

Alabama Grocer

2026, ISSUE 2

Alabama Grocers Association

**AGEF Golf Outing
Drives Impact for
Scholarships and
Industry Connection**
PAGES 26-28

**Making Alabama's
Voice Heard on
Capitol Hill**
PAGES 32-33



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FEATURES

AGEF Golf Outing Drives Impact for Scholarships and Industry Connection

From friendly competition to meaningful impact, the 2026 AGEF Golf Outing showcased the grocery industry's commitment to education and future leaders.



2026–2027 AGEF Scholarship Recipients

Education, opportunity, and gratitude. Learn how AGEF scholarships are helping students achieve their goals and prepare for the future.



Making Alabama's Voice Heard on Capitol Hill

As America celebrates 250 years of independence, AGA reflects on the importance of engaging directly with elected leaders on behalf of Alabama grocers.



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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

ADVOCATING FOR ALABAMA GROCERS IN WASHINGTON AND BEYOND



WADE PAYNE

Director Retail Operations
Food Giant/Mitchell Grocery Corp.

I JUST FINISHED SPENDING A WEEK IN WASHINGTON, DC, WORKING ON THINGS THAT WILL HAVE A GREAT IMPACT ON THE GROCERY BUSINESS.

I was glad for the opportunity to talk to our leaders about the things they do and how they have or will affect all of us back home in Alabama. I was proud to represent the independent grocers on a panel that kicked off a new effort called the Main Street Competition Coalition that is working to make sure as independent grocers we have a level playing field to compete. This recognizes that sometimes the local grocer is the heart of a

community and is vital for the survival of that community, especially in rural areas. It is also focused on pharmacies and farmers, not just grocers. It is taking up the fight against consolidation that gives the big guys too much power in the market.

I was joined in DC later by independent grocers from all over the country for our NGA Fly-In. We learned things that were

going on that affected our business and then spent time on Capitol Hill talking to our representatives about these issues. I was proud of our group from Alabama led by Ellie Taylor because we brought an issue concerning the very real threat to SNAP funding. In fact, due to Ellie's and Jimmy Wright's research, we found out we were way ahead of other states in recognizing how much of a threat the legislation passed last year



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is to SNAP. We are working on a plan for it, and it will be a guide for other states to follow and hopefully keep the funding in place for this vital program. Again, we are fortunate to have passionate grocers who will get involved and leaders who will take these issues and fight for what is right. We all benefit from these efforts.

AS WE CELEBRATE AMERICA 250, WE RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE FORTUNATE TO LIVE IN A COUNTRY WHERE WE CAN TALK TO OUR LEADERS ABOUT THINGS WE NEED, AND THEY LISTEN.

It was good to be able to go to Washington, but as always, there is nothing better than getting back home to the great state of Alabama and the friendly people. I hope you have a great second half of the year.

Please check our busy calendar of events with AGA and attend when you can. If there is anything we, as the Alabama Grocers Association, can do for you, please let us know. ■

Sincerely,

Wade



photo courtesy of NGA



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION HELPS SHAPE SNAP WAIVER LEGISLATION



ELLIE TAYLOR

President/CEO
Alabama Grocers Association

THE 2026 ALABAMA LEGISLATIVE SESSION BROUGHT ONE OF THE MOST CLOSELY WATCHED FOOD POLICY DEBATES IN RECENT YEARS AS LAWMAKERS CONSIDERED LEGISLATION SEEKING A FEDERAL WAIVER TO RESTRICT CERTAIN SNAP PURCHASES IN ALABAMA.

Through months of negotiations and advocacy, the Alabama Grocers Association (AGA) worked to ensure the final legislation was practical, narrowly tailored, and workable for retailers across the state.

The process began well before the Legislature convened in January. In September, AGA representatives met with Representative Rex Reynolds, Representative Reed Ingram, and Senator Arthur Orr to discuss early drafts of the proposed SNAP waiver legislation and the operational concerns it could create for grocery retailers.

At that time, the original versions of the bill were significantly broader than the final legislation that ultimately passed. Early drafts proposed restricting SNAP purchases for a wide range of products, including all soft drinks, energy drinks, all candy products, and all baked goods, including grocery deli and bakery

items. Retailers immediately raised concerns about the complexity of implementation, the lack of clear product definitions, and the operational burden such a broad restriction would create at checkout.

Throughout the process, Senator Arthur Orr became a key advocate for ensuring retailers' concerns were heard and addressed. Working closely with AGA, Senator Orr helped shape a more focused and workable version of the legislation.

One of the most important compromises achieved during Senate negotiations was narrowing the affected products to only high sugar carbonated soft drinks and candy. Equally important, AGA secured language requiring the state to provide retailers with detailed guidance on implementation, including a UPC

based list of products covered under the waiver. This provision was critical to ensuring retailers would not be left to independently determine which products qualified under the law.

The bill continued to evolve as it moved through the legislative process and into the Alabama House of Representatives. During House consideration, lawmakers made several additional changes, including shifting responsibility for administering the waiver from the Alabama Department of Revenue to the Alabama Department of Human



Resources. The House version also added energy drinks back into the legislation, raising new concerns for retailers about product classification and enforcement.

Because the House version differed from the Senate passed bill, the legislation was sent to a conference committee for final negotiations. During those negotiations, Senator Orr remained committed to the agreements made with the Alabama Grocers Association earlier in the process.

True to his word, Senator Orr ensured the final compromise returned to the original framework negotiated with AGA. The final version of the legislation limits the waiver request to only candy and high sugar carbonated soft drinks, removing broader restrictions that had been proposed earlier in the session.

Another major issue during negotiations involved which state agency would be responsible for providing retailers with product data and implementation guidance. As discussions progressed, neither the Alabama Department of Revenue nor the Alabama Department of Human Resources wanted responsibility for maintaining and distributing the detailed retailer product information.

To resolve the issue, lawmakers adopted a compromise



photo courtesy of Getty Images
April and was signed into law as Act 2026-537 on April 15, 2026.

recommended by AGA, stating that once the waiver is submitted to the USDA, the Governor will designate the appropriate state agency responsible for administering the details of the waiver and providing retailers with implementation guidance and product identification information.

The final legislation, SB57, requires the Alabama Department of Human Resources to request a federal waiver from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to exclude candy and soda from eligible SNAP purchases. The bill also requires the state to publish product identification information, including UPC related data, for affected items.

The legislation further protects retailers by prohibiting penalties for accidental SNAP transactions involving restricted items unless a retailer has more than three accidental violations in a fiscal year.

