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GHRA In Action

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VOL. 12 | **MARCH 2025**

FDA Bans Red Dye No. 3 From Food Products

Page 11

Three Foodservice Trends Influencing Consumer Behavior

Page 06

Keurig Dr Pepper Adds Several New Flavors to Its 2025 Beverage Lineup

Page 12

Year-Round E15 Legislation Reintroduced Into Congress

Page 13

In This Issue

MARCH 2025

Welcome Members

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff at GHRA, please welcome our new members:

FASTRAC	ELAN #15	BUZZY BEE TRAVEL CENTER	ALAYA FOOD MART
STRIKE	BAYFRONT MART	TOUCH DOWN	SPEDD MAX
KROOZIN MARKET	GRAB N GO #11	HAPPY'S	SWIFT
LANDMARK	GRAB N GO #12	MR. EXPRESS	FUEL MAXX #89
ELAN #13	GRAB N GO #13	RAYFORD FOOD MART	CHIMNEY ROCK FOOD MART
ELAN #14	RIVERWALK STORE LLC	FALCON EXPRESS	

Three Foodservice Trends Influencing Consumer Behavior

Operators that adapt to these shifts will be best positioned for long-term success.

By Danielle Romano

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Consumers' evolving definition of value will have an impact on the foodservice industry, predicts Rich Products Corp.

"Consumer behavior across the foodservice industry is shifting rapidly, driven by convenience, customization, experience and an evolving value equation," said Amanda Buonopane, senior manager, strategic insights, Rich Products. "Not only are we seeing e-commerce continue to surge — both in delivery and personalized experiences — but we're also seeing a shift in how consumers define value in food and beverage choices. Operators that adapt to these shifts will be best positioned for long-term success."

Conducted by Rich's Strategic Insights team to help industry professionals respond to rapidly evolving market shifts, the company's 2025 trends outlook dives into everything from how consumers are redefining value to key growth drivers across the category.

1. Beverage Innovation Fuels Growth

The beverage sector is experiencing a wave of innovation, with rising demand for specialty drinks, such as "dirty" sodas — a mix of syrup, juice or cream — refreshers and healthier soda alternatives. Trends such as the "Stanley cup movement" are encouraging people to adopt better hydration habits by using reusable drinkware, Rich's said.

Additionally, the surge of mocktails is shaping the landscape, offering sophisticated nonalcoholic options for social occasions. Consumers are increasingly turning to beverages to satisfy both indulgent and better-for-you urges, with preferences for both dessert-as-a-flavor, as well as healthy and fresh flavor profiles. These trends are inspiring new product launches and menu adaptations amongst foodservice operators.

2. Value, Redefined

Consumers are redefining value in food and beverage choices, moving beyond price to a more comprehensive assessment of what they receive for their investment. In addition to price, factors like quality, convenience, relevance and experience now play a pivotal role in the total value equation. As selective spending becomes the norm following recent economic challenges, consumers seek offerings perceived as "worth the dollar" rather than simply the cheapest options.

This shift presents a significant opportunity for foodservice operators to differentiate themselves through menu innovation and experiences that meet these evolving consumer expectations, the company stated.

3. E-commerce Continues to Dominate

While traditional dining remains under pressure, online food delivery and e-grocery services are booming. Platforms like DoorDash have seen sustained demand, proving that convenience was not just a pandemic-era trend but a long-term shift. Additionally, e-grocery services are attracting new demographics beyond repeat customers by leveraging customization, such as personalized grocery experiences.

More information about Rich's insights, live events and courses is available via Rich's Academy.

Headquartered in Buffalo, Rich's is a family-owned food company whose portfolio includes creative solutions geared at helping food industry professionals compete in foodservice, retail, in-store bakery, deli and prepared foods, among others.

Rich's was the 2021 Category Captain for Prepared Food as part of *Convenience Store News'* annual Category Captains awards program. ■

Poor Merchandising Cost Retailers $125 Billion in Last 12 Months, *Report Says*

CSP talks with convenience-store experts on maintaining "an organized, well thought-out merchandising customer experience."

By CSP Daily News

Hard-to-find products, cluttered displays and disorganization all play a part in poor visual merchandising, and retailers across the United States lost a "staggering" $125 billion in sales over the past 12 months because of this, according to report The Cost of Poor Merchandising, published in January.

This loss, which represents 3.3% of the size of the entire physical retail market, "highlights the importance of effective merchandising practices for driving sales and retaining customer loyalty," according to the report produced by New York-based data and analytics company GlobalData for Boston-based One Door, which helps retailers in planning and executing in-store merchandising. "This is consistent across luxury, mid-market, discount and needs-based stores; however, the degree of impact varies by store type and shopper profile."

