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2026 GROCERY IT MATURITY BENCHMARK

What top-performing regional grocers do differently to modernize store IT, improve uptime, reduce risk, and control cost in a 24x7 retail environment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional grocery chains are entering a new operating cycle. The store is no longer a physical environment supported by back-office technology. It's a connected operating platform that depends on reliable networks, payment systems, POS lanes, self-checkout, handheld devices, digital coupons, loyalty data, online fulfillment, refrigeration monitoring, security systems, electronic shelf labels, and increasingly AI-enabled analytics.

That shift creates a different benchmark for IT performance. The question is not simply whether tickets are being closed or whether total IT spend is within budget. The more important questions are whether store technology is protecting revenue, reducing labor friction, improving inventory accuracy, limiting shrink, supporting regulatory requirements, and giving leaders enough visibility to prioritize the right investments.

At the same time, regional grocery operators must navigate several real pain points: lean internal IT teams, POS and self-checkout (SCO) downtime, network refresh debt, field services gaps, and PCI/cybersecurity exposure. The opportunity is to connect those operational realities to the grocery trends now driving executive pressure.

This report reframes grocery IT benchmarking around decision readiness with the goal of helping internal IT quantify what leadership already suspects, compare operational maturity against a practical peer model, and create a prioritized plan that finance, store operations, and IT can act on together.

$26.9B

In Lost Sales Revenue Due To Food Waste

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WHY GROCERY IT BENCHMARKS NEED TO CHANGE

Traditional IT benchmarks no longer fully capture how grocery technology affects store performance. Average ticket volume, close time, and total IT spend matter, but in today's 24x7 retail environment, these benchmarks are incomplete. A grocer can look acceptable on a help desk dashboard while still losing money through checkout delays, poor endpoint visibility, recurring device failures, field-dispatch delays, inconsistent patching, inventory inaccuracy, and unresolved network refresh debt.

Grocery is different from many other retail categories because the store is simultaneously a transaction environment, a fresh-food operation, a fulfillment node, a regulated payment environment, and a local customer-experience platform. A technology issue can affect revenue, perishables, labor scheduling, substitution accuracy, customer trust, payment acceptance, and shrink at the same time.

23%

Unknown Store Shrink With Fixed SCO

A better benchmark ties IT operations to store operating outcomes. For a regional grocer, the core benchmark categories should include:

- **Checkout continuity:** POS, self-checkout, payment device, scanner, scale, produce lookup, and receipt-printer reliability
- **Store network resilience:** Switching, Wi-Fi, SD-WAN, segmentation, backup connectivity, device density, and uptime during weather or peak-volume events
- **Endpoint visibility:** Handhelds, tablets, associate devices, kiosks, cameras, ESL gateways, IoT sensors, pharmacy/fuel endpoints where applicable, and store-manager workarounds
- **Field services readiness:** Dispatch coverage, parts availability, technician familiarity, SLA alignment to store hours, priority definitions, and escalation discipline
- **Cybersecurity and compliance:** PCI scope, patch posture, MFA, logging, incident response, third-party access, ransomware recovery, and vendor governance
- **Digital operations support:** Click-and-collect, delivery, substitutions, loyalty, digital coupons, order staging, and customer communications
- **Decision readiness:** Whether IT can convert technical problems into quantified cost, risk, and operational priority

Benchmarking principle

The right grocery IT benchmark isn't "how fast did IT close the ticket?" It's "how much did the issue affect store throughput, labor productivity, customer experience, risk, and revenue?"

EXECUTIVE BENCHMARK AT-A-GLANCE

35%
Of All Transations Are Self-Checkout

Regional grocery IT is being tested by forces that extend well beyond the service desk: e-grocery growth, self-checkout loss exposure, payment compliance, AI readiness, ransomware risk, food waste, labor constraints, and the need to modernize store infrastructure without disrupting daily operations. As a result, IT maturity can no longer be measured only by traditional metrics like ticket volume or device uptime.

For grocery CIOs, operations leaders, and finance executives, this snapshot provides a clearer view of whether today's IT operating model can support the next phase of grocery modernization, or whether it remains built around yesterday's store environment.