The bill passed both chambers in

WHILE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WAIVER WILL ULTIMATELY DEPEND ON FEDERAL USDA APPROVAL, THE ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION'S INVOLVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS HELPED ENSURE THAT RETAILERS' OPERATIONAL REALITIES REMAINED PART OF THE CONVERSATION.

From narrowing product categories to securing retailer protections and implementation guidance requirements, AGA's advocacy played a significant role in shaping the final outcome of the legislation. ■

Sincerely,

Ellie



ELECTION SEASON REMAINS IN FULL SWING



PATRICK MCWHORTER

Legislative Consultant
The McWhorter Group

WE HAVE A VERY TEMPORARY BREATHER FOLLOWING THE FIRST PRIMARY.

AGA saw great success with the candidates we endorsed. But we can't rest on our laurels, because several of our candidates will again face off in the runoff election on June 16. Also, there will be special elections, called by Governor Ivey, for State Senate Districts 25 and 26. They will be held on August 11. It is not known yet for Congressional Districts 1, 2, 6 and 7, pending another Supreme Court ruling.

On the congressional side, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the Louisiana Callais case held that a state could not draw congressional districts using race as the predominant factor. Following that decision, Alabama asked the Supreme Court to revisit an earlier ruling that required the state to adopt a new congressional map creating an additional district. The Supreme Court instead returned the matter to the lower court, where the judges declined to alter their previous decision. That ruling has also been appealed to the Supreme Court, leaving uncertainty surrounding the

special election scheduled for August 11.

State Senate Districts 25 and 26 are a different story. The U.S. Court of Appeals overturned a previous court decision redrawing these two districts and ordered that the old districts be used. Therefore, Sen. Kirk Hatcher, who has been representing citizens in District 25 but had been a candidate in the new District 26, and Sen. Will Barfoot, who has been representing the citizens of District 26 but was a candidate for District 25, will now go back to their original districts. So, Gov. Ivey has called a special election for those two seats on August 11. It will be winner take all; there will be no runoff if one candidate does not get 50%. Confused yet?

Things are a bit clearer in the remaining races. Of course, Sen. Tommy Tuberville had token opposition in the primary race for Governor, winning handily with 85% of the vote. He will face former U.S. Senator Doug Jones in the General Election.

Our biggest focus is and has been the race for the open seat of Commissioner of Agriculture & Industries. One of our own, AGA member Corey Hill, led the field. But we have a runoff. Sen. Jack Williams ran third and has endorsed Corey. His opponent is a newcomer to politics, Christina McGinnis, who ran second to Corey by a narrow margin. Sen. Williams has endorsed Corey and is bringing his 30% of the vote with him. We've never had an actual grocer in that post, and it will be a huge boon to our efforts.



In the U.S. Senate race, Jarod Hudson was somewhat of a surprise, pushing Attorney General Steve Marshall out of the race. He faces Congressman Barry Moore, who is our endorsed candidate, on June 16. A recent poll shows Congressman Moore with a 15 point lead in that runoff race, so we are very optimistic. He has been a strong supporter of our industry.

In the Lt. Governor's race, former party chair John Wahl is leading Secretary of State Wes Allen in that same poll. Unfortunately, our dear friend and endorsed candidate, Ag Commissioner Rick Pate, was drowned out by the battle between Wahl and Allen. But Wahl has been a good friend of our industry and has, as one of his primary platform issues, the total removal of the grocery sales tax. He was very helpful to the Legislature in reducing the state tax from 4% to 2%.

The other big race of interest in the runoff election is for Attorney General. Our endorsed candidate, former Supreme Court Justice Jay Mitchell, ran second to the current Attorney General's chief aide, Katherine Robertson, in the first primary. But he has been endorsed by the third place candidate, DA Pamela Casey, and we have high hopes for this race as well. Mitchell and Casey combined to receive 70% of the total primary vote.

Our endorsed candidate, Caroleen Dobson, won her race to

become Secretary of State by a wide margin.

WE SCORED ALMOST PERFECTLY IN THE RACES WE ENDORSED IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE, WINNING 64 SEATS IN WHICH WE MADE AN ENDORSEMENT AND LOSING ONLY 1.

Most of our candidates face little or no opposition in the General Election. Most notable, several major trade groups in the state opposed Senator Andrew Jones, but we endorsed him due to his strong support and leadership on the sales tax reduction. He won his primary, but faces another Republican in the fall running as an independent. So we have to keep working.

Several key legislators and other office holders were defeated in the primary. PSC Commissioner Jeremy Oden was soundly defeated in his reelection bid. And PSC Commissioner Chip Beeker, who the Governor appointed to replace his father, was forced into a runoff. In the Legislature, those defeated included Sen. Greg Albritton, chair of Senate Finance & Tax General Fund; Sen. Dan Roberts, chair of Contract Review;

Rep. Matt Simpson, chair of the House Ethics Committee; Representative Kelvin Datcher; Representative Greg Barnes; and Representative Jim Carnes, chair of House Commerce. These members will be missed, and we will have a whole new group of legislators coming in.

It is such an honor to represent this industry in Montgomery. If there's ever any way I can be of service to you, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at 334-221-0220 or patrick@themcwhortergroup.com.



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NEWLY-ELECTED ALABAMA OFFICIALS SHOULD MAKE ABOLISHING GROCERY TAX PRIORITY IN 2027



PAUL DEMARCO
AGA General Counsel
Parsons, Lee, & Juliano, PC

SO AS THE ALABAMA CAMPAIGN SEASON MOVES ALONG FROM THE PARTY PRIMARIES TO THE RUN-OFFS AND ULTIMATELY THE GENERAL ELECTION IN THE FALL, THERE WILL BE A LOT OF PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS.

Of course, pocketbook issues are usually first and foremost on the minds of everyone that heads to the polls. All of the candidates running for office want to promise “a chicken in every pot” to solicit support.

States across the Nation, particularly those in the Southeast, have passed targeted tax relief for their citizens. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, in the past five years over half of the states cut the personal income tax. Other states, have

looked at ways to focus tax relief that would benefit children, families and veterans. Some states have zeroed in on reducing capital gains taxes and lowering corporate taxes to stimulate economic development and job growth for their communities.

ALABAMA LEADERS CAN ACTUALLY DELIVER ON A LONG TERM PROMISE THAT WOULD HELP EVERYONE - THAT IS TO FINALLY ABOLISH THE STATE TAX ON GROCERIES.

Alabama is one of the few states to still tax groceries and the issue will remain on the table until it is completely removed.

