Grocery Stores & Behavioral Economics

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USDA Suggests Changes to Grocery Stores to ‘Nudge’ Consumers to Eat Healthy

Talking shopping carts, spotlighting on vegetables

- July 2014 USDA report outlined ways in which Behavioral Economics can be used to impact healthy eating

- “These strategies, in particular, draw on principles of behavioral economics to nudge consumers towards healthier choices.”

- One specific recommendation is MyCart, a compartmentalized grocery cart that alerts customers when a healthy balance of groceries is selected
Experiment Design

Test Groups
- Healthy Choices Agreement + MyCart
- Healthy Choices Agreement + Regular Cart

Control Group
- No Agreement + Regular Cart
Experiment Design

After one month, test groups will have the option to change to the other group

New Test Groups

● Healthy Choices Agreement + MyCart
  ○ Continue Using MyCart
  ○ Change to Regular Cart

● Healthy Choices Agreement + Regular Cart
  ○ Continue Using Regular Cart
  ○ Change to MyCart
Hypothesis

Short run - All groups will make healthier choices. Those committing more so, and those using MyCart the most.

Long run - All groups will regress towards previous shopping behavior. Those committing, especially those who continued to use MyCart will not regress completely.
At-home spending patterns of U.S. households are not in sync with USDA food plan recommendations.

Expenditure shares in 1998-2006 (percent)

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service calculations using Nielsen Homescan data and USDA, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion's Liberal food plan.