Market signal	Benchmark	Why it matters
E-grocery	Online grocery sales grew to **$11.6B** in October 2025, up 10.5% YoY [1]	Stores now support in-person and digital demand at the same time.
Self-checkout scale	In 2024, **35%** of all supermarket transactions used self-checkout [2]	SCO is a core front-end operating model. Downtime, false alerts, scale errors, and loss-prevention controls affect revenue, labor, and customer experience.
Shrink / loss prevention	Fixed SCO drives up to **23%** of unknown store losses, with **66%** of retailers now viewing SCO losses as a growing concern[3]	SCO can't be benchmarked only by uptime. It requires reliability, intervention workflow, camera/AI integration, associate support, and exception analytics.
Retail ransomware	Retail ransom payment rates rose to **58%** in 2025, up from **32%** in 2021[4]	Cyber readiness must be measured as continuity readiness.
Consumer theft pressure	**27%** of self-checkout users have intentionally taken an item without scanning, up from 15% in 2023.[5]	Consumer behavior is adding risk to an already complex checkout environment, increasing the need for balanced controls that don't damage customer experience.
Payment compliance	**51** future-dated PCI DSS v4.0 requirements effective March 31, 2025 [6]	PCI readiness must be continuous across lanes, SCO, e-commerce, fuel, pharmacy, vendor integrations, and network segmentation.
Food waste / fresh execution	**3.98M** tons of unsold retail food and **$26.9B** in lost sales value, with fresh departments leading unsold-food rates [7]	Perishables are margin- and time-sensitive. Better forecasting, cold-chain response, markdown execution, and inventory visibility depend on reliable systems.

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THE TOP TRENDS SHAPING GROCERY IT

$11.6B
Online Grocery Sales

Grocery IT maturity is being shaped by several converging pressures that range from digital grocery growth and checkout transformation to cybersecurity, AI readiness, and store infrastructure complexity. These aren't separate technology trends; they are operating-model pressures that determine whether regional grocers can protect uptime, control cost, modernize efficiently, and support stores without overextending internal IT teams.

The following trends connect each market signal to its grocery-specific impact and the IT maturity gap it creates.

1 E-grocery has turned stores into fulfillment nodes

Online grocery is no longer a side channel. Brick Meets Click and Mercatus reported that U.S. online grocery sales reached $11.6 billion in October 2025, a 10.5% year-over-year increase.[1]

For regional grocers, this growth puts more pressure on store-level infrastructure. Click-and-collect, delivery, digital coupons, substitutions, real-time inventory, loyalty offers, and customer notifications all depend on stable store systems. A weak wireless network, aging endpoint fleet, or unreliable handheld environment doesn't just affect IT ticket volume. It impacts order accuracy, associate productivity, customer satisfaction, and the grocer's ability to compete with national chains.

Omnichannel reliability now depends on network performance, endpoint visibility, and rapid incident response.

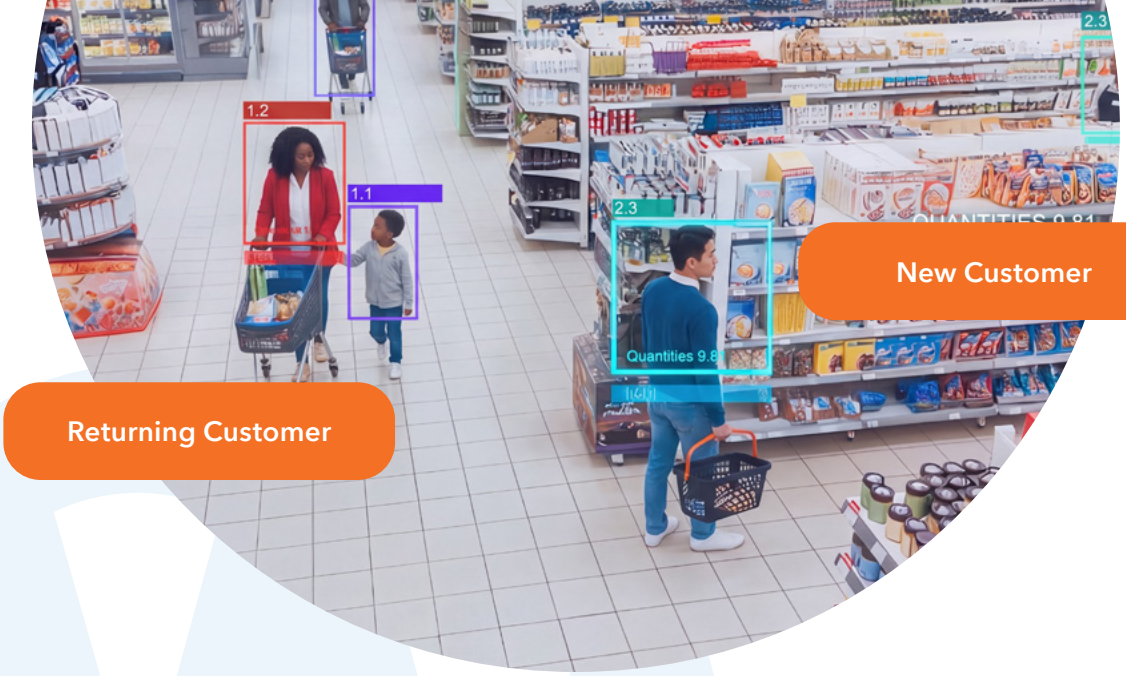
2 Self-checkout is now a reliability, labor, shrink, and customer experience pressure point

