

'The End of Cheap Food' Report Finds Food Industry Growth Is Moving Beyond Cheap Calories

New report from Socha Branding connects farm economics, consumer health, CPG growth and new science to show market shifts

DENVER, CO, UNITED STATES, August 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The U.S. food market is changing what it rewards. The End of Cheap Food, a new industry report from Kristine Root of [Socha Branding](#), finds that growth is shifting toward companies and partners that make quality, health, sourcing and trust easier for consumers to recognize and act on.



Kristine Root of Socha Branding

For decades, the food system optimized around efficiency and affordability, which helped create a more abundant and lower cost food supply, but it also pushed the costs it could not measure outside the market equation. The End of Cheap Food argues that these costs are now becoming

impossible to ignore as pressure builds across farms, supply chains, healthcare, consumers, and the CPG industry.

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Kristine Root of Socha Branding

“The food system did not fail. It delivered exactly what it was designed to deliver,” said Root, founder and chief strategist of Socha Branding and author of The End of Cheap Food. “The problem is that the market has changed. The next era of growth will belong to companies that understand and deliver what people value now.”

Key signals highlighted in the report include:

- The old economics of cheap food are under pressure. Americans spend a smaller percentage of income on food than previous generations, declining from roughly 18% historically to 10–11% today, while hidden costs continue to rise. U.S. healthcare spending increased from approximately \$100 billion in 1970 to nearly \$5 trillion in 2023, with diet-related chronic diseases estimated to account for approximately 85% of that spending.
- Differentiated food brands are capturing an outsized share of growth. Bain & Company research cited in the report found that insurgent food brands generated more than 27% of food category growth despite accounting for less than 1% of market share.
- Consumers are using new signals of value. Processing has become a mainstream purchase consideration, with eight in 10 Americans considering whether food has been processed before purchasing it. Familiarity with the term “ultra-processed food” reached 44% in 2025, up 12 points from the prior year.
- Food quality is becoming measurable in greater detail. Advances in nutrient density research, metabolomics and food composition analysis are expanding what the industry can understand about food quality, including how farming systems, soil health, sourcing and processing may influence the finished food.
- Consumers want better food but struggle to identify it. Research analyzed in the report shows growing interest in nutrient richness, freshness and minimal processing, even as consumers report confusion about how to recognize higher quality options at the shelf.

The report identifies why quality, health and system resilience are becoming central to growth and trust, and increasingly part of how the market defines value. The opportunity is not limited to brands. Farmers, processors, retailers, certifiers and food companies all play a role in making that value visible and meaningful in the market.

“When shoppers can’t clearly identify meaningful differences in quality, health impact, ingredient integrity or processing, they default to safer and simpler signals: lower price, familiar brands or short-term promotion,” said Root.

“This is not about chasing a trend or one technology,” said Root. “It is about seeing the system more clearly. Agriculture, nutrition, consumer behavior, supply chains and brand strategy are all connected. The next era will reward those who can make real value visible and easier for people to recognize.”

To access [The End of Cheap Food Report](https://www.sochabrading.com/the-end-of-cheap-food-2026-report), visit <https://www.sochabrading.com/the-end-of-cheap-food-2026-report>

About Socha Branding

Founded by Kristine Root, Socha Branding is a business strategy and growth marketing agency working across food and agriculture. Socha helps brands, retailers, and industry partners make sense of changing markets and turn that understanding into strategies that create value and

drive growth. The agency works across research, business strategy, brand positioning, messaging, and market activation for companies working to build stronger markets for better food. For more information, visit sochabranding.com and follow Socha Branding on LinkedIn.

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