For decades, this has been on the table but Alabama State Representatives and Senators struggling to balance the state budget did not have the income to strip away the grocery tax.

As state finances improved, legislators finally took the opportunity to tackle the grocery tax.

In 2023, legislators made their first effort of reducing the tax by dropping it from 4 percent to 3 percent. In 2025, lawmakers took another swing at the grocery tax, reducing the tax from 3 percent to 2 percent. This year state leaders temporarily suspended the tax from May 1st to June 30th.

What we now need to come the new year is for Alabama legislators to join the majority of states and finally abolish the grocery tax. Hopefully, 2027 will be the year we see this tax removed once and for all to benefit the citizens of the state.

Paul DeMarco is a former member of the Alabama House of Representatives and serves as the general counsel for the Alabama Grocers Association. He can be found on X at @Paul_DeMarco and LinkedIn.



photo courtesy of Bianca



ALABAMA ON THE HILL: WHY OUR VOICE MATTERED AT NGA'S 2026 FLY-IN FOR FAIR COMPETITION



GREG FERRARA
President & CEO
National Grocers Association

THIS PAST MAY, INDEPENDENT GROCERS FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE COUNTRY BOARDED PLANES, TRAINS, AND RENTAL CARS AND CONVERGED ON WASHINGTON, D.C. FOR ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS ON OUR INDUSTRY'S CALENDAR: THE NATIONAL GROCERS ASSOCIATION'S FLY-IN FOR FAIR COMPETITION.

Alabama's delegation was proud to be among them, walking the marble halls of the Capitol and bringing the perspective of family-owned, community-rooted grocers directly to the lawmakers who represent us.

Over two days of policy briefings, advocacy training, and back-to-back meetings on Capitol Hill,

independent grocers held more than 125 meetings with members of Congress and their staff. Together, with peers from across the country, they delivered a letter signed by nearly 1,700 independent grocers, asking Congressional leadership to take long-overdue action on credit card swipe fee reform. The message was simple, unified, and

unmistakable: independent grocers cannot keep absorbing the cost of an uncompetitive payments market, and neither can the families we serve.

The Cost of Inaction

For those who haven't lived inside the realities of running an independent supermarket, the swipe fee fight can sound like inside baseball. But the numbers tell a story every grocer and every shopper should know.

Two credit card behemoths control roughly 80 percent of the U.S. credit card market. Because there is no real competition, they set the network and interchange fees that merchants are required to pay, and they raise those fees on a schedule of their choosing. In 2024 alone, those increases totaled \$187.2 billion. For an industry where net profit margins average just 1 to 2 percent, every fee hike has to come out of something: store investments, employee wages, or the prices we



charge at the register. The average American family now pays roughly \$1,800 a year in hidden swipe-fee costs baked into the price of everyday goods.

That is why the bipartisan Credit Card Competition Act

(S.3623/H.R.7035) was at the center of our conversations on the Hill. The bill takes a simple, pro-market approach: require that credit cards issued by the largest banks support at least two competing networks, so that merchants have a choice and the

payment giants finally have to compete on price and service. It is not a price control. It is not a subsidy. It is competition, applied to one of the only corners of the American economy where it does not currently exist.

A Special Welcome to a First-Time Advocate

This year's Fly-In carried an extra layer of meaning for the Alabama Grocers Association, because it marked the first trip to Washington for one of our newest advocates, Stephanie Crabtree. Stephanie stepped into the role with curiosity, confidence, and a clear understanding of what's at stake for Alabama's grocers. From her first policy briefing to her final office meeting on the Hill, she carried AGA's story with poise and purpose.

There is something powerful about watching a first-time advocate find her footing in the Capitol. The first meeting is always the most intimidating; by the third or fourth, you start to see the lawmakers and staff nod with recognition because you have shared something they hadn't heard before, a real story from a real store in their district. Stephanie did exactly that. She reminded us why we keep showing up:

EVERY NEW VOICE WE BRING TO WASHINGTON BROADENS OUR INDUSTRY'S REACH AND DEEPENS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN POLICY AND MAIN STREET.



Honoring Champions of Fair Competition

The Fly-In also featured the presentation of NGA's prestigious Spirit of America Award, which this year was given to U.S. Senator Roger Marshall (R-KS) for his leadership on the Credit Card Competition Act and his steadfast advocacy for independent grocers and rural communities. Established in 1982, the Spirit of America Award has previously honored leaders such as Presidents George H. W. Bush and Gerald Ford, Vice President Dan Quayle, General Colin Powell, and former Speaker Tom Foley. Senator Marshall joins a remarkable lineage, and his recognition is a reminder that when grocers organize and engage, we can earn champions on both sides of the aisle.



photo courtesy of NGA

Why Membership and Advocacy Matter

Trips like this don't happen by accident. They happen because the National Grocers Association builds the platform, the relationships, and the policy expertise that turn 125 meetings into real momentum on Capitol Hill. They happen because state associations like AGA recruit, prepare, and travel with the grocers who generously take time away from their stores to speak up. And they happen because individual members invest their time, their dollars, and their personal stories in something bigger than any one company.

If you are an independent grocer in Alabama and you are not yet a member of NGA, this is your invitation. Membership gives you a voice in Washington, access to industry-leading research and resources, and a seat at the table when the policies that shape your business are being written. Advocacy is no longer optional for our sector. It is how we keep our doors open, our shelves stocked, and our communities served.

The Fly-In is over for this year, but the work continues as our members are unified. And until key pieces of legislation like the CCCA are passed, the National Grocers Association will keep showing up, keep telling our story, and keep building the next generation of advocates. ■



ASSOCIATION NEWS

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INDUSTRY NEWS

A MATTER OF INFLUENCE



MICHAEL SANSOLO
Retail Food Industry Consultant

IT'S SAID THAT THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS BAD PUBLICITY.

I have a feeling the CEO of McDonald's might well disagree.

As you no doubt saw in all forms of media recently, CEO Chris Kempczinski of McDonald's went viral for a video meant to highlight a new burger available at the Golden Arches. In the video, Kempczinski waxed poetically about the new product and prepared to take a big bite.

Only he didn't.

Instead, he took a small nibble, which might have been his way of



photo courtesy of Africa Images

politely eating and talking without too much food in his mouth. Instead, he became an inadvertent Internet joke for appearing to not like his new burger very much.

The joking went beyond the usual Internet barbs as his main competitors mocked him by chomping heavily into their own products.

In case you didn't know already, the Internet can be a mean place, but it's also a place where a company can find new ways of connecting with shoppers, building brand identity, and possibly creating a whole new level of relationships.

