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# Why Do Consumers Cross-Shop Between Different Types of Food Retail Outlets?

**Brenda J. Cude and Michelle A. Morganosky**

This research analyzed consumer cross-shopping between supermarkets and nontraditional food retail outlets and examined reasons for cross-shopping. Focus groups were conducted in two major metropolitan markets and one medium-size market. Participants indicated they *add* nontraditional retail formats to the existing mix of stores at which they shop. Despite the increased number of types of food retail outlets they patronized, focus group participants said they didn't feel they spent more time grocery shopping at multiple formats compared to shopping in a traditional supermarket.

In recent years, consumers' options for buying food have greatly expanded. Traditional discount retailers such as Kmart and Wal-Mart now build supercenters that include not only the full line of goods sold in their traditional discount store format but also complete supermarkets. Today's consumers can also find in many supermarkets large package-size items that were once available only in warehouse clubs. And the supermarket has changed in other ways, often offering many non-food related services such as banking and dry cleaning as well as take-out and other prepared foods (Lisanti 1996).

How have consumers responded to this blurring of food channels? That question is the focus of this article. Specifically the goals are to analyze consumer cross-shopping for food between supermarkets and nontraditional food retail outlets and to explore how and why consumers choose to patronize multiple retail outlets when buying food.

## **Recent Changes In Food Retailing**

While U.S. grocery sales typically average yearly gains of about 5 percent, most of this growth is attributed to nontraditional channels such as supercenters and warehouse clubs, rather than conventional supermarkets (Food Institute 1998). Jones (1996) and Binkley and Conner (1998) suggest that the emergence of new retail formats and consumers' patronage of these formats have been the most notable change in food retailing in recent years.

Kinsey and Senauer (1996) single out

supercenters, which combine food and general merchandise categories, as providing serious competitive challenges to traditional supermarkets. Capps and Griffin (1998) examined sales data and concluded that the introduction of a Super Wal-Mart in the rural area surrounding Dallas/Fort Worth reduced sales of a conventional retail grocery store in the same area by 21 percent. Woo et al. (2001) found that in the 11-week period after a Super Wal-Mart opened in Athens, Georgia food prices were 20 to 50 cents per pound lower at Super Wal-Mart than at six supermarkets in town.

In 1997, 31 percent of consumers in a national study reported they now shop more often at supercenters for their food purchases than in the previous year (Liebmann 1998). In the same study, 28 percent of respondents said they shopped more often at warehouse clubs for food than previously (Liebmann 1998).

Consumers have not, however, abandoned the traditional supermarket. Surveys indicate that consumers continue to be relatively well-satisfied with supermarkets. In a 1997 national survey consumers gave supermarkets a 6.6 on a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is "extremely satisfied" (Weinstein 1998). Many also said they enjoy shopping in supermarkets (6.5 on a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is "most enjoyable") (Weinstein 1998).

Traditional supermarkets have responded to the growing demand for convenience by offering items such as pre-washed, pre-cut produce; ready-to-eat packaged salads; and even fully cooked take-out meals (Kinsey and Senauer 1996). Kinsey and Senauer (1996) note store responses to at least two other aspects of convenience that food shoppers increasingly expect. By expanding their product assortments and adding a variety of services such

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as banking, floral services, video rental, and dry cleaning, supermarkets have improved their one-stop shopping appeal. Supermarkets are also changing their layouts to allow more direct access to frequently visited departments and looking for ways to increase efficiencies in checkout (Weaver 1998).

## Literature Review

How do consumers decide which store or stores to patronize given this new mix of retail formats available to them? Bell, Ho, and Tang (1998) criticized the conventional view that location explains most of the variance in a consumer's choice of a food retailer. In their study of 520 households they showed that the average number of trips to a particular food store by a given segment is not necessarily correlated with distance. They suggested that store choice is explained better by analyzing consumer response to shopping costs, in which locational differences are captured as part of the fixed cost. Specifically, the researchers represent the total cost  $TC_d^h(s)$  for household  $h$  to shop at store  $s$  on day  $d$  as

$$(1) \quad TC_d^h(s) = F_d^h(s) + V_d^h(s)$$

where  $F_d^h(s)$  is the fixed cost for household  $h$  to shop at store  $s$  on day  $d$  and  $V_d^h(s)$  is the variable cost.

