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## The Specialty Food Buyer Profile

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Before investigating the specialty food buyer, it is important to understand what constitutes a “specialty food” product. There is no clear definition for specialty foods. For example, a product that is considered a specialty food in the early 1990’s may not be a specialty food in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the popularity of a specialty food product increases, competing manufacturers start producing and mass-marketing similar products. As a result, the once specialty food has been transitioned to a mainstream grocery item. However, specialty foods can be loosely defined as premium-priced food products that provide an added-value appeal for one or more of the following reasons:

- quality of ingredients, manufacturing process and/or finished product
- sensory appeal, flavor, consistency, texture, aroma and/or appearance
- presentation (branding or packaging)
- origin (where the product was manufactured)
- distribution channel (specialty food retail outlets or sections within supermarkets/grocery stores)

The National Association for the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT) conducted extensive demographic research in 1999 to create a profile of the specialty food consumer. The information is very useful to any business that sells to specialty food consumers. According to the NASFT’s 1998 *“Today’s Specialty Food Consumer”* research, the specialty food consumer can be generally described as:

- Residing in a two-person household
- Affluent (\$100,000 + household income)
- Older (45 years of age or older)
- College graduate
- Residing in large metropolitan areas
- Residing in New England and Mountain and Pacific regions of the United States



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The following table uses demographic characteristics to more specifically describe the specialty food buyer.

	National Percentage	Specialty Buyers Percentage	Specialty Buyers Index
<b>Number of persons</b>			
1	24.6%	17.2%	70
<b>2</b>	<b>31.7%</b>	<b>37.2%</b>	<b>117</b>
3	17.5%	18.8%	108
4	15.0%	15.6%	104
5+	11.1%	11.3%	102
<b>Household Income</b>			
<\$10,000	11.3%	6.5%	57
\$10,000-\$19,999	14.7%	9.8%	67
\$20,000-\$29,999	14.1%	11.3%	80
\$30,000-\$39,999	12.9%	11.6%	89
\$40,000-\$49,999	11.1%	11.3%	102
<b>\$50,000-\$74,999</b>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>\$75,000-\$99,999</b>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>\$100,000+</b>	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Household Age</b>			
18-24	5.2%	3.7%	72
25-34	19.2%	16.2%	85
35-44	23.1%	22.4%	97
<b>45-54</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>19.9%</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>55-64</b>	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>65 +</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>23.9%</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Race</b>			
White	78.6%	79.3%	101
Black	10.8%	8.6%	80
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Age and Presence of Children</b>			
<b>Children &lt; 6 yrs. old</b>	<b>9.5%</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	<b>105</b>
Children 6 - 17 yrs. old	18.5%	17.5%	95
Children < 6 and 6 - 17 yrs. old	7.5%	7.3%	97
No Children	64.1%	65.4%	102
<b>Housing Tenure</b>			
<b>Owned Housing</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>72.5%</b>	<b>112</b>
Rented Housing	35.3%	27.4%	78
<b>Householder Education</b>			
Grade School	10.8%	8.2%	76
Some High School	14.4%	10.5%	73
High school graduate	28.2%	23.5%	83
<b>Some college</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>26.6%</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>College graduate</b>	<b>20.9%</b>	<b>31.7%</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Nielsen County Size</b>			
<b>21 largest metropolitan areas</b>	<b>39.6%</b>	<b>46.2%</b>	<b>117</b>
Metro areas with more than 85,000 households	30.4%	29.5%	97
Counties with 20,000 to 5,0000 households	15.4%	12.4%	79
All other counties	14.4%	11.8%	82
<b>Census Division</b>			
<b>New England</b>	<b>5.2%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Middle Atlantic</b>	<b>14.4%</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>115</b>
South Atlantic	18.5%	17.5%	95
East South Central	6.3%	2.0%	47
West South Central	10.8%	9.5%	89
East North Central	16.5%	11.1%	67
West North Central	7.1%	4.6%	66
<b>Mountain</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Pacific</b>	<b>15.3%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>151</b>