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2026 FOOD RETAILER'S GUIDE TO FROZEN MERCHANDISING: with insights from the Power of Frozen Report

Frozen foods are hot right now.

More shoppers are turning to frozen foods to manage rising grocery costs, help with meal planning and provide a balance of convenience and nutrition. Frozen sales reflect that, sustaining year-over-year growth.

Now is the perfect time for food retailers to leverage the latest data and trends to create compelling frozen merchandising that boosts basket size, share of stomach and shopper loyalty.

This guide makes it easy. Here, you'll find four key merchandising takeaways backed by real shopper data and key insights from The 2026 Power of Frozen Report. Published by the American Frozen Food Institute (AFFI) in partnership with FMI, The Power of Frozen Report shares data from real shoppers about attitudes, behavior and purchasing decisions.

Hillphoenix is a proud sponsor of the report, and we are thrilled to share data-powered merchandising guidance based on its findings to help food retailers stay competitive and maximize merchandising impact.

BOOST FROZEN SALES BY THINKING OUTSIDE THE FROZEN AISLE

KEY INSIGHT:

29%

of shoppers aren't regularly looking for frozen food items they haven't purchased before.

Food retailers who are winning in frozen think outside the aisle when creating their frozen food merchandising strategy.

Shoppers are hungry for new flavors and innovative recipe ideas, but they don't always look for inspiration in the frozen aisles. That means food retailers have the opportunity to showcase frozen solutions for every occasion and daypart, from mealtime to snacktime, in ways that surprise and delight shoppers' tastebuds.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR STORE:

Disruptive merchandising—like adding self-contained frozen displays outside of the frozen aisle—breaks the traditional store flow in a way that grabs attention.

Using this strategy accomplishes two things: It entices shoppers to explore new-to-them products, even when they're not seeking them out. It also satisfies adventurous shoppers actively searching for exciting alternatives to their regular staples.

Disruptive merchandising does more than just boost basket size by inspiring impulse purchases. When done right, it can elevate your store's reputation and build shopper loyalty because you're maximizing convenience and making it easy for shoppers to find delicious, nutritious and cost-effective new products without requiring them to go out of their way.



DO THIS TO MAXIMIZE FROZEN MERCHANDISING:



Identify your store's ideal spots for disruptive frozen merchandising. Look for high-traffic or high-transition zones, like near the checkout lanes, produce area or right inside the store's entrance.



Consider your shoppers' "need states" at these locations and choose products that align with them.

- Imagine a tired parent stopping into your store after work, trying to answer the age-old question: "What's for dinner?" They spot a frozen display near your store's entrance full of frozen heat-and-eat pleasers for the entire family all in one merchandiser: chicken nuggets, mac and cheese, one-pan meals and one or two more sophisticated options tailored to adult palates. Just like that, dinner is solved from appetizers to dessert and your store is the hero.
- Think of a budget-conscious Gen Z shopper doing their weekly grocery run. They stick to their list throughout the whole store, but as they approach the checkout, they're looking for a little treat. That's when they see the perfect reward in a display featuring low-cost indulgences: frozen mochi ice cream, single-serve frozen lava cakes, mini apple pies. These affordable, delectable luxuries feel like a bonus without breaking the bank, so of course they grab one.
- Add frozen protein options in a range of package sizes, from single-serve to family sized, next to precut vegetables to create a customizable dinner solution merchandising set.



Don't be afraid to experiment with locations and placements to see where disruptive frozen merchandise is most effective. Shopper patterns change, so be sure to evaluate your placements regularly. Having an easy-to-position, easy-to-move case is essential.

HILLPHOENIX SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT: CLARITY JNRZHSR R-290 Self-Contained Glass Door Reach-In

Our flexible and customizable JNRZHSR is the perfect foundation for disruptive frozen merchandising.

- Easily build and move frozen displays anywhere in your store. With plug-and-play functionality, all you need is an outlet.
- 64" interior merchandising height offers maximum packout with minimal floorspace so you can go longer between restocks, keeping shelves full and aisles clear for shopping.
- Designed to fit through an 80" door opening for easier delivery and installation without requiring a loading dock.
- Choose from a range of options to match your store's look and feel, including custom colors, finishes, textures and more.

Like all CLARITY cases from Hillphoenix, the JNRZHSR is available with a suite of configuration and style options so you can customize your case for your specific application and merchandising goals.



APPEAL TO YOUNGER SHOPPERS WITH YOUR SUSTAINABILITY STORY

KEY INSIGHT:

70% of shoppers say sustainable freezers are at least somewhat important.

Younger generations don't just buy what's in the freezer. They care about the environmental impact of how frozen products are kept cold.

While some shoppers in all age groups report that it's important for their stores to use freezers with smaller carbon footprints, more Millennial and Gen Z shoppers think it's very important for a store's freezers to have a minimal carbon footprint. To build loyalty with these key demographics, your store needs to “walk the walk” and “talk the talk.”



