is a vegetarian, another is trying to lose weight, and her husband is battling high cholesterol. And, no surprise, when she asks her family what they want, they offer no guidance.

Luckily for her, there's now a tool that will help her navigate all of this and on her budget. She visits the website for her local supermarket and clicks on its artificial-intelligence-powered meal planner, enters her specific needs, and within seconds a week's worth of menu ideas pops up on her screen.

Sounds like science fiction, but it's not. It's something that can easily be done today thanks to the emergence of various apps

powered by AI.

For example, a news outlet in the Washington, D.C., area where I live tried this very exercise with a local shopper and Chat GPT, one of the widely available AI offerings on the Internet. And within seconds the shopper received a week's worth of menu ideas with cooking instructions and all under her budget.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HAS ARRIVED, AND WHILE THE FULL SCOPE OF ITS USE REMAINS UNKNOWN, IT'S CLEAR THAT IT COULD BE AN ENORMOUS TOOL FOR SHOPPERS AND EVEN THE INDUSTRY ITSELF.

Already industry insiders are discussing how AI could be used for category management, ordering and assortment decisions, hiring, scheduling, training, and more. It's hard to

imagine any part of business that might somehow be immune from AI.

Those who have yet to experience AI can dip a toe in the water by trying Chat GPT or Microsoft's Co-Pilot for anything as simple as writing e-mails or assembling a presentation.

For example, I asked Chat GPT how AI could help run a supermarket. In just a few seconds, it produced:

AI can improve supermarket efficiency by managing inventory in real time, predicting stock levels, and reducing waste. AI-powered checkout systems streamline payment and cut wait times, while personalized promotions based on shopping history boost sales and satisfaction. Behind the scenes, AI strengthens supply chains, forecasts demand, and detects

pricing errors, making stores more responsive and profitable.

In the broader context of AI's role in supermarkets, recent advancements illustrate its potential:

- **Customer Behavior Analysis:** Tracking shopper movements to optimize layouts and product placement.
- **Inventory Management:** Predicting demand more accurately to reduce stockouts and overstocks.
- **Queue Management:** Anticipating peak times to improve staffing and shorten lines.
- **Personalized Marketing:** Offering tailored promotions to boost satisfaction and loyalty.

Or more to the challenge facing the food retail industry (and the fictional mom referenced at the start of this article), check out www.Ollie.Ai, an application currently available that shoppers can easily use to build menus. Or, as the app promises, "The smartest way to feed your family."

And if that doesn't get your attention, consider that Ollie (and it's just the first of what's sure to be an array of AI-

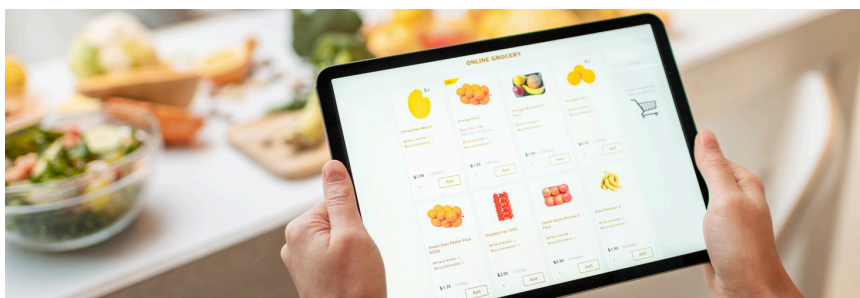


photo courtesy of RossHelen

powered choices) can link directly to online shopping services, meaning your customers could build menus and order products without ever setting foot in your store.

Obviously, no one can currently completely grasp the potential of AI, much as no one could have seen all the uses for the bar code when it was introduced 50 years ago. But, as with the code, over time the industry came to understand the power of the data it created and its use expanded far beyond what anyone thought possible in the mid-1970s.

Most of what we all know about artificial intelligence comes to us so far through science fiction movies, which, far from helping on recipe planning, usually involve machines violently overthrowing human society.

