

# Merchandising Cues Critical in Shaping Consumer Perceptions of Freshness

CHICAGO — A new study from **Culinary Visions** finds that retailers can get a product's freshness across to customers with a few merchandising tips.

"Freshness is affected by a long list of different factors beyond the food itself. These factors include packaging, store perceptions and service style," said Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions. "Consumers gravitate towards fresh merchandising cues such as clean and fully stocked display cases. Uncluttered shopping, dining and ordering spaces are also important aspects to consumers' perceptions on freshness."

According to the **Culinary Visions Fresh Perspectives Study**, 76 percent of consumers surveyed reported that a **fully stocked shelf or display case is important to determining freshness**.

**The cleanliness of merchandising displays is also important to more than 90 percent of consumers**. In addition, roughly two-thirds of consumers surveyed said that a clean display case was extremely important to consider food as fresh while 28 percent of consumers described that factor as a moderately important.

**Clutter is also counterproductive to perception of freshness**. According to the study, 90 percent of consumers surveyed said it was important to have a clear and uncluttered shopping, dining or ordering space when buying fresh food. Further, nearly half of consumers surveyed said it was extremely important while 41 percent of consumers said it was moderately important.

Looking specifically at on-site foodservice, **consumers indicated cleanliness and presentation of a service counter, salad bar or an action station is significant**, transparency also plays an important role in defining freshness.

Eighty-five percent of those surveyed said that **transparent packaging** was "moderately important" or "extremely important" to them when considering freshness of food. In addition, 88 percent agreed that a **label stating when the food was prepared** was an important factor in their consideration of the freshness of food.

However, looks aren't everything. As Culinary Visions found, **consumers also allow online and word-of-mouth assessments of stores and restaurants to influence their decision to purchase fresh foods**. Specifically, 88 percent said the reputation of a retail store is important when buying fresh foods and 84 percent of consumers reported that a restaurant's reviews and ratings were important when making dining decisions to eat fresh foods.

**The Culinary Visions Fresh Perspectives Study** surveyed 1,500 U.S. consumers to gather comparable data about the key influencing factors impacting fresh food purchasing decisions at home and away from home. This comprehensive report explores fresh perception between age demographics, as well as topics such as merchandising, flavor preferences, customization and convenience.