A new direct-to-consumer opportunity?
Meat and seafood consumption trends during the COVID-19 pandemic

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THE DELOITTE CONSUMER INDUSTRY CENTER
A new direct-to-consumer opportunity?: Meat and seafood consumption trends during the COVID-19 pandemic

Consumers are eating more meat and seafood at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, but they are avoiding the grocery store. Is now the time to offer more protein direct-to-consumer?

5 RESTAURANTS HAVE closed or faced capacity restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers have turned to at-home dining—and that often features protein. In fact, seven in 10 respondents in Deloitte’s recent Future of Fresh survey say they eat even more meat and seafood at home when they cannot dine out at a restaurant.1 With half of consumers reporting they feel stressed when shopping for food in stores and two out of three concerned that their favorite meat or seafood will be out of stock when they do,

So, who wants to buy meat online?

In The Future of Fresh: Patterns from the pandemic, we identified the “contemporary consumer” archetype that is more willing to shop for their food online than their conventional counterparts. These consumers tend to be young families, well-off financially, and living in an urban setting. When it comes to meat and seafood specifically, about two in three millennial and Generation Z consumers are interested in purchasing protein online, which is about twice the interest as with older consumers in our survey.

Good news for protein: Perceptions of frozen and safety packaging are relatively good

Meat is highly perishable, so to be shipped to a consumer it needs to be transported frozen and in protective packaging. With respect to these two factors, our data suggests a major difference in how consumers view meat and seafood versus food products generally, which may provide DTC an advantage. While a large majority of consumers surveyed believe fresh food is superior to frozen in terms of its health properties, when asked about meat and seafood specifically, most consumers say that frozen is just as good as fresh (figure 1).
“Meating expectations”: Percent of respondents who agree frozen is as healthy/good as fresh

When it comes to meat and seafood, only about a quarter of respondents feel strongly either way.

Note: Respondents were presented with statements “I believe that fresh food is healthier than frozen food” and “Frozen meat/seafood is just as good as fresh.” The orientation of response data for the first was transformed for easier comparison. Source: Deloitte Future of Fresh Consumer Survey.
Additionally, nine in 10 consumers surveyed said that packaging to prevent contamination was important to them in their food purchasing and two in three said they wished meat and seafood specifically had more protective packaging.

These findings suggest frozen meat and seafood products shipped in protective packaging may be perceived as equivalent to fresh alternatives, which is good news for the DTC model.

**A surprising strategy to reach consumers**

It turns out consumer acceptance of frozen meat is correlated with interest in plant-based meat alternatives. Adding plant-based options could be a winning formula to bring more customers over to a protein DTC offering. In fact, that may be why Perdue Farms—an established meat and poultry provider that entered the DTC market in 2020—is exploring more plant-based options in its own new DTC channel.²

The pandemic has accelerated trends across many industries, including food products. DTC enables companies to build a direct relationship with customers and collect important data about their interactions. It also creates opportunities for new strategies centered around the bundling or unbundling of products, pack sizes, pricing, and subscription-based models. Given consumer shifts and digital acceleration, now seems an opportune time to think strategically about new business models, even for something as fundamental as the protein at the center of the plate.
Endnotes


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