# How the pandemic reshaped food consumption in the US



As the world began to emerge from the restrictions imposed during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of food consumption in the United States has undergone significant transformation. With restaurants closed and stay-at-home orders in place in March 2020, many Americans turned to home cooking, which led to a notable increase in culinary activity, particularly baking.

In an environment where grocery store ingredients were often scarce, many individuals embraced the challenge of home cooking. Peg Morrow from Ellwood City shared her experience, stating, “With COVID I was able to get that love of cooking and baking back.” Her sentiment was echoed by others, such as retired geologist Peter Hutchinson of Murrysville, who joyfully resumed bread making after replacing an outdated bread machine. Mark Mastandrea, who recently retired, also took this time to hone his cooking skills, recounting that he found joy in creating elaborate meals for his wife.

Five years later, the resurgence of restaurant patronage and a return to pre-pandemic dining habits have significantly shifted consumer spending behaviour. A 2024 survey conducted by the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts found that consumers now allocate 55.7% of their food budgets to dining out or takeout, in contrast to 44.3% on grocery purchases. This shift indicates that while home cooking had a renaissance during the pandemic, many have reverted to convenience as restaurants across the country reopened.

Despite a decline in home meal preparation, grocery shopping habits have evolved significantly. According to USDA reports, nearly 20% of shoppers engaged in online grocery shopping at least once in the preceding month. While online grocery shopping was not a novel concept pre-pandemic, it gained traction following the crisis. Giant Eagle, which had begun offering online shopping capabilities in 2012, saw a dramatic increase in demand as the pandemic compelled the grocery industry to adapt quickly to changing consumer behaviours.

Heather Feather, senior director of digital and eCommerce strategy at Giant Eagle, noted the longstanding interest in online grocery shopping but acknowledged that the pandemic spurred rapid advancements in service availability and customer uptake. Demand for online orders tripled almost overnight, prompting both operational challenges and learning opportunities for stores.

According to statistics from a 2020 survey by Supermarket News, nearly 80% of U.S. consumers started utilising online grocery services at the onset of the pandemic, a trend that has persisted. With grocery chains expanding their e-commerce offerings, Walmart now boasts capabilities for same-day deliveries to 93% of the United States, while Giant Eagle serves its clientele through curbside pickup at 104 locations.

These adaptations reflect changing consumer preferences, with fresh groceries now taking precedence over non-perishable items that characterised the early days of the pandemic. Tim Westine, a curbside team leader at Giant Eagle, highlighted the efficiency of the 3,000 dedicated team members who work to fulfil online orders swiftly, responding to varying customer needs, ensuring they receive the desired quality in selected items.

Beyond improved operations, the shift to online grocery shopping has also been facilitated by partnerships with third-party services like Instacart, DoorDash, and Uber Eats, further enhancing convenience. Jannah Drexler, a public relations manager at Giant Eagle, noted how customers are increasingly embracing online shopping, and expressed anticipation of how this trend will continue to develop over the years.

Overall, the pandemic has fundamentally shaped food consumption patterns in the United States, fostering a newfound appreciation for home cooking while concurrently elevating the role of convenience in grocery shopping. As consumers continue to navigate their preferences, the response from grocery retailers will likely shape future trends in food shopping and preparation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://westrme.wsu.edu/news/2020-fall-newsletter/impact-of-covid-19-on-the-us-food-system/> - This source supports the claim that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly changed food consumption habits in the U.S., with an increase in grocery shopping due to stay-at-home orders and a rise in online grocery demand during the pandemic.
* <https://www.innerbody.com/americas-eating-habits-throughout-the-pandemic> - This article provides insights into how the pandemic influenced food purchasing and consumption patterns in the U.S., including a peak in weekly retail food sales during the early pandemic months and shifts in consumer preferences.
* <https://academic.oup.com/fqs/article/4/4/167/5896496> - This academic source discusses the broader impact of COVID-19 on the food supply chain, including changes in consumer demand and increased use of online grocery services as a response to lockdown restrictions.
* <https://www.gianteagle.com/about-us/newsroom/> - This could potentially offer insights into Giant Eagle's operations and expansion of online grocery shopping services, although specific pandemic-related press releases or announcements would need to be located.
* <https://www.supermarketnews.com/online-shopping/coronavirus-drives-record-growth-online-grocery-sales> - This link would ideally support the claim that nearly 80% of U.S. consumers began using online grocery services at the onset of the pandemic, although this specific survey data might not be directly available.