

## Return to work in the food industry

How food retailers and product suppliers will operate behind frontlines

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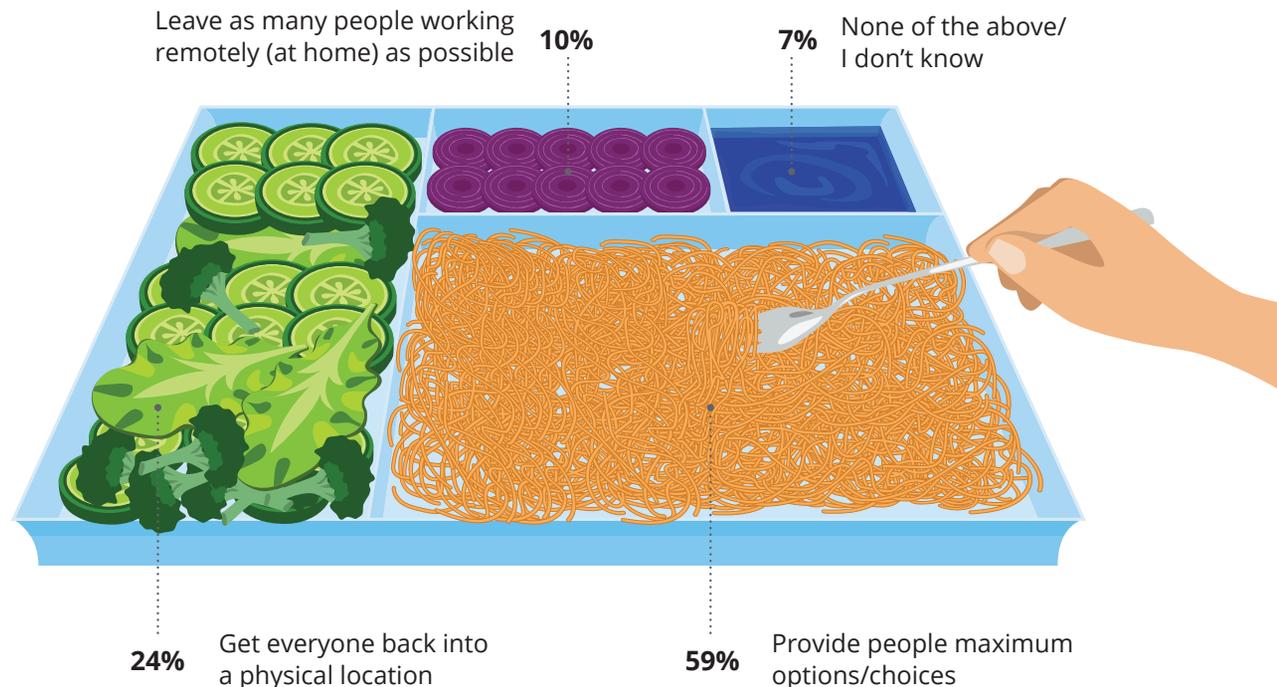
**T**O GET A sense of what food retailers and product suppliers are thinking, Deloitte and FMI-The Food Industry Association (FMI), surveyed over 150 US-based executives and interviewed another 15. Our analysis revealed that the top return-to-work goal for close to 60% of executives is to provide maximum options/choice to employees. Why? As one executive said, “It all boils down to the war for talent. As much as some may want to get back to where we were before, it’s going to be something in the middle. People want flexibility.” Companies should build adaptive workplaces to accommodate.

But not everyone agrees. Roughly one in four are looking to get everyone back into physical locations. Some executives believe in-person work is more effective and others think it is only fair to ask office workers to come back in since their essential worker peers—who stocked shelves or operated on production lines—never really left. Regardless of the goal, the industry is expecting about double the level of remote work after the pandemic relative to 2019, according to the executives surveyed.

Still the industry has an obligation to keep its employees—and consumers—safe. That includes getting workers vaccinated for COVID-19. In our survey, 18% of both retailers and product suppliers said they will be requiring vaccination. This number may shift based on early experiences and further clarity on legal and contractual grounds. For now, many are taking the carrot approach instead of the stick. As one executive put it, “We’re not demanding, but we encourage. And the way we encourage every employee that gets the vaccine is we give them a hundred dollars.”

For more insights from this research, look for a forthcoming series on the future of work in the food industry, publishing this summer.

### Food industry goals for return to work



Sources: Deloitte and FMI survey of executives in the food industry.

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