

Retail meat and poultry purchases normalizing, annual survey shows By [Ann Bagel Storck](#) on 3/8/2010

ORLANDO, Fla. — With restaurant visits on the decline, food retailing grew its share of total production among most proteins for the first time in many years as meat and poultry purchases at retail began to normalize, according to the 5th annual Power of Meat research presented by the Food Marketing Institute and the American Meat Institute here during the 2010 Annual Meat Conference.

"This is our chance to recapture mealtime," said Anne-Marie Roerink, a research consultant commissioned by FMI who presented the findings from a November 2009 survey of 1,100 consumers. "The food landscape has fundamentally changed."

This year's study showed 40 percent of shoppers have changed their meat and poultry purchases due to the economic downturn, an improvement compared with the 51 percent who said the same thing last year and the 50 percent this year who said they spend less in the store overall. Inclusion of meat and poultry at dinner also has improved: Consumers eat dinner at home five nights a week, and this year's research indicated four of those meals included meat or poultry.

"This shows the power of meat," Roerink noted. "People are not very willing to give up meat and poultry."

Power of supermarkets

Although supermarkets continue to lose market share when it comes to serving as shoppers' primary store — 61 percent of this year's survey respondents listed supermarkets as their main shopping destination, and 32 percent named supercenters in that role — they are still the primary destination for meat. Sixty-eight percent of consumers buy meat primarily at supermarkets, while only 19 percent do so at supercenters.

What's more, supermarkets tend to retain shoppers when it comes to meat purchases. Eighty-eight percent of consumers who shop primarily at supermarkets stay there to buy meat, while only 60 percent of supercenter shoppers remain at supercenters to make their meat purchases.

Buying in bulk

The practice of purchasing meat and poultry in bulk continues to increase, with 60 percent of respondents to this year's survey indicating they buy meat and poultry in larger quantities for use over time (a number that stood at 51 percent as recently as 2007).

While 40 percent of shoppers said a substantial discount was the main reason behind their bulk purchases, it's not the only motivating factor. Fifteen percent said they chose bulk products because of pre-portioning, and 11 percent were drawn to them when variety packs were offered.

Steady course for natural/organic

Sales of natural/organic meat and poultry, Roerink noted, have remained stagnant, not growing

or crashing despite the recession. One in five consumers said they have bought natural/organic in the past three months.

Among the reasons she listed for that phenomenon are increased natural/organic offerings per store and across proteins, a growing number of retail outlets — including Walmart — selling natural/organic meat and the wealthier demographic profile of many organic purchasers.

"Meat is a driver to the store," Roerink reminded attendees. "It can cause someone to come to this store instead of that store."