

# Butterball Togetherness Report™

Unlocking Retail Potential Through Social Meal Gatherings



**BUTTERBALL®**

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# Introduction: Stability at the Table, Opportunity on the Shelf

Today's consumers are stretched thin: rising costs, busy schedules, and emotional fatigue are all taking their toll. Yet amid these pressures, one ritual remains strong: social meal gatherings with friends and family.

These moments of connection – people gathered around a common table with tasty, nourishing food – have become a force for stability and comfort for consumers. The central importance of these occasions in people's lives drives different shopping behaviors and bigger baskets, making social meal gatherings an underleveraged, high-impact market segment for grocery retail.

## 88%

of Americans have changed grocery shopping habits in response to inflation, including trading down and avoiding impulse buys<sup>1</sup>

## Nearly 25%

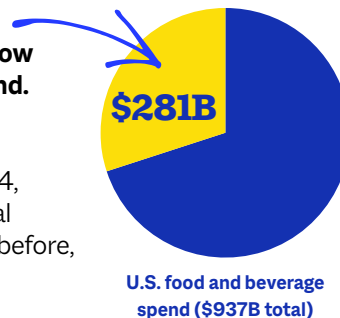
of consumers use buy-now/pay-later loans to finance groceries, up from 14% a year ago<sup>2</sup>

## 1%

growth was recorded in U.S. food and beverage sales in 2024.<sup>3</sup>

According to consumer estimates, social meal gatherings beyond everyday dinners and holidays now account for nearly a third of food and beverage spend.

Many of these occasions are anchored by protein, suggesting an opportunity for meat departments to more actively address these shoppers. Indeed, in 2024, the average American hosted 15% more at-home meal gatherings with a main protein than they did the year before, according to Circana's National Eating Trends report.



This year's Butterball Togetherness Report™ reveals

shopper behavior around these meals, how grocers can capture these moments with practical strategies, and how turkey, in all its forms, can move beyond the holiday centerpiece to claim a more regular role in the social meal gathering.



## Defining the social meal moment



The social meal gatherings discussed in this report are based on results of a survey of consumer attitudes towards shared meals. These were defined as casual dining occasions hosted at home, excluding everyday meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner) with immediate household members and larger holiday celebrations or special occasions (birthdays, graduations, etc.). Examples of social meal gatherings, or social meals for short, might include a backyard barbeque, Sunday brunch, a dinner party, or having friends over to watch the game. They do not include dining out.

**This report explores the key opportunities we uncovered for grocery retailers:**

- 1 Realize the Importance of Social Meal Gatherings**
- 2 Engage Shoppers Early with Easy Recipes and Fun Experiences**
- 3 Establish Your Store as the Go-To Social Meal Destination**
- 4 Protein is the Anchor, and the Upsell**

<sup>1</sup> Food & Wine, "9 in 10 Americans Are Changing How They Shop for Groceries to Save Money – Even High Earners," April 26, 2025

<sup>2</sup> New York Times, "Consumers Are Financing Their Groceries. What Does It Say About the Economy?," June 2, 2025

<sup>3</sup> Circana Integrated Fresh MULO+ FY 2024



## Realize the Importance of the Social Meal Moment

Social meals differ from special celebrations; they're about maintaining and nurturing relationships with the people in our lives. Even amid economic pressures and budget concerns, consumers prioritize them and the moments of connection they provide.

69%

say shared meals help them stay connected to friends and family

52%

say staying within their budget for shared meals is important

47%

say cooking for others is how they show care

This creates a scalable opportunity. **Some 85% of consumers say they want to have more or the same number of social meals when compared to last year**, and that finding more time, space, and budget flexibility will help them achieve that. Retailers can directly influence those constraints by bundling offerings, reducing friction, and spotlighting ready-to-cook proteins.



### Retailer Opportunity

Regular social meals, not just holidays or special occasions, represent a high-impact opportunity for grocery retailers to increase share. Streamlining the in-store shopping experience, bundling offers, and promoting ready-to-cook proteins can help consumers overcome time and cost barriers. Position social meals as a frequent, achievable ritual with solutions that remove planning burdens.

