

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Transforming Produce: Reducing End-of-Summer Shrink

