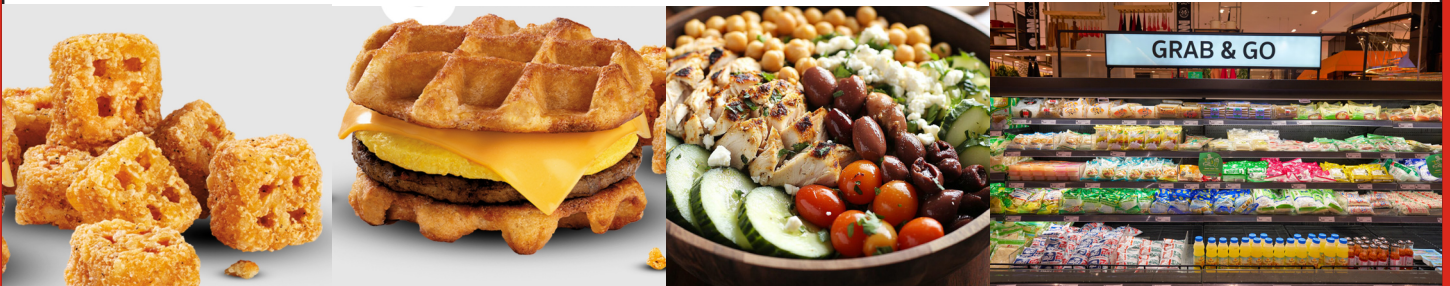


KAGOME

RETAIL PREPARED FOOD TREND REPORT 2026



Grab-and-Go Meals Future Engine for Growth



This report explores how grab-and-go meals are evolving into a powerful driver of retail growth. It highlights how leading retailers are investing in prepared foods to meet rising expectations for convenience, quality, and variety. You will see how grocery stores are drawing inspiration from restaurants through chef-inspired meals, global flavors, and fresher formats. The report also outlines key consumer behaviors shaping demand, including the desire for better-for-you options and quick, satisfying meal solutions. In addition, you will find insights into high-growth areas like healthy bowls and protein-forward choices that are resonating with today's shoppers. Use these insights to identify new opportunities, refine your strategy, and stay ahead in the fast-growing prepared foods space.



Costco Taco Kit



Kroger's Fried Chicken



Walmart Fresh Cranberry Walnut Salad

RETAIL FOOD SERVICE PREPARED FOOD & BEVERAGE REPRESENT POWER GROWTH OPPORTUNITY

Restaurants still lead when it comes to setting new food trends, but retail is quickly catching up by improving quality, creativity, and cultural relevance. Retailers are paying closer attention to what consumers want and are adopting current trends, especially in beverages, health-focused foods, and snacks. These categories are becoming areas where retail is starting to shape trends, not just follow them. As economic pressure changes how people spend, prepared foods are becoming more important to retail's future. There is a clear opportunity for retailers to offer better flavors, more variety, and new ideas at prices people can afford. While retail may not yet match restaurants in culinary skill, it is winning on convenience, speed, and value. Technology, like dark stores, delivery-focused models, and AI tools is also transforming retail by making shopping faster, easier, and more personalized. Prepared meals from retail stores aren't just about being quick and easy—they're a smart way to compete with restaurants and win more market share in a crowded arena of food options.

BY THE NUMBERS

64%
of consumers
purchase
prepared foods at
least occasionally,
45% from a grab-
and-go station

52%
of consumers expect
retail venues to
play a bigger role in
offering new food and
beverage trends in
the future

Gen Z and
Millennials are
significantly more
likely than older
generations to
partake in prepared
offerings at grocery
stores

How key retailers are betting on the future of prepared foods

Kroger is actively building what comes next when it comes to prepared food in retail. Kroger's Deli of the Future opened in September of last year in Edgewood, Kentucky to the cost of \$25 million. A 6,500 square ft open-kitchen flagship project that replaced an existing store. The new concept blends the elements of quick-service restaurants with the atmosphere of a classic neighborhood deli.