85%

of shoppers indicate that they plan to have as many or more shared meals in the next year.

### What would motivate you to host more shared meals?

36% Larger budgets

27% Easier cleanup

27% More space

24% More time



# Engage Shoppers Early with Convenient Recipes and Fun Experiences

Generational data reveals a clear behavioral shift: Gen Z and Millennial shoppers are not just participating in shared meals more often, they're actively hosting them. These younger groups spend significantly more per gathering than Boomers and are more likely to explore new stores when shopping for shared meal prep.



## Gen Z and Millennial

**Gen Z/Young Millennials are 42% more likely** than younger Boomers to say they shop at different stores for casual shared meals, **and 63% more likely** than older Boomers

More likely than  
younger Boomers:

42%

More likely than  
older Boomers:

63%

**Younger generations spend more than older ones** on casual meals at home with family and friends

**\$131**

Gen Z/Younger  
Millennials

**\$144**

Older  
Millennials

**\$146**

Gen X

**\$121**

Younger  
Boomers

**\$88**

Older  
Boomers

**\$64**

Retirees/Seniors

These shoppers also want inspiration and guidance. [One recent study](#) found that **just one-third of Gen Z and less than half of Millennials consider themselves skilled in the kitchen**. Moreover, large majorities of those cohorts watch cooking videos, with YouTube and TikTok taking the lion's share of views.<sup>4</sup> They gravitate toward stores that are fun, well-staffed, and filled with ideas. Simplicity also matters: almost half want food that makes them feel confident in the kitchen, regardless of skill level.



## Retailer Opportunity

It is important to build loyalty early with younger shoppers. Grocery retailers can offer content, protein-led recipes, and in-store experiences that foster confidence and fun. Moreover, they can position turkey as an easy, go-to choice for social meals, not just holidays. Easy to prepare options such as boneless roasts and tenderloins, along with burgers and sausages, all make for convenient and attractive options.

<sup>4</sup> Home Run Inn Pizza, "Culinary Confessions: Cooking Habits of Gen Z & Millennials", August 16, 2023

# Establish Your Store as the Go-To Social Meal Destination

Shoppers don't follow their typical grocery rhythm when preparing for social meals. These occasions trigger unique shopping behaviors. Shoppers plan differently, visit multiple stores, and are more intentional with quality and variety. Meat and seafood departments play a crucial role in store choice, especially when shoppers are entertaining.

**Consumers don't shop the same way for shared meals as they do for everyday needs.**



A significant share of high-frequency hosts are also high-income shoppers, willing to spend more on these occasions. They want one-stop solutions but will travel for the right offering. That means retailers who claim this territory with tailored displays and offerings can win.

## Retailer Opportunity

Grocery retailers can position their stores as destinations for shopping for social meals by spotlighting variety, quality, and ease. Use these meal occasions to drive incremental trips and premium baskets. Consider hosting-themed endcaps or cross-merchandising bundles tied to weekends, seasonal gatherings, or even social trends.

### Top reasons for store choice

Affordable

67%

Product variety

47%

Convenience

42%

Quality meat/seafood department

30%



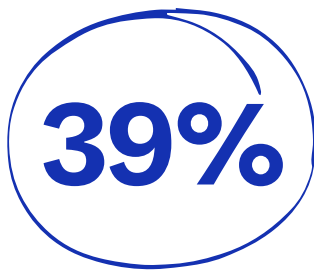
## Super Hosts

Hosts who entertain most frequently represent a high-value segment for grocery retailers. The overwhelming majority (83%) of these "super hosts" are their household's primary grocery decision-makers, and more than a third report annual incomes over \$100,000. On average, they spend \$130 on shared meals, 12% more than medium or light hosts. And they're not slowing down. In fact, 15% expect to host even more meal occasions in the coming year, making them a prime audience for premium offerings, bundled solutions, and loyalty-building experiences.



