

# Center of Store - US - 2021

Report Price: £3695 | \$4995 | €4400

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## This report looks at the following areas:

- The impact of COVID-19 on consumer behavior and the center of the store
- Center-store purchase factors
- Interest in center-store product and promotional concepts
- Attitudes toward the center of the store

Sales in center-store shelf-stable and frozen food categories surged in the initial stages of the pandemic and have remained at elevated levels as many consumers continue to work from home and do more home cooking. As the pandemic wanes, the center store overall will settle back into its long-term slow growth pattern.

While consumers broadly view packaged foods from the center store as less healthful than fresh foods, they acknowledge improvement, a positive trend that may in part reflect the introduction of healthier alternatives in the freezer case. Nearly six in 10 center-store shoppers agree that frozen fruits and vegetables are just as healthy as fresh, a perception that may have been bolstered during the pandemic as more food shoppers turned to the freezer case.

The tendency toward routine and repetition is both a challenge and an opportunity for center-store retailers and marketers. Routine purchases can reflect a degree of shopper loyalty, but breaking the routine can result in incremental sales.

While improved product quality and healthfulness is helping to propel sales growth in these categories, the bigger opportunity for the center store as a whole may be to position it as a facilitator of freshly prepared meals rather than an alternative.



“While center store sales overall will inevitably revert to their slow-growth pre-pandemic pattern, retailers and marketers can leverage the center store to deepen shopper loyalty and engagement, deliver value and help make fresh meal preparation a little easier.”

– John Owen, Associate Director – Food and Retail

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