Compare the sad McDonald's story with something very, very different happening at Staples, the office supplies store.

Kaeden Rowland started a new job as a print specialist at a single Staples store in upstate New York last summer. Today, she has hundreds of thousands of followers who know her as the

Staples Baddie, her online moniker.

Rowland, who shoots videos about a range of Staples products, no doubt has none of the support staff and video crews that surrounded Kempczinski when he shot his ill-fated burger video. What Rowland has is something that is good as gold on the Internet: authenticity.

Her videos largely take place at work in her store, where she'll talk about various products and services. In one video, she explains that she started doing it because she didn't think the company explained itself well in traditional ads. She admits she thought the videos would get her fired, but instead Staples has come to embrace her, which makes sense given that her videos have been viewed more than 18 million times by one recent count.

While her success might be extraordinary, it's not entirely unusual. There have been other stories of staffers in

supermarkets, restaurants, and more building online followers through quirky (and at times informative) postings.

So the question companies need to ask is how to take part in this very new world of communications and marketing.

I recently met an influencer who explained to me some of the keys to her craft, which have earned her a following of about 500,000 people.

The main key, she says, mirrors what seems to be the secret sauce for the Staples Baddie. Essentially, the content and the person providing it must be authentic. That means no actors or scripts, just people who genuinely use and enjoy specific products.

The influencer I met goes by the name of “One Sweet Mama” and features recipes for making various candies and other treats. As she says, what makes her authentic is that she makes the items in her home kitchen, so essentially she’s doing what her followers want to do.

The authenticity extends to relationships she’s created with her fan base. She frequently gets responses from many viewers (luckily, not all half million) and she tries to respond whenever possible so that her viewers know she’s a real person really doing what they see.

(By the way, it’s also a creative way to build income as she makes money through the clicks on her site and videos, plus she draws advertiser dollars for products and appliances.)

Granted, the entire notion of allowing front line employees to represent your stores, products, or services might be enough to raise serious concerns. It’s hard to imagine that every wannabe influencer will find the right tone as easily as the Staples Baddie has done for her

But with the risk comes the reward. Real people authentically talking about your stores, products, and services might humanize your company in ways that traditional advertising never could. It might, as it’s doing for Staples, give shoppers an unexpected reason to connect with you.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE AUTHENTICITY AND CONNECTION IN SUPERMARKETS IS ALMOST ENDLESS.

Consider having your produce manager talk about seasonal items, offering thoughts on how to carefully select an item and how to best serve it. A meat manager could do the same with different cuts and menu ideas.

In addition, suppliers can get in the game by having key staffers talk about various aspects of individual products, such as menu ideas, nutritional information, and certainly how anything fits into economical meal planning. But rather than simply making these statements appear like advertisements, which people click past rapidly, allow people to give these videos authenticity and personality



photo courtesy of pocstock

similar to the Staples Baddie.

In building relationships, you might well build loyalty and the sales that go with it. But again, before you turn staffers into influencers, it might help to establish some ground rules,

including what can and cannot be done during work hours. And remember that the Internet era has constantly taught us all that guidelines are easily erased or ignored.

Just remember, missteps such as

the one we all saw at McDonald's take on a life of their own on the Internet, so even the best intentioned efforts need some level of thought and planning.

And, of course, a big bite of authenticity. ■



photo courtesy of TrueCreatives

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WHY THE PHYSICAL GROCERY STORE STILL MATTERS



JENNIFER HATCHER

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

DESPITE THE RISE OF ONLINE ORDERING, CURBSIDE PICKUP AND HOME DELIVERY, MOST AMERICANS STILL PREFER TO SHOP FOR GROCERIES IN PERSON.

That is one of the key findings from the [2026 U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends](#) report, recently released by [FMI – The Food Industry Association](#).

The annual study offers a detailed look at how shoppers define value, what they expect from stores and why the physical grocery experience continues to play an important role in American life.

THE FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT WHILE CONSUMERS ARE INCREASINGLY BLENDING DIGITAL AND IN-STORE SHOPPING, THE GROCERY STORE REMAINS FAR MORE THAN A PLACE TO PURCHASE FOOD.

For many, it is a source of confidence, discovery, connection and even enjoyment.

Grocery Shopping Remains a Positive Experience

Today's shoppers are highly intentional about where they

shop. In an effort to fulfill their unique definitions of value, consumers visit more than five separate grocery store banners on average per month.

Consumers often use different stores for different purposes. One retailer may be viewed as a destination for stock-up trips, another for specialty ingredients, another for bargain hunting and another for a more entertaining shopping experience. Rather than relying on a single store, shoppers are assembling their grocery needs from a diverse mix of formats.

The average American visits 5.4 different grocery banners each month. Younger shoppers are even more likely to shop around, with members of Gen Z visiting an average of 6.7 banners and Millennials visiting 6.1.

Why In-Person Shopping Endures

Shopping in person provides benefits that are difficult to replicate online. Consumers say

being in the store gives them a greater sense of control, confidence and efficiency, particularly when selecting fresh products such as produce, meat and seafood. Many shoppers want to see and choose these items themselves.

In-person shopping also fulfills social and emotional needs. It helps consumers care for their families, connect with their cultural traditions and enjoy the shared experience of preparing meals.

When asked what they would miss most if they could no longer shop in person, nearly half of respondents (48%) said they would miss the ability to personally select products. Other top responses included human connection (22%), enjoyable experiences (22%), product selection (21%), finding lower prices (20%), product discovery (17%) and ease of shopping (15%).

Loyalty Is Built through Experience

Loyalty is not based on price alone. Stores that create simple, efficient, clean and enjoyable experiences are more likely to earn repeat visits. Consumers appreciate environments that are well organized and not overwhelming. They also gravitate toward retailers whose offerings and atmosphere align with their specific needs.

For example, mass retailers may appeal to households seeking one-stop shopping and bulk purchases, while specialty grocers attract shoppers looking for unique products, local foods or culturally relevant ingredients.

The enduring importance of grocery shopping reflects the meaningful role food plays in people's lives. Consumer perspectives may shift with the times, but grocery shopping remains a positive and purposeful experience for Americans.

Digital Tools Are Part of the Journey

While shoppers continue to value the physical store, technology is deeply integrated into the grocery experience. According to the report, 77% of consumers use digital tools before they shop. This includes checking weekly ads, comparing prices, building shopping lists and clipping digital coupons. Once inside the store, 71% continue using

technology to locate products, access loyalty offers and stay on budget.

