

Mushrooms have been enjoying sky-high demand at U.S. retail since the pandemic took hold, amid hopes that sales will carry over to foodservice.

Dr. Mark Lang, associate professor of marketing at The University of Tampa who specializes in food marketing and retailing, noted that "consumer demand at retail has been incredibly strong for mushrooms since the health crisis took hold".

"According IRI data from April to July, mushroom sales were not only strong, they were among the most consistently strong during this time," he said.

"Our weekly sales increases when compared to same week 2019 never dipped below 21% during that time. Only two other items shared that benchmark - oranges and limes."

A recent survey Dr. Lang conducted for the Mushroom Council in April suggests demand will continue at this pace after this crisis.

The survey of 750 shoppers found that 25% of consumers plan to cook more with fresh mushrooms "after things get back to normal." Another 63% plan to cook "about the same."

"While grocers are currently experiencing this increased demand, it's probable these new consumer preferences will also carry over to foodservice as restaurants work to rebuild," said Lang.

Like other commodities, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted the mushroom industry, especially early in the pandemic.

AMI President Rachel Roberts said: "On a commercial mushroom farm, new crops are 'planted' or filled every other day."

"When the Coronavirus hit, no one could have foreseen the markets' unpredictability. To adjust to the uncertainty, mushroom growers made the decision to scale back crops, in order to sustain the health of their businesses."

In mid-March, when the country issued stay-at-home orders and restaurants closed, many farms saw an immediate decline in orders. Others, either cut back or delayed future plantings in order to right-size their operations to align with market predictions.

After the initial shock to retail supply chains, mushroom demand from retailers increased. Consumers adhering to stay-at-home orders were left to consume more meals at home, which included fresh mushrooms. While some restaurants have re-opened with limited

capacity, the reduction in foodservice demand continues to impact growers.