

Worth Doing Well

GROCERS CAN BECOME POPULAR HEALTH DESTINATIONS BY INVOLVING THE WHOLE STORE.

By Bridget Goldschmidt

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any grocers offer in-store pharmacies, and a growing contingent now feature in-store nutritionists to counsel shoppers, but what can supermarkets do to make their stores true wellness centers? The first step is a change in attitude.

"About six years ago, I recall driving up to a grocery store and seeing a huge sign outside that said 'wellness,' in place of a more familiar sign, 'pharmacy,'" recounts Susan T. Borra, chief wellness officer at Arlington, Va.-based Food Marketing Institute (FMI)

and executive director of the FMI Foundation. "This decision for a store to stake its claim on being the destination for shoppers' wellness needs was poignant to me as a registered dietitian, facilitator of the Food Marketing Institute Health and Wellness Council and as a consumer. It wasn't just a sign on a storefront; this placard foreshadowed a movement among our food retail members to embrace and align their brands with wellness."

Borra notes that such a shift in emphasis goes all the way to the top and requires ongoing dedication. "According to 'FMI Retailer Contributions to Health & Wellness,' back in 2014, we were aware of two primary leadership teams responsible for operationalized health-and-wellness initiatives: pharmacy (59 percent) and nutrition (50 percent) leadership teams," she observes. "Today, there's an entire category of managers for health-and-wellness leadership, and 71 percent of these focused experts are leading the decision process on how programs are established and operationalized in food retail. We're also aware through our research that there's commitment at the highest corporate level, as 46 percent of companies say their president and CEO are involved in evaluating health-and-wellness opportunities."

Key Takeaways

- ▶ Ongoing commitment to creating comprehensive supermarket health-and-wellness programs goes all the way to the top and should encompass all store departments.
- ▶ Grocers are both providing their own branded solutions and teaming up with outside suppliers to promote health and wellness.
- ▶ Produce, deli and center store products are just some of the items that can experience improved sales from health-and-wellness positioning.
- ▶ Most food retailers see supermarket health-and-wellness programs as a significant business growth opportunity for the entire industry going forward, and are investing more in community-based health care initiatives.



Store-Level Strategies

At the store level, this all-in approach is exemplified by the ShopRite supermarket banner, operated by members of the Keasbey, N.J.-based retailer cooperative Wakefern Food Corp.

"There is a greater awareness today of the connection between food and health, and ShopRite is committed to sharing that message with our customers," says Natalie Menza-Crowe, RD, MS, director of health and wellness at Wakefern. "More than 100 registered dietitians work in ShopRite stores and offer complimentary services such as personal consultations, store tours, support groups, weight management classes, and kids' and adult cooking classes. Those dietitians often work with different departments in the store, including pharmacy staff, to coordinate care and programs and communicate important messages about the best ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle. ShopRite's Well Everyday campaign helps reinforce those messages with consumer-friendly tips, recipes and in-store signage to inform and educate customers as they shop throughout the store. Color-coded shelf tags also help consumers better understand the health-and-wellness attributes of products on store shelves."

The chain plans to expand and build on the program "by providing important information to customers in our stores — look for new Well Everyday signs and tips each month in grocery aisles," notes Menza-Crowe.

When it comes to in-store items and services, "the most important thing is to provide the information and products our customers need and want," she asserts. "More customers are seeking ways to create healthier meals, and our highly qualified dietitians can help provide that information to customers right where they need it most — at the stores where they shop for the ingredients they need to make meals for their families."

These items include ShopRite's private label Wholesome Pantry line, which debuted in 2017 and features foods made with simple, clean ingredients free from artificial additives, flavors, colors and preservatives, and packaged with easy-to-read labels, and a recently introduced line of dietitian-approved, gourmet-style meal kits for customers seeking affordable meal solutions that are creative, easy to make and prepared with better-for-you ingredients.

Produce for Kids teams with Meijer on displays featuring child-friendly recipes in the retailer's produce departments twice a year.



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Barrier-Breaking Partnerships

In addition to marketing their own brands, food retailers can join forces with outside manufacturers to promote health-and-wellness initiatives.

"Our experiences with the Gold Plate Awards and National Family Meals Month campaign [in September] demonstrate how food retailers can collaborate with suppliers to deliver mealtime solutions to the customer," notes Borra. "The business of food retail has always been grounded in community, so FMI members can ultimately serve a greater societal good by helping families meet both wellness and togetherness goals."

"With health and nutrition being top of mind for today's shoppers, it only makes sense to collaborate efforts across departments to drive plan development," points out Amanda Keefer, director, marketing communications at Orlando, Fla.-based Produce for Kids (PFK), an organization that develops programs involving retailers and produce companies. "Creating merchandising that brings together like-minded healthy brands across departments will provide meaningful and relevant resource areas for shoppers. The barrier oftentimes boils down to internal logistics of departmentalizing a grocery store that has been strictly departmentalized for many years."

Some of the ways that PFK has helped to break down this barrier is through programs such as a We Heart RDs kit distributed to 400-plus retail dietitians at more than 50 U.S. and Canadian retailers, containing seasonal recipe ideas, a What's in Season counter card, stickers for shoppers, and information on in-season commodities, and a partnership with Meijer stores to deploy recipe standees in the chain's produce department twice a year.

