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Report Name: Mexican Food and Beverage Consumption Following COVID--2021 Consumer Survey Summary

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Prepared By: Violetta Denise Soria

Approved By: Jonn Slette

Report Highlights:

The Agricultural Trade Office (ATO) Mexico City commissioned a consumer survey to assess Mexican's purchasing habits following the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey focused on changing consumer habits in the wake of COVID-19, consumer perceptions about imported products, and the effect of the new Front of Pack Labeling Law (NOM051) has in consumer purchasing decisions. The survey focused 12 focus-groups from sample populations in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. The participants all had college degrees and had access to enough disposable income to buy imported products (middle class or higher). The survey found that throughout the pandemic, most Mexican consumers adapted their shopping habits for food and consumer products, cooked more often at home, consumed more healthful foods, avoided overeating and weight gain, and consumed more supplements and vitamins.

Disclaimer:

The information contained in this report was commissioned by ATO Mexico City from a local survey consultant. The following report is based entirely on the findings of the consultant. The U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), the ATO, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and/or any other U.S. Government agency make no claims of accuracy or authenticity. The Government of Mexico has not officially endorsed this report.

Methodology

The qualitative focus group technique was used to collect people's thoughts and feeling about specific topics, products, or services. Discussions in focus groups were moderated to elicit more precise responses. Due to the pandemic, groups were limited to 6-8 people in sessions lasting approximately two hours. This method did not use a structured questionnaire, but rather prompted a series of topics to be discussed. The sessions for this survey included four main guiding categories: 1. consumption patterns, 2. changing habits during the pandemic, 3. perceptions of imported food, and 4. environment and health.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Survey Participants

Segment	Sociodemographic Characteristics
Housewives	Women between 31 and 40 years old with children and dedicated exclusively to home care.
Youth	Men and women between 25 and 30 years old, responsible for the purchases and maintenance of their homes.
Double Income No Kids (DINKs)	Men and women between 31 and 40 years old, married or living together without kids, responsible for their home's shopping.
Professional Women	Women between 31 and 40 years old, responsible for their home's shopping.

The survey was performed in 12 focus groups in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. The participants had at least a bachelor's degree, a membership in a price club commercial chain, or were frequent consumers of a supermarket that supplies imported products (Superama, Chedraui Selecto, HEB, or City Market). All participants belonged to socioeconomic levels C+ or higher¹ (middle class or higher).

Consumption Profiles

This study focused on millennials and Gen Z², as these consumers tend to be more inclined toward conscientious consumption, tend to have more willingness to adapt purchasing habits, and often prefer more natural and sustainable products. Participants indicated the differences in their communities, as well as differences in the perceptions and consumption preferences. Some considerations to these differences are contained in Table 2.

¹ According to Parametría, the consulting firm performing the study, 15% of the Mexican population can be categorized in these socioeconomic levels.

² According to the [Pew Research Center](#), millennials are people born between 1981 and 1996, while Gen Z are people born between 1997 and 2012.

Table 2. Particularities of the Focus Groups in Each City

City	Considerations
Mexico City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most young people lived with their partner or in a living apart together (LAT) model. • Housewives tended to be former professionals but gave up careers to dedicate time to their children. They frequently modified purchases toward more healthful food. Most had only one or two children. • In general, there was a preference to buy national products, based mainly on political perception.
Guadalajara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most youths came to Guadalajara from other municipalities or states to study or work. They live alone or in a LAT model. • Housewives showed a big preference for tasty products over nutritious ones. Many showed disinterest or were uninformed about socially responsible consumption. • Except for housewives, food consumption was determined by the available information about the processes and production conditions of natural foods vs processed foods. In general, this was the most informed community. • There was some interest in national products, but purchasing decisions were more often determined by the production process. The country of origin was less important.
Monterrey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most youth still lived with parents, but because of the pandemic, they exercised greater responsibility for household purchases. • The COVID lockdown limited social dynamics but originated new activities. In Monterrey, ready-to-eat food consumption spiked, mainly through delivery services. Home grilling also saw an increase. • There is a preference to purchase foreign products, mainly from the United States. Participants easily identified brands and stores where they can purchase these. The main motives of their purchase decision were better quality and presentation.

