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Power of Produce session a highlight at Southern Exposure

By

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One of the most popular events at the [Southeast Produce Council](#)'s Southern Exposure has become the Power of Produce session, hosted by Anne-Marie Roerink of 210 Analytics and Rick Stein, vice president of fresh foods for FMI.

This year's session featured a panel of Jerry Callahan, group vice president produce/floral for Albertson Cos., Robby Cruz, vice president produce/floral for Target and, Jim Hancock, vice president /DMM produce/floral for Sam's Club. SEPC officials said the attendance at the session topped 750, the most since the event began.

The session revealed highlights of the report, which included that 25 percent of shoppers ranked price as the No. 1 factor when making fresh produce purchasing decisions, followed by appearance (19 percent), health benefits (19 percent) and ripeness (15 percent). The report also offers insights on consumers' produce shopping habits related to health and well-being and heightened preference for locally grown and convenience options.

"In the past, the clear No. 1 factor when buying fresh produce was appearance and quality," said Stein. "However, this year's survey showed that item price is now the No. 1 factor produce consumers consider — on par with appearance and quality. In addition to price, consumers are focusing on items with prolonged shelf-life, buying less or finding substitutes. At the same time, we see more shoppers concentrate on health and well-being when making fresh produce purchasing decisions and a strong desire for convenience."

Other top findings:

• Shoppers Link Produce to Health Benefits:

For most shoppers (96 percent), picking from the produce aisle is considered an investment in personal health and well-being. Consumers increasingly associate fresh produce with digestive health, weight management and disease management. In fact, one-third of consumers who pay a lot of attention to health and nutrition tend to see fresh produce as playing a central role in their diet, and six in 10 shoppers purchase fruits and vegetables to deliver on specific health benefits. This positive association has spurred higher demand for more information about nutrition, health benefits, recommended daily amounts, and other health-centric insights.

• Consumers Crave Convenience:

From pre-cut and pre-washed options to grab-and-go and ready-to-serve solutions, convenience remains the top value-add for produce shoppers. The report found that nearly half of shoppers frequently purchase convenient vegetable (45 percent) and fruit (48 percent) solutions. This popularity among consumers led to value-added fruits and vegetables making up 14.4 percent of total fresh product sales in 2021. The share of shoppers expecting to purchase more value-added produce remains high at 27 percent, while only 5 percent anticipate they will purchase less.

• **Locally Grown Outperforms All Other Attributes:**

Fifty-six percent of consumers say they want their produce department to carry more fruits and vegetables that are locally grown, followed by grown in the United States (54 percent). Such distinctions are most effective when paired with specific locally sourced definitions, like a certain mile radius or state lines.

However, the definition of the term differs depending on the area of the country in which the shopper lives and the generation to which they belong.

Photo: Rick Stein, Jim Hancock, Jerry Callahan and Robby Cruz.

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