Rather than replacing the store, digital tools are enhancing it, helping consumers plan smarter and shop more efficiently.

How Americans Shop Today

The report also offers a snapshot of current shopping behaviors. American households spend an average of \$169 per week on groceries. Consumers make 1.6 individual grocery shopping trips per week, while households with children make 1.8 individual trips weekly. Total household grocery trips average 2.8 per week.

The supermarket remains the dominant channel, with 77% of shoppers purchasing groceries there. However, consumers are also using a broad mix of formats: 67% shop at mass retailers, 45% shop at warehouse club stores, 36% shop at limited assortment stores, 32% shop at dollar stores and 28% use online-only retailers.

Even with the growth of e-commerce, 54% of consumers say they always shop in person at their primary grocery store. Only 15% report shopping equally online and in-store.

The Grocery Store's Enduring Role

The 2026 U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends report underscores a simple but important truth:

grocery stores continue to serve as essential community institutions.

They are places where consumers evaluate quality, discover new foods, seek value and connect with others. Technology may streamline the process, but the physical store remains at the center of how Americans shop.

For retailers, the message is clear. Success depends on understanding what shoppers value most and creating a store experience that reflects a distinct and meaningful personality. In a rapidly changing retail landscape, the stores that offer convenience, confidence and connection will continue to earn customer loyalty. ■

To download the U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2026 report, visit www.fmi.org/grocerytrends.

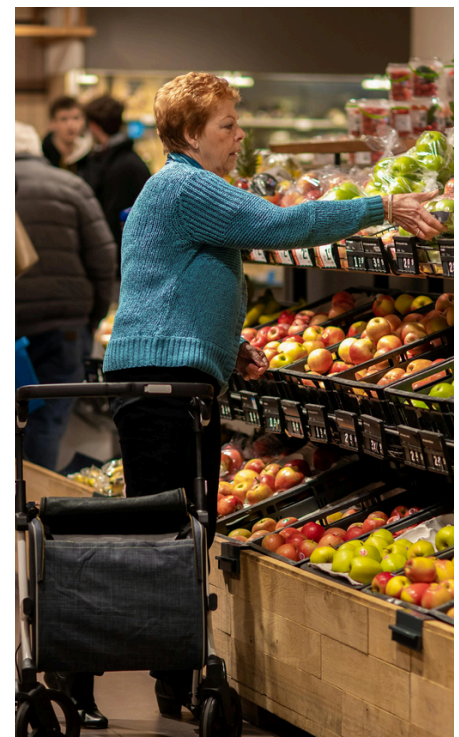


photo courtesy of Pexels



OH SNAP! FOR RETAILERS, THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'



STEWART FRIED

Principal
OFW Law

IN 1964, PRESIDENT JOHNSON SIGNED THE FIRST FOOD STAMP ACT INTO LAW.

That legislation, which was a central component of his War on Poverty, has provided critical nutritional support for over 200 million Americans during the past six decades. The same year, Bob Dylan released his anthem “The Times They Are A-Changin.” More than sixty years later, the same can be said about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Recent statutory, regulatory, and policy changes lead to the conclusion that 2026 will be the year with the most profound modifications to the SNAP program since its introduction. Retailers, in Alabama and across the country, are likely to be directly and indirectly impacted by these changes. Retailers, in Alabama and across the country, are likely to be directly and indirectly impacted by these changes.



Soda and Candy Will No Longer Be SNAP-Eligible Foods

On April 15, 2026, Governor Ivey signed SB57 into law. This new legislation, which goes into effect on October 1, 2026, directs the Department of Human Resources to request a waiver from USDA’s Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) that would exclude candy and soda from the definition of “eligible foods.” Once the waiver takes effect, SNAP beneficiaries will be prohibited from using their SNAP benefits to purchase those items at approved retailers in the Heart of Dixie. The law, which defines candy to include “chocolate bars, non-chocolate candy, chewing gum and similar products,” excludes foods intended for cooking, baking, or meal preparation. The definition of “soda” is limited to carbonated beverages that have sugar or corn syrup as a primary ingredient.

Unlike many other states that have received waivers, Alabama will not include low and no-calorie sodas and energy drinks in the forthcoming waiver request.

On a positive note, the legislation expressly requires the Department of Human Resources to provide guidance, including lists of UPC codes or other similar POS identifiers, to Alabama retailers regarding what are SNAP-eligible and ineligible items. Only two other states with approved waivers have done so to date; retailers in other jurisdictions whose waivers have gone into effect are struggling with compliance given the lack of clarity regarding which items are no longer SNAP-eligible. Alabama’s forthcoming waiver request is almost certain to be granted and, if so, will likely go into effect during the first quarter of 2027. The law also has a unique provision that purports to exclude retailers from being fined or penalized based on the accidental acceptance of soda or candy prior to a fourth violation

in a calendar year; whether this portion of Alabama's waiver request will be granted remains to be seen.

Increased Variety Requirements for Staple Foods

On May 8, 2026, FNS published its final rule increasing the minimum number of staple food varieties that SNAP retailers must carry from (a) three to seven in each of the four staple food categories; and (b) the number of food categories for which at least one perishable variety must be provided from two to three. While larger retailers in Alabama likely already satisfy these requirements, convenience stores and other smaller retailers will need to more than double the minimum number of varieties of staples they stock at all times in each of the dairy, fruits and vegetables, proteins, and grains categories. While FNS adopted most of the provisions contained in its proposed rule, it did make several changes in the final rule that will make it easier for smaller retailers to satisfy these new requirements, including classifying shredded cheese, flavored milk, and sour cream as distinct varieties of dairy staple foods, and treating breakfast cereal and whole grain breads and pasta as varieties of grains distinct from non-whole grain breads and pasta and non-cereal breakfast products. These new requirements will go into effect on November 4, 2026. Alabama

retailers should keep copies of purchase invoices for SNAP-eligible foods for at least a year in order to be able to demonstrate that they purchased the required minimum variety of staple food products within 21 days prior to a store visit by FNS personnel.

SNAP Provisions in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act

On July 4, 2025, President Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 (PL 119-21)(OBBB). The OBBB contains several important SNAP-related provisions, including modifications to the able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) work requirements, the first-ever SNAP state-federal cost-share model, and increases in states' share of SNAP administrative costs.

The changes to the ABAWD work requirements, which were effective upon enactment, increased the upper age exception from 54 to 64 years of age, limited the exception for those with dependents to those under age 14, and removed exceptions for the homeless, veterans, and others. These new requirements are already having profound impacts on SNAP eligibility for beneficiaries; USDA Secretary Rollins recently announced that 4.3 million fewer Americans were SNAP beneficiaries than at the start of the second Trump presidency.

