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Press Release

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Convenience Is Top Reason for Food Choices

Think consumers are choosing healthy foods over convenient foods? Guess again.

In recent years, consumers have become increasingly concerned with healthy food, but according to Rob Holland, a specialist with the University of Tennessee *Center for Profitable Agriculture*, “Studies of consumer preferences show that convenience dominates the decision-making process.”

While consumers remain attracted to food products for reasons that include taste, flavor, tradition and health, they gravitate toward convenient foods. “They may not always realize how much convenience drives their food-purchasing decisions, but consumer actions at the check-out counter and their continual purchasing patterns confirm the trend,” Holland added.

According to the recent report “Annual Eating Patterns in America,” which was issued by the market research firm The NPD Group, sandwiches are now the most-often served entree at the evening meal over chicken, beef, Italian and homemade family recipes. Also, the number of take-out lunches from restaurants is at an all-time high with a 62 percent increase since 1990. Consumers are also using fewer fresh ingredients in meals prepared at home.

This trend is important to Holland because he assists farmers and agri-entrepreneurs who are evaluating markets for value-added food products. Through educational programs available through the *Center for Profitable Agriculture*, Holland and other UT Extension specialists work directly with farmers and other entrepreneurs as they develop and consider marketing plans for value-added products and enterprises. “Farmers and value-added entrepreneurs need to understand the role of consumer preferences when developing, promoting and packaging their food products,” says Holland.

“We help analyze value-added food enterprises ranging from fresh meats to fresh salsa,” Holland adds. “Helping our clients understand consumer trends is important to successful product positioning, effective packaging and target marketing.”

For more information about the programs and services available through the Center for Profitable Agriculture, visit their Web site at <http://cpa.utk.edu>.

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