# Protein Is the Anchor, and the Upsell

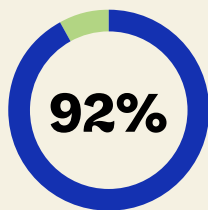
Hosts plan their meals around protein. It anchors the meal, determines sides, and is the item they're most likely to splurge on. On top of this, protein dominates much of the current popular conversation around nutrition and well-being. Indeed, the International Food Information Council found that 71% of people are trying to get more protein, while high protein was the most popular diet of 2024<sup>5</sup>. Butterball's research and supplemental data confirm: protein sits at the center of the plate and top of the shopping list.



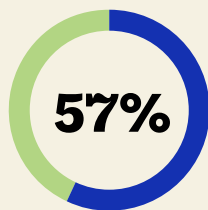
Increase in searches  
for "high protein"<sup>6</sup>

This is a key entry point for new thinking around proteins that are versatile, lean, and crowd-pleasing. Turkey is one such protein, naturally lean, able to stretch across a wide variety of types of shared meals and boasting strong nutritional benefits. Yet it's often overlooked outside major holidays. **By marketing turkey as an everyday anchor, retailers can both meet health-conscious and budget-minded consumers while driving margin.**

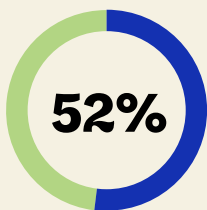
**Protein remains the centerpiece of shared meals. Among hosts:**



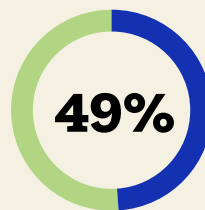
include protein in  
shared meals



say it anchors  
the menu



are most likely to  
splurge on protein



choose sides/  
appetizers based  
on protein



## Retailer Opportunity

Feature turkey burgers, dinner sausages, roasts, and tenderloins in promotions beyond Thanksgiving. Promote with signage that highlights meal ideas for game days, brunches, or midweek gatherings.



## Food for Thought

Amid the stresses of life, consumers continue to prioritize moments of togetherness, and they're turning to shared meals with family and friends to find them. Grocery stores that make shared meals easier, more affordable, and more inspiring are well positioned to win consumer loyalty. This isn't just about one-off promotions, it's about owning the shared meal occasion as a recurring revenue stream.

<sup>5</sup> IFIC, [2024 Food & Health Survey](#)

<sup>6</sup> New York Post, "High-protein Foods, Alcohol-free Drinks Top List of Health Trends," April 1, 2025

# Conclusion: Social Meal Gatherings as a Retail Growth Engine

Social meal moments are more than holiday feasts and special occasions, they're a regular part of people's lives that is rooted in emotional connection. Grocery retailers willing to meet shoppers with empathy, simplicity, and practical solutions stand to win a bigger share of this durable, year-round opportunity. Turkey, long associated with the biggest meal of the year, is ready for a bigger role. By repositioning it as the go-to anchor for social meals, retailers can not only build baskets but bonds with customers that last well beyond the table.

## Key takeaways

### 1 Realize the Importance of Social Meal Gatherings:

Social meals offer a frequent sales opportunity for grocery retailers by easing time and cost barriers through streamlined shopping, bundled offers, and convenient meal solutions like kits and grab-and-go options.

### 3 Establish Your Store as the Go-To Shared Meal Destination:

Shared meals trigger unique shopping behaviors. Emphasize variety, quality, and convenience. Boost sales with themed endcaps and bundles linked to events, seasons, or social trends.

### 2 Engage Shoppers Early with Healthy Recipes and Fun Experiences:

Gen Z and Millennial shoppers are hosting – and spending – more. Offer protein-focused recipes and compelling in-store experiences, and position turkey as a simple, everyday protein option for regular social meals, not just holidays.

### 4 Protein is the Anchor, and the Upsell:

Promote turkey products like breast roasts, tenderloins, burgers, and smoked sausage year-round with signage showcasing meal ideas for occasions like game days, brunches, and midweek gatherings.



## ✓ Survey Methodology

A 12-minute online survey was fielded from April 15-21, 2025, in the contiguous United States. The survey reached 1,872 respondents who share or are the primary grocery shopper for their household, and had some type of shared meal more than once in the last year. We included a minimum age of 24 to focus on adults more likely to be independent household decision-makers.