The forthcoming cost-share model will have profound impacts on Alabama and other states with

more than a 6% error rate (overpayments or underpayments to SNAP beneficiaries). During FY24, Alabama's error rate was 8.32%. While that was far lower than the national average of just under 11%, it would still be high enough to require the state to pay 10% of the total SNAP benefits provided to Alabamians.



photo courtesy of Getty Images

ASSUMING THE STATE'S ERROR RATE REMAINS BETWEEN 8% AND 10%, THE ALABAMA LEGISLATURE WILL BE REQUIRED TO APPROPRIATE AS MUCH AS \$200 MILLION TO FUND THE STATE'S SHARE OF RESIDENTS' SNAP BENEFITS FOR FY28.

Needless to say, legislators in Montgomery are unlikely to be receptive to doing so, especially when coupled with the increase (from 50% to 75%) in SNAP administrative costs that the state will be required to pay beginning in FY27.

Retailer associations and other interested parties are actively pushing to have these new

provisions modified and/or to have implementation delayed, including in the Farm Bill and in connection with other legislation. Whether these efforts gain

traction during these challenging times remains to be seen. Unfortunately, retailers in Alabama and across the country can be assured that they are and

will continue to face unprecedented changes in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. ■



photo courtesy of Getty Images

Stewart Fried is a Principal at OFW Law in Washington, DC. Mr. Fried represents SNAP retailers across the United States before FNS and the federal courts.



AGA ANNUAL SHOW Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort

**JULY
25-28
2027**



**JULY
23-26
2028**

Bringing Grocers to the Table



AGEF GOLF OUTING DRIVES IMPACT FOR SCHOLARSHIPS AND INDUSTRY CONNECTION

The Alabama Grocers Education Foundation (AGEF) once again brought the grocery community together for a day of purpose and partnership at its 2026 Annual Golf Outing, held April 9 at Timberline Golf Club in Calera.

Presented by Buffalo Rock/Pepsi, the event highlighted what the industry does best, building relationships while investing in its future. This year's outing raised more than \$53,000 to support AGEF scholarship programs, contributing to a legacy that has now surpassed \$1.5 million in total scholarships awarded.

More than just a tournament, the outing served as a powerful reminder of the grocery industry's shared

commitment to education, career development, and supporting the next generation of leaders. Retailers, wholesalers, vendors, and industry partners came together not only for friendly competition, but for a cause that continues to create meaningful opportunities for employees and their families.

On the course, Coca-Cola Bottling Company UNITED claimed first





place honors, followed by Food City in second and Country Bob's in third, an outcome that reflected both the competitive energy and camaraderie that define the event year after year.

The day's success was made possible through broad support across the industry. In addition to presenting sponsor Buffalo Rock/Pepsi, key contributions came from Publix Super Markets, Inc. and Red Diamond as breakfast sponsors; Greer's and Higginbotham as lunch sponsors; DCR as beverage cart sponsor; and Bunzl as goody bag sponsor. Dozens of additional companies supported the event through hole and half-hole sponsorships, reinforcing the depth of commitment within Alabama's grocery network.

Beyond the sponsorships and scorecards, the true impact of the outing lies in its mission. Proceeds directly fund scholarships for employees of Alabama Grocers Association member companies and their dependents, helping students pursue higher education and build careers that strengthen the industry for years to come.

From the energy on the course to the shared sense of purpose off it, the 2026 AGEF Golf Outing reflected the very best of Alabama's grocery community. It was a day defined not just by swings and scores, but by generosity, connection, and a collective investment in what comes next.

"The continued support from our members and partners is what makes events like this possible," said AGA President and CEO Ellie Taylor.



“WHEN WE COME TOGETHER
LIKE THIS, WE’RE NOT JUST
SUPPORTING A GREAT
EVENT—WE’RE OPENING
DOORS FOR STUDENTS AND
INVESTING IN THE FUTURE
OF OUR INDUSTRY.”

ELLIE TAYLOR, AGA PRESIDENT AND CEO

Quality service is the main ingredient in everything we do.

At Buffalo Rock, every day we strive to provide quality service to our customers. It's a reputation we've built for more than a century, and a source of pride to us. We are equally proud of the communities we serve, and we stay dedicated to making them better places to live and work. The positive impact that we have in the places we do business will always be one of the most important services we offer.



buffalorock.com



2026-2027 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



photo courtesy of Getty Images



“Winning this scholarship means a lot to me. It will help me reach my goal of graduating as a nurse so I can help many people around me. I am a first-generation college student, and if it were not for scholarships like these, I wouldn't be able to attend in the first place. It also means a lot to me, seeing as while nursing is my future, my current job has helped shape me over the past three years. I am honored to be offered this scholarship and know my hard work has paid off.”

Kaytlynn Brady, Houchens Food Group, Inc.

University of North Alabama, Nursing

“I am so glad I get to represent my mother’s workplace in my studies. Foodland has done so much to support my family, and I will represent them well. This award will definitely help alleviate financial difficulties.”

Hagen Hagood, Gateway Foods

University of Montevallo, Accounting



“Receiving this scholarship is meaningful to me because it represents the dedication and hard work I have put into my education throughout my academic career. I have consistently challenged myself to maintain strong grades, stay committed to my schoolwork, and pursue my goals with determination. Being selected for this scholarship is both an honor and a reminder that those efforts have been recognized and valued. This award is also significant to me because my brothers were recipients of this scholarship during their college years. Seeing their achievements inspired me to work hard and strive for the same opportunity. Receiving this scholarship allows me to continue that legacy while motivating me to make the most of the educational opportunities ahead of me.”

Corrin Burnett, Higginbotham Insurance

Faulkner University Montgomery, Elementary Education



“This scholarship gives me the opportunity to focus on my education and tennis career by reducing the financial burden of college. I also am proud to be able to represent my dad by receiving this scholarship.”

Bailey Woods, Retail Data Systems
Huntingdon College, Government

“Winning this scholarship is such an honor to me because it helps me to see how hard work and commitment to goals can benefit me in ways I would never expect. This is more than just financial assistance, it is a way for me to move towards success in my education with gratitude.”

Ava Horn, A&R Super Marekts
University of Montevallo, Communication Studies



“This scholarship means the world to me. Growing up in a small community like Sparta, I have seen how hard people work and how much every opportunity matters. Being selected for this award tells me that the effort I have put into my education, my community, and my character has not gone unnoticed, and that is very encouraging. As I head to Auburn to study Civil Engineering, this lifts a real burden and allows me to focus on becoming the best student and leader I can be. More than the financial support, it gives me confidence to chase my goals and motivation to one day give back to others the same way you have given to me.”