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR STORE:

To build loyalty with Gen Z and Millennial shoppers, your store must pass the “vibe check.” That goes beyond offering sustainable products.

Younger shoppers are “digital natives.” These internet-savvy researchers are looking for brands that align with their values so they feel good about their purchasing decisions. Capture this key demographic by educating them on your commitment to sustainability, but make sure you're following through. Making claims that you can't back up will diminish your credibility.

The good news is that sustainable refrigeration solutions typically yield energy savings. It's a win-win for attracting younger shoppers and keeping your operating costs low.



DO THIS TO MAXIMIZE FROZEN MERCHANDISING:



Identify any ways your store is already using sustainable refrigeration solutions. Most food retailers have already incorporated glass doors into their frozen aisles to maximize efficiency, so that's an easy win. Using refrigerants with low Global Warming Potential (GWP), such as CO_2 or R-290, is a huge sustainability win, too.



Build your sustainability story into your merchandising with strategic signage.

- Add low-residue clings to call out cases that use natural refrigerants. The message can be simple: "This freezer is powered by natural refrigerants."
- Add QR codes that link to your store's sustainability reports, ESG statements and other "proof points." For maximum impact, include information on how much your store has reduced its carbon footprint through sustainable refrigeration.
- Get creative. Educate staff on your sustainability efforts so they can share with your shoppers. Leverage in-store radio or shopping cart ads. Whatever you're doing to ensure cooling efficiency, make sure you're promoting it!



Struggling to find your store's sustainability angle? Hillphoenix can help. Our experts can help you modernize your refrigeration, whether you're ready for a full-store remodel or just want to add a few sustainable cases. We make it easy by offering everything from low-GWP CO_2 refrigeration systems to plug-and-play, self-contained R-290 merchandisers.

HILLPHOENIX SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT: CLARITY JNRZH Remote Glass Door Reach-In

Our durable, sustainable low-temp JNRZH is an ideal scalable solution to showcase your commitment to sustainability.

- Get maximum product visibility and the ideal stage for planogram designs with 64" interior front facings.
- Unlock advanced energy efficiency, even while maintaining lower average product temperatures, with proprietary Synerg-E® technology.
- Maximize efficiency with Anthony Optimax LED lighting that saves energy (and maximizes merchandising impact).
- Elevate your frozen aisle with cases manufactured via Acculine™ automated production processes that maximize production efficiency and achieve precise fit and finish, creating unmatched consistency.
- Further reduce your store's carbon footprint by pairing these cases with an efficient, sustainable CO₂ refrigeration system from Hillphoenix.

As part of the CLARITY portfolio, JNRZH cases are fully customizable to align with your store's merchandising goals. Choose your interior and exterior colors, door frames, handles and more to build your ideal case.



BUILD LOYALTY BY MERCHANDISING FOR LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS TRENDS

KEY INSIGHT:

77%

of shoppers look for one or more better-for-you attributes when purchasing frozen.

High protein. Low sugar. “Real” ingredients.

When your shoppers walk down the aisle, they’re looking for key words like these to signal which products align with their health and lifestyle goals. In the frozen department, nutrition-focused merchandising is especially important because some shoppers still think “pizza” when they think of frozen entrees.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR STORE:

When your merchandising taps into current trends in health and wellness, you’re not just catching the eye of shoppers looking to maximize protein or cut sugar. You’re building loyalty.

For shoppers who incorporate their health and wellness goals into their identity, seeing merchandising that resonates with their goals builds an affinity with your brand. Building frozen displays around key health and lifestyle goals also makes it easier for shoppers to find what they’re looking for, so you’re delivering on convenience while shopping in addition to the convenience of frozen.

Food retailers who build wellness trends into their merchandising strategy position themselves as a partner who can help shoppers achieve their goals, building trust and inspiring return visits.

DO THIS TO MAXIMIZE FROZEN MERCHANDISING:



Identify which health trend(s) resonate most with shoppers in your area and merchandise them together. Build your display in one section of the frozen aisle, on an endcap or somewhere unexpected, by using disruptive merchandising strategies with a self-contained case in other premier areas for an added disruptive edge.



- Not sure which trend to build your set around? More shoppers reported interest in a high-protein frozen food section than any other health goal. All-natural frozen foods with no artificial ingredients were a close second.
- Other health and lifestyle goals to merchandise around include GLP-1 friendly, high fiber, no sugar added, organic, gut healthy, gluten free or plant based.



For your display, choose a mix of top-selling favorites and new or slower-moving products to encourage exploration. When products are grouped by wellness attributes or health goals, shoppers are encouraged to try new-to-them items that might have previously gotten overlooked.



