# How the pandemic reshaped grocery shopping and cooking habits in America



During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant shift occurred in the way Americans approached meal preparation and grocery shopping. As lockdown measures forced restaurants to close and stay-at-home orders were implemented, many turned to cooking at home more than ever before, despite facing challenges in sourcing ingredients. Grocery stores adapted by altering their occupancy levels and traffic patterns for social distancing.

Peg Morrow from Ellwood City remarked in an email about rediscovering her passion for cooking during this time. “With COVID I was able to get that love of cooking and baking back,” she stated, noting her improved bread-making skills acquired through practice and exploration of new recipes. Similarly, retired geologist Peter Hutchinson of Murrysville shared that he began using a new bread machine gifted to him, with many of his friends also revisiting their bread makers.

Mark Mastandrea of Shaler took the opportunity during the shutdown to advance his culinary skills. Previously, he described himself as an “adequate, by the numbers cook,” but with ample time, he committed to preparing fresh meals more frequently, experimenting with healthy recipes and learning new cooking techniques. This included sourcing ingredients online and from local markets, contributing to a more enjoyable home dining experience. He expressed how their culinary projects became “replaced by grilled seafood and roasted veggies,” as their cooking habits shifted back to pre-pandemic efforts.

According to a 2024 survey by the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, consumer behaviour has notably changed; Americans now allocate 55.7% of their food budgets to dining out and takeout, as opposed to 44.3% for grocery shopping. Despite a decline in home cooking frequency, shoppers are engaging in different purchasing behaviours. Nearly 20% of shoppers have participated in online grocery shopping at least once in the previous month, as reported by the USDA.

Giant Eagle, a major grocery chain, initially began offering online grocery services in 2012, but it was the pandemic that caused a significant surge in demand for this service. Heather Feather, Giant Eagle’s senior director of digital and eCommerce strategy, noted that as pandemic restrictions began, demand for this service tripled almost overnight, testing the company’s systems and operations. “It was a great learning opportunity and it encouraged guests to try the service who hadn’t before,” Feather stated.

Walmart and Giant Eagle both accelerated their online shopping capabilities, with Walmart claiming that over 90% of shoppers now engage in both in-store and online grocery shopping. Walmart has also expanded its delivery services, now able to make same-day deliveries to 93% of the U.S., and offers expedited delivery options for customers.

In a conversation regarding current consumer trends, Tim Westine, a curbside team leader at Giant Eagle, highlighted that Sundays have become their busiest day for online orders. With around 3,000 dedicated team members preparing online grocery orders, the processes developed during the pandemic have become a robust system capable of handling large volumes, now focusing more on fresh items as opposed to non-perishable goods.

Shopping practices have evolved, emphasising freshness and convenience. Team members at Giant Eagle are trained to meet customer preferences closely, ensuring satisfaction with substitutions and products. The integration of third-party partnerships with services like Instacart, DoorDash, and Uber Eats has further simplified the online shopping experience.

While traditional brick-and-mortar shopping remains the more dominant practice, the substantial shift towards online grocery shopping signifies changing consumer preferences, a trend likely to continue as customers become increasingly comfortable with eCommerce solutions in the grocery sector. The future of grocery shopping appears poised to continue evolving alongside technology and consumer behaviour.

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