

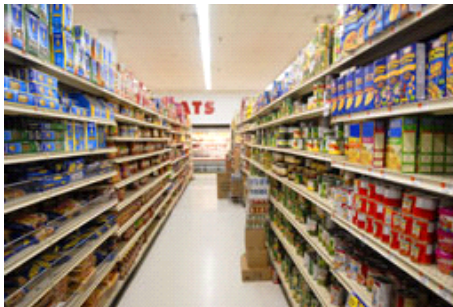
GROWERTALKS

Consumer Buzz

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Consumers Return to Supermarkets' Center Aisles

Ann-Marie Vazzano



Before the recession, many U.S. consumers were bypassing the grocery store's center aisles—known for their abundance of canned and boxed food—in favor of the fresh foods found on stores' perimeters. A new study from Symphony IRI, however, shows a shift in this mentality. In fact, about two-thirds of money spent on groceries is now spent in the more pocketbook-friendly center aisles—that's 70% of unit sales totaling approximately \$440 billion. The biggest increases were in sales of coffee, energy beverages and bottled water.

"When you put all the aisles together, the center store is actually outperforming the perimeter," Susan Viamari, editor of Times & Trends, SymphonyIRI Group, told Marketing Daily, which reported on the study. "A lot of the things that started as belt tightening in the early part of the recession have become habits."

And it's not just food, either. The study found that more consumers are shopping in supermarkets' hair and cosmetics aisles, cutting into sales of these products and services at salons. They're also hitting the pharmacy aisles instead of calling the doctor.

It's not all good news for grocery stores, though. While they still maintain 54% of the market share when it comes to food sales, the study found they're losing ground to mass merchants, membership retailers and convenience stores. **GP**