For this study, three basic consumer profiles were found:

- a) **Engaged:** They determine their purchases starting with values such as altruism, social justice, environmental care, and they seem to have a lot of information about the origin and production processes of the products they buy. These conditions guide them in their lifestyle decisions, such as eliminating or reducing consumption of animal products, or purchasing determined products or brands that are perceived as responsible with the environment. This is the smaller group and are found amongst professional women and some DINKs in Mexico City and Guadalajara.
- b) **Curious:** Most participants were among this group. They showed interest in developing a healthy and socially responsible lifestyle but, unlike ‘Engaged’ consumers, they tend to prioritize practicality and price over ideals during their purchases. High costs, the idea that they need a complicated process to prepared healthy food or unavailability, are factors that usually discourage them of making changes in their habits. This group was found mostly between youths

and DINKs in the three cities, housewives in Mexico City, and professional women in both Mexico City and Guadalajara.

- c) **Indifferent:** These consumers have little or no interest in implementing socially responsible habits to their lifestyle. Most will remain loyal to their current patterns due to cultural (“less healthy”) consumption patterns and the practicality in food preparation due to lack of time. This group was identified amongst housewives in Guadalajara and Monterrey, as well as amongst professional women and DINKs in Monterrey.

Key Findings

1. Consumption Patterns

- **Basic Market Basket:** There were not a lot of differences between what people included in their basic market basket. Most people considered natural foods to be fruits, legumes, grains and seeds, and meat. Some confusion occurred concerning dairy products regarding whether they are processed foods or not. In terms of processed food products (PFP), the study did not intend to differentiate between processed foods and ultra-processed food products (UPF), however, indifferent consumers (mainly in Monterrey) knew a lot of PFPs and UPFs and they were part of their day-to-day diets. The rest of the participants mentioned mostly sausages, desserts, and frozen foods as PFPs. Some Engaged consumers expressed doubts as to how dairy products must be cataloged.
- **Product Selection:** Product selection seems to follow a similar pattern across all groups. However, it was observed that women are more careful when selecting food and other products. Some housewives and professional women check the ingredients list and labels minutely, mainly because they want to take care of their family’s health and their own. In general, the price, brand, and presentation are the main influential factors in a purchase decision (see Graphic 1 below). For women in general, the date of production seems to be also important. Particularly amongst millennials without kids, lactose intolerance tends to be the main cause for reviewing nutritional information while buying food.
- **Shopping Places:** Except for Monterrey, people showed some hesitancy toward buying fruits and vegetables via the internet or delivery apps. People argue that sometimes when they buy fresh food on shopping apps, they received a lower quality or different item than what they would have purchased themselves. Some exceptions were mentioned: Justo, Cornershop, and Superama (and Calii in Monterrey). Price Clubs such as Sam’s Club and Costco are perceived to offer a special shopping experience and are perceived as good to find specific products they don’t find in other stores or to buy nonperishable products that can be bought in big scales.

Graphic 1. Distribution of Decision Factors When Purchasing Food.

