

Supermarkets Lead On Food And Nutrition Initiatives, Study Suggests

Phil Lempert Contributor 

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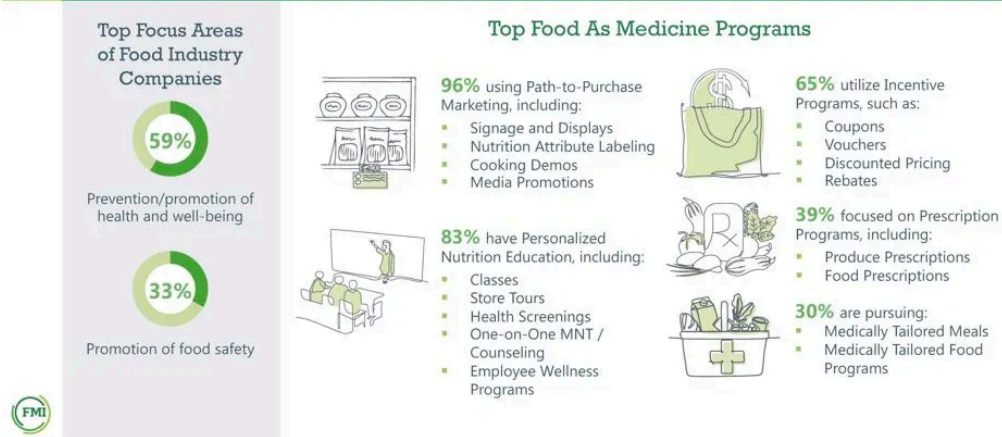
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Supermarkets and food companies have registered dietitians in strategic leadership roles and adding registered nurses, nurse practitioners, medical doctors, and health coaches to drive their health and well-being initiatives and to fuel their commitment to “Food as Medicine”.

FMI – The Food Industry Association released the findings from its latest survey report, “[Food Industry Contributions to Health and Well-Being 2024](#)” late last week underscoring the food industry’s focus to empower consumers to eat healthier and to offer programs to aid their journey. The FMI Survey, which represented more than 11,000 stores represented by 36 companies, found that 84% of responding food retailers are operating with nutrition and health & well-being strategies. This is the first report from FMI which has collected findings from both food retailers and consumer packaged goods brands and will serve as a benchmark on health and wellness for the food industry.

FOOD AS MEDICINE INITIATIVES GAIN MOMENTUM

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FMI's Food as Medicine Initiative Programs being utilized by supermarkets and brands FMI- THE FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

The FMI report states that “Food as Medicine” programs that connect food and nutrition services to improve health are gaining momentum nationwide, and the food industry has always played an important role in both food security and nutrition security. Many of these “Food as Medicine” efforts, particularly when implemented in the community grocery store and supported by registered dietitians’ leadership, are proven successful in changing behavior and improving health. In February 2021 the FMI Board adopted and announced its [commitment and policy](#) on Food as Medicine. The report found that 59% of those surveyed ranked the prevention and promotion of health and well-being as the number one focus area for both employees and customers.

Supermarkets Lead The ‘Food As Medicine’ Initiative

Supermarkets are increasingly recognizing their pivotal role in public health and are making concerted efforts to lead the "Food as Medicine" movement. This initiative seeks to leverage the power of wholesome, nutritious foods to prevent, manage, and even reverse certain health conditions, thereby reducing reliance on conventional medications. By doing so, supermarkets are

transforming from mere food retailers into wellness hubs that offer comprehensive health and nutrition solutions to their customers.

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At the forefront of this effort is the integration of dietitian-led services within the supermarket setting. Registered dietitians are employed to provide personalized nutrition counseling, conduct store tours that highlight healthy choices, and organize workshops that teach customers how to read labels, understand nutritional information, and make healthier food selections. This educational approach empowers consumers to make informed decisions about their diets and lifestyle.

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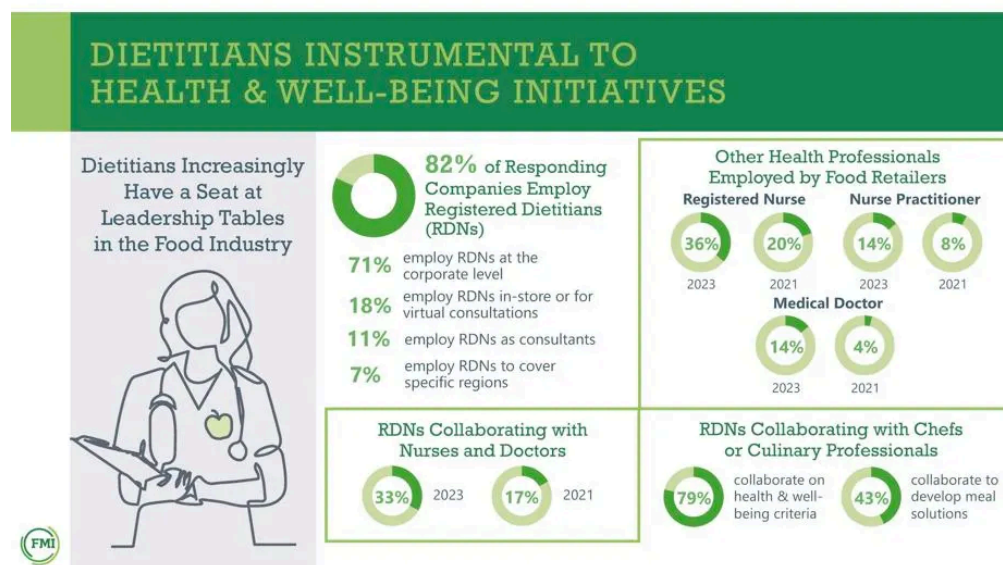
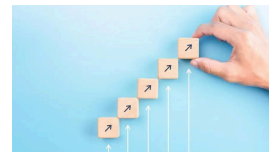
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Supermarkets are expanding their health & wellness teams to include registered nurses and medical ... [+] FMI - THE FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

