

A Year of Consumer Behavior in Review

A Planning Guide for CPG Brands,
Built on a Year of Consumer Insights



Why This Moment Matters

2026 packed years of shopper change into twelve months. GLP-1 medications moved from prescription trend to household force. Ingredient scrutiny went from fringe conversation to mainstream purchase filter. AI tools became available to the masses, changing how consumers search and discover. Two once-in-a-generation cultural moments, America's 250th anniversary and a home-soil World Cup, converged in one summer to peak levels of hosting and celebration.

Chicory watched it happen in real time. Across six national surveys fielded between January and July 2026, we asked more than 6,700 U.S. consumers how they intended to plan, cook, shop, and celebrate in relation to these tentpoles and macro trends. Their answers tell a consistent story: the grocery cart as we know it is being rebuilt. Consumers are more informed than ever, following health trends closely, and seeking inspiration on how to incorporate these benefits into their meal plans.

This report looks back at what 2026 taught us and ahead to what 2027 will demand. Next year opens with Dry January, runs straight into the first Super Bowl ever played on Valentine's Day, and reaches Easter before March ends. Chicory is ready to strategize and help you show up in more of the moments that matter.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Chicory Summer Occasions Survey, January 2026 (n=1,019)

Chicory Spring Occasions Survey, February 2026 (n=502)

Chicory Fall Occasions Survey, March 2026 (n=1,057)

Chicory AI & Grocery Survey, April 2026 (n=1,005)

Chicory GLP-1 Usage Survey, May 2026 (n=1,377)

Chicory Holiday Occasions Survey, May 2026 (n=800)

Chicory Cyclospora Outbreak Survey, July 2026 (n=1,044)

The 2026 Trend Look Back

Our consumer research series followed shoppers through every season of 2026. Here's a look back at the tentpoles and trends that shaped the year.

The Spring Re-Emergence

The year began with pent-up demand. After a winter that 40% of consumers described as harsher than usual, 64% said they were more eager than usual for spring to arrive, according to Chicory's Spring Occasions Survey of 502 U.S. consumers, fielded February 2026.

**64%**

of shoppers were more eager than usual for spring to arrive. Pent-up demand is a planning signal.

That eagerness translated directly into intent.

66% planned to spend more time outdoors than the year before, 43% planned to host more gatherings, and grilling topped the list of anticipated activities at 57%.

Spending intent spanned the full store. 41% expected to spend more on groceries for entertaining, 39% on seasonal food and beverage, and 33% on cleaning and organization products. Spring 2026 became a whole-basket reset.

America250: Big Cultural Moment, Converging Carts

America's 250th anniversary entered the year as a question mark. In Chicory's Summer Occasions Survey of roughly 1,000 U.S. consumers, fielded in January 2026, 58% planned to celebrate and 63% felt excited or interested. Enthusiasm split sharply by generation: 68% of Gen X planned to participate against 38% of Gen Z, and only 16% of Gen Z felt outwardly excited.

Food and hosting behavior converged anyway. Asked what would make the holiday feel different, consumers pointed first to hosting larger cookouts (37%) and buying more food and beverages (36%). Sentiment varied by household but the grocery list did not.

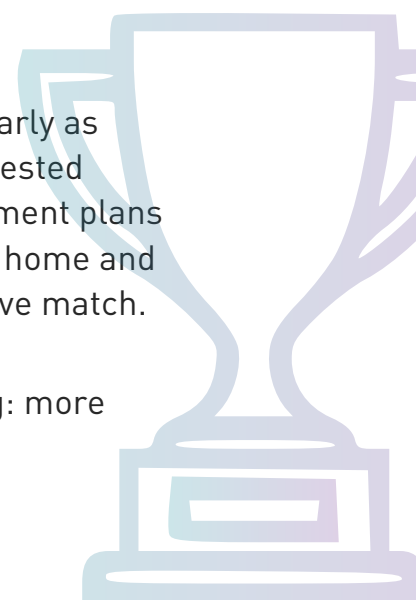
For brands, the moment proved low risk when handled through food and shared moments. 85% of consumers said brand association with A250 would affect their perception positively or not at all. Gen Z split nearly even between positive and negative, a reminder that context-led participation beats overt commemoration.

