



# Best Practices

for Reducing Food Waste  
and Boosting Freshness  
in Grab-and-Go



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**D**espite market recovery, fluctuating levels in demand continue to bring a level of uncertainty to retailers' foodservice operations. With many consumers still working and learning remotely and with others adjusting to new routines, traffic levels remain unpredictable—leaving retailers with the task of keeping enough food in supply without overbuying

Fortunately, some best practices can help keep waste low, profits high and customers happy—regardless of changes within the market.

## Grab-and-go convenience meets fresh-made quality

In the months leading up to the pandemic, many convenience-store retailers were highlighting made-to-order options in their foodservice programs. Amid current concerns for health and safety, however, many consumers are instead gravitating toward the grab-and-go section—with the same expectations for freshness and quality.

According to Technomic's Q2 2021 *C-Store Consumer Marketbrief*, consumers' most-cited purchase drivers for lunch at the c-store include quick transactions, portable options, great taste and good value. In addition, freshness



remains top of mind, as concerns that food doesn't look or taste fresh are among the top three deterrents to purchasing lunch at the c-store, according to consumers.

Still, in recent months, the grab-and-go section has gained greater traction. According to Technomic's 2021 *The New State of C-Store Foodservice* report, nearly 50% of consumers say that, amid the pandemic, grab-and-go items seem safer than other prepared food formats in c-stores, and 43% say they plan to purchase grab-and-go items more often going forward.

For example, consumers prefer cold grab-and-go sandwiches over made-to-order sandwiches by a 20% margin, according to Technomic's Q2 2021 *Marketbrief*.

With concerns about freshness and heightened demand for grab-and-go simultaneously top of mind for consumers, retailers need prepared foods that offer made-to-order quality—and that keep margins high, too.

## Prepared options boost the bottom line

Prioritizing freshness can't come at too great a cost. Demand for c-store prepared foods has waxed and waned over the course of the pandemic, making it easier for retailers to overbuy and for wasted food and wasted costs to

result. When demand is unpredictable, it becomes especially difficult to buy sparingly without running out or to stock up without throwing away spoiled food that couldn't be sold.

For these reasons and more, prepared items that stay fresh longer can afford retailers some much-needed flexibility while delivering on the freshness, convenience and quality their consumers expect. Prepared options made in freshness-boosting packaging, for example, can help increase shelf life for items that may otherwise spoil more quickly, such as cold grab-and-go sandwiches.

Prepared options for the grab-and-go section can provide an answer to labor challenges, too. Especially as many retailers struggle to fill open positions in their stores, labor-saving solutions that eliminate prep work can help reduce stress for staffs that are already stretched thin, speed up transactions for busy shoppers and help boost margins overall.

## Focusing on sustainability

Spoiled food doesn't just undermine the bottom line, however; food waste presents a concern for sustainability, too. Wasted food is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions—even more so than the airline industry, according to the *Washington Post*.



Modified Atmosphere Packaging (M.A.P.) →

“Sustainability is a growing choice point for consumers, and manufacturers need to be aware of this mega trend,” says Dave Keller, founder at Keller Consulting LLC. “Manufacturers need to proactively migrate their packaging to meet this growing demand for

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sustainable goods and packaging. Similarly, retailers are also committed to reducing their environmental impact and are choosing to sell items with extended shelf life to reduce spoilage and food waste.”

Indeed, sustainability concerns can sway shoppers’ purchasing decisions greatly as consumers continue to become more mindful of the environmental impact of their purchasing decisions. According to Meet the 2020 Consumers Driving Change, a report from the IBM Institute for Business Value in Association with NRF (National Retail Federation), nearly six in 10 consumers surveyed are willing to change their shopping habits to reduce environmental impact. And, according to Technomic’s 2019 *Packaging and Trends Outlook* report, most c-store consumers say they’re willing to pay a premium for food and beverage packaging that’s more sustainable.

For this reason, freshness-boosting packaging is doubly beneficial; not only does it help maintain freshness and prevent spoilage, but it can also afford a greater sense of quality and value for shoppers’ keen on getting their money’s worth. And if that same

freshness-boosting packaging meets consumer sustainability concerns, it’s really a home run.

## Cutting-edge solutions change the game

E. A. Sween’s line of grab-and-go sandwiches packed in Modified Atmosphere Packaging (M.A.P.) offers an answer to the plethora of concerns retailers consider as they seek to recover and recoup costs lost to the pandemic.

M.A.P. packaging extends the shelf life of perishable foods by up to 30 days by slowing spoilage and keeping food

looking and tasting fresh for a longer period of time. By replacing the oxygen in heat-sealed sandwich packages with carbon dioxide and nitrogen gases, M.A.P. packaging slows microbial growth and prevents unsightly oxidation of deli meat without the need for added preservatives. Plus, E.A. Sween sandwiches sealed in M.A.P. packages are

frozen before shipping to retailers—ensuring that the food is at peak freshness by the time it reaches c-store shelves.

“E. A. Sween has a dedicated Research and Development team not only creating delicious on the go food products, but also designing packaging with sustainability as a high priority,” says Keller. “This team is continuously exploring new materials, along with package designs that will fundamentally move the needle in recyclability and sustainability.”

Adds Keller, “E.A. Sween sets a high bar for freshness in the grab-and-go sandwich market, which others are not currently able to match.”



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