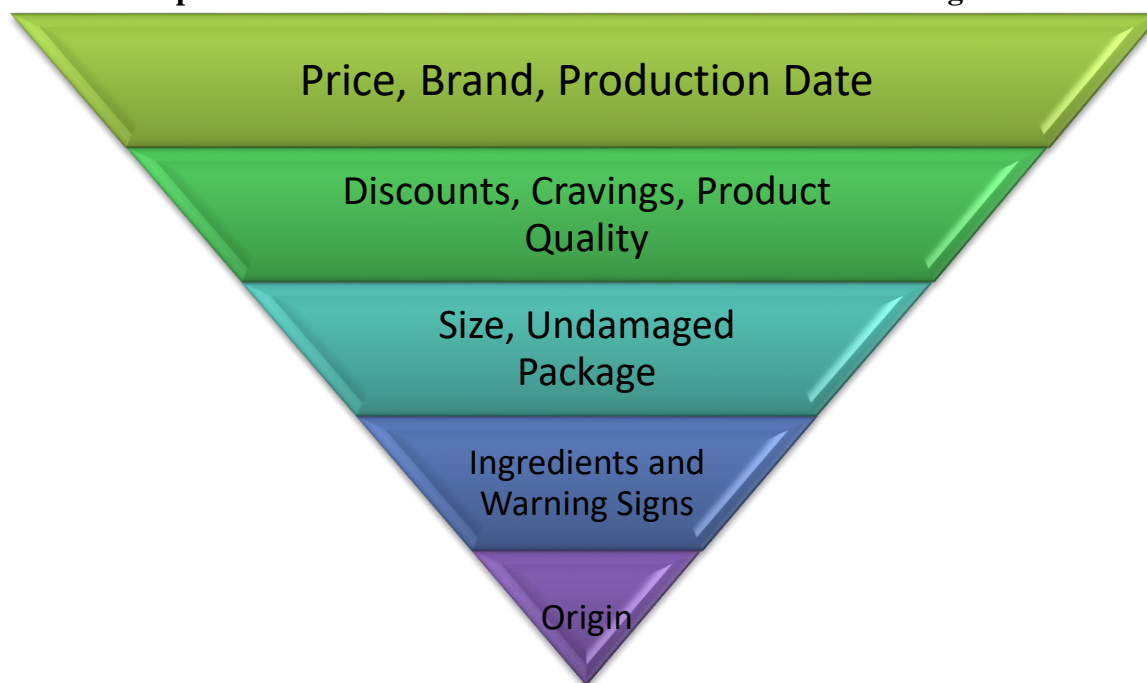


Table 3. Where, When, and How Mexicans Buy Food

Type of Product		Mexico City	Guadalajara	Monterrey
Food	Fresh Food – fruits and vegetables	<u>Frequency:</u> Weekly <u>Where:</u> markets, tianguis, small grocery stores	<u>Frequency:</u> Weekly <u>Where:</u> markets, small grocery stores, supermarkets.	<u>Frequency:</u> Weekly <u>Where:</u> HEB or Calii
	Meat and animal products	<u>Frequency:</u> Weekly <u>Where:</u> Supermarkets and Butcher Shops	<u>Frequency:</u> Weekly <u>Where:</u> Supermarkets and Butcher Shops	<u>Frequency:</u> Weekly <u>Where:</u> HEB or COSTCO
	Frozen Foods	<u>Frequency:</u> Monthly <u>Where:</u> Supermarkets or Price Clubs	<u>Frequency:</u> Monthly <u>Where:</u> Supermarkets or Price Clubs	<u>Frequency:</u> Monthly <u>Where:</u> Price Clubs
Nonperishable (personal hygiene, cleaning supplies)		<u>Frequency:</u> Monthly <u>Where:</u> Price Clubs	<u>Frequency:</u> Monthly <u>Where:</u> Price Clubs	<u>Frequency:</u> Monthly <u>Where:</u> Price Clubs

2. Changes to Consumption Patterns

- **Profiles During the Pandemic:** Three profiles pandemic profiles tended to emerge: 1. People who did not isolate because their jobs were deemed essential, their food consumption habits did not change a lot during the pandemic. They tended to consume ready-to-eat food and use delivery services and apps. 2. People who worked from home, resumed going to restaurants, to movies, etc. as soon as possible. 3. People who did not resume the social aspects of their life until they were fully vaccinated or felt safe outside of their houses. These last group tended to live healthier lifestyles and be more self-care focused. They cooked their own meals or had someone to do it for them at home.
- **Changes to the Purchase Process:** One recurring theme during the pandemic is that people had to change the way they purchased food. Housewives and particularly young people demonstrated the biggest changes. Young people often went from consumers to purchasers, as they had to take on additional shopping responsibilities to take care of their parents. DINKs and professional women alternated shopping responsibilities with food delivery, according to their time availability; they showed more openness to new technologies and showed more adaptability. Housewives and married professional women saw an increase in their responsibilities at home and taking care of their children; their trip to the supermarket used to be a time for leisure but this was gone thanks to the lockdown. They showed less openness toward new technologies. Most participants agreed that they had to change the day and time they used to go to the supermarket, to avoid crowds. For some, family trips to the supermarket transformed into quick, solo errands. Some people still prefer to go to the supermarket in person instead of using delivery apps because they do not trust other people choosing their food. They complained about the low-quality products, especially fruits and vegetables.
- **Changes in Food Consumption Patterns:** The new dynamic brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic opened the possibility to also reformulate feeding habits that most of the times were influenced by emotions. Some identifiable patterns emerged:
 - **Being More Intentional when Preparing Meals.** Some people, especially at the beginning of the lockdown, started preparing their own meals with more complicated recipes. This created an increase in purchases of the basic market basket. A lot of people started baking more and trying new recipes, even as a fun family activity.
 - **Increase in Food Delivery Apps Usage.** Delivery of ready-to-eat food increased either because people wanted to give variety to their weekly diet, they did not have time to cook, or because they wanted to support local businesses. Before the pandemic, participants used these services once a month approximately, to become a weekly thing.
 - **Increased Demand for Food.** This was especially the case for families with children, which spending all their time at home, had the need to eat more and more times a day too.
 - **Need to Eat Healthier.** Because of the pandemic, a lot of the participants signaled their need to eat healthier and take better care of their weight and health in general to prevent not just COVID-19, but other diseases as well. They are looking for food with less fat and/or less sugar.