Self-checkout has become a core part of grocery operations. FMI reports that 35% of supermarket transactions used self-checkout in 2024.[2]

At the same time, self-checkout is under increasing scrutiny due to rising inventory shrink and operational complexity. A study by ECR Retail Loss found that fixed self-checkout lanes drive up to 23% of total unknown store losses.[3] Retailers are feeling the pressure, too, with 66% of those surveyed now viewing SCO-related losses as a growing concern.[3]

This creates a difficult balancing act. Grocers still need self-checkout to support customer convenience and labor efficiency, but they also need the right controls, monitoring, staffing model, and technical reliability around it. A poorly supported self-checkout environment creates lane disruption, customer frustration, theft exposure, associate intervention burden, and higher incident volume.

Leading grocers treat self-checkout as a business-critical operating environment, not simply a checkout technology.



3 AI is moving from an innovation discussion to store-level execution

AI in grocery is becoming practical and operational. FMI notes that AI is affecting planning, inventory management, customer engagement, stock optimization, food waste reduction, and the shopping experience.[8]

That matters because AI is only as useful as the systems feeding it. Forecasting tools depend on accurate inventory and sales data. Fresh optimization depends on reliable store-level inputs. Labor planning depends on clean demand signals. Loss-prevention analytics depend on functioning cameras, checkout systems, exception data, and network connectivity.

For regional grocers, the biggest AI challenge may not be selecting the tool, but whether the store technology environment is mature enough to support AI-enabled operations.

AI initiatives succeed when the underlying store infrastructure is reliable, connected, and data-rich.

4 Fresh execution and food waste are now IT-enabled operating priorities

Fresh departments are central to grocery differentiation, but they're also among the hardest areas to manage. Demand can shift quickly, shelf life is limited, and small execution gaps can create waste, out-of-stocks, markdowns, and margin erosion.

ReFED and the U.S. Food Waste Pact estimate that retailers lost approximately $26.9 billion in sales value in 2025 due to unsold food, representing nearly four million tons of inventory that never reached consumers.[7]

This makes food waste a technology issue as much as an operations issue. Fresh forecasting, inventory systems, temperature monitoring, demand planning, markdown optimization, and store execution tools all depend on reliable data and connected infrastructure.

Reducing food waste requires connected systems, accurate inventory data, and reliable store operations.

THE TOP TRENDS SHAPING GROCERY IT

5 Cybersecurity and ransomware risk are store-level business risks

Retailers remain a high-value ransomware target because they operate distributed environments with large endpoint footprints, payment systems, customer data, third-party integrations, and limited tolerance for downtime. Sophos reported that the percentage of retailers paying ransom to recover encrypted data nearly doubled from 32% in 2021 to 58% in 2025.[4]

For grocery, a cyber incident is not only an IT disruption. It can affect checkout, pharmacy, fuel, warehouse operations, vendor ordering, loyalty, digital coupons, e-commerce fulfillment, and customer trust.

Store continuity now depends on cyber resilience.

6 PCI and payment security have become continuous disciplines

Payment compliance is especially important in grocery because payment acceptance is distributed across lanes, self-checkout, e-commerce, pharmacy, fuel, mobile ordering, and third-party integrations. The PCI Security Standards Council confirmed that PCI DSS v4.0.1 did not change the March 31, 2025 effective date for the new requirements.[5] PCI SSC also stated that PCI DSS v4.0 includes 64 new requirements, with 51 future-dated requirements effective as of March 31, 2025.[5]

For regional grocers, this raises the bar for continuous compliance. Annual assessment activity is not enough if segmentation, access controls, logging, vulnerability management, and endpoint discipline are inconsistent across stores.

Payment security requires consistent controls across every store and channel.