Celebration sentiment varied. Grocery behavior converged. July 4, 2026 was a food-first occasion and larger celebration.

The World Cup Took Over Living Rooms

Awareness of the North America-hosted World Cup stood at 74% as early as January, and 46% of consumers said proximity made them more interested (Chicory Summer Occasions Survey, January 2026 [n=1,019]). Engagement plans centered on the home: 34% planned to watch with friends or family at home and 21% planned to host or attend a watch party, against 9% attending a live match.

The tournament concentrated grocery demand around shared viewing: more food and drink, shareable formats, easy preparation.



Grilling Became a Weekly Tradition

97% of consumers planned to grill at least once a week between May and September, per Chicory's Summer Occasions Survey (2026). That cadence has made summer a rolling series of planning occasions, with a list built for every cookout.

Convenience carried the season. Shoppers reached for grill-ready proteins (56%), pre-chopped produce (45%), and ready-to-serve sides (42%). The summer shopping basket ran well past food: 69% stocked up on foil and storage supplies, 57% on disposable tableware, and 53% on charcoal or grilling fuel.

GLP-1s Rebuilt the Cart From the Inside

GLP-1 medications became a grocery story in 2026. In Chicory's GLP-1 Usage Survey of 1,377 U.S. consumers, fielded May 2026, users described a cart rebuild. 71% bought more high-protein foods and 62% more fresh fruits and vegetables, while 70% bought fewer sugary snacks and 55% bought less soda and fewer salty snacks.

The shift ran through the whole household. 57% of users say the entire household now eats differently, and 76% are cooking at home more. By the holidays, 39% of U.S.

households included at least one GLP-1 user (Chicory Holiday Occasions Survey, May 2026 [n=800]).

57%

of GLP-1 users say the whole household eats differently now. This is a household-level intervention.

This change is proving to be structural. 53% of users plan to stay on the medication indefinitely, and under 4% have stopped. Food and grocery content is where shoppers plan: 64% rely on recipe websites and food blogs, searching first for high-protein (64%), high-fiber (48%), and GLP-1-friendly (47%) meals.

MAHA Moved Ingredient Scrutiny Into the Mainstream

Four in five consumers are aware of the Make America Healthy Again conversation, and more than 40% follow it closely, according to Chicory's Fall Occasions Survey of 1,057 U.S. consumers, fielded March 2026. 71% always or often read ingredient lists before purchasing, and 68% say ingredient awareness has increased their grocery spend. Scrutiny landed hardest on packaged snacks, where 54% of consumers have changed or reconsidered purchases, followed by cereals (50%) and candy (46%). Even Halloween felt it: 64% of parents said ingredient concerns affect which trick-or-treat candy their kids can keep.

71%

of shoppers always or often read ingredient lists before buying. The label is the new shelf talker.

The Return to Routine Resets Brand Loyalty

61% of consumers said their daily routine becomes more structured as fall begins, and 73% plan meals at least a few days ahead (Chicory Fall Occasions Survey, March 2026 [n=1,057]). Structure means lists, and lists mean planning moments.

Back to school proved the year's biggest trial window. 72% of parents said they were more likely to try a new brand during back-to-school shopping. Further, the lunch box is becoming a nutritional statement: high protein (54%) and low sugar (47%) lead parent priorities, with no artificial dyes (36%) ranking ahead of convenience and organic.

Food content remains a key discovery channel. 76% of consumers have made an unplanned purchase after discovering a product through online food or cooking content.

72%

of parents are more likely to try a new brand during back-to-school shopping. Trial season has a date on the calendar.

The Holidays Run on Micro-Events and Careful Math

The 2026 holiday season stretches from early November through New Year's. 72% of consumers plan at least one micro-event such as a Friendsgiving or cookie exchange, 62% expect three or more gatherings, and 40% attend their first function before Thanksgiving (Chicory Holiday Occasions Survey, May 2026 [n=800]).

62%

of consumers attend three or more holiday gatherings. The season is a repeated-contact opportunity, not a single event.

