

Curbing Bad Diets: How Consumption Patterns Change Due to a Cancer Diagnosis, a Meat
& Dairy-Free Week, Non-Alcoholic Alternatives, and Capping Alcohol Promotions,
Analyzed Through AiMark Data

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The objective of this special session is to explore how public policy, marketing interventions, and private actions affect household grocery shopping and shape healthier and more responsible consumption patterns. By integrating evidence from health shocks, collective action campaigns, product innovations, and regulatory caps, the session aims to advance understanding of how firms and policymakers can effectively promote societal well-being through the marketplace. The session focuses on projects that use data from the AiMark organization, which provides academics with longitudinal household-level purchase data for 37 countries across the globe. It features the following papers:

The first paper, “How and When Does a Cancer Diagnosis Impact Consumers’ (Un)Healthy Grocery Shopping Behavior,” by Lien Lamey, Els Breugelmans, and Niels van Holtrop links individual health data with grocery purchase records to study how cancer diagnoses reshape (un)healthy food choices. The authors show that, after diagnosis, households improve their purchasing habits across most food categories—buying more fresh produce and less fast food, red meat, and sugary drinks—though alcohol consumption remains unchanged. These findings highlight how health shocks can trigger meaningful but selective shifts toward healthier consumption.

The second paper, “Can Collective Action Campaigns Drive Dietary Change? Evidence from the Netherlands,” by Max Pachali, George Knox, and Bart Bronnenberg examines the impact of the “National Week Without Meat & Dairy.” Leveraging a border-based difference-in-differences approach, the study finds that the campaign generates a sharp but short-lived rise in plant-based meat alternative purchases. While awareness and trial surge during the campaign, consumption reverts afterward, underscoring the challenge of converting temporary enthusiasm into lasting behavior change.

The third paper, “Can Alcohol-Free Products Help Reduce Alcohol Sales?” by Stijn Maesen, Saeid Vafainia, and Michael Haenlein analyzes seven years of scanner data to evaluate whether adopting alcohol-free beverages reduces alcohol consumption. The results show divergent effects: heavy drinkers buy less alcohol after adopting alcohol-free variants, while

light drinkers tend to increase total alcohol purchases. The study provides valuable insights into substitution patterns and their implications for public health and product strategy.

The final paper, “From Deep Discounts to Responsible Retailing: Retailer and Consumer Responses to a 25%-Off Cap on Alcohol Promotions,” by Nick Bombaij, Bernadette van Ewijk, Jonne Guyt, and Arjen van Lin investigates the effects of a Dutch policy limiting alcohol discounts. Comparing retailer practice and household choices in the Netherlands with Belgium and Germany, the authors find that the policy successfully curbed deep discounting and reduced alcohol purchases without triggering compensating price increases. The results highlight how moderate regulatory measures can realign retailer practices with societal goals.