

Refrigerated & Frozen Foods

UNIQUE MONTHLY VISITORS: 27,779

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Study: Amazon's acquisition of Whole Foods Market ranks as 2017's No. 1 story in food news

This food news study reveals the Top 5 most recalled news stories of the past 12 months.

In a year when food topics related to safety and nutrition were most important to Americans, news of [Amazon's acquisition of Whole Foods Market](#) broke through, ranking as 2017's No. 1 food news story among Millennials, GenXers and Baby Boomers/Matures alike, according to an [Annual Food News Study](#), produced by Hunter Public Relations, New York.

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The study, conducted in partnership with Libran Research & Consulting, Scarborough, Maine, surveyed 1,000 American adults and asked respondents to select the most recalled news stories of the past 12 months. The data is reviewed by key demographics, including the age cohorts of Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers/Matures.

Occupying 2017's No. 2 spot was "Another Food Safety Scare at Chipotle." Chipotle's food safety issues made national news late in 2015 and continued in 2016 when norovirus affected more than 200 customers in the Boston area. In 2017, another foodborne illness outbreak affected several Chipotle patrons at an outlet near Washington, D.C., forcing the location to temporarily close.

Topics of food safety (48%) and food nutrition/health and wellness (35%) continue to be at the top of the list for most Americans. Taking the No. 3 spot is “Nearly 2.5 Million Pounds of Tyson Chicken Products Recalled.”

Though according to the study, topics of food policy and politics are not generally as important to Americans as food safety, three politically-motivated stories claimed top spots this year:

- At No. 4 is the news coverage that ensued after “Trump Took Aim at School Lunch Guidelines.”
- News around “Restaurant Chain Delivery” came in at No. 5.
- At No. 6, President Trump “Proposed Tariffs on Mexican Imports to Fund the ‘Wall.’”
- Designed to reduce the time and stress of preparing a gourmet, home-cooked meal, “Meal Kits” snagged the No. 7 spot on the list and came in as the “Top Food Trend Story of the Year.”
- At No. 8 (tie), President Trump rebuffed yet another one of former first lady Michelle Obama's health initiative legacies when it was announced in June 2017 that the “FDA Would Delay Rollout of New Nutrition Labels,” intended to help Americans eat healthier. “Unicorn Food” captured the other No. 8 (tie) spot on this year's list, mainly thanks to Starbucks’ limited-time-only “Unicorn Frappuccino.”
- “Avocado Prices Stabilized” claimed the No. 10 spot.

The competitive media landscape

This year, more than one-quarter of Americans across all three key age demographics feel that food and nutrition stories are very important, comparable to 2016 figures. However, in 2017, only 35% say that food and nutrition stories are more important than other types of stories – down from 41% in 2016 – revealing the competitive nature of today's media landscape, with politically-charged stories dominating the news cycle.

About those Millennials

Amazon's acquisition of Whole Foods Market and Chipotle's new food safety scare were ranked as the No. 1 and No. 2 stories, respectively, across Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers/Matures. When it came to the story that occupied the No. 3 spot, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers/Matures both agreed on Tyson's chicken recall, while Millennials ranked the emergence of unicorn food as the third most memorable food story of 2017. The study also revealed that Millennials are more often moved to change as a result of these stories and report higher levels of changed opinions across many stories, even those outside of the Top 3.

Impact of food news on consideration, intent and advocacy

Stories that have a broader impact on the population's opinion - either positive or negative - correlate to the breakthrough power of these stories, measured by awareness, regardless of their topic. Unsurprisingly, the top stories of 2017 are also delivering the top changes of opinion among consumers. News of Amazon's Whole Foods Market purchase had the highest number of Americans, especially Millennials, noting a change of opinion, trailed closely by the food safety scare at Chipotle and Tyson recall, the No. 2 and No. 3 stories, respectively.

Similarly, the top stories of the year based on awareness are also those most likely to drive behavior changes among all consumers polled. But, when looking at behavior changes, specifically among those aware of a particular news story, several nutrition and trend-related stories broke into the Top 10. The "Top Nutrition Story of the Year" and No. 13 overall, "How Much Protein is Necessary?," rose to the top at 44%, and "Veggies Are Becoming the Star of Your Meal" impacted the behavior of 41% of those aware. Trend-related news stories, "The Rise in Korean Flavors" (44%), "The Fermented Food Trend" (34%) and "Cheers to Frosé!" (30%) all had a substantial impact, reinforcing the connection between awareness and behavior.

The most noted specific food behavior changes occurring this year by Americans is paying more attention to food labels, where almost one-third of Americans admit to this change. Secondary specific behavior changes include educating oneself more on food (24%), paying more attention to food's impact on health (24%), as well as to food safety (24%) and ingredients (23%). While all age groups are most likely to be paying more attention to food labels, compared to Gen Xers and Baby Boomers/Matures, Millennials are more likely to try new foods and flavors and change how they prepare food as a result of the top food stories.

Millennials are also more likely to change their diet and how they shop and pay more attention to their impact on the environment.

In recognition of the power of social media to fuel news sharing, for the first time this year, the food news study went a step further along the consumer engagement continuum to examine advocacy and the "share-ability" of food-related news. This year's top stories appear to have more "water cooler" sharing potential, meaning that Americans are more open to talking about these stories with friends, family or co-workers. Those stories that broke into the Top 10 for social sharing of the article itself often offer a "teachable moment," such as "How Much Protein is Necessary?" and "Warriors Against Food Waste," as well as those with a touch of shock value, including "Insect-Based Foods Rise in Popularity" and "The Dark Side of Food: Activated Charcoal."

New media leads for food information

Beginning in 2012, the Hunter Public Relations Food News Study expanded to delve more deeply into where and how consumers are accessing information about food, recipes and nutrition. For the first time this year, social media has become the No. 1 source for recipes for all consumers, taking over websites as the go-to source. Millennials lead the shift, with 40% reporting that they have found recipe inspiration on Facebook, as well as Pinterest (38%) and Instagram (35%). Surprisingly, nearly 15% report that they have found recipe inspiration on Snapchat.

For many consumers, it seems, there is not a single source for food news, but rather most find their primary nutrition news on websites (39%), search for recipes on social media (51%) and learn about general food news on television (42%). For Hispanic consumers, though, social media is the No. 1 source for all food news, including recipes (60%), nutrition (48%) and general food news (51%).

The survey was implemented Oct. 24-Oct. 28, covering the 12-month period from November 2016 through October 2017.