

Health & Wellness

Grocery Shoppers ‘Nudged’ to Make Healthy Choices via Blue Zones Project

How many of the choices made in grocery aisles are influenced by store signage and layout—and is it possible for a grocery store to make shoppers healthier?

New research on food buying habits indicates it is possible to “nudge” people to make healthier choices by presenting food in a different order or proximity. And in a growing number of communities, changes are being implemented in grocery stores to make it easier for shoppers to make healthy choices and avoid the temptations of high-sugar and high-fat foods.

The Blue Zones Project, a nationwide well-being improvement initiative, says it is helping communities redesign the places where people live, work and play to make healthy choices easier. That includes working with grocery stores to highlight foods and beverages that support well-being based on lifestyles in Blue Zones areas—regions of the world where people live longer, with less chronic disease. In many cases, the result is an increase in sales for produce and other featured items.

“Research shows that people gravitate toward better options when they are easy and accessible,” says Dan Buettner, a National Geographic Fellow and *New York Times* best-selling author who founded Blue Zones Project. “When grocery stores make small changes to increase awareness of healthy foods and drinks, people naturally purchase more of those items.”

A June 2016 review of existing research published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* by the Faculty of Science at the University of Copenhagen identified that manipulation of food product order or proximity can influence food choice. According to *Science Daily*, “nudging” or ‘choice architecture’ refers to strategic changes in the environment that are anticipated to alter people’s behavior in a predictable way, without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives.”

Blue Zones Project has identified 35 evidence-based practices, or nudges, that transform a grocery store environment—by optimizing layout and displays, highlighting locally grown produce and foods commonly eaten in Blue Zones areas, and giving shoppers healthier options in the checkout lane. Customers are responding favorably, with stores reporting higher customer counts and more revenue from healthy items.

Following are a couple of examples.

Naples, Florida: Wynn’s Market

As president of a grocery chain in southwest Florida that has been family-owned since 1938, Tim Wynn knew he had to set Wynn’s Market apart to compete with larger grocers.

With guidance from Blue Zones Project, Wynn’s rearranged its cold beverage cases, adding green tea and flavored water and making bottled water more visible than sugary drinks. The result? Bottled water sales rose nearly 15 percent.

When Wynn’s added Blue Zones-inspired recipes to its “grab-and-go” entrées, customers

wanted more, so the store created an entire Blue Zones Project grab-and-go entrée section with 25 choices. Wynn’s also added a Blue Zones checkout lane, replacing candy and soda displays with water, quinoa, sweet potato sticks and fresh produce.

“We didn’t eliminate any items; we still have our delicious bakery goods and sweets. We just remind customers about other items that are just as delicious and better for you,” Wynn says.

The approach is working. Since becoming Blue Zones Project approved, Wynn’s has experienced a 5 percent boost in produce sales as well as increases to overall sales and customer counts.

Hawaii Island, Hawaii: KTA Super Stores

KTA Super Stores was in the state and national spotlight as the first grocery store in Hawaii to become Blue Zones Project approved. The Hawaii Island supermarket chain first earned the designation at its Waimea store (North Hawaii), followed by its Puainako location (East Hawaii) in June. Now, all six KTA locations are approved as Blue Zones Project grocery stores, and as a next step, are working to become approved worksites as well.

The KTA stores are making it easier for shoppers to make healthy choices, and it’s working. Since implementing Blue Zones Project in the first two stores:

- The sale of fresh fruit, nuts and dried fruit more than doubled when prominently displayed at or near a Blue Zones checkout lane. Fruit leather strip sales tripled.
- New half-sandwich offerings sell two to three times faster than whole sandwiches.
- Blue Zones grocery lanes are so popular, additional lanes are being considered.



All six KTA locations in Hawaii are approved as Blue Zones Project grocery stores.

As cities across the country engage in Blue Zones Project as a means to improve community well-being, it’s fitting that grocery stores play an integral role.

“We know that shopper preferences are evolving to healthier foods,” Buettner says. “Blue Zones Project-approved grocery stores meet that demand by making small but significant changes that encourage healthier choices and also bring in additional revenue for the retailer. That’s a win-win.”

Currently, 31 communities in eight states have joined Blue Zones Project. The movement includes three beach cities in California; 15 cities in Iowa; Albert Lea, Minnesota; the city of Fort Worth; and communities in Hawaii, southwest Florida, Wisconsin and Oregon. Blue Zones Project is a division of Healthways, a Sharecare company.

Raley’s New Concept Focuses on Customers’ Well-Being

A new store concept “founded on the principle that real, natural food is essential to living a healthier and fulfilled life” is slated to open in the R Street District of Sacramento, California, this spring.

Market 5-ONE-5 architectural rendering

Raley’s, parent company of the new format, says the store’s goal is building awareness about where food comes from and promoting the belief that food affects health. It has a farmer’s market-like design, with fresh products delivered daily.

The name comes from the concept’s three core values—Organic, Nutrition and Education (ONE). The two 5s in the name come from the five senses and five essential nutrients: carbohydrates, protein, fats, vitamins and minerals, and water.

“I want to go back to the basics and create a store that is reminiscent of a neighborhood corner market but with a focus on nutritious food at a fair value,” said Michael Teel, owner. “Market 5-ONE-5 will be an unpretentious, inclusive and straightforward shopping experience.”

The store will include 11,000 s.f. of curated product intended to encourage wholesome eating. The goal for the store is to source products that meet the highest quality standards—minimally processed, organic (when available), sustainably sourced and free of elements not found in nature.

The store’s GM, Levi Wingo, has said that the store will feature a large produce department and prepared foods department, a full-service meat department and a large nutrition and health area. Offerings will include humanely and naturally raised, antibiotic-free meats; locally grown produce, delivered daily; a selection of wine and craft beers, including local offerings; and an in-store chef and nutritionist as part of the store’s focus on education.

“We want every choice in the store to be easy to understand,” said Raley’s COO Keith Knopf. “It is our goal to earn the trust of every customer so that they may have confidence that only nutritious options are being offered at Market

5-ONE-5.”

The company hopes Market 5-ONE-5 will enhance the R Street District, an important part of the city of Sacramento’s history as the Farm to Fork Capital. The market hopefully will be a place to socialize and to enjoy seasonally prepared cuisine. The store will feature both indoor and outdoor seating areas.

“Being part of the renewal taking place on this important and historic street in Sacramento is very exciting,” said Ali Youssefi of CFY Development Inc. “The opportunity to serve downtown with a convenient and healthy shopping alternative has long been an objective of mine.”

Market 5-ONE-5 is being designed in partnership with Stafford King Wiese Architects.

All Raley’s checkstand areas go healthier

In other news from Raley’s, the chain has implemented “Better for You” checkstands in all its stores. This includes removing all artificially sweetened sodas from the checkstand cold cases and upgrading the selection of snacks and treats—enlarging offerings such as granola bars and nutrition bars and improving the quality of certain candy options.

“We know impulsive choices happen at the checkstand,” said COO Keith Knopf. “We are proud to take a brave next step by making it easier for shoppers to choose healthy, more nutritious options.”

“Better for You” checkstands are another first step toward helping customers make affordable, nutritious choices, according to Raley’s, which operates 121 stores in Northern California and Nevada under four banners: Raley’s Supermarkets, Bel Air Markets, Nob Hill Foods and Food Source.

This fall, Raley’s began offering free fruit for kids. In August, it eliminated private label brand soda that contained high-fructose corn syrup and artificial colors and flavors, including diet soda varieties. In 2015, the grocer eliminated tobacco products from stores.

The company says these decisions are in response to customers’ increased interest in food and greater concerns



about their health than ever before.

In addition to these changes in the store experience, Raley’s has launched its “Let’s Begin” campaign in stores and on Raleys.com to help educate customers on how to make more informed decisions when purchasing food.

BRIEFLY...

Good Housekeeping (GH) Magazine this fall launched the GH “Nutritionist Approved” emblem, designed to help simplify the process of making better food decisions for consumers. The GH Food and Nutrition Brand Lab Incubator—housed inside the Good Housekeeping Institute at Hearst Tower in New York City—will evaluate new and existing products for emblem consideration. The effort is led by GH Nutrition Director and Registered Dietitian (RD) Jaclyn London. “Brands that align with GH Nutritionist Approved core values—simplicity, transparency and innovation—are considered and go through a rigorous evaluation process,” London says. “We are proud to stand behind our first nine GH Emblem earners—nutritious options to incorporate into our everyday meals and snacks.”

The first emblems were awarded to Chelan Fresh, Larabar, Dole, Garden of Eatin’, Luvo, Panatea, Carrington Farms, Jarlsberg and Beanitos.

Good Health has launched its new Eat Your Vegetables chip lineup. The chips are made with a blend of eight vegetables: carrots, sweet potatoes, kale, spinach, broccoli, tomato, beets and shiitake mushrooms. Five flavors are available: Sea Salt, Jalapeño Ranch, Korean BBQ, Sour Cream & Onion and Sea Salt & Lime. Originally launched in 2012 under the Snikiddy brand, Eat Your Vegetables joins the Good Health family of better-for-you snacks.

Eat Your Vegetables chips (SRP \$3.49) are an excellent source of vitamins A and C and a good source of vitamins E and B6, says the company. Certified gluten-free, each chip also is free of nuts, cholesterol, MSG, hydrogenated oils, trans fat and artificial colors. Many flavors are also Non-GMO Project Verified.