But in real life the likely outcomes are far less dramatic and yet, far more important. Armed with this new tool, companies might find ways to enhance the shopping experience and even better

deploy human resources, while allowing technology to handle non-customer-facing tasks. Certainly, no new technology comes without unforeseen problems or challenges, but the technologies keep coming all the same.

The question facing many companies out there is: What are you doing about AI? Do you have any staffers examining how it could improve your business practices, and are you personally even experimenting with Chat GPT or Co-Pilot and the like to get a sense of what it can and cannot do and what might be possible in the near future?

Hopefully the answers to those questions are "yes" because it seems increasingly likely that in very short order AI will become as essential to business as many technologies we widely use today. And if history has taught us anything, it's that those who don't get involved surrender competitive advantage quickly.

Given the speed of AI, that loss of advantage could accelerate with shocking speed. ■



INDUSTRY NEWS

SHOPPERS INCREASINGLY SHIFT ROUTINES AND PRIORITIZE “EATING WELL”



JENNIFER HATCHER

Chief Public Policy Officer and SVP, Government and Member Relations
Food Marketing Institute

SUMMER IS OFTEN A TIME FOR AMERICANS TO TAKE A BREAK FROM THEIR NORMAL ROUTINES AND ENJOY SPLURGING ON THINGS THEY NORMALLY WOULDN'T DURING THE REST OF THE YEAR.

As the summer months come to an end, we typically revert back to our old routines, but sometimes the summer helps us develop new ones as well. This is especially true for grocery shopping.

FMI recently surveyed grocery shoppers on their habits around meal occasions to understand where and how they're prioritizing meals and snacks at home. Our report, *U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2025: New Routines*, finds that shoppers' meal routines remain fragmented. Just 64% eat dinner regularly, and fewer still eat lunch or breakfast.

REGARDLESS OF ROUTINE, “EATING WELL” IS AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION AND ASPIRATION FOR SHOPPERS.

However they define it, shoppers share common themes, needs, priorities and values like interest in cooking

fresh, healthful food; sharing meals with friends and family; and eating ethically.

But other components of eating well are also important, with health and nutrition, as well as entertainment and enjoyment being particularly relevant during meals and convenience taking precedence with snacks. Underpinning all these meal and snack benefits is the widespread need for social eating with 82% of shoppers.

Dinner remains the centerpiece of shoppers' eating routines, with a focus on taste, socializing and a bit of fun. Among those who eat dinner regularly, most (63%) enjoy it at home with others more often than not (four-plus times a week) and many (43%) follow at least one weekly dinner tradition in the form of a specific type of repeating dish (tacos, pizza, pasta, etc.) that eases the burden of cooking

while creating a crowd-pleasing household ritual.

Consumers tell us they are most consistent about eating dinner and lunch. Peak dinnertime remains at 6:00 p.m., with 36% of shoppers having dinner at home and with others seven days a week. Health and entertainment are most important to eating well at all meals. For breakfast, shoppers seek health above all, while for snacking, combining convenience and health is a priority.

As we turn toward fall, roughly half of shoppers anticipate setting new routines around eating occasions. These include making meals at home (41%); eating dinners at consistent times (34%); eating at home with others (32%); and dining out less frequently (31%).

We also asked shoppers which meal occasions they intend to share together as a family in the future. While 54% wanted to share more dinners, an impressive 40% wanted to share more lunches and 43% wanted to share more breakfast occasions, indicating a significant opportunity to make family meals happen throughout the day.

The change in routines is even more acute for parents. Two-thirds to three-quarters expect changes depending on the meal occasion in question. However, the fact that parents are more likely than others to expect changes in both directions in the fall (i.e., both more and fewer meals at home) reflects the diverse ways that different families plan to adjust to school year schedules. Given these

shifts, parents are also more likely than others to ask retailers for convenience solutions and to pursue deliberate shopping strategies.