For consumers, the most frustrating area of poor merchandising, with 33.3% saying they've been affected, was "hard-to-find products."

> *"To retain customers and reduce the substantial sales lost annually, retailers must address these core merchandising issues."*

"Products being hard to find is a shared frustration among all types of shoppers, and a customer's propensity to purchase an item is severely dampened if they have to spend time and effort locating it within the store," the report said "Messy, cluttered and disorganized displays are the next three main points of frustration for shoppers. To retain customers and reduce the substantial sales lost annually, retailers must address these core merchandising issues."

Drilling down, the mid-market had the highest level of losses from poor merchandising in the last year, with retailers in this segment losing out on a potential $54.1 billion, the report said.

"However, all types of stores face significant consequences from poor merchandising," the report said. "Of the discount shoppers who have experienced poor merchandising, only 51.5% are likely to return and, while more tolerant in some areas, particularly where prices are competitive, this group also exhibits lower tolerance for inefficiency in product accessibility. Meanwhile, for luxury shoppers, cluttered and messy displays were the most common frustrations."

CSP spoke with experts on this subject. Here is what they said:

Issue Always Challenging

"We always try to maintain an organized, well thought-out merchandising customer experience," said Mike Jones, director of marketing, S&S Petro, Mukilteo, Washington. "If products are not easy to find and considered shoppable, then you are doing your customer a disservice."

Jones said this issue is always a challenge for a variety of reasons: more SKUs than space, understanding what is priority when it comes to first position or strike zone, and understanding that sometimes simply less is more.

The report is "pretty spot on," Jones said. "You have to create and maintain a good merchandise flow in order to capture your shopper's experience. You are dealing with small, tight time windows with customer buying decisions and it's critical not to create barriers. There is no question that proper merchandising can enhance sales or, if done poorly, have just the opposite impact."

Stress-Free Experience

Brandon Beil, lead field merchandiser at for Southwest Georgia Oil Co., Bainbridge, Georgia, which operates 79 SunStop c-stores, said that ensuring that his chain's products are visible, well-organized, clearly display retail prices and are easy to find are top priorities.

"We consistently assess the layout of our stores to make sure that we are not only merchandising products effectively but also creating a stress-free shopping experience for our customers," Beil said. "It's important that our stores are organized in a way that minimizes clutter and directs shoppers' attention to key items, which ultimately drives sales."

SunStop c-stores has recognized the importance of effective merchandising, investing in the field merchandiser position, Beil said.

"This report serves as a reminder for us to continually innovate and refine our merchandising practices."

"We understand that when displays are not prominently displayed, are disorganized or products are hard to find, it directly affects retail sales," he said. "This is in line with the report's findings about the frustration consumers feel when they encounter clutter or difficulty locating items."

The report is alarming yet enlightening, he said. The statistic that retailers lost $125 billion in sales due to poor visual merchandising "highlights how significant this issue really is," he said.

"The impact across various store types highlights the need for us to prioritize effective merchandising strategies," Beil said. "It's clear that addressing the frustrations in the report, such as hard-to-find products and messy displays, should be a central focus in order to improve sales and customer loyalty. This report serves as a reminder for us to continually innovate and refine our merchandising practices to ensure we are meeting or exceeding customer expectations and maximizing our potential sales."

Just Too Much

Donna Hood Crecca, principal at *CSP* sister research arm Technomic, Chicago, said, "I can't tell you how many c-stores I drive by and there's so much clutter that my brain doesn't even pick up on anything. I can't absorb it all. There's just too much. And when that happens, literally there's an overload of signage, and the consumer might just disregard everything."

Walk the Store

Jeff Taylor worked in the c-store industry for 30 years, most recently at Last Minit Mart, New Castle, Pennsylvania. He is now director of fuel order management and dispatch for 21st Century Energy Group in the same city; 21st Century Energy Group used to own the marts.

Taylor said that supervisors don't always take the time to walk their store and look at it from a consumer's viewpoint—something he always coached his managers to do when they arrived in the morning.

"You need to see that things are organized, that the store is clean and that you have sufficient product, and if not, then you need to take corrective measures, whether it's stocking, cleanliness or replenishment," he said.

Having a supervisor do this is a challenge because they often might go into a store for a specific purpose and don't take the time to walk the store.

"Same with the manager," he said. "They come in and know they have to do their paperwork or have employee issues they may be dealing with, and they don't really walk their store to see are they really ready for their day."

"You need to see that things are organized, that the store is clean and that you have sufficient product."

Taylor recalled a different c-store chain in Pennsylvania where they created a spreadsheet for the manager to fill out every day to show they walked the store and checked on key areas.

