

Fresh produce's share of total produce sales at U.S. retail finally returned to pre-pandemic levels in the week ending July 5.

The week also managed to beat the same week period year in terms of fruit and vegetable sales.

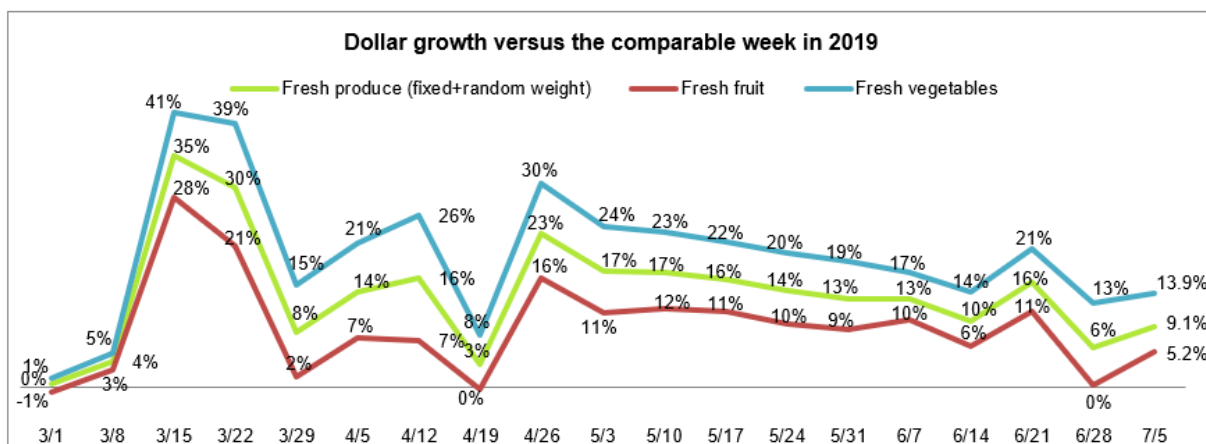
In the Independence Day week, sales of fresh produce made up 84% of total produce sales, which is the same level as in 2019.

The share crashed at the onset of the pandemic in mid-March, with frozen and canned produce taking much bigger shares than normal.

“We are back!” said Joe Watson, VP of Membership and Engagement for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA). “When consumers were in their stock-up mindset early on in the pandemic, the share of fresh produce versus the total fell as low as 70% from our normal position of about 84%.

“Slowly but surely fresh produce has recovered its position and the holiday week brought the share back up to 84% for the first time since early March. We have overcome ungrounded shopper concerns about food safety and by educating shoppers about items with longer shelf-life to make it through the week with items for now and items for later, we can further increase our share in the months to come.”

During the week ending July 5, elevated everyday plus holiday demand drove gains of 9.1% for fresh produce — higher than the week prior, but not as high as Father’s Day. This was made up by a 13.9% boost in vegetables and a 5.2% uptick in fruit sales.



Source: Source: IRI, Total U.S., MULO, 1 week % change vs. YA

Frozen and shelf-stable fruits and vegetables did continue to see double-digit gains, with particular strength for frozen, at 24.4%.

Year-to-date, fresh produce sales are up 10.6% over the same time period in 2019. Frozen fruit and vegetables increased the most, up 28.0% year-to-date. This is in spite of a limited assortment of frozen vegetables and fruit, down by 6.7% in average items per store selling.

"Independence Day is always a big holiday for fresh produce so this is not an easy bar to beat," said Watson.

"Despite all that has changed amid the pandemic, much is the same as well. Cherries, melons, corn and more all lived up to their holiday strength reputations and helped drive the significant boost over last year's numbers.

"Now we need to keep that summer spirit alive in the next seven weeks until Labor Day. We know many people are having staycations, are looking to build their immune systems and yet others are at a loss for new meal ideas. All these are big opportunities for fresh produce."