# The evolution of cooking and grocery shopping during and after the pandemic



During the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Americans pivoted to cooking at home due to restaurant closures and stay-at-home orders, leading to a significant increase in home-cooked meals and baking activities. The shift was evident as grocery stores adapted their operations, modifying occupancy limits and traffic patterns to ensure social distance amid the public health crisis.

Peg Morrow, from Ellwood City, highlighted her renewed passion for cooking, stating, "With COVID I was able to get that love of cooking and baking back," as she actively sought new recipes and experimented with her skills. Similarly, retired geologist Peter Hutchinson from Murrysville shared his joy in baking bread again, particularly after upgrading his 1999 bread machine, while Mark Mastandrea from Shaler noted his transformation from a casual cook to one who relished preparing meals from scratch, enjoying the process of sourcing quality ingredients.

As the pandemic receded, patterns in consumer spending shifted once again. A 2024 survey conducted by the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, based on USDA data, revealed that Americans now allocate a substantial portion of their food budgets—approximately 55.7%—to dining out and takeout, as compared to just 44.3% spent on groceries, marking a return to pre-pandemic habits.

In addition to the frequency of cooking, a notable change in behaviour is the growing reliance on online grocery shopping. According to USDA reports, nearly 20% of shoppers across all age groups engaged in online grocery shopping at least once in the month leading up to 2025. This trend, which had been gaining momentum before COVID-19, accelerated significantly during the pandemic, as many grocery chains scaled operations to meet increasing demand for delivery and pickup services. Giant Eagle, for example, had started offering online grocery shopping around 2012 but saw a dramatic rise in demand that led to more efficient systems and processes.

Heather Feather, Giant Eagle’s senior director of digital and eCommerce strategy, noted that the pandemic challenged their technical systems and staff but ultimately led to a major transformation in consumer habits. Even Walmart, which began its grocery pickup service in 2013, expanded its operations to accommodate the increased demand and has seen substantial growth in eCommerce. A spokesperson for Walmart indicated that same-day deliveries now reach 93% of the U.S. population, demonstrating an industry-wide pivot towards speed and convenience.

In the early days of the pandemic, customers flocked to buy essentials, resulting in prolonged wait times for grocery delivery. Tim Westine, a curbside team leader at Giant Eagle, recounted, "People were waking up at midnight to place an order," as the demand outstripped their capacity.

Today, the focus of online grocery orders has shifted from stockpiling non-perishable items to purchasing fresh produce, meats, and dairy products. Grocery items ordered online reflect a significant degree of customer interaction, as team members strive to meet specific preferences through personalised communication, enhancing the experience for online shoppers. Giant Eagle’s recent partnerships with third-party services such as Instacart, DoorDash, and Uber Eats further streamline the process, providing greater convenience for customers who prefer online shopping.

While traditional in-store shopping continues to dominate grocery sales, the rise of online ordering indicates a substantial shift in consumer behaviour, making it clear that the grocery landscape has been irrevocably altered by the pandemic. With ongoing enhancements to technology and service, the future of grocery shopping appears poised for further evolution as consumer preferences continue to change.

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