One area to keep an eye on is the placement of shippers, which is important for impulse sales but that can slow traffic in aisles or block another product, Taylor said.

"Now it's one thing to hide paper towels, not that you want to, but maybe it's blocking your paper towels—or maybe it's in front of high-margin items, maybe your breakfast snacks or your sweet snacks—and sweet snacks are perishable," he said.

"Oftentimes when I would go into stores, I would have the manager walk with me and would talk about things and what they saw and why, what their thinking was, why did you put this here?" Taylor said. ■

Tapping Into Three Gen Alpha Food Trends

The cohort's behaviors, values and expectations set them apart from previous generations.

By CS News

NEW YORK — Members of Generation Alpha are still young — born between 2010 and 20205 — but now is a crucial moment for brands to begin preparing for and engaging with the emerging cohort, according to a new Mintel report.

By 2029, Gen Alpha's spending power is projected to reach $5.5 trillion as their unique behaviors, values and expectations distinguish them from previous generations.

According to Mintel, Gen Alpha already has three key core characteristics:

- **Independent and influential —** While still young, the cohort is growing up amid a parental and mental health revolution in which their opinions are valued and their influence on household decisions is significant.
- **Tech savvy and digitally native —** Growing up in a digital-first world, Gen Alpha is more tech-savvy than any preceding generation. However, there is a growing awareness of the importance of screen-life balance, driven by concerns about potential health risks related to excessive screen time.
- **Sustainably and ethically focused —** Growing up in a world marked by social and environmental issues has fostered a strong ethical consciousness in Gen Alpha, making them discerning consumers who prioritize food brands with genuine social environmental values. This awareness is likely to intensify as they mature.

Gen Alpha is growing up in an era of heightened health consciousness. As the first generation to come of age with a focus on functional food and drinks, enriched with vitamins, minerals and probiotics, they are likely to have a deeper understanding of the connection between diet and overall well-being. In the United States, there is growing demand from parents of Gen Alpha for food and beverages that support immune function and digestive health.

Still, global childhood obesity rates are on the rise, driven by a complex set of factors such as socioeconomic challenges, declining levels of physical activity, and heavy presence of high-fat, high-sugar and high-salt foods in children's diets.

Gen Alpha children are increasingly aware of sustainability issues, and are likely to be more pragmatic and open to sustainable food technologies such as genetically modified ingredients and lab-grown foods as climate change endangers food security and global food demand rises, according to Mintel.

At the same time, Gen Alpha is growing up with adventurous palates due to their parents exposing them to diverse cuisines early, and a side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is their deeper appreciation for real-life experiences and food that serves as a real-world method of connecting. This shift has boosted interest in immersing dining experiences like themed restaurants as well as interactive food experiences.

Although global new product launches aimed at children have declined over the last decade due to tighter regulations and increased scrutiny around advertising to children, brands should be mindful of the significant influence a generation's early years have on lifelong brand loyalty, Mintel advised. Despite the lower number of product launches, demand remains for innovative children's food and drinks.

Mintel has provided research and market intelligence solutions to consumer-focused businesses for more than 50 years. ■

FDA Bans Red Dye No. 3 From Food Products

The Food and Drug Administration said on Wednesday that it is banning red dye No. 3 from food products. Manufacturers have until January 2027 to reformulate their products, agency says.

By CSP Daily News

Two studies have shown cancer in laboratory male rats exposed to high levels of red dye No. 3, the FDA said. And while the FDA said studies in other animals and in humans did not show these effects, the Delaney Clause—enacted in 1960 as part of the Color Additives Amendment to the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act—prohibits FDA authorization of a food or color additive if it has been found to induce cancer in humans or animals.

This is not the first time the agency revoked an authorization based on the Delaney Clause. In 2018, the FDA revoked the authorization for certain synthetic flavors based on the Delaney Clause in response to a food additive petition

"At long last, the FDA is ending the regulatory paradox of red 3 being illegal for use in lipstick, but perfectly legal to feed to children in the form of candy," said Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) President Dr. Peter G. Lurie.

The food and drug industries used more than 200,000 pounds of Red 3 in 2021, CSPI said in a statement on Wednesday.

Red dye No. 3 is a synthetic food dye made from petroleum that gives foods and drinks a bright, cherry-red color used in certain food products, such as candy, cakes and cupcakes, cookies, frozen desserts, and frostings and icings, as well as certain ingested drugs.

"Food safety is the No. 1 priority for U.S. confectionery companies, and we will continue to follow and comply with FDA's guidance and safety standards," the National Confectioners Association said in a statement. "Our consumers and everyone in the food industry want and expect a strong FDA, and a consistent, science-based national regulatory framework. We have been saying for years that FDA is the rightful national regulatory decision maker and leader in food safety."