7 GS1 Sunrise 2027 will test POS, scanner, labeling, and data readiness

GS1 Sunrise 2027 is a major readiness issue for retailers and suppliers. GS1 US is encouraging retailers to prepare for scanning 2D barcodes at point of sale by 2027, with implications for POS systems, scanners, product data, labeling, inventory, traceability, and consumer-facing product information.[9]

For grocery, this is especially relevant because item-level data touches checkout, fresh departments, supply chain, recalls, promotions, loyalty, and regulatory requirements. The transition may require hardware readiness, software updates, testing, vendor coordination, and associate training.

GS1 readiness depends on connected store systems and accurate product data.

WHAT TOP-PERFORMING REGIONAL GROCERS DO DIFFERENTLY

Top-performing regional grocers aren't simply spending more on IT. They're building more mature operating models around the store technologies that now carry the greatest business risk: checkout, payment, digital fulfillment, inventory, fresh operations, cybersecurity, and field support.

The distinction is important. Average performers tend to manage IT reactively, responding to tickets, outages, device failures, and project demands as they arise. Top performers identify which store systems have the highest impact on revenue, labor, customer experience, shrink, compliance, and food waste – then build support models around those operational priorities.

1 They treat store IT as a revenue and operations function

Top-performing grocers no longer view IT as a back-office support function. They recognize that store technology now sits directly in the path of revenue capture, customer experience, associate productivity, and operational execution.

POS lanes, self-checkout, handhelds, digital coupons, loyalty platforms, Wi-Fi, e-grocery tools, cameras, refrigeration sensors, and payment systems are not simply "IT assets." They're operating infrastructure.

That mindset changes how support is structured. Incidents are prioritized based on business impact, not technical category alone. A checkout issue during peak traffic, a handheld failure affecting pickup orders, or a refrigeration sensor outage in fresh departments receives a different level of urgency than a standard back-office request.

58%

Increase In Retail Ransom Payments

2 They build store-hour SLAs

Regional grocery stores operate early mornings, nights, weekends, holidays, and seasonal surges. Top-performing grocers design support coverage around when stores actually need help, not when corporate IT is traditionally staffed.

This is especially important for POS, self-checkout, payment devices, store networks, handhelds, and digital fulfillment systems. A delayed response during a Saturday rush or holiday shopping period can create a much larger operational impact than the same issue during a low-volume period.

3 They manage self-checkout as a business risk environment

Self-checkout is no longer only a convenience or labor-efficiency tool. It's now tied to uptime, shrink, associate intervention, customer satisfaction, payment reliability, and loss-prevention workflows.

Top-performing grocers manage self-checkout as a high-risk operating environment. They track recurring device failures, scanner and scale issues, payment-device errors, exception rates, associate interventions, and shrink-related patterns. They also connect IT, operations, and asset protection so checkout modernization doesn't create unmanaged exposure.

4 They connect IT, operations, and asset protection around shrink

Shrink reduction is becoming increasingly dependent on technology. Cameras, self-checkout controls, exception reporting, AI-assisted monitoring, POS data, and associate alerting all depend on reliable infrastructure.

Top-performing grocers don't leave shrink technology solely to asset protection or store operations. They involve IT early because the effectiveness of these tools depends on network reliability, device health, integration, data quality, and field support.

5 They treat fresh execution and food waste as technology-enabled priorities

Fresh departments are among the most important drivers of grocery differentiation, but they're also difficult to manage. Forecasting, ordering, receiving, replenishment, temperature monitoring, markdowns, and inventory visibility all depend on accurate data and reliable store systems.

Top-performing grocers recognize that reducing waste is not only an operations challenge, but also an IT maturity challenge. If handhelds are unreliable, inventory data is inaccurate, wireless coverage is inconsistent, or refrigeration monitoring is disconnected, fresh execution suffers.

6 They prepare their infrastructure before adding AI

Many grocery AI use cases depend on the same foundation: clean data, reliable endpoints, stable networks, integrated systems, and secure access. Top performers understand that the value from AI is limited if the underlying operating environment is fragmented or unreliable.

Rather than pursuing AI as a standalone innovation initiative, mature grocers evaluate whether their store infrastructure can support AI-enabled use cases such as demand forecasting, inventory optimization, shrink detection, labor planning, personalization, and food waste reduction.

7 They manage PCI and cybersecurity as continuous store disciplines

Payment security and cybersecurity are no longer annual compliance exercises. Grocery environments are distributed, payment-heavy, vendor-connected, and highly dependent on uptime. That makes cybersecurity a store continuity issue as much as an IT risk issue.

Top-performing grocers maintain better visibility into payment systems, endpoints, segmentation, access controls, patching, third-party vendors, and incident response procedures. They also understand that cyber events can affect checkout, pharmacy, fuel, loyalty, e-commerce, warehouse systems, and customer trust.

8 They track cost and risk per store

Top-performing grocers use store-level metrics to make IT investment decisions easier to defend. Instead of relying only on total IT budget, they evaluate IT cost, risk, uptime, incident volume, and refresh needs by location.

This approach gives CIOs, operations leaders, and finance executives a clearer way to evaluate tradeoffs. A network refresh, managed field services contract, or endpoint lifecycle program becomes easier to justify when the business can see the impact by store.

9 They use flexible capacity instead of overloading internal teams

Regional grocers often face project surges tied to store remodels, POS upgrades, compliance work, network refreshes, e-grocery expansion, seasonal volume, and new technology rollouts. Top performers don't try to force every surge through the same internal team.

Instead, they use managed services, field services, and staff augmentation to create flexible capacity. This allows internal IT teams to stay focused on strategy, governance, vendor management, and high-priority business initiatives.

GROCERY IT MATURITY BENCHMARK: WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The grocery store has become one of the most technology-dependent environments in retail. As a result, grocery IT maturity can no longer be measured by traditional support metrics alone. CIOs, operations leaders, and finance executives need to understand whether their current model is resilient enough to support where grocery is headed, not just stable enough to maintain yesterday's store environment.

This benchmark provides a practical framework for evaluating that maturity and identifying where regional grocers can improve uptime, reduce risk, control cost, and modernize with greater confidence.

Domain	**LEVEL 1:** Reactive	**LEVEL 3:** Managed	**LEVEL 5:** Mature / Top-Performing
Store technology reliability	Incidents handled store by store; limited root-cause visibility.	Critical systems tracked; recurring issues reviewed monthly.	Uptime, MTTR, interventions, and repeat issues measured by store, device class, and business impact.
Field-services coverage	Break-fix dispatch with unclear response expectations.	Partial SLA coverage for priority systems or regions.	Store-hour SLAs, parts readiness, first-visit resolution tracking, and technician familiarity by geography.
Infrastructure lifecycle	Refresh decisions driven by failure or budget cycle.	Asset inventory exists but lifecycle plans are inconsistent.	Lifecycle debt modeled by store, linked to incident patterns and planned refresh funding.
Cybersecurity and PCI	Annual evidence scramble; limited vendor-access governance.	Core controls documented; segmentation and patching managed periodically.	Continuous evidence, tested recovery, vendor access controls, PCI scope visibility, and executive risk reporting.
Digital operations support	E-grocery issues handled as one-off tickets.	Fulfillment devices and order systems monitored with escalation paths.	Digital order friction measured across devices, Wi-Fi, inventory, substitutions, and customer communication.
SCO and loss-prevention technology	SCO uptime tracked but exceptions/loss patterns not connected.	SCO reliability, interventions, and device failures reviewed with operations.	SCO treated as integrated checkout/labor/loss-prevention system with exception analytics and support playbooks.
Fresh and food waste support	Waste treated mainly as merchandising issue.	Temperature and inventory systems supported, but correlation to waste is limited.	Fresh technology reliability, alert response, markdown execution, and waste patterns reviewed together.
Executive decision readiness	IT reports technical issues without quantified business impact.	Some cost and risk estimates included in budget requests.	Leadership receives prioritized roadmap tied to cost, risk, uptime, labor, shrink, waste, and implementation difficulty.

FROM BENCHMARK INSIGHT TO OPERATING MODEL IMPROVEMENT

Grocery IT maturity is not defined by a single system, vendor, or project. It's defined by the grocer's ability to support store-critical technology consistently, securely, and cost-effectively across every location.

For regional grocers, that means understanding where the current IT model is strong, where hidden risk is accumulating, and which improvements will have the greatest impact on uptime, labor productivity, shrink reduction, compliance readiness, customer experience, and cost control.

That's the purpose of Pomeroy's IT Decision Index:

A structured decision process that uses objective data and peer benchmarks to define your next operating model.

IT Decision Index

The Index was designed to help you define exactly where you're overspending and which costs are fixable now. You'll isolate the real causes of instability and prioritize fixes tied to uptime. And you'll walk away with a quantified, executive-ready case that brings IT, finance, and operations to the same table.

LEARN MORE

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