Their basic premise is that shoppers are more likely to visit the store that imposes the lowest *total* shopping cost per trip. They concluded that a store that reduces fixed costs (through improved service, better parking, higher quality, etc.) will increase patronage from consumers who currently shop at competitors' stores, at no revenue loss from current customers. However, a reduction in consumers' variable costs (through lower prices, reward programs, etc.) will increase patronage but reduce revenue from current customers, since they will pay lower prices.

This reasoning can be expanded to model the consumer decision to shop multiple retail formats. The consumer will shop the mix of retail formats that imposes the lowest *total* shopping costs. Some formats may appear in the mix because they have relatively low fixed costs, others because they have relatively low variable costs, and still others because consumers view both fixed and variable costs

as relatively low. Specifically, the total cost  $TC_d^h(s)$  for household  $h$  to shop store  $s$  and retail format  $i$  on day  $d$  is

$$(2) \quad TC_d^h(s_i) = F_d^h(s_i) + V_d^h(s_i)$$

Consumers may also choose to patronize different stores (as well as a variety of retail formats) over time. Bell, Ho, and Tang (1998) related the concept of "basket size" (number of items purchased per visit) to shopping costs and a consumer's choice of a food retail outlet. Retailers might offer small-basket shoppers the lowest fixed shopping costs but higher variable costs, while offering large-basket shoppers the lowest variable costs but higher fixed costs. For example, a convenience store may charge higher prices but have parking spaces close to the door and no wait at the checkout. In contrast, a warehouse club's prices may be lower but the store is located in a secondary rather than a primary retail location. Thus, a consumer whose purpose is a major shopping trip to stock up on a number of grocery items may select a different store or a different retail format than when the purpose is to pick up a few forgotten items or specialty products.

Carsky, Dickenson, and Smith (1995) developed a shopping model that relates a consumer's choice of store to prices and locations. In their model, consumers identify an acceptable set of stores that household members would routinely pass in their daily travel. The researchers assumed consumers will be familiar with the prices for their set of acceptable brands so they will recognize a "price trigger"—a designated low price that triggers a purchase. The authors suggested consumers can adopt this model to use "marketplace mechanisms and competitive environments to their advantage" (p. 453). Carsky, Dickinson, and Smith—who did not test their model—noted that little is known about consumer travel patterns as they relate to search behaviors.

Dellaert et al. (1998) developed a very different theoretical model to explain how consumers combine multiple purposes and destinations in planning their shopping trips. They defined a "trip chain" as a shopping trip that includes visits to multiple locations to buy products of multiple "orders"; order is the term the researchers used to describe the frequency with which a product is purchased. For example, durable products are higher-

order products (since they are purchased less frequently) and fresh food items, which are purchased more frequently, are lower-order products. They assumed the utility of a trip chain consists of a weighted sum of the utility of the stores visited to purchase products of different order and the disutility of travel to the stores. However, the researchers specifically assumed that consumers do not plan multi-stop trips for products of the same order; i.e., they do not plan to visit more than one retail store per trip to buy fresh food items.

Dellaert et al. (2000) concluded that consumers prefer to combine purchases of multiple types of products in their trips to reduce their overall travel. They also concluded that consumers tend to give less frequently purchased items priority over more frequently purchased items such as food when planning multipurpose, multi-destination trips.

As Dellaert et al. (2000) note, current research approaches typically assume that consumers visit only one store in each shopping trip. For example, in their research on consumer grocery shopping strategies, Pologato and Zaichkowsky (1999), Avery (1996), Kolidinsky (1990), and Crowell and Bowers (1977) each assumed that consumers select one store from which to buy groceries. None of the researchers identified any retail options for grocery shopping other than a supermarket. When researchers do acknowledge that consumers grocery shop at multiple stores, they assume it is for the specific purpose of getting the best value (see, for example, Hermann and Warland 1990). Thus, a notable void exists in the literature concerning how and why consumers routinely food shop at more than one store and how and why they cross-shop between traditional and nontraditional food retail outlets. Therefore, in this paper we analyze cross-shopping for food between traditional and nontraditional outlets, examining why consumers choose to cross-shop and the management strategies they use when cross-shopping.