Walmart is moving beyond traditional grocery and its no frills store experience into retail foodservice, trying to capture meal occasions that previously went to restaurants or QSRs. They are doing this by adding hot food bars, grab-and-go meals, freshly prepared foods, QSR partners for in-store restaurants, and more read-to-eat offerings. This is one more step in becoming a one-stop shop for consumers.

Whole Foods positioned restaurant quality convenience of its prepared food long before other retailers. Their differentiating factors are chef-prepared meals, clean ingredients, premium freshness, dietary-specific meals (vegetarian, vegan, dairy, and gluten free), and healthy convenience. Whole Foods lead the shift from processed convenience to premium fresh meal solutions.

Costco's prepared food offers large size family portions, a strong food quality, and value perception with highly trusted signature items. Their prepared meals are popular because they feed a crowd, require little effort, and are a less expensive option than restaurant take out. Costco's signature rotisserie chicken, a 3 pound bird at the famous \$4.99 price point, according to Costco has them selling more than 100 million chickens annually. This big box store turned prepared foods into a warehouse-club staple rather than a niche grocery convenience category.

All of these retailers recognize prepared foods are more than a deli side category but is an engine for growth that can compete directly with restaurants and delivery.

GRAB-AND-GO MEAL TRENDS

The fastest-growing grab-and-go meal direction in big-box and club-store-adjacent retail is a clear shift toward healthy bowls, high-protein prepared meals, and globally inspired hot meals that combine convenience with stronger perceived quality.

Nearly 40% of consumers – especially Gen Z (43%) and Millennials (42%) – say they’re more likely to purchase from retail venues that offer healthy, better-for-you prepared meals. Sprouts Farmers Market, for instance, late last year debuted its rotating line of “Wellness Bowls”, which are grab-and-go chef-crafted meals featuring whole ingredients and global flavors like Chimichurri Beef, Hibachi Grass Fed Beef, Vegan Sticky Sesame Chili Tofu, or Mediterranean NAE Chicken Bowl. As this expectation becomes the norm, the opportunity is clear: wellness-forward convenience isn’t just a trend, it’s a strategic advantage.

64% Of consumers see prepared foods from grocery and convenience stores as a convenient alternative to fast food restaurants for everyday meals.

CHICKEN: THE PROTEIN OF CHOICE FOR HEALTHY BOWLS

Among Total US consumers, Chicken leads as the top protein for healthy bowls at 89% Love or Like It, followed closely by Grilled Chicken at 87% and Chicken Breast at 87%. Beef-based proteins (Beef at 85%, Ground Beef at 83%, and Steak at 83%) show strong but secondary appeal in this category.



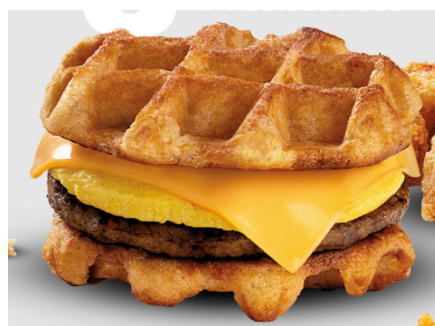
C-STORE RECENT LTO ITEMS & HIGHLY RATED ITEMS BY CONSUMERS



BONELESS WINGS by 7-ELEVEN
Boneless wings with seasoned breading for an even crispier bite. Options include plain, hot honey for sweetness with a kick of heat, or Buffalo for a tangy and peppery spice.



CRISPY WAFFLE TOTS by 7-ELEVEN
For \$1 customers can enjoy crispy waffles in the shape of tots with a crispy exterior and fluffy center.



SAUSAGE, EGG, & CHEESE WAFFLE BREAKFAST SANDWICH by 7-ELEVEN
Belgian waffles with pearl sugar and is stuffed with fluffy eggs, seasoned sausage, and melty cheese.



BARN BURNER CHICKEN PIZZA
by CASEY'S
Built with a Sriracha sauce base, grilled chicken, bacon, real mozzarella and cheddar cheese, red onion, jalapeños, and finished with a post-bake drizzle of Sweet Baby Ray's BBQ. sauce.

Source: Datassential



NASHVILLE HOT CHICKEN TAQUITO by QUIKTRIP
A crispy chicken filled taquito with a Nashville Hot flavor.



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