3. *Health and Environment*

- **Knowledge about Food and Nutrition:** The study showed that women in general have more knowledge about nutritional information. For men, typically those that tended to exercise often or have a medical condition were more astute at correctly classifying different types of food.
- **Type of Foods:** People classified their food in four groups: healthy food, light food, sugar-free or fat-free food and vegan food. Healthy foods were defined as food from natural origin, without preservatives or added chemical ingredients (fruits, vegetables, seeds, grains, meat). Light foods were defined as food reduced in sugar or fat that normally has synthetic ingredients to improve its flavor. This addition of synthetic ingredients causes people to perceive these products as unhealthy; examples that participants gave were dairy products and sausages. Sugar-free and fat-free foods were confusing to participants as they thought both could be included within the light food category. Participants were not able to find examples of fat-free products; for the sugar-free products they mentioned chocolates and other products designed for people with diabetes. Lastly, participants understood vegan food as food free of animal origin ingredients. Even though they indicated familiarity with the term, there was some confusion when defining what ‘vegan’ food is. Some people confused it with organic food. Except for knowing vegetal substitutes for milk (almond, oat, soy) and knowing some dishes based on grains and seeds, the participants accepted they had little knowledge about these products. Some of them were discouraged from buying them due to their high prices or unavailability in the market.
- **Immune System Care:** When talking about this topic, people tended to raise medicine and food supplements. In terms of food that helps boost the immune system, participants mentioned citrus, green tea, ginger, turmeric, and garlic. People are aware that a good immune system helps prevent illness and as such, they normally consume food supplements and vitamins, but they were unable to explain how their diet can help with this objective. Women were the most informed on this subject and the ones that have made more changes to take care of their immune system because of the pandemic.
- **Perception of New Front of Pack Labeling Law:** Participants were able to immediately identify the black octagons, but they were surprised to know the different warnings these octagons make. The study showed that even though people recognize the signs, they do not know what they mean or what are the implications for their health. They do understand a product is not healthy if it has a lot of signs, but it is not clear to them why. The participants said that these new signs in their food did not change the way they perceive a product or does not stop them from buying it. They do not think it is a useful strategy. They think it is meant for older people or for younger people to make better food choices. Only people in Mexico City showed a little openness to paying attention to the seals when dealing with a new product. Even engaged consumers said they’d rather check the ingredients list and nutritional information than paying attention to the seals.
- **Environment Care:** The levels of knowledge in this topic vary from city to city and from group to group. In Guadalajara, all groups except for housemakers showed to be informed about what they could do to take care of the environment, although they did not define themselves as ecologists; housemakers showed lack of information on this subject. In Mexico City, people

were interested on the subject but did not show initiative to do anything extra to what the government has already implemented. In Monterrey, participants in the survey approached this subject from the actions the government has already implemented such as prohibition to use plastic bags or to use disposable plates and cups. Participants did mention it is the responsibility of the companies to have more ecological options and actions as they are the main polluters in the community. For them, it is both the responsibility of the government to create regulations and control mechanisms and of the companies to establish new dynamics in their production and distribution processes, dynamics that are more environmentally friendly.

Final Comments

The study also showed some results regarding the consumption and perception of imported products. In general, a product's country of origin is not a decisive purchase factor, although some consumers do give this strong consideration. Because of the diversity of the focus groups, three postures were identified:

1. **Nationalist:** People that feel proud about purchasing Mexican products and feel some level of distrust about imported products. This is most noticeable when purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables.
2. **Favoring Imported Products:** People in this group firmly believe that products from the U.S. have better sanitary controls and therefore higher quality. Participants also mentioned imported frozen foods as more practical and easier to use. The preferred imported products for the focus groups were red meat and frozen products. This preference was more evident among housewives from Guadalajara and Monterrey and professional women in Monterrey.
3. **Informed Consumers:** This group (mainly young people, and DINKs in Guadalajara and Monterrey and professional women in Guadalajara) has a better understanding about national regulations and food production processes in the U.S. They will buy imported products without hesitation.

For further information and to learn more about the services provided by the Agricultural Trade Offices in Mexico, please contact us at:

**Agricultural Trade Office
Mexico City, Mexico**
Liverpool No. 31, Col. Juarez
06600, Mexico City, Mexico
Tel: (011 52 55) 5080-5287
E-mail: AgMexico@usda.gov

**Agricultural Trade Office
Monterrey, Mexico**
Prolongacion Av. Alfonso Reyes No. 150
Santa Catarina 69196 Monterrey, Nuevo Leon
Tel: (011 52 81) 8047-3393
E-mail: AgMexico@usda.gov

Attachments:

No Attachments.