### **Data Collection: Focus Group Interviews**

Focus groups were conducted in March 1998 with consumers in three different markets: Chicago, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri; and Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. Each market offers a variety of food retail formats to consumers.

In both Chicago and St. Louis, consumers can

choose to grocery shop at several major supermarkets, supercenters, warehouse clubs, and online. Champaign-Urbana has a smaller population (100,000) but also offers a wide variety of retail options. At the time of data collection there were 11 supermarkets representing four different retail chains, two supercenters, and one warehouse club in Champaign-Urbana. Shortly after the focus groups were conducted, online grocery shopping also became available.

Consumers selected to participate in a focus group were those who indicated in prescreening that they do their grocery shopping at supermarkets and at least one other format (e.g., supercenters or warehouse clubs). A paid facilitator made initial contacts by telephone with individuals based on the above criteria and then, using the snowball technique (Templeton 1994), asked those contacts for the names and telephone numbers of others who fit the criteria. The participants were chosen to provide a mix of men and women, a range of ages from young adults through retirement age, individuals representing racial and ethnic minorities, and different family types including singles and couples with and without children.

The paid facilitator conducted the focus group interviews in hotel conference rooms in the evening. The facilitator worked from a discussion guide prepared by the researchers. Participants received \$25 each at the end of the session. Focus group discussions were recorded and later transcribed in their entirety.

The 31 individuals who participated in the three focus groups completed a brief survey at the end of each session. The demographics of the participants (Table 1) indicated that there was diversity among the individuals in age, income, and employment. However, the majority (61 percent) of the participants were college graduates and all but five were female. All of the participants patronized at least one retail format in addition to traditional supermarkets for their grocery purchases. Warehouse clubs (67 percent), limited-line discount stores (58 percent), and supercenters (55 percent) were the retail formats most often combined with supermarkets. However, focus group participants also described shopping for food at ethnic markets; specialty stores including meat markets and drug stores, farmers' markets, school fund-raisers such as Market Days, home-delivered food shopping services

**Table 1. Profile of Focus Group Participants (N=31)**

Demographic Variables	Percent of Total
Age	
Less than 35 years	26%
35 to 55 years	45%
Less than 55 years	29%
Gender	
Male	16%
Female	84%
Annual Household Income	
Less than \$30,000	23%
\$30,000–\$49,999	19%
\$50,000–\$69,999	29%
\$70,000 or more	29%
Employment Status	
Full-time	42%
Part-time	23%
Retired	23%
Homemaker or Not Employed	13%
Education Level	
High school or less	10%
Some college	29%
College graduate	61%

such as Schwann's, and by mail order for meats. None of the participants shopped for food online.

## Results

Individuals in the focus groups represented a variety of attitudes about and approaches to grocery shopping and food retailers. Attitudes about grocery shopping varied; some participants said they didn't like to grocery shop or saw it as a "necessary evil" or a "waste of time," while others enjoyed it. Specifically some participants described it as "... time away from the kids," or "a fun activity to try to save money," or "... the time I'm away by myself." As one participant said, "I don't like getting to the store. I don't like having to put away all the stuff. I hate all that. But I love my actual experience in the store."

Focus group participants also varied in their frequency of grocery shopping as well as when they shopped and the time spent preparing as well as

shopping. While one shopped every day, others shopped as seldom as once every six weeks. Some shopped late at night (even at midnight on the day that a sale started) or early in the morning (before 7 a.m.) while others didn't have a specific time preference. Some said they didn't specifically schedule their grocery shopping. As one participant said, "My shopping's usually scheduled in with whatever else I have to do. . . . Usually it's stopping on the way here or the way there." Others planned their grocery shopping trips very carefully. For example, a participant said, "I spend a lot of time getting ready to go grocery shopping. I go through every ad on Sundays. I write down every grocery store that has a bunch of things, and then I go through my coupon book and try and match coupons with what I have on my list." Others did little pre-planning, saying "I just go" or "I don't plan ahead."

Some indicated they devote very limited time to grocery shopping, with two saying they spend an hour, including travel time. At the other extreme, a participant in the same market area said she spends two and a half to three hours. However, most weren't specific about how much time they spent on grocery shopping each week.