Manufacturers who use red dye No. 3 will have until January 2027 to reformulate their products.

In 2023 California signed a bill to ban four chemicals used in candy and other food and drinks, including red dye No. 3, starting in 2027. ■

Keurig Dr Pepper Adds Several New Flavors to Its 2025 Beverage Lineup

Dr Pepper Blackberry, 7UP Tropical among new offerings for convenience stores.

By CSP Daily News

Keurig Dr Pepper has introduced several new flavors to its 2025 U.S. beverage lineup. Dr Pepper Blackberry, 7UP Tropical, Snapple Peach Tea & Lemonade and RC Cola Zero Sugar are among the new offerings.

"Our 2025 cold beverage pipeline builds on our strong track record of delivering successful consumer-centric innovation across our portfolio of legendary brands," said Eric Gorli, president, U.S. refreshment beverages at Keurig Dr Pepper. "Our experts, from flavor scientists to trend spotters, have crafted a dynamic lineup across soft drinks, waters, teas and juices that will offer consumers nationwide even more choice through new fruit flavors, modern twists on familiar favorites and zero sugar options."

New flavors that have launched, or will be launching, nationally within KDP's owned cold beverage portfolio include:

- **Dr Pepper Blackberry:** This drink, which launched Feb. 5, is the newest permanent variety from the Dr Pepper brand, combining the 23 flavors of Dr Pepper with the sweetness of blackberry flavor, the company said. It will be available in regular and zero-sugar varieties across a range of pack sizes, and in fountain and frozen dispensed formats.
- **7UP Tropical:** 7UP Tropical is 7UP blended with tropical flavors of mango and peach. It launches as a permanent flavor in February, and the regular and zero-sugar versions will be available nationwide in 12-ounce 12 packs.
- **Snapple Peach Tea & Lemonade:** The new team combines the brand's No. 1 tea flavor with lemonade. It will launch in March and be available nationwide in a variety of pack sizes.
- **Bai Simbu Strawberry and Bai Shala Coconut Strawberry:** These are two permanent additions to the Bai lineup. Both are sweetened with plant-based stevia. Simbu Strawberry provides Vitamin C and Zinc and Shala Coconut Strawberry has Vitamin E and Zinc, KDP said.
- **A&W Ice Cream Sundae:** This drink was inspired by the combined flavors of vanilla ice cream and fudge flavor, KDP said. It will be available in regular and zero sugar options, and it will come in 12-ounce 12 packs for a limited time starting in August.
- **RC Cola Zero Sugar:** This zero-sugar cola drink will be available to expanded retailers nationally in February in both 12-ounce 12 packs and 2-liter options.

KDP will also offer retailer-exclusive regional offerings throughout the year from brands including Sunkist, Crush, Mott's and more.

KDP is a leading beverage company in North America, with a portfolio of more than 125 owned, licensed and partner brands. It is based in Burlington, Massachusetts, and Frisco, Texas. ■

Year-Round E15 Legislation Reintroduced Into Congress

The push for year-round E15 continues.

By Brownfield AG News

On Thursday, the bicameral, bipartisan Nationwide Consumer and Fuel Retailer Choice Act of 2025 was reintroduced into the 119th Congress. If passed, the bill would remove seasonal restrictions from those who sell, market or purchase ethanol blends up to 15 percent. Year-round E15 was initially included as part of a lame duck spending bill in December but was removed at the last minute.

U.S. Senators Deb Fischer, of Nebraska, and Tammy Duckworth, of Illinois, introduced the Senate legislation. Fischer says the bill, coupled with work to ensure strong renewable volume obligations, could enable biofuels to contribute to the nation's energy independence.

Additional cosponsors include U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Leader John Thune (R-S.D.), Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.), Dick Durbin (D. Ill.), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Roger Marshall (R-Kan.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), Tina Smith (D-Minn.), and Mike Rounds (R-S.D.).

House Ag Committee ranking member Angie Craig, of Minnesota, and Congressman Adrian Smith, of Nebraska, introduced identical companion legislation in the House.

The bill is endorsed by the American Petroleum Institute, Renewable Fuels Association, Growth Energy, National Corn Growers Association, National Farmers Union and the National Association of Convenience Stores.

RFA President and CEO Geoff Cooper says the legislation would bring nationwide consistency and stability to the marketplace and eliminate the need for emergency waivers.

Growth Energy CEO Emily Skor says she hopes this is the bill that finally pushes E15 across the finish line. ■

"Create the highest, grandest vision possible for your life, because you become what you believe."

– Oprah Winfrey