

Amazon's Whole Foods Acquisition Ranks as Top Food News of 2017

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Food safety among the list of top news stories.

Amazon's acquisition of Whole Foods Market ranks as 2017's No. 1 food news story among Millennials, Gen Xers and baby boomers/Matures alike, according to the Hunter Public Relations Annual Food News Study.

Since 2003, Hunter Public Relations, a food and beverage marketing communications agency, has been commissioning an annual study to identify the top food news stories according to the opinions of Americans. Now in its 15th year, this year's food news study also set out to quantify the impact of these stories at every step of the consumer engagement continuum by measuring the influence on consumers' awareness (are the stories remembered?), consideration (do they change opinions?), intent (do they change behavior?) and advocacy (are they shared with others?).

For the past five years, Hunter has conducted the study in partnership with Libran Research & Consulting, which 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.

Amazon, the world's largest online retailer, made major headlines on June 16, 2017 when it announced its plans to acquire Whole Foods Market. The e-retail giant, which has dabbled in brick-and-mortar store concepts over the past couple of years, agreed to acquire 460 Whole Foods Market locations in the US, Canada and the UK in a 13.7 billion-dollar deal, Amazon's biggest acquisition to date. On Aug. 28, 2017, the deal was official and Amazon announced that all Whole Foods Market customers would immediately see lower prices across a selection of best-selling products.

Last year's top food news story found itself back on this year's list, occupying 2017's No. 2 spot: 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 food-borne illness outbreak affected several Chipotle patrons at an outlet near Washington, D.C., forcing the location to close temporarily and sending the chain's stock down more than 6%.

Topics of food safety (48%) and food nutrition/health and wellness (35%) continue to be at the top of the list for most Americans. In addition to Chipotle's food safety scare taking the No. 2 spot, Nearly 2.5 Million Pounds of Tyson Chicken Products Recalled - due to misbranding and undeclared allergens on ready-to-eat breaded chicken sold to food-service customers in 30 states - came in as the No. 3 food news story of the year.

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. In March 2017, the Trump administration challenged Michelle Obama's agenda to promote healthy school lunches by weakening restrictions on salt and requirements for whole grains. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced that school meals would no longer have to adhere to standards championed by the former first lady, granting schools more flexibility to serve foods they choose.

At No. 6, in January 2017, President Trump Proposed Tariffs on Mexican Imports to Fund the “Wall,” which would mean that Americans would have to pay a 20% tax on food and beverages imported from our neighbor to the south. Both before and after the 2016 election, Trump has remained steadfast about building a wall along the Mexican border, and about increasing tariffs on Mexico, as well as other countries. The administration, however, quickly backpedaled, maintaining that the tariff was just one of a few options being considered to fund the construction. News outlets and constituents alike were quick to criticize the proposed tax and the notion that the resulting funds would cover the wall’s costs.

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 more healthfully. The updated labels, advocated by Obama, would have a special line for added sugars and feature calorie content in large, bold text.

Also included in the top 10 food news stories of 2017:

News around Restaurant Chain Delivery came in at No. 5. With the influx of third-party delivery services, restaurants assume almost no risk in testing out delivery, which means consumers can get much more than just pizza delivered to their door. Steak, anyone?

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. Research has shown that the meal-kit industry resonates most with Millennials, who tend to rationalize spending money to save time on shopping and planning, and seek sharable experiences and creations for social media.

While capturing a unicorn is said to be impossible, it’s no surprise that Unicorn Food captured the No. 8 (tie) spot on this year’s list. The pastel and sparkle trend broke the Internet when Starbucks introduced its limited-time-only “Unicorn Frappuccino.”

Avocado lovers, rejoice because coming in at No. 10, is the news that Avocado Prices Stabilized. California's crop size was down in the first half of the year, leading to higher prices. To counter the price incline, growers started planting more avocado trees to keep up with the demand - avocado toast! - and stabilize prices.

To summarize, the top food stories of 2017 according to the Hunter Public Relations 15th Annual Food News Study are as follows:

- Amazon Acquires Whole Foods Market
- Another Food Safety Scare at Chipotle
- Nearly 2.5 Million Pounds of Tyson Chicken Products Recalled
- Trump Takes Aim at School Lunch Guidelines
- Restaurant Chains Now Deliver
- Proposed Tariff on Mexican Imports to Fund "Wall" Means Americans Will Pay More for Food & Beverages
- There's a Meal Kit for Everyone
- (TIE) Unicorn Food is Colorful, Sparkly and Everywhere
- (TIE) FDA Delays Rollout of New Nutrition Labels
- Avocado Prices Stabilize