Several participants were quite suspicious of food retailers and their practices. Participants referred to stores as "competing to see who can have the highest prices" and "doubling prices after they remodeled a store." Another fairly common belief was that posted prices in stores did not match scanned prices. One participant said, "I almost deliberately now get behind somebody that has a full cart, so that I have time to get my stuff up on the conveyer belt because if I'm putting it up at the same time that they're checking it out, I can guarantee you that they're going to do something wrong."

## Cross-Shopping Between Food Retail Channels

When discussing how often they bought food from retailers other than supermarkets, some focus groups participants were quite vague ("sometimes") while others were very specific ("twice a month on Fridays.") As noted earlier, the participants described combining a variety of retail food store formats with traditional supermarkets.

A primary objective of the focus group interviews was to learn *how* consumers decide where to

shop for food. The focus group participants identified a number of criteria that influenced their store choice regardless of the type of retail format. Among the criteria mentioned were store location (including proximity to other stores they also patronize), selection (including stocking well-known brands and the quality and variety of produce), helpful salespeople, convenience (including convenient hours of operation and ability to get in and out of the store quickly), being locally operated, having a discount card program, and accepting the form of payment the consumer wants to use (check, credit card, debit card).

Consumers were just as articulate about factors that discouraged them from shopping at a store. The focus group participants mentioned salespeople (not enough, not knowledgeable), inconveniences (store inconveniently located, having to pay cash, having to bring your own bags, having to bag your own groceries, rearranging the location of items within the store), prices (posted price different from scanned price, prices higher than other stores in town, prices not on the shelf, prices on the shelf tags but too small to read), stores not mailing out flyers, limited variety, and stores not being clean.

When discussing why they cross-shop, some participants said they shop at a mix of retail formats because they can't find everything they want under one roof. For example, one said, *"I have to go to different stores because they don't all carry the same thing."* In fact, some participants described shopping a variety of formats as routine. For example, *"I split my shopping up 50-50 between Warehouse Club A and Supermarket A. From time to time I'll run into Supermarket D."* Others made their decision about where to shop based on a single item. The trigger varied across focus group participants and included variety in meats and produce, high-quality meats and produce, a specific brand of cereal, sales on soft drinks, and the price of diapers.

Some shopped at a particular format only to get certain items. For example, participants said:

- *"We always get certain things at the warehouse. Our paper products, big toilet paper that lasts for six months."*
- *"Well, usually I buy meat . . . at Warehouse Club A."*

An influence on the decision to cross-shop appeared to be price and/or sales. For example, one participant said, *"The number of times I grocery*

*shop each week) is totally related to the number of stores that have a special deal."*

Convenience also encouraged cross-shopping. For example:

- *"It (grocery shopping at a supercenter) seems to save me a trip or two."*
- *"I go there (the supercenter) when I'm shopping for clothes or anything because that has the clothes and everything."*
- *"But I find myself going to Supercenter A most of the time any more simply because of the variety, also convenience . . . I'll swing through the rest of the store and buy quarts of oil or something I want, and go do grocery shopping and do it all at once rather than having to shop two or three different times."*

Store location also influenced cross-shopping, although as Bell, Ho, and Tang (1998) suggest, an inconvenient location was not necessarily a deterrent. As one participant said, *"I usually will look to see if it (the store) is on the route of anything that I'll do, like either work or my husband's work, or you know is it a route that I'll take once or twice a month or even every six weeks and then use it that way."*

Also as suggested by Bell, Ho, and Tang (1998), some focus group participants recognized that their choice of formats depended on the type of grocery shopping they were doing. For example, a participant said, *"If I'm going for big grocery shopping and I've got lots of time, I could care less because I've got time. But if I'm going for something specific, and I need to pick it up and get home I want to go to a store that I know where it is, and I can run in and get it quick."*

Several factors deterred consumers from shopping at either supercenters or warehouse clubs or both. Discussions focused on inconveniences associated with shopping in larger stores, the belief they spent more per trip, and reluctance to buy food and nonfood items in the same trip.