Don't forget to build dynamic signage into your merchandising plan! Whether you use a digital display, colorful shelf tags, case clings or above-the-case signage, make your chosen theme crystal clear to your shoppers. Signs should be both eye-catching and easy to understand.

HILLPHOENIX SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

CLARITY VNRZH Narrow Glass-Door Reach-In

Our elegant, modern VNRZH is the perfect foundation for themed merchandising sets that grab attention and entice shoppers.

- Maximize product visibility with an ultra-low 8" front, 72" interior front facings and 81" tall glass doors.
- Easily design planograms and create captivating merchandising since refrigeration components are out of the way at the bottom of the case.
- Maximize floorspace with narrow case depths that enable a compact footprint.
- Elevate your display's visual impact while reducing energy consumption with Anthony® Optimax LED lighting.
- Choose case lengths up to 5 doors with 30" standard swing doors.

Like all CLARITY cases from Hillphoenix, the VNRZH is fully customizable with an industry-leading range of options.

Choose your ideal doors, finish, handles and more to create a case tailored to your application and merchandising goals.



SATISFY SHOPPERS WITH COMPLETE MEAL SOLUTION CROSS-MERCHANDISING

KEY INSIGHT:

44%

of shoppers have changed how they approach meals due to rising costs

Shoppers are feeling the squeeze of inflation, but they're also pressed for time.

That means more meal planning, more cooking at home and a rising demand for meal solutions that are simple, easy and fast. Frozen food plays a key role. Given that most consumers purchase both fresh and frozen items during the same trip, displays that cross-merchandise fresh and frozen items that complement each other to create full meals are especially effective.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR STORE:

Integrated cross-merchandising builds engagement across categories, making it a winning merchandising strategy.

Food retailers who take the next step to build displays featuring convenient, cost-effective meal solutions stand to gain increased loyalty that drives return visits. This kind of merchandising makes it easy for shoppers who don't want to search through the aisles to put together a complete meal.

Plus, offering complete meal solutions in one spot entices shoppers to stock up on their favorites to simplify meal planning.

DO THIS TO MAXIMIZE FROZEN MERCHANDISING:



The core idea is simple: Merchandise a combination of frozen, fresh and shelf-stable products that can come together fast for a complete meal. Choose versatile options like frozen veggies, fully cooked rotisserie chicken and quick-cook rice. Be sure to include shelf-stable enhancements like sauces and spices that shoppers can use to elevate and customize their meals.



Prioritize big portions and family-size offerings. Households with 3 or more people are much more likely to purchase frozen foods, so keep their needs in mind.

- Shoppers with kids are also more likely to buy frozen. Include heat-and-serve family favorites like chicken nuggets in fun shapes alongside fresh produce for busy parents aiming for balanced meals. Win bonus points by adding “hidden veggie” options that sneak vegetables into familiar comfort foods into your display.



Don't limit your displays to dinnertime. Data shows a clear opportunity gap in frozen breakfast options, so showcase options that go beyond dinner. Make it easy by merchandising complete breakfast solutions from smoothies to waffles to check everyone's favorites off the list.

- Frozen waffles pair perfectly with fresh products from departments across the store—sausage, eggs, fresh fruit and juice. Frozen tater tots can pair with eggs, cheddar cheese and scallions for a quick casserole. When shoppers can find everything they need for a week's worth of breakfast in one spot, they'll breathe a sigh of relief—and come back next week for new quick breakfast ideas.

HILLPHOENIX SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

CLARITY ONRZH High Glass Door Reach-In

Our versatile, customizable ONRZH reach-in makes the perfect foundation for easy meal display destinations.

- 64" interior front facings enhance planogram design options and set the stage for eye-catching merchandising that makes your food the star.
- With a taller height and narrower footprint, the ONRZH is ideal for creating engaging displays in tight spaces without creating traffic bottlenecks that disrupt your store's shopper experience.
- Matching medium-temp cases are available to create a seamless visual look that emphasizes merchandising displays.
- Customize to match your store's look and feel with door options, LEDs, bumpers and more.

Like all CLARITY cases from Hillphoenix, the ONRZH is highly customizable. Tailor to your store's aesthetics with 130+ color options, several different finishes and multiple textures to meet any merchandising goal.



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Frozen food touches almost every household.

We are seeing sustained category growth, and 3 in 10 shoppers say they plan to buy more frozen food in the coming year, revealing momentum—and opportunity. Food retailers who take this opportunity to reimagine frozen merchandising and tailor it to the needs of today's shoppers will stand out.

Good merchandising boosts basket size, but great merchandising makes it easy for shoppers to meet their goals effortlessly. Great merchandising positions your store as a helpful partner for meal planning and feeding the family. Great merchandising goes beyond products to reflect values that your shoppers align with. That's the strategy for building long-term loyalty and inspiring return visits for years to come.