Samuel Cook, Conecuh Sausage Co.
Auburn University, Civil Engineering

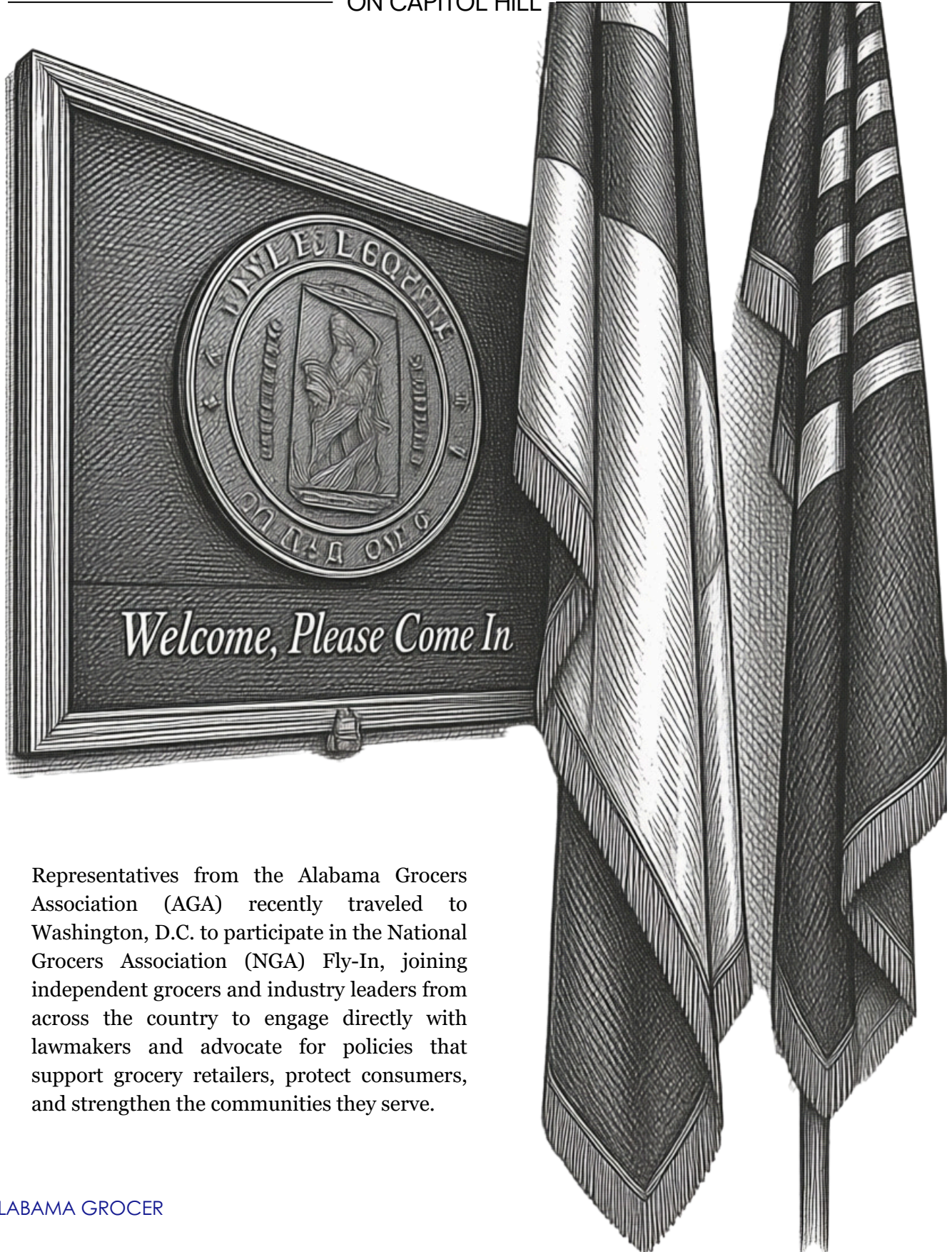
2026 – 2027 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Anna Agan, *Campbell Snacks*
Mia Andrade, *Red Diamond Coffee and Tea*
Braewyn Arceneaux, *Rouses*
Ciel Arceneaux, *Rouses*
Kyla Blackburn, *Piggly Wiggly of Red Bay*
Kaytlynn Brady, *Houchens Food Group, Inc.*
Corrin Burnett, *Higginbotham Insurance*
Amanda Bussey, *Publix Super Markets, Inc.*
Samuel Cook, *Conecuh Sausage Co.*
Asa Crowson, *Coca-Cola Bottling Company UNITED*
Will Dickinson, *DCR*
Dawson Duboise, *Gateway Foods*
Shalia Duncan, *Baker's Food Piggly Wiggly*
Emily Edwards, *Publix Super Markets, Inc.*
Katelyn Elliott, *Mayfield Dairy Farms*
Brookelyn Estes, *S&S Foods*
Carson Floyd, *Mitchell Grocery*
MaryEllen Ford, *Mitchell Grocery*
Rayann Fox, *Associated Wholesale Grocers*
Alissa Glass, *Associated Grocers of the South*
Hagen Hagood, *Gateway Foods*
Ashley Hattaway, *Ben E Keith*
Ava Horn, *A&R Super Markets*
Emily Hye, *Reynolds American*

Sydney Jansen, *Coca-Cola Bottling Company UNITED*
Graesyn Jones, *Reynolds American*
Kaley Kennamer, *Piggly Wiggly*
Lily Lafleur, *Daisy Brand*
Kylie Lovett, *Walmart*
Parker Lybrand, *Piggly Wiggly*
Landon Meador, *Houchens Food Group, Inc.*
Connor Miller, *Buffalo Rock*
Bristol Moseley, *Coca-Cola Bottling Company UNITED*
Faith Oden, *Publix Super Markets Inc.*
Adyson Owens, *Buffalo Rock*
Maddox Padgett, *Associated Grocers of the South*
Sanyaa Ricketts, *Piggly Wiggly Alabama Dist. Co.*
Brittan Sandlin, *Son's of Parrish*
Allison Sizemore, *Gateway Foods*
Kinsley Smith, *Bruce's Foodland*
Mia Sullivan, *Associated Wholesale Grocers*
Tucker Thomas, *Campbell Snacks*
Jaxon Vinson, *Piggly Wiggly of Red Bay*
Jaycee Vinson, *Piggly Wiggly of Red Bay*
Landry Waddingham, *Associated Wholesale Grocers*
Jay Wills, *Red Diamond Coffee and Tea*
Lucy Wills, *Red Diamond Coffee and Tea*
Bailey Woods, *Retail Data Systems*

MAKING ALABAMA'S VOICE HEARD

ON CAPITOL HILL



Representatives from the Alabama Grocers Association (AGA) recently traveled to Washington, D.C. to participate in the National Grocers Association (NGA) Fly-In, joining independent grocers and industry leaders from across the country to engage directly with lawmakers and advocate for policies that support grocery retailers, protect consumers, and strengthen the communities they serve.



