

In-store grocery sales changes remain

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Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

As stay home orders swept the nation and people shifted away from a patchwork of restaurant meals to almost entirely in-home consumption, grocery retailers hustled to meet the booming demand.

They weathered supply and staff shortages while attempting to reduce risks for shoppers and employees.

The grocery industry nationwide saw record sales in March and April and with them a massive increase in adoption of online purchasing for delivery or curbside pickup.

Because of their essential status, grocers were among the first

businesses forced to adopt new safety protocols in retail environments.

They designated one-way aisles, set specific shopping hours for older people and the immunocompromised, enforced occupancy recommendations by only allowing in a certain number of shoppers at a time, and installed Plexiglass barriers between cashiers and customers.

Now, as other businesses begin to implement the same strategies, grocers offer a bellwether for the changes we can expect in retail spaces going forward.

As states allow businesses to operate more normally, local grocers report sales returning to more normal volumes, but questions linger

about personal protective equipment in public spaces and other safety measures.

No shirt, no shoes, no mask, no service

Before the CDC made the recommendation that people wear cloth masks out in public, some grocers and other large retailers resisted allowing grocery workers to wear masks on the job. Others didn't expressly ban them, but also didn't take steps to provide them as workplace-specific safety equipment.

Oregon's United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555 has advocated both hazard pay and physical protections for grocery workers. Nation-

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Gas tax

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People stopped driving

No event in history has precipitated such a rapid decline in driving as the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the worst of the Great Recession in 2008, the largest drop in gasoline purchases was 7% in a quarter, according to ODOT, and there were fall-offs during gas rationing in the 1970s and during World War II.

According to data compiled by traffic analytics company INRIX, traffic had its most significant month-to-month drop off in conjunction with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the United States, there were over 1.6 billion trips by passenger cars on March 8, which dropped to about 700,000 trips as of April 12 as many states enacted stay home orders. There were about 1.2 million trips on May 23, but that is still far short of the rare in previous years.

Vehicle counts across Oregon dropped about 50% in the early weeks of Gov. Kate Brown's executive order, according to an April report by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Though some restric-

tions have been eased as businesses return to operation, drivers have not returned to Oregon's roads at the same level as before, people in the state are driving 21% less than usual, according to data from INRIX.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials estimated gas tax revenue will decline 30% nationwide and have asked Congress to appropriate \$50 billion to compensate for lost state revenues.

Uncertainty of when drivers go back to normal

State agencies were told in May to plan on budget cuts of 17% by Brown, but ODOT is classified a non-general fund agency, which means its department gets its revenue from sources outside the general fund.

Of ODOT's total budget of over \$5 billion, the \$125 million reduction doesn't seem like a lot.

"It's reasonably modest in comparison to other parts of the state budget," Brouwer said.

The lost gas tax revenue could hurt smaller governments harder, where those revenues can make up a larger portion of their budget and some have hundreds of miles of roads to maintain.



The South Salem Fred Meyer gas station opens on Wednesday, Sep. 26, 2018. ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

The latest numbers Marion County received from ODOT say it will see a decrease of about \$2.6 million in gas tax revenue over the next 12 months due to the decrease in gas sales.

Marion County Public Works Director Brian Nicholas said the county is balancing its transportation budget by deferring some equipment purchases, downsizing some projects, putting off other projects and using some of the contingency

funds it has.

"For Marion County, the decreased revenue isn't going to translate into a noticeable decrease in service on the roads," Nicholas said.

"Cities and counties whose transportation funding programs include county gas taxes, large system development charge programs and other types of fees might see a more significant impact from COVID-19. The impact to Marion County is project-

ed to be pretty manageable."

Silverton finance director Kathleen Zaragoza said the city received \$624,603 of a budgeted \$640,000 from state gas tax revenues as of May and \$71,718 of a budgeted \$95,000 from the local fuels tax and has revised the local revenue down by over \$10,000.

The uncertainty of when people will resume driving and creating gas tax revenue as much as they once did means fu-

ture roads projects could be delayed for years.

"What are we going to see in three months, six months, a year? That's kind of the uncertainty," Campbell said. "Short term this is pretty devastating. What will be the long-term impacts in terms of consumers driving?"

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Alpacas

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Neither of them had any experience caring for alpacas before purchasing the ranch and the animals.

"By December 2013, Jocelyn's Alpaca Ranch was a disaster," Kamins said during Robert Silver's trial. "There were animals dropping dead in front of neighbors' eyes."

Some of the alpacas were eating a tarp when deputies found them. Autopsies on six of the animals determined they

died from starvation.

Silver's defense attorney Timothy Park argued the couple tried to do the best with what they had by sometimes selling the animals to buy food for the remaining alpacas.

He said Robert Silver inherited a large amount of money and agreed to open an alpaca ranch based on his wife's wishes. When they started the ranch, they could sell an alpaca for \$5,000 to \$7,500.

The market soon turned, and the Silvers could no longer afford to buy nutritional pellets for the alpacas.

Jocelyn Silver, 62, pleaded guilty to first-degree and second-degree animal neglect and was sentenced to three years of probation. She was also ordered to pay joint restitution for the alpacas' care.

Robert Silver pleaded not guilty and was later convicted by a jury of two felony counts and 16 misdemeanors counts of animal neglect.

He was sentenced to three years in prison and ordered to pay more than \$15,000 to reimburse the Polk County Sheriff's Office for the animals' care.

At the sentencing, Polk County Judge Norman Hill said Silver deserved a heavier sentence than his wife because he had previously shown no remorse for the dead and neglected alpacas.

Hill also said the money for the feed was controlled by Robert Silver, not his wife.

"(His) position was that there was nothing wrong," Hill said. "He did nothing to try and remedy the situation. He didn't offer to clean up."

Robert Silver appealed the restitution amount in 2018, arguing that he should only have to pay restitution for the animals specifically listed in the counts he was con-



Stall worker Rylee Henderer fills water buckets for rescued alpacas at Oregon State University's College of Veterinary Medicine in Corvallis in 2014. About four dozen alpacas were rescued from a ranch in Falls City and taken to OSU for treatment. STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

victed of. The 18-count indictment he was convicted on listed 17 animals found dead at his property.

But the jury had found that this neglect was part of a criminal episode involving more than 40 animals, argued Greg Rios, senior assistant attorney

general, who represented the state in the appeal.

The appeals court judges used this aspect to determine the finding referred to the herd as a whole, not just the 17 dead animals listed in the indictment.

They then concluded the trial court had the au-

thority to order Silver to pay \$15,622 in restitution for the herd's care.

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