Outside of these programs, Keefer suggests "a 'What's for Dinner' cooler case near the front of the store. We know every family struggles with this question. Why not make it easy for a mom or dad running from work to home with everything in the front of the store, ready to go, simple, and, of course, with some sort of nutritionally sound stamp of approval and recipe card?"

This kind of approach is heartily endorsed by Borra: "Consumers are stressed for time, and successful grocers understand that they can be a thoughtful resource to their customers."



Other convenient solutions Keefer mentions are meal kits like those carried by ShopRite — “Offering healthy versions of these kits in a grab-and-go space in the store makes a lot of sense today for today’s busy shopper” — and, during summer, placing water bottles for infusing fruits above a berry display, with signage explaining to shoppers how to infuse their water.

What it all comes down to for retailers, she asserts, is “being a resource and listening to their shoppers,” and she believes that the internet provides a valuable point of connection. “Social media platforms offer a direct way to gain insight from shoppers,” observes Keefer. “Oftentimes, shoppers in store are hard to capture, but when consumers are logged into their social outlets during their own downtime, they are more likely to offer thoughts and ideas on what they’d like to see in store. Millennials live on platforms like Instagram, where grocers [are] yet to have a strong presence.”

It’s not just produce that stands to benefit from such collaborations, however.

Ridgefield, N.J.-based Toufayan Bakeries, for instance, has been developing various better-for-you items, among them gluten-free options such as wraps, pita chips, cookies (under the Goodie Girl brand name), and pizza crust; Non-GMO Certified products; and natural/organic breads such as a line of whole wheat sprout-

ed-grains wraps, pitas, Smart Pockets and naan. Future innovations may include breads made with high-nutrition flour, according to the company.

“Since ‘healthy/wellness’ solutions have become mainstream, these products should be merchandised with all the regular deli breads, to ensure that consumers will find these options more easily, and recognize that eating well is a broadly accepted notion, not an isolated specialty product or niche item,” advises VP of Marketing and Sales Karen Toufayan.

“With medical solutions now deriving from food and specialty diets, retailers have an incredible opportunity to build a section in their stores that caters to the many digestive health needs,” notes Steven J. Singer, founder and CEO of Montreal-based Fody Foods, whose products are designed to be low in FODMAPs, short-chain carbohydrates that can trigger symptoms in people with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). “Taking their already impressive gluten-free offerings and expanding to low FODMAP, probiotics and more will allow consumers to shop with confidence, knowing their needs are being taken care of. By addressing the many sought-after wellness solutions, retailers will benefit

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from increased loyalty to their stores.”

Adds Singer: “From bars to pasta sauces, ketchup to salsa, salad dressings to spice blends, the business already caters to many eating occasions. In the future, new products that address other eating occasions such as snacking, breakfast and mealtime will be coming out, ensuring more happy customers.” The company recently inked a distribution deal with West Des

Moines, Iowa-based Hy-Vee, which is carrying Fody products in more than 100 of its stores across the Midwest.

What’s on the horizon for health and wellness in supermarkets?

PFK’s Keefer predicts such strategies as coupons supporting sales of fresh produce items alongside CPGs, cooking classes and education sessions, and even a mobile app “that ties back to stores and offers deals and ideas.”

“According to our research, 81 percent of the food retailers ... currently view supermarket health-and-wellness programs as a significant business growth opportunity for the entire industry in the years ahead,” notes Borra, whose organization has just published a best-practices guide for food retailers and suppliers in this area with regard to all of the fresh departments. “What do we expect to see? More. Food retailers are genuinely interested in their customers’ vitality through food and how that relates to their health.”

She also singles out growing investment in community-based health care programs, adding that “many retailers are exploring how their stores can be a true health care provider. It is an exciting time in food retail, and I’m confident our members will invest in the people, processes and technologies to help their businesses lead in health.” **PG**

50 Years of Toufayan

PIONEERING MANUFACTURER
REACHES MILESTONE

Toufayan Bakeries, one of the largest family-owned commercial bakeries in America, is celebrating 50 years in business in the United States. Based in Ridgely, N.J., with additional manufacturing facilities in Plant City and Orlando, Fla., the company, which produces more than 100 varieties of breads and baked goods, helped kick-start the long-running pita trend and introduce U.S. consumers to ethnic breads.

Harry Toufayan, who grew up working in his father’s bakeries overseas, opened the first Toufayan Bakery in the United States in West New York, N.J., and discovered an eager market for his products in this country.

“We found early success selling traditional breads within the ethnic community,” notes Toufayan, now in his mid-70s. “But at some point, just a few years after we opened, I was picking up a deli order at the local supermarket and thought, wow, this would be a great place for pita bread, which was very hard to find in those days. I refocused our attention on grocery stores, and some forward-thinking buyers bit and placed orders. Together, we introduced Americans to pita breads, wraps and other

specialty baked goods that have now become commonplace in households nationwide.”

In addition to acquainting American shoppers with traditional breads, Toufayan Bakeries was one of the first manufacturers to offer shoppers such healthy on-trend options as the Smart Bagel, a version of a “scooped-out” bagel with fewer calories, and a line of gluten-free wraps in varieties like Spinach, Garden Vegetable, Savory Tomato and Original. The company’s latest products include Gluten Free Pita Chips, Organic Sprouted Pita Bread, a gluten-free thin-crust for pizza, and what’s billed as the country’s first Organic Naan. Also among its offerings are vegan, non-GMO, organic, low-carb and kosher items.

