

## AGRICULTURE

### United States Food Shopping Preferences

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The American grocery shopper is complex, and their preferences are constantly evolving. This study identifies food-buying priorities for U.S. consumers. The objective of this research is twofold: summarize consumers' prioritization of their food spending in eight categories (vegetables, fruits, honey, meat, seafood, baked goods, water and other beverages, and "other" category) and analyze the relationship between stated preferences and demographics (gender, income, etc.).

I collected data through a nationally representative online survey of 1,200 U.S. consumers. I summarized the data, and t-tests indicated that there were statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.10$ ) differences between expenditure for various food items between different demographic groups. For example, females allocated significantly more expenditure on fruits and vegetables, while males allocated more to baked goods and honey. Similarly, households with children allocated significantly more expenditure on baked goods and honey, while those without children allocated more to the "other"

category. This result was somewhat surprising. Given that dairy was not a stand-alone category, it was expected that the "other" category would capture those purchases, and that households with children would be more likely to prioritize these purchases given that dairy is a key component of many children's diets. Households with income  $< \$50,000$  allocated significantly more expenditure on meat as well as water and other beverages, while households with income  $\geq \$50,000$  allocated more on seafood, fruit, and honey.

How respondents allocate their income to their food budget is important information for those hoping to improve the diets of Americans, as well as retailers and those marketing food products.

*Research advisors Nicole Widmar, Courtney Bir, and Nathan Thompson write: "Caroline's project offers a nationally representative look at U.S. grocery shoppers' prioritization of food spending. Given constantly evolving preferences for food products, this research is relevant and timely. The results of her analysis offer a variety of interesting insights into the interaction of demographic factors and grocery spending, which have implications for policy makers, food marketers, and retailers."*