Additionally, this school year, 96% of American children aged 12 and under will be eating lunches at school during the week, more than last school year (up eight points from last August). Most (75%) will bring lunches from home every day or at least some days. The number of parents who expect their children to eat solely lunches from home increased from 23% in August 2024 to 39%.

Taken together, food companies have a distinct opportunity to take advantage of these changing behaviors. Retailers and suppliers that are

able to differentiate themselves through unique offerings that cater to health and nutrition, entertainment, enjoyment and convenience will be better equipped to drive loyalty among shoppers, particularly parents. The good news is that Americans are increasingly expecting to eat more meals at home this fall – something that is not only good for the industry but also for the health and well-being of families across the country. ■



To download the U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2025: New Routines report, visit www.fmi.org/grocerytrends.



photo courtesy of Happylark



ASSOCIATION NEWS

AGA WISHES TO RECOGNIZE OUR DIAMOND AND FOUR STAR SPONSORS FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE 2025 ANNUAL SHOW

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35TH ANNUAL AGA SHOW: A WINNING TRADITION

The Alabama Grocers Association scored big at its 35th Annual Show in Destin, Florida! Hosted at the Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort, the event brought together retailers, wholesalers, and vendors for a tailgate-style celebration of Alabama's grocery industry.

FOR 35 YEARS, THIS HOME-FIELD EVENT HAS FUELED GROWTH, CONNECTION, AND CELEBRATION FOR ALABAMA'S GROCERY INDUSTRY.

From education and networking to exhibitors showcasing the latest products and innovations, the Annual Show once again proved that when Team AGA comes together, everybody wins.

FUND THE FUTURE NIGHT SCORES BIG FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

AGEF's Fund the Future took the spotlight Monday night during the Welcome Dinner—and it was a touchdown for education! Thanks to the generosity of members and supporters, the event raised over \$40,000 for the scholarship fund, fueling opportunities for students pursuing higher education.

THIS YEAR ALONE, AGEF AWARDED 57 SCHOLARSHIPS VALUED AT MORE THAN \$49,000, AND SINCE ITS FOUNDING, HAS INVESTED OVER \$1.5 MILLION IN SCHOLARSHIPS.

A huge thank you goes out to all who contributed the incredible raffle packages, adding excitement and energy to the night. The crowd also got in on the action with a lively round of the classic heads or tails game—making it a true game-winning evening of fun, fellowship, and impact.



2025
Annual Show
RECAP



HAROLD GARRETT HONORED WITH *Spirit of America Award*

At the Alabama Grocers Association Annual Show in Destin, the National Grocers Association (NGA) presented Harold Garrett, President & General Manager of Gateway Foods, with the Spirit of America Award. The honor recognizes his extraordinary leadership, service, and dedication to the independent grocery industry.

With more than 50 years in the food retail industry, Garrett is admired for his perseverance, humility, and vision. His journey began at just 15 years old, bagging groceries at Piggly Wiggly in his hometown of Double Springs, Alabama. He later joined Gateway Foods in 1985, where he rose through the ranks to become President and General Manager, a role he continues to hold today.

**“HAROLD GARRETT REPRESENTS THE BEST OF WHAT OUR
INDUSTRY STANDS FOR: COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY, BELIEF IN
PEOPLE, AND AN UNSHAKABLE WORK ETHIC,”**

said Ellie Taylor, AGA President and CEO. “His leadership has helped shape the future of grocery in Alabama and serves as an example to us all.”



Beyond his work at Gateway, Garrett has been a dedicated advocate for the industry, serving nearly two decades on the AGA Board of Directors, including two terms as Chairman. His service and mentorship have left a lasting impact on Alabama’s grocery community.

The Spirit of America Award is one of NGA’s highest honors, recognizing leaders who embody service and dedication to community and country—qualities Garrett has demonstrated throughout his remarkable career.

