



Millennial insights

PLMA surveyed more than 1,800 millennials to learn more about who they are and how they feel about and use store brand products.

By Joe Azzinaro

Millennials represent upwards of 50 million individuals, or about 15 percent of the U.S. population. By their sheer number, as well as their non-conventional ways, this diverse group promises to exert major influences on how companies will fare for decades to come.

This cohort continues to demonstrate unorthodox marketplace behavior and attitudes, which in turn point to changes in lifestyles and habits reflecting the definitions of family, home, work and leisure. Not least of these is how they buy, prepare and consume food. Many such shifts are without precedent and could be more fundamental in nature for the store brand business than were the changes brought about by the baby boomers and Gen Xers before them.

To analyze the eating habits, preferences and attitudes of millennial consumers, the Private Label Manufacturers Association (PLMA), New York, commissioned London-based SurveyLab Ltd. to conduct a comprehensive nationwide online survey of 1,839 shoppers. The 931 women and 908 men between the ages of 20 and 29 who participated are representative of what many demographers consider to be the core group of the millennial generation.

What follows is a summary of selected findings from that survey. The full survey, which is titled "How America's Eating Habits Are Changing," will be released to PLMA members, the retail industry and other press outlets.

Highlights:

• **Their living arrangements are diverse.**

Respondents to the new PLMA study produced an interesting generational profile, particularly when it came to their living arrangements. A plurality, 39 percent of them, live with a spouse or significant other; one-quarter live with a parent or parents, and one-fifth live alone. Some 6 percent live with adult friends not related to them, and 5 percent live in a school dorm or off-campus housing.

• **The size of their households is disparate.**

More than one-fourth of respondents (26 percent) live in households with four or more people (both

adults and children).

Meanwhile 68 percent live in households with no children under the age of 18. As for the total annual income of their entire household, 35 percent of respondents in the study say it falls between \$50,000 and \$99,000, and one-third of them say their household income is between \$25,000 and \$49,000.

• **They are well-educated.** Fully 79 percent have at least some college education or more: 27 percent hold undergraduate degrees, 8 percent have a two-year college certificate, and 11 percent have graduate degrees. Four percent have completed some graduate study. On the other hand, 17 percent say their education consists of completion of high school or its equivalency. Only 3 percent have not completed high school.

• **Their employment status is a mixed bag.** Some 45 percent have full-time jobs, and 14 percent have a part-time job. Six percent say they are currently unemployed, and 5 percent say they are currently looking for work. Meanwhile, 15 percent are full-time students, and 3 percent are part-time students. Eight percent said they are a homemaker or caregiver for someone in their household.





● **They are well-informed consumers.** More than eight in 10 (84 percent) respondents are aware of store brands for the foods they eat. Another 12 percent describe themselves as “not very aware” of store brands, and only 4 percent say they don’t think about store brands. Looking at all brands of products in the supermarket, 86 percent of those in the PLMA study affirm they are aware of brands when it comes to the foods they eat. Nearly three-quarters of all respondents (72 percent) say they are aware of which company actually makes or produces the foods they eat. Only 21 percent say they are not very aware, and 7 percent don’t think about it.

● **They scrutinize labels and packages.** Three out of four respondents said they read nutritional labels. One-third of respondents are “very aware” of the ingredients in their food. As it relates to eating and food, large numbers of these millennials say they are “very interested” in the following attributes: flavor and taste (57 percent); freshness of foods and ingredients (44 percent); health (42 percent); proper hydration (40 percent); nutritional value (39 percent); energy and stamina (34 percent); weight control (29 percent); and protein

intake (20 percent). Reflecting on when they were growing up, four out of 10 say they “eat less processed or packaged food” now than their parents did back then.

● **They are certain about what they do not want in their food.** One in four respondents says it is very important to avoid high-fructose corn syrup, while one in five feels that way about sodium, artificial colors and flavors, as well as ingredients they can’t pronounce and food additives. One in four says it is very important to avoid GMOs, hormones and antibiotics.

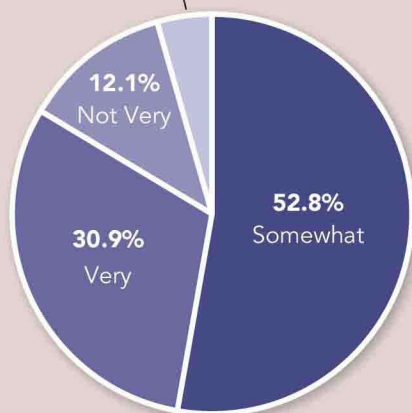
● **Cooking at home and from scratch is important to them.** When they eat at home, 64 percent enjoy making food from scratch. Men in the study are almost as enthused about scratch cooking as women (60 percent of men versus 66 percent of women). More than one-third of all respondents watch cooking videos on YouTube or a cooking show on TV; 43 percent like to cook but don’t do it very often; 49 percent describe themselves as a “skilled cook”; 69 percent say they like cooking and learning about cooking. Only about one in four says he or she doesn’t like to cook. One-third of respondents heat and eat something from the supermarket.

● **They are often the chief cook at home.** Nearly half of respondents say they are the only one to prepare meals for their household. More than half, 55 percent, describe themselves as the primary cook at home. About one-third (36 percent) say they are obligated to make food for others in their household, while about half (48 percent) prefer to share the responsibility for food preparation with others. As a group, they cook at home often: 24 percent prepare food at home for themselves or their households five or more times a week, and 32 percent do so three or four times a week. Only 8 percent rarely or never do so. Half of respondents say they prefer food that requires as little work as possible.

● **They seek out new recipes often.** Reflecting their strong interest in cooking, millennial consumers search for recipes in many places and use them often. More than half of respondents always or frequently look up recipes online, and 36 percent use an application to find recipes. Forty-seven percent prepare food from a recipe they saw online, and 28 percent do the same from a recipe they saw on TV. **SB**

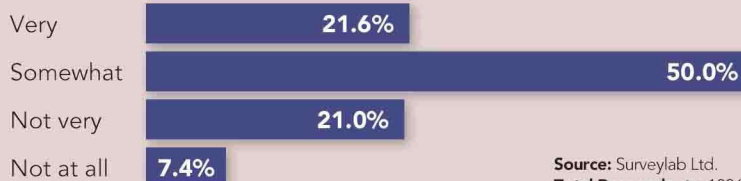
How aware would you say you are of store brands — products that retailers put their own names or brands on — for the foods you eat?

I don’t think about it 4.2%



Source: Surveylab Ltd.
Total Respondents: 1833

How aware would you say you are of who actually makes or produces the foods you eat?



Source: Surveylab Ltd.
Total Respondents: 1836

Joe Azzinaro is director of special projects for PLMA and editor of the 2016 study.