

Thursday 8 April 2021

2020 – THE YEAR EVERYTHING ABOUT FRESH PRODUCE CONSUMPTION CHANGED

A study into consumer shopping and consumption behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role of Australian horticulture in helping people find health and wellbeing through the benefits of fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts, nursery and turf products. Australians also wanted to show their support for Australian growers by purchasing locally made produce.

“COVID-19 has shown how valuable horticulture is to maintaining a mentally and physically healthy nation. I think people can see that and that’s why they support Australian growers, who continue to work hard and deliver produce through challenging times”, said Hort Innovation CEO Matt Brand.

Consumer insights

The pandemic resulted in one event that heavily impacted how we consume: lockdown. Spending more time at home resulted in more gardening, exercise, cleaning and cooking. A rise in cooking from home – especially cooking from ‘scratch’ – meant that fresh, quality, Australian ingredients instantly became more important.

During 2020, Hort Innovation worked with research company Fiftyfive5 to provide the Australian horticulture sector access to regularly updated information on a weekly basis about consumer attitudes and behaviours during the time of COVID-19 disruption, through Fiftyfive5’s Category and Consumer Impact Monitor.

Across the 9 months that the monitor was running, they found the biggest concern Australians had was around their ability to find a job (50%). A similar proportion were worried about experiencing future waves and these concerns translated into concerns about health and wellbeing for themselves and their families. These concerns had a profound impact on shopping and consumption behaviour.

Lockdown had a profound impact on how we prepared food. No commuting and more time at home gave us the freedom to get creative in the kitchen. From sourdough to spaghetti sauce, Australians were getting busy making fresh food. Almost half (46%) of main grocery buyers reported cooking more meals from scratch and over a third (38%) reported doing more baking. This behaviour increased demand for fresh produce through retail channels.

4 in 10 buying more fresh produce

Australians looked to fresh produce as core ingredients. Between March and December, on average 39% more Australian grocery buyers reported buying more fresh produce as part of their shop.

Maintaining a healthy diet became even more important as gyms and restaurants temporarily closed, with 39% of Australians wanting to cook more healthy and nutritious meals. The research saw considerable momentum for staple fruits with 34% reporting buying more bananas, 28% buying more apples, and 23% buying more oranges. The purchase frequency for staple vegetables such as carrots (28%), broccoli (25%), and mushrooms (24%) also increased.

Australian grown

The research showed that being grown in Australia, has become significantly more important (compared to before the start of the pandemic). 60% of main grocery buyers in Australia reported that being Australian grown had become more important when choosing fresh produce.

Supporting local farmers

42% of all main grocery buyers want to buy Australian fresh produce to support local farmers.

Snacking

The research investigated snacking behaviours from July and found that 27% of Australians were eating more snacks. Compared to consumption before the pandemic began, many fresh produce categories were consumed more regularly (as snacks), including berries, bananas, and nuts.

Greenspace

Both public and private greenspace became more valued by people in lockdown. On average, 40% of Australians were walking more, indicating that use of public greenspace increased and was respite from spending more time at home. 38% also reported spending more time gardening, which translated to increased retail sales of nursery and turf products. With more time spent working from home and in the local community it is likely these trends will continue.

Hort Innovation CEO Matt Brand said, “The pandemic impacted every element of the Australian way of life and drove behaviour change which meant consumers interacted with horticulture through the consumption of fruit, vegetables and nuts with meal preparation at home, through to people spending more time in the garden increasing consumption of nursery items and turf.

“Hort Innovation was able to provide weekly overviews of the data and insights for growers, highlighting particularly interesting and noteworthy trends to help them prepare for the increases in domestic demand.”

Media contact:

Hort Innovation Media and Public Affairs Manager

Maria Stathis

maria.stathis@horticulture.com.au

0447 304 255

More information:

- <https://www.horticulture.com.au/growers/help-your-business-grow/research-reports-publications-fact-sheets-and-more/st19031/>