

INSIDE THE PANTRY

THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABILITY ON FOOD AND SHOPPING ROUTINES

Examining consumer pantries from an ethnographic perspective complements analytic segmentations and sheds light on a very large and growing market that coalesces under the umbrella term “sustainable products.” To underscore demand in the marketplace, we find that more than a quarter of consumers (26 percent) claim that environmental and social concerns always or usually always impact much of their purchasing. Here’s a look at consumers’ views, from the Core to the Periphery, of the impact of sustainability on food and shopping routines.

CORE



The Core are more likely than others to shop at natural/specialty stores, especially Whole Foods and Trader Joe’s, likely due to perceived shared values and these retailers’ selection of sustainable and bulk products. Plant-based meat/cheese alternatives and functional beverages are more popular among the Core, who tend to see animal products as less sustainable. The Core tend to eat at home for more control over their diets. Their purchasing does suggest more home cooking, as they are more likely to buy fresh perishables and cooking staples.

INNER MID-LEVEL



In addition to grocery, the Inner Mid-level are more likely to shop natural/specialty than less engaged consumers, likely searching for products that meet their sustainability and personal health criteria. Uniquely, they are most likely of any segment to shop at club. While fresh foods — such as produce, meat, and dairy — are top of mind, Inner Mid-level consumers go for more convenience and indulgence than their more engaged Core counterparts, with a taste for frozen breakfast items and frozen desserts. These choices likely reflect their greater prioritization of taste and convenience.

OUTER MID-LEVEL



The Outer Mid-level are similar to the general market in their retailer preferences, relying most on mass, grocery, and discount/dollar. However, they are more likely than the Periphery to shop natural/specialty, reflecting their greater engagement in sustainability. Outer Mid-level consumers buy less fresh produce, eggs, and dairy than other segments, suggesting less scratch cooking. More motivated by personal health, price, convenience, and other priorities, they factor sustainability into their purchasing as a quality cue.

PERIPHERY



Most Periphery consumers shop mass and grocery, and they are the most likely segment to shop Walmart. These conventional retailers likely satisfy their desire for good prices and convenient shopping for conventional items. Compared to other segments, Periphery consumers’ kitchens reflect a desire for convenient cooking. They buy more ready-made, shelf-stable, and frozen food. They also are more likely to choose snack foods and sweets. Similarly, frozen items in their shopping basket are more likely to include pizza than produce.