Congratulations, Harold!



BUSINESS SESSIONS PLAYBOOK

The Monday Business Session kicked off like the opening drive of a big game, featuring Keynote Speakers Senator Tommy Tuberville & Commissioner Rick Pate with a National Legislative Update; Greg Ferrara, National Grocers Association & John Ross, Independent Grocers Alliance with a National Overview of the Grocery Industry; and an Alabama Power Panel including LaQuisha Buggs, Matthew Petro, Kent Gicker, and Andrew Virciglio.

On Tuesday, the momentum carried into the next quarter with Beth Z, Your Nerdy Best Friend, on Seven Ways Your Company Should Be Using AI; Sarah Mitchell Wagner, Mitchell Marketing Solutions with Grocery Marketing Gets Smarter: Practical AI Tools for Real Retail Results; and Jon Cline, FMS Solutions, closing out the session with a National Grocery Trends Overview.

Thank you to all of our speakers and attendees for making our 2025 Annual Show Business Sessions a winning playbook for success. We hope you left the huddle with invaluable industry insights, practical strategies for business growth, and strong connections with thought leaders and peers alike.



**SENATOR
TOMMY
TUBERVILLE**
National Legislative
Update



**COMMISSONER
RICK PATE**
National Legislative
Update



**GREG
FERRARA &
JOHN ROSS**
National Overview of
the Grocery Industry



**ALABAMA
POWER PANEL**
LaQuisha Buggs,
Matthew Petro, Kent
Gicker, & Andrew
Virciglio



BETH Z
Seven Ways Your
Company Should Be
Using Artificial
Intelligence



**SARAH MITCHELL
WAGNER**
Grocery Marketing
Gets Smarter: Practical
AI Tools for Real Retail
Results



JON CLINE
National Grocery
Trends Overview



Annual Show

Bringing Grocers to the Table



EXHIBIT HALL SHOWDOWN: A WINNING DISPLAY

The exhibit hall turned into the ultimate tailgate party this year, with more than 60 exhibitors bringing game-day spirit to the floor. From creative displays to festive team pride, the energy was electric. The competition for Best Decorated Booth was fierce, but United-Johnson Brothers of Alabama and UTZ Snacks/Golden Flake clinched the win, proving they know how to tailgate in style.







MIKE HANSON HONORED WITH *Spirit of Alabama Award*

At Tuesday night's Chairman's Banquet during the Alabama Grocers Association Annual Show, Mike Hanson was presented with the Spirit of Alabama Award, recognizing his outstanding leadership, service, and dedication to Alabama's grocery industry.

A respected leader known for his tireless work ethic and commitment to relationships, Hanson has previously been named Vendor of the Year by his peers.

**"MIKE HANSON REPRESENTS THE
VERY BEST OF OUR INDUSTRY—
NOT JUST IN HIS BUSINESS
ACCOMPLISHMENTS, BUT IN THE
WAY HE LEADS WITH INTEGRITY,
HUMILITY, AND HEART,"**

said Ellie Taylor, President/CEO of the Alabama Grocers Association. "He's been a true leader and advocate for products made in Alabama. This award is a small token of the deep appreciation we have for his decades of service and leadership."

Hanson's career began in 1985 with SC Johnson and later included leadership roles with Big B Drugs, Harco Drugs, ConAgra Frozen Foods, and Maybelline/Garnier. In 2009, he joined Milo's Tea Company, where he has helped grow the brand into the nation's #1 refrigerated tea while managing top accounts across the Southeast.

In addition to his corporate success, Hanson has been a strong advocate for the state's grocery industry. He has served on the AGA Board of Directors, Vice Chairman of the AGEF Board of Trustees, and has been a leader in the Buy Alabama's Best campaign—guiding efforts to spotlight and support Alabama-made products, including during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Spirit of Alabama Award honors individuals who exemplify excellence and community leadership—qualities Hanson has demonstrated throughout his career and service to the industry.

Congratulations, Mike!





BEST BAGGER COMPETITION: THE ROAD TO NATIONALS

It was game day for grocery greatness as the Alabama Grocers Education Foundation (AGEF) hosted the Alabama Best Bagger Competition! Fans packed in to watch the showdown as three all-star contestants—Amy Lee of K-V-A-T/Food City, Elizabeth Ripperdan of Publix Super Markets Inc., and James Scott of Rouses Market—stepped up to the line.

The competition was fast and fierce, with every bag packed like a winning play. When the final whistle blew, Elizabeth Ripperdan of Publix emerged as the MVP, claiming the championship title and the chance to represent Alabama at the National Grocers Association's Best Bagger Championship next year—where she'll compete for \$10,000 and national bragging rights.

From the roar of the crowd to the flawless “bag-and-go” moves, the event proved that grocery bagging is a true team sport. A special thank you goes to Bunzl Distribution and DCR, who sponsored and judged the event, helping make this competition a championship experience. Now, all eyes are on Elizabeth as she carries Alabama's pride onto the national stage—ready to bring home the trophy!





Annual Show
Bringing Grocers to the Table

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Attend educational sessions featuring speakers with topics directly related to the grocery industry.

SHOWCASE

Display your products and/or services at our Exhibit Hall and have a chance to win our Best Display of the Year Award.

ENJOY

Have fun at nightly entertainment, receptions, banquets and the beach!



For more information, please scan the QR code or contact Julie Owen



jowen@alabamagrocers.org



205.823.5498





ASSOCIATION NEWS

BUY ALABAMA'S BEST LAUNCHES SEPTEMBER PROMOTION WITH KICKOFF AT CHILDREN'S OF ALABAMA



BUY ALABAMA'S BEST PROUDLY LAUNCHED ITS ANNUAL SEPTEMBER PROMOTION WITH A SPECIAL KICKOFF EVENT AT CHILDREN'S OF ALABAMA.

Each September, grocery stores across the state sell paper icons at checkout to raise vital funds for Children's of Alabama, while spotlighting Alabama-made products and the companies who bring them to our communities.



This year's kickoff celebration was hosted at Children's of Alabama and featured a lively food expo where Buy Alabama's Best vendors showcased and sampled their products to retailers, wholesalers, and hospital staff. The event highlighted the strong partnership between Alabama's food industry and Children's of Alabama—a partnership built on gratitude, community, and giving back.

President of the Alabama Food Manufacturers & Producers Association, Bubba Lindley of EDLINCO, addressed the crowd, emphasizing the importance of supporting local businesses while giving back to Alabama's children.



Chairman of the Alabama Grocers Association, Wade Payne of Food Giant/Mitchell Grocery Co., encouraged retailers to take part in the promotion.



TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

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EDLINCO
Golden Eagle Syrup
Milo's
Moore's Marinade
Noddie's BBQ Sauce
Red Diamond
Sid's Sure Shot
Uncle Al's
Wickles Pickles



We are grateful to everyone who joined us in launching this year's campaign and to the countless shoppers who will support Children's of Alabama by purchasing icons throughout September. Together, we are proving that when you "Buy Alabama's Best," you're helping Alabama families thrive.



For a complete list of Buy Alabama Best participating companies, visit www.buyalabamasbest.org. ■



WHEN YOU BUY ALABAMA'S BEST, YOU'RE NOT JUST FILLING YOUR CART—YOU'RE FILLING HEARTS AT CHILDREN'S OF ALABAMA.



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Red Diamond Coffee & Tea
Retail Data Systems Mid South
Reynolds American Company
Truno, Retail Technology Solutions
Utz/Golden Flake

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EDLINCO
Food Giant Supermarkets
Fresh Value
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Keurig Dr Pepper
Kroger Company
K-VA-T Food Stores
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ASSOCIATION NEWS

UPCOMING EVENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS



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