In each of the focus groups, grocery shopping at supercenters generated a fair amount of discussion and the size of supercenters was always discussed. Typical comments from those who patronized supercenters were:

- *" . . . I don't really like big, big stores. But now that I know it really well, then it's okay."*

- *“The square footage of a store doesn’t matter if I know where things are.”*

Consumers who patronized supercenters indicated they now have a different perception of that format. As one said, *“I think of (Supercenter B) now as a grocery store and a regular store.”*

In contrast, consumers who did not grocery shop at supercenters often saw the size of the store as a deterrent. One participant said, *“Supercenter A for me, too big. The first time I was in there I thought I was going to the produce and ended up in the car battery section . . . I was having problems finding the front door.”*

Some participants also complained of longer waits in supercenters: *“I have never seen all (of the checkout lanes in a supercenter) open, so why did they build that many?”*

Other factors mentioned as deterrents to supercenter patronage included a greater temptation to make impulse buys (*“I think it causes more impulse buying because you have it all around”*), crowds (*“If you go out there [Supercenter A] at the wrong time, it’s so crowded you can’t even move”*), a greater likelihood that the scanned price will be different from the posted price (*“Every time (at Supercenter A) there’s been a problem with what the price is supposed to be and what the price really is”*), distance to the store (*“I would shop at a supercenter on a regular basis but it’s so far away.”*), and limited help from salespeople (*“I still spend time looking for people [to help me find things]”*).

Some shoppers were reluctant to shop at either warehouse stores or supercenters because they were unwilling to change their current shopping styles. For example, a participant said, *“It takes me an hour (in a supermarket) because I’ll go down every aisle and see what’s on sale, what specials they have. So, to do that in a supercenter would take me forever.”*

Another deterrent common to both supercenters and warehouse stores was the participants’ belief that they spend more per trip than in a supermarket. For example:

- *“It is easier to come out spending more than you thought because once you get there, you’re like, right, I need a pair of tennis shoes.”*
- *“You think it looks like a really good deal (at Warehouse Club A), but you could ac-*

*tually get the same thing (somewhere else) and not have so much extra. You can fill up your trunk and spend \$200, and you come home and you’ve got cereal and crackers and one other thing.”*

Some participants’ reluctance to buy food and non-food items on the same shopping trip prevented them from grocery shopping at either warehouse clubs or supercenters. Illustrative comments were:

- *“I just couldn’t make myself buy food there (at a supercenter) . . . I just felt really funny about buying food with my other items.”*
- *“I like the idea that I go to a grocery store to get groceries.”*

Some of those who shopped at warehouse clubs or supercenters had developed a strategy for buying food and nonfood items on the same trip. For example, one participant said, *“If I do pick up something at Supercenter C, if I pick up a piece of clothing, I keep it in the cart. I really do because (the conveyer belt) is wet, there’s wet spots. People have just had their groceries there in front of you. Then I’ll hand it to (the clerk) . . .”*

Focus group participants also mentioned other strategies they used to shop larger retailer formats. Several mentioned pre-planning their trip. For example, *“Well, I’m an avid ad reader so I read the grocery ad then I read their regular ad which is their nonfood things. And so when I go I always get something on both lists.”*

Participants described the specific routine they follow once in the store. For example:

- *“I’ll get the couple of things that I need in the general, nonfood items, get those, and then I’ll just do my grocery shopping and I’ll be done. I don’t bounce back and forth.”*
- *“The food section is separate from the clothing section. If I’m going to go, I’ll shop around the food section first, and then I’ll go into the other sections where the clothes are. I don’t jump back and forth.”*

#### *How Do Consumers Manage Cross-Shopping?*

Focus group participants indicated that as new retail options have become available, they have added these formats to the existing mix of stores from which they shop. For example, participants said:

- *“Well, we added them and then they became a more important part of our shopping.”*
- *“I’m not going to pass up on those good deals. So I’ll still go to all those stores.”*
- *“So I’m one of those people, as long as it’s not a real big inconvenience, I’ll go two places to get a better deal if it’s worthwhile rather than get everything at one store.”*

As noted earlier, all of the participants continue to shop at supermarkets. Despite the increased number of types of food retail outlets they shop, the consensus among focus group participants was that they don’t feel they spend more time grocery shopping now than before. That perception may be related to their grocery shopping patterns. Participants usually indicated they do not go to each type of format that is part of their shopping mix each time they shop for groceries. For example, a participant said, *“I won’t hit all the stores on the same day so I don’t think I’m spending any more time.”*