Budgets tighten without ending the celebration. 55% budget more carefully, yet splurge logic holds for guest-facing categories: the centerpiece protein (45%), wine and spirits (33%), and desserts (31%).

The bar cart changed too. Half of consumers said they won't drink at holiday gatherings or weren't sure, led by personal health goals at 45%. Sparkling water (45%) is now nearly as expected at gatherings as soda (60%).

The Cyclospora Outbreak Reshuffled the Produce Aisle

Food safety became a basket-level event in July. When a cyclospora outbreak tied to fresh produce hit the headlines, 91% of shoppers in affected states knew about it and 61% changed what they buy, according to Chicory's Cyclospora Outbreak & Consumer Response survey of 1,044 U.S. consumers, fielded July 2026.

Fresh, ready-to-eat formats absorbed the hit: 52% bought fewer bagged salad kits and 44% less loose lettuce, while frozen (32%) and canned (29%) led the substitution. Caution turned into cooking, with 45% cooking at home more to control what goes on their plate. The brands that make home cooking safe create a trust that doesn't disappear when the headlines do.

61% of shoppers changed what they buy in response to the outbreak. Food safety is now a demand driver, not a news story.



What Consumers Are Telling Us

Across these tentpoles and macro trends, a handful of themes emerged, holding across every survey, every season, and every demographic.



Food & grocery content is still the highest-intent moment.

54% of shoppers say recipes drive their grocery list almost always or often (Chicory AI & Grocery Survey, April 2026 [n=1,005]). 62% are more open to trying a new product when it appears in food and grocery content than anywhere else online. Only 7% are less open.

76% of consumers have made an unplanned purchase after discovering a product through food content (Chicory Fall Occasions Survey, March 2026 [n=1,057]). The path from inspiration to cart is intact, and it runs through the active mindset.



Health is restructuring the cart.

Protein was the year's dominant nutrient. It led GLP-1 purchase increases (71% buying more high-protein foods), parent lunch priorities (54%), and recipe searches among GLP-1 users (64%).

With 39% of households including a GLP-1 user and 68% of consumers spending more because of ingredient awareness, health-forward stopped being a niche audience in 2026. It is the mainstream shopper.



Value pressure shapes every trip.

70% of consumers expected their fall grocery haul to cost more than the year before, and 48% are switching to store or private label brands more often (Chicory Fall Occasions Survey, March 2026 [n=1,057]). Gen Z leans hardest on the swap at 52%.

Value pressure redirects spending rather than eliminating it. The redirection happens during meal planning, which means brands that reach shoppers while the list is forming influence the choice before the trade-down happens.



Occasions are multiplying.

The hosting calendar stopped being a handful of major occasions. Micro-events reached 72% participation during the holidays, 55% of fall consumers planned to tailgate or entertain for game day, with 84% of those hosting at home, and grilling ran weekly all summer.

Each occasion carries its own basket, its own planning window, and its own high-intent moment. Brands that plan for a rolling calendar get more at-bats than brands that optimize for one peak.



AI assists but humans decide.

64% of surveyed shoppers intentionally use AI daily, yet 63% of those who used it for recipes report at least one negative real-world experience (Chicory AI & Grocery Survey, April 2026 [n=1,005]). 60% say the final purchase decision should always be theirs, 76% would change the brands an AI agent selected, and only 10% would let AI reach checkout or beyond.

Adoption is real, but consumers are not ready to hand the purchase over. The brands that appear in the recipe, rather than the algorithm, are the ones that get chosen.

76%

of shoppers would change the brands an AI agent selects. The purchase decision stays human.

The 2027 Planning Calendar

2027 does not ease in. The year opens with Dry January, hits Lent on February 10, reaches the first Super Bowl ever played on Valentine's Day four days later, and lands on Easter March 28, the earliest since 2016. Four seasonal resets in thirteen weeks.

Here is the year, quarter by quarter. Every date is a planning window that opens weeks earlier than the occasion itself.

Some 2027 highlights: _____

February 10 Ash Wednesday. Lent begins mid-February, so seafood and meatless meal planning starts before the Super Bowl confetti falls.

February 14 Super Bowl LXI at SoFi Stadium, Los Angeles, played on Valentine's Day for the first time ever. Snacking and entertaining meet chocolate and gifting in a single trip, a single basket, a single day. Plan the two occasions as one shopper moment.

March 28 Easter, the earliest since 2016. Baskets, baking, and the ham move into March. Easter planning begins the Monday after the Super Bowl.

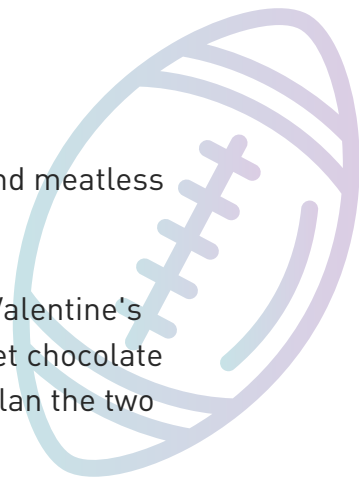
July 4 Independence Day. Will the cookout habits built during A250 carry forward?

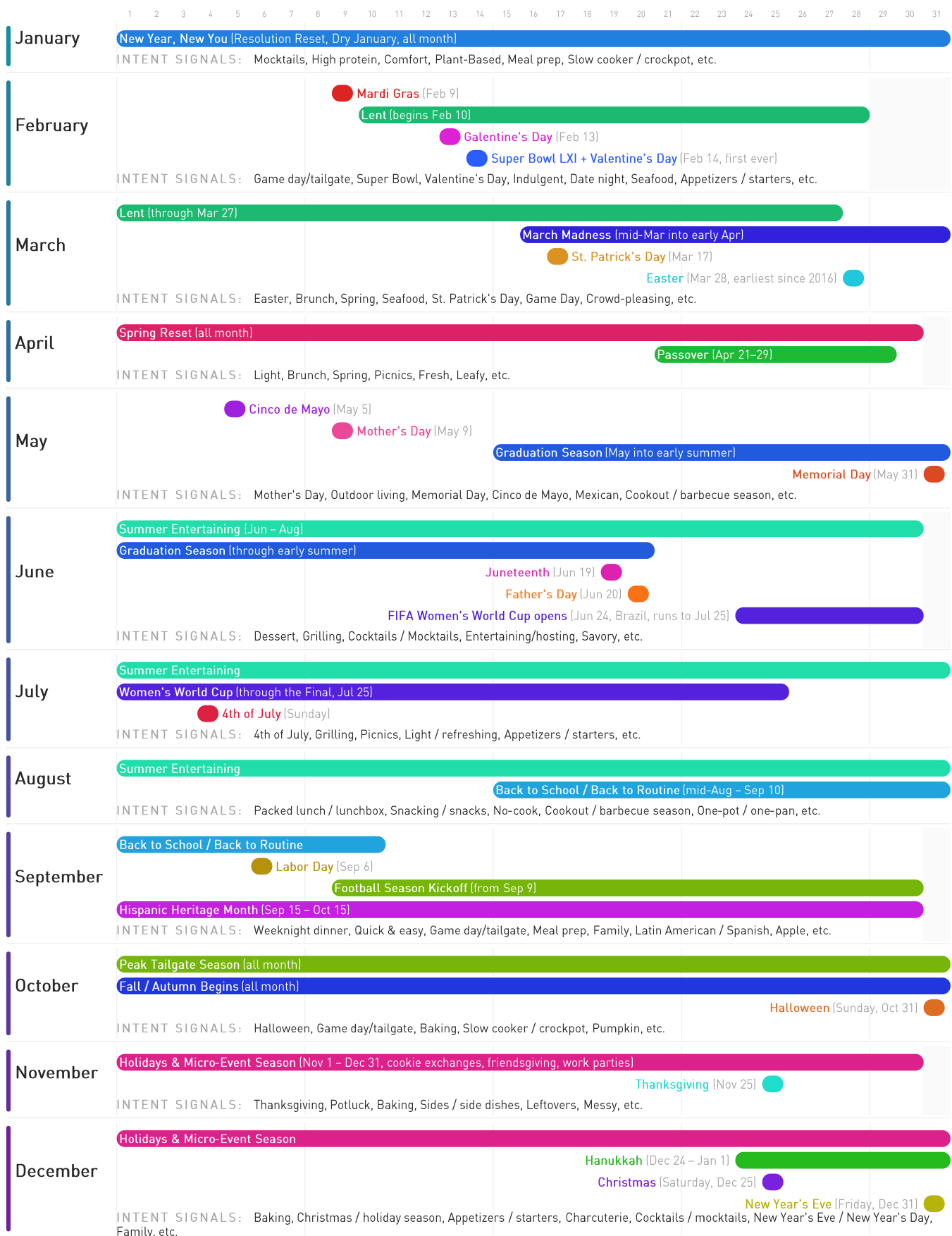
**June 24-
July 25** FIFA Women's World Cup, Brazil. 2026 proved tournament viewing lives at home. Watch parties, shareable formats, and a fast-growing women's sports audience.

October 31 Halloween falls on a Sunday, making it a full-weekend occasion. Ingredient-conscious candy is now table stakes.

Nov-Dec 31 Micro-event season. Friendsgivings, cookie exchanges, holiday parties, and New Year's Eve, each with its own basket.

February 14, 2027: the first Super Bowl ever played on Valentine's Day. One day, two tentpoles, one grocery trip.





Predictions from Chicory

COMMERCE MARKETING



My 2027 prediction: mid-funnel will gain in popularity as RMNs expand capabilities and CFOs demand better measurement and performance.

Yuni Baker-Saito
CEO of Chicory



Next year we will see a continued merging of CPG trade, shopper/commerce and brand budgets as retail media networks increasingly align strategies with retailer merchandising teams and build events that address all stages of the funnel.

Nick Minnick
VP of Retailer Partnerships



Commerce marketing will expand beyond Retailer.com into the moments that shape the shopping list. Retailer websites will remain critical conversion points, but growth will come from influencing consumers earlier in the journey—during planning, inspiration, and meal consideration. Retailer data will become increasingly portable across media, but data alone won't win. Brands will need to connect with consumers in the moments when they're deciding what to eat, not just where to buy it.

Meghan Howard
Chief Revenue Officer



Online grocery adoption will keep climbing as express delivery becomes table stakes, not a differentiator. The delivery battle isn't just Walmart and Amazon anymore: even Dollar General now offers under-an-hour delivery for a \$1 fee. As more omnichannel shoppers replace or supplement in-store trips with online orders, the retailers that win share of wallet will be the ones offering same-day (or faster) delivery at the same prices they charge in-store.

Jenna Smith
Sales Team Lead

Predictions from Chicory

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR



By 2027, the recipe will be the new retail shelf. AI-driven meal planning will collapse the journey from 'what's for dinner?' to 'delivered to your door' — and brands woven into that contextual layer (reaching shoppers when they're actively building their list) will be the ones that make it into the cart.

Kelly Mackay

Sales Team Lead



'Healthy' is dead. Contextual health is the future. Consumers will stop asking whether a food is simply "healthy" and start asking whether it's healthy for me. Food choices will increasingly be defined by specific life stages and wellness goals—high protein, anti-inflammatory, GLP-1 friendly, toddler approved, menopause friendly, heart healthy, gut healthy. Food won't just be fuel; it will become personalized medicine, tailored to individual needs.

Meghan Howard

Chief Revenue Officer



GLP-1s aren't killing indulgence, they're making it intentional. Consumers aren't cutting back on treats or drinks so much as they're being more deliberate about when and why they indulge. The brands that win in 2027 won't be the ones chasing 'better for you.' They'll be the ones that understand a smaller, smarter splurge is still a splurge worth having.

Lindsay Penley

Sales Team Lead

Predictions from Chicory

CPG TRENDS



First-party data will become every CPG's competitive advantage—but unified measurement will be the real prize. Retailer data will remain incredibly valuable, but CPGs will continue investing in their own consumer intelligence to better understand and activate audiences across channels. The next frontier isn't just owning more data—it's connecting retailer, brand, and media measurement into one unified view of marketing performance.

Meghan Howard

Chief Revenue Officer



Lifestyle will become the new brand positioning—but authenticity will separate the winners. Brands will increasingly market the role they play in consumers' lives, not just the products they sell. That means leaning into wellness where it's authentic—but also embracing moments of celebration, indulgence, convenience, and connection. Not every brand needs to become healthier. Sometimes the most authentic message is, 'We're the food for the tailgate.' The brands that know who they are—and who they aren't—will stand out.

Meghan Howard

Chief Revenue Officer

Predictions from Chicory

INDUSTRY CONSOLIDATION



I think in 2027 you will see some massive consolidation across this industry, affecting retailers, brands, agencies, and even digital advertising vendors.

Joey Petracca

COO of Chicory



Winning will require choosing fewer retail partners—and going deeper. The era of trying to be everything to every retailer is coming to an end. The most successful CPGs will double down on five to seven strategic retail partners, making bigger bets, building deeper relationships, and creating more meaningful joint business plans. It's a strategy that favors focus over breadth—and one that will make the competition even tougher for long-tail retailers.

Meghan Howard

Chief Revenue Officer



We're going to see consolidation at multiple levels in the grocery space. Retailer M&A activity will pick up, but we'll also see internal consolidation, with increased alignment between retail media and merchandising teams within grocers. AI-driven efficiencies will consolidate retail media campaign management and media planning teams, while externally, increased scrutiny on campaign performance will weed out third-party tactic and service providers that can't prove their value.

Nick Minnick

VP of Retailer Partnerships

What to Watch in 2027

Benefit fatigue sets in

Protein maxing and fiber maxing defined 2026 grocery marketing. High-protein led recipe searches among GLP-1 users (64%) and parent lunch priorities (54%), per Chicory's 2026 Consumer series. When every package makes the same claim, the claim stops differentiating.

2027 will favor brands that prove the benefit inside a meal, in context, instead of shouting it on pack. Watch the consumer temperature on functional ingredients: the brands that read the shift first will reposition before the shelf gets crowded with lookalike claims.

NA graduates to primary category

Half of 2026 holiday consumers said they won't drink at gatherings or were undecided, led by personal health goals at 45% (Chicory Holiday Occasions Survey, May 2026 [n=800]). Gen Z drinks the least of any cohort. Dry January 2027 is the launch window, but the behavior runs all year. Retailers and brands that treat NA as an accommodation will lose the shopper who now expects it as a category.

The February 14 double tentpole

The Super Bowl and Valentine's Day have never shared a date. In 2027 they share a grocery trip. Brands that plan them as a single shopper moment, snacking and gifting in one basket, will own the biggest planning weekend of the decade. Separate playbooks split your own audience.

The Q1 compression

Dry January, the Super Bowl, Valentine's Day, Lent, and an early Easter all land inside thirteen weeks. The seasonal aisle turns over four times before April. Supply, shelf, and media plans need to be sequenced before the year starts, because the calendar leaves no room to catch up.

Agentic AI meets the deliberate shopper

Agentic shopping tools will scale in 2027. Shoppers have already set their boundary: 76% would change the brands an AI selects, and 60% insist the final purchase decision stays theirs (Chicory AI & Grocery Survey, April 2026 [n=1,005]). The purchase decision stays human, and the high-intent moment stays in food content. Watch which brands build for the assistant and which build for the person.

Women's sports come to the kitchen table

The 2026 World Cup proved the tournament lives at home, with 34% of consumers planning to watch with friends or family and 21% hosting or attending watch parties (Chicory Summer Occasions Survey, January 2026 [n=1,019]). The 2027 Women's World Cup in Brazil tests whether the watch-party habit extends. Early movers in beverage, snacking, and entertaining will find out first.

Start Planning Now

Every trend in this report emerged while consumers were still planning their grocery purchases before entering a retailer's website, app, or store. Shoppers aspired towards spring hosting in February, brainstormed micro-events in May, and explained how GLP-1s were changing their grocery carts while some industry players remained skeptical.

2027 will bring more opportunities for brands to plan ahead and shape moments of consideration. The brands that win will be top-of-mind, on the list, and in the cart in the marketing moments that matter with Chicory.

LET'S START PLANNING.

Get in touch with the Chicory team.