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Another significant aspect of this movement is the collaboration with healthcare providers. Some supermarkets are partnering with local clinics and hospitals to develop food prescription programs. These programs allow doctors to prescribe healthy foods to patients with specific health conditions, such as diabetes or hypertension, with the supermarket offering discounts or vouchers for these prescribed foods. This not only makes healthy food more accessible but also reinforces the connection between diet and health.

There is little doubt that supermarkets are (and should be) at the vanguard of the “Food as Medicine” movement, as they employ a multifaceted approach that includes education, product curation, healthcare partnerships, and digital innovation.



Krystal Register, MS, RDN, LDN is FMI's Senior Director of Health and Well-being FMI-
THE FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Krystal Register, MS, RDN, LDN, FMI's Senior Director of Health and Well-being, who led the study, said that "Healthy eating has clearly become a priority for shoppers, and the grocery store continues to evolve as an accessible, community-based destination for health and well-being". Over the past decade, many supermarkets have hired retail dietitians, offered in-store and on-line nutrition classes, offered health screenings better-for-you recipes, added nutrition rating systems with on-shelf signage to help their shoppers navigate what at times has been a confusing landscape. Sixty-five percent reported offering incentives to encourage the purchase of better-for-you foods though coupons, vouchers, rebates and discounts.



Supermarkets are providing a plethora of health & wellness services to their shoppers FMI - THE FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Ms. Register, during the media briefing, highlighted that a significant effort is underway with 78% of supermarket retailers and brands reformulating their products to provide healthier options; with over half planning on reducing sodium and reducing added sugars, on cereals, breads, baked goods and frozen foods as well as across supermarkets' own brands portfolios. Another priority for 45% of those companies surveyed said adding 'beneficial' ingredients to their products is part of their reformulation plan. One in four companies also cited adjusting portion sizes which could be an attempt to curb

inflationary prices, or meet the consumer need for portion control especially in light of the growing population now taking GLP-1 weight loss medications.

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Dietitians Get A Seat At The Table

Registered dietitians now ‘have a seat at the leadership table’ she added, with 71% of those employed at grocers or brands operating at the corporate level playing key roles in overall strategy, marketing, communication, regulatory and legislative issues, food safety, e-commerce, and digital merchandising. The survey found that of those surveyed, 82% employ registered dietitians. As one of the few scientific based professionals at supermarkets during the COVID pandemic, these dietitians stepped in to elevate the knowledge and importance of health and well-being throughout their organizations as they sought to better understand how to satisfy their shoppers’ needs. In turn, highlighting their value across their companies, which helped to create a strong foundation to build on retailers’ health and wellness initiatives. In fact, the survey finds that 46% of company presidents, CEOs and marketing leadership are driving health & well-being initiatives.

Family Meals A Priority

The [FMI Foundation’s Family Meals](#) initiative, founded in 2015, focuses on the importance of families eating together to improve family connectiveness, communication and as a result families who eat together have better diets in general and eat more fruits and vegetables. The FMI survey found that 75% of food industry companies are actively promoting communal eating such as family meals and that 90% include nutritional messaging in their communal eating promotions. Fifty-six percent of the food industry respondents said that their companies employ a chef or culinary professional at the corporate level and that 79% of those said working with registered dietitians they develop recipes based on health and well-being criteria. In-store, 43% said they

developed meal solutions based on health and well-being criteria by being involved with registered dietitians.

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Social Media's Impact On Health & Wellness

To communicate nutrition, health and well-being information, the food industry's number one customer outreach by 100% of those surveyed reported to be through social media, with 33% reporting the channel as being very effective. Not surprisingly, the most effective vehicle by 64%, among those using the channel, was through store pharmacists, underscoring the importance of health, nutrition and well-being being a store-wide initiative. Old school marketers will delight to learn that the second highest rated in being very effective was the store's weekly circular, reinforcing the need for retailers (and brands) to include their health messaging both in print and on digital circulars to reach all generations of shoppers. The FMI report also finds that the best way to combat health trends that shoppers are exposed to is that 52% are providing evidence-based nutrition messaging, that FMI highlights as an industry opportunity.

As "Food as Medicine" programs continue to gain attention from retailers, brands and shoppers, this FMI 2024 Report on Food Industry Contributions to Health and Well-Being provides valuable tools and insights for the food world to effectively communicate better-for-you messaging to consumers and help change the foods and beverages that Americans consume. By doing so, they are redefining supermarkets role in society, contributing to a healthier population, and addressing some of the root causes of chronic diseases through the power of nutrition.

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Phil Lempert

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