Participants described incorporating grocery shopping with other trips such as going to and from work or shopping for other products. Illustrative comments include:

- *“Sometimes on the way to work, I would pick up things that could stay in my car all day.”*
- *“Now (the supercenter) is on my husband’s way home (from work), so I’ll send him there (if I think of it) for the food section basically.”*
- *“I think I do my shopping most between doing other errands, so if I happen to be going down the street and am passing Warehouse Club A, I’ll run in.”*
- *“I look at the ads every week . . . and then just kind of as I’m out (I shop) at whatever store I happen to drive by.”*

However, for the most part, participants described grocery shopping trips as purposeful, not impulsive. For example, a participant said, *“I make a list and then I separate it into stores and my coupons and match those with the flyers. . . . So I go to all of my different stores with my coupons. . . . I probably spend two-and-a-half to three hours.”*

Focus group participants also seemed very conscious of the time spent in a store. They recognized that shopping at an unfamiliar store requires more time until one learns the layout. Participants said:

- *“I’ve got to know my store in order to know where I’m going.”*
- *“It took a while to know where things were (in a supercenter), so that I can (shop) fairly quickly.”*

In each of the groups, participants indicated they still valued having the option to shop a store format that involved low time costs. They usually described low time costs as a store that doesn’t require “too” long a wait in the checkout line, and/or isn’t “too” large, “too” distant, or in a location with “too” much traffic. Two participants’ comments are illustrative:

- *“I think it’s important to plan though because time is money. If I’m going to a store that’s far away, I need to get several items or I’m losing money by just getting one item on sale.”*
- *“If it (the supercenter) were closer by home, I probably would shop it regularly.”*

In summary, the focus group interviews indicated that with the introduction of nontraditional food retail formats, the way consumers shop for groceries has changed rather dramatically. Instead of replacing the supermarket with a newer format, consumers are increasing the number of retail channels they shop but leaving the supermarket in the mix. Grocery shoppers who patronize multiple formats appear not to make the once-a-week major shopping trip that we think of as traditional. Instead, they fit grocery shopping in among other errands.

## Discussion

Our research provides insights into the shopping behaviors of consumers who are willing to grocery shop across multiple formats. The focus group interviews support the idea that when consumers select a retail format or a mix of formats they consider the fixed cost of shopping (costs such as travel time that are independent of the specific items being purchased). In fact, in each of the three focus groups, consumers mentioned fixed costs as frequently as variable costs (the cost of the items purchased) when discussing their decisions about which types of retail stores they shop. Focus group participants referred to both economic costs such as prices or travel time and psychic costs such as the confusion large store formats create for some



consumers. Sometimes relatively high fixed costs were the reason consumers chose not to shop at a particular store (“*where Supermarket C is located it’s hard to get in and out*”) or didn’t patronize a format (“*(supercenters) very confusing, very large, very. . . . I’m sorry, I don’t even try*”). Other consumers mentioned relatively low fixed costs as primary reasons for shopping at a store (“*I want to go to a store (where) I know where (the specific item) is*”) or a format (“*(can) do it all at once rather than having to shop two or three different times*”). One focus group participant mentioned that he manipulated fixed costs by using one supermarket “*as though it were a convenience store.*” He said that he had never “*shopped*” at that supermarket but “*just ran in and picked things up.*”

One of the most interesting observations from the focus group interviews is the perception of many participants that although they have increased the number of food retail formats they patronize their total shopping time has *not* increased. While we cannot know how their perceptions relate to the reality, they may reflect a societal shift in the way we view time. Combining several tasks and/or errands as our shoppers reported they did is not an uncommon practice for consumers in either their personal or professional lives (Kaufman, Lane, and Lindquist 1991). Robinson and Godbey (1997) refer to this phenomenon as “time deepening.” As they explain the concept, increased productivity in the workplace causes consumers to seek to balance work and non-work time by becoming more productive in their non-work hours. They identify four ways in which Americans might choose to do this:

- speeding up a given activity,
- substituting an activity that can be done more quickly for one that takes longer,
- doing more than one activity at once, and
- undertaking an activity with more precise regard for time.

Focus group participants mentioned each of these strategies in relation to grocery shopping. Several mentioned they speed up their shopping by going to a smaller store or one with which they are more familiar. While some shoppers buy items in bulk and repackage them individually at home, others have given up that activity and now buy smaller quantities. Shoppers referred to doing more than one activity at once; many combined food and non-food purchases in the same trip and even within

the same store. Participants mentioned shopping when their time was constrained or that they had expectations about the maximum amount of time they should spend in a store.

## Conclusions and Implications

Generalizations to regional or national levels are not recommended, because of the small sample size and the limited scope of the study. Also, the qualitative approach does not provide insight about how widespread practices or beliefs are, even in the study markets.

Although exploratory, this research suggests that consumers who choose a complex pattern of grocery shopping behaviors involving multiple retail channels may not perceive this as being more time-consuming or negative in other ways. Perhaps they have adopted the approach suggested by Carsky, Dickinson, and Smith (1995). If so, they identify an acceptable set of stores that household members would routinely pass in their daily travel and buy when a designated low price triggers a purchase. A typical comment that reflects this approach is “*(The number of times I grocery shop each week) is totally related to the number of stores that have a special deal.*”

However, focus group participants’ comments more often seemed to reflect the reasoning that is the basis of the Dellaert et al. (1998) model. Consumers frequently described multipurpose, multi-destination trips that combined grocery shopping with stops for other types of products and services. However, they also described single-destination, multipurpose trips and multi-destination, single-purpose trips. Obviously, even more complex models are needed to explain these consumer behaviors. These models should incorporate online grocery shopping, an option in some markets.

Food retailers can take advantage of consumer interest in multi-destination, multipurpose shopping trips by locating near other types of retailers and/or adopting the supercenter format, combining food and nonfood items under one roof. However, in many communities, zoning restrictions are used to limit the expansion of store-based retailers to certain locations and/or perimeter areas of a community. While some public-policy makers would argue they are only protecting their constituents from “unsightly retail sprawl,” consumers may be dis-

advantaged in other ways by having to drive longer distances to stores in less convenient locations. In contrast, tax incentives can be used to encourage retail development in a way that is well-suited to community needs considering both the costs and benefits of such development.

Further research is needed to learn how many consumers and which consumers have adopted food shopping behaviors involving multiple retail outlets. If a complex pattern of grocery shopping behaviors involving multiple retail channels is common among consumers, there are implications for antitrust policy. In the past two decades there has been extensive merger-and-acquisition activity within all major sectors of the food industry, including retailing (Adams, Love, & Capps 1997). For example, in 1998 the Kroger Company merged with Fred Meyer, Inc. to create the nation's largest supermarket company (Kroger 1998). When antitrust regulators review proposed mergers and acquisition, it may be appropriate for them to consider the market to consist of a wide variety of food retail channels. The impact on a community of a merger of two supermarket companies is likely to be less if consumers see the nontraditional food retailers in that community as acceptable alternatives or supplements to supermarkets.

Finally, this research has implications for food retailers. To appeal to a broader range of consumers, supercenters should look for ways to make their store format less intimidating. Prominent, accurate store maps posted throughout the store and/or on shopping carts combined with large, easy-to-read signage throughout the store is one approach that might reduce consumer concern about store size. Infrequently moving merchandise to another location in the store and posting signs about the new location when merchandise is moved would address consumer concerns about investing time to learn a store layout only to have it change.

Food retailers should also consider changes in the store layout to accommodate shoppers who select a store type based on the basket size they are buying on that particular shopping trip. Focus group participants all seemed to value a format where they can quickly get in and out of a store to pick up a few specific items. One way that supermarkets, supercenters, and other large format stores can accommodate that interest is by changing the store layout to allow more direct access to frequently

visited departments. For example, to increase customer convenience a retailer might locate a single refrigerator case near the front of the store and stock it with a limited selection of milk, eggs, butter, and similar items. However, food retailers who believe that sales suffer when shopping patterns do not traverse the store may be reluctant to adopt this approach. On the other hand, the increasingly popular self-scan checkout lanes and other technologies that speed customers through checkout may appeal not only to customers who want to get in and out of a large-format store quickly but also to food retailers looking for greater efficiencies.

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