



What Really Works in Supermarket Meal Displays

by [David Orgel](#) in [Viewpoints](#)
Jun. 2, 2012

Supermarkets are willing to take occasional risks, but they much prefer if other retailers have already charted good paths to follow. This is an industry that isn't shy about emulating success.

That fact should help draw attention to a new study that points to proven retailer successes in meal merchandising displays, one of the most important topics for supermarkets.

The research was produced by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, and its findings have relevance well beyond any single product category.

As reported in [a story by Fresh Market Editor Jenna Telesca](#) in *SN*, May 21, the following six retailers participated in tests of refrigerated meal solution displays for 16 weeks: Harris Teeter, Brookshire Grocery Co., Save-Mart, Weis Markets, Roche Bros. and Food City.



The retailers achieved a 19.2% average incremental increase in units sold across the displays and 20.5% in dollar sales. Dairy products scored even higher.

Here's the most interesting part: The gains were recorded without promotional pricing or extra marketing, which indicates that a campaign could accelerate results.

The pilots all involved refrigerated displays geared to specific meal occasions. For example, Food City executed a breakfast trial that included eggs, milk, yogurt and pineapple, and Roche Bros. pursued testing related to healthy foods merchandising. Displays often included recipes and always at least some recipe ingredients.

The precise methodology included consumer focus groups, consumer intercept surveys, store associate input, and tracking of sales data.

All this activity led to key takeaways and, importantly, the creation of a group of best practices for meal displays that seems solid.

These practices include: Make displays convenient and place them early in traffic patterns; incorporate only items that directly address a specific meal occasion; keep assortments simple, and create a long-term program for displays that is rotated frequently.

I'd add two additional suggestions based on recent *SN* reporting about meal displays: Make the pricing consistently sharp and put marketing muscle behind efforts.

The full report is called: "Dairy Meal Solutions: Merchandising Works." Its best practices may not appear earthshaking, but you don't need a seismic shift in tactics to produce strong results. You just require proven strategies that will consistently attract shoppers and drive sales. On that score, the Innovation Center's report delivers.

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