ADVOCATING FOR ALABAMA GROCERS

During the visit, AGA met with Alabama legislators and their staff to discuss key industry concerns, including the SNAP error rates and rising credit card swipe fees. These conversations provided an opportunity to share firsthand how federal policies impact grocery retailers, their employees, and the customers they serve every day. The NGA Fly-In brings grocers together from across the country to share real world experiences and help policymakers understand the impact their decisions have on local businesses and communities.



photo courtesy of NGA

CELEBRATING 250 YEARS OF FREEDOM

As our nation celebrates 250 years of independence, the NGA Fly-In also served as a reminder of one of America's greatest strengths: the ability for citizens to engage directly with their elected leaders. The opportunity to freely meet with lawmakers, discuss important issues, and advocate for positive change is a privilege that reflects the principles on which our country was founded. AGA is proud to represent Alabama's grocery industry and help ensure its voice is heard in Washington. ■



photo courtesy of NGA





AGA ADVOCACY IN ACTION

2026 LEGISLATIVE WINS FOR ALABAMA GROCERS



ACT 2026-548 – PENNY ROUNDING

Through ongoing advocacy to improve operational efficiency for retailers, the Alabama Grocers Association (AGA) supported HB545, which allows retailers to round the total of in-person cash transactions to the nearest five cents without impacting the actual sales price or taxes. This commonsense measure reduces reliance on pennies, streamlines cash handling, and speeds up checkout—directly addressing concerns raised by AGA members across the state. The bill takes effect immediately.



ACT 2026-537 – SNAP PRODUCT GUIDANCE

SB57 reflects significant leadership and collaboration by the AGA and its coalition partners. While the bill requires the state to seek a federal waiver to restrict SNAP purchases of candy and soda, AGA worked extensively to ensure that the definitions of covered products are clear, narrow, and workable for retailers. Just as importantly, AGA successfully advocated for provisions requiring the state to provide retailers with detailed product guidance prior to implementation, helping prevent confusion and compliance challenges for grocery operators.



ACT 2026-515 – ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME

The AGA strongly supported HB328 as part of its continued efforts to combat organized retail crime and protect store employees and customers. This legislation expands the definition of first-degree arson to include fires or explosions set during thefts causing at least \$25,000 in damages and establishes a mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years. AGA championed this tougher approach to deter criminal activity targeting grocery and retail establishments. The bill takes effect October 1, 2026.



ACT 2026-492 – PRODUCT REGULATION

AGA played a critical role in shaping HB139 to balance public health goals with the practical realities faced by grocery retailers. While the bill expands fortification requirements for corn masa products, AGA worked to secure key exemptions for certain products sold in grocery stores and to clarify the definition of “snack food.” These changes ensure that retailers can comply without unnecessary disruption to product offerings. The bill takes effect October 1, 2027.



ACT 2026-604 – TAX RELIEF

HB527 delivers meaningful financial relief to Alabama families, and the AGA worked to ensure its implementation aligns with the needs of retailers. The bill allows a state income tax deduction for overtime pay and temporarily suspends the state sales tax on groceries for two months. AGA's engagement helped highlight the importance of grocery tax relief and ensured retailers' operational considerations were part of the conversation. Section 1 becomes effective October 1, 2026, and Section 2 takes effect immediately.



ACT 2026-587 – INTERCHANGE FEES

While SB221 does not immediately change typical grocery transactions, it represents an important early step in a long-term priority for the AGA. AGA has been actively leading efforts to address interchange fees on the sales tax portion of transactions, and this bill lays the groundwork for future reforms that could significantly reduce costs for retailers. This act becomes effective on September 1, 2026.

Together, we are the voice of the grocery industry.





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 23 - March 13, 2026.



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 - \$2,500, Family - \$5,000



SCAN ME!

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



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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Expect Perfection.



◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ DIAMOND SPONSORS ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆



Expect Perfection.





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The Chambliss & Chastain Group



CHOICE (\$5,000+)

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Bunzl Distribution
Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits
Flowers Baking Company
Frito-Lay
Gateway Foods

Gulf Distributing Holdings
Higginbotham Insurance
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Red Diamond
Retail Data Systems, Inc.
Reynolds American
Truno
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Geloso Beverage Group
General Mills
H.L. Coshatt Co Inc.
Hiland Dairy Foods
Holten Meats
Hometown Grocery, Inc.
Johnny Fleeman's Gourmet
Lewis Bakeries

McCall Farms/Holmes Canning
Mrs. Stratton's Salads, Inc.
Ole Mexican Foods, Inc.
Piggly Wiggly of Red Bay
R.L. Zeigler Company
Renfro, Inc.
Royal Foods of Alabama
RSA America
Rudolph Foods
ServiceStar
SPECX
Sunset Farm Foods
Trend Sales
Wright's Markets



ASSOCIATION NEWS

UPCOMING EVENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Annual Show
Bringing Grocers to the Table

JULY 6-9, 2026
SANDESTIN GOLF & BEACH RESORT

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
6	7	8	9

AGEF CLAY SHOOT

a day at

SELWOOD FARM

10.08.26

CELEBRATING ALABAMA'S FINEST

10.21.26
THE CLUB
BIRMINGHAM, AL

RETAILER OF THE YEAR
JAY WILBORN
PIGGLY WICKEY

WHOLESALE OF THE YEAR
BOYD WEST

VENDOR OF THE YEAR
CHRIS WOODS
RDS Retail Data Systems Mid South
WE DO THAT

Facebook.com/AlabamaGrocers

alabamagrocers



alabama-grocers-association

AlabamaGrocers

**DOING MORE THAN
EXPECTED**



**WHAT YOU NEED,
WHEN YOU NEED IT,
FOR THE LOWEST COST!**

ASSOCIATED GROCERS OF THE SOUTH, INC.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

**Billy Leverett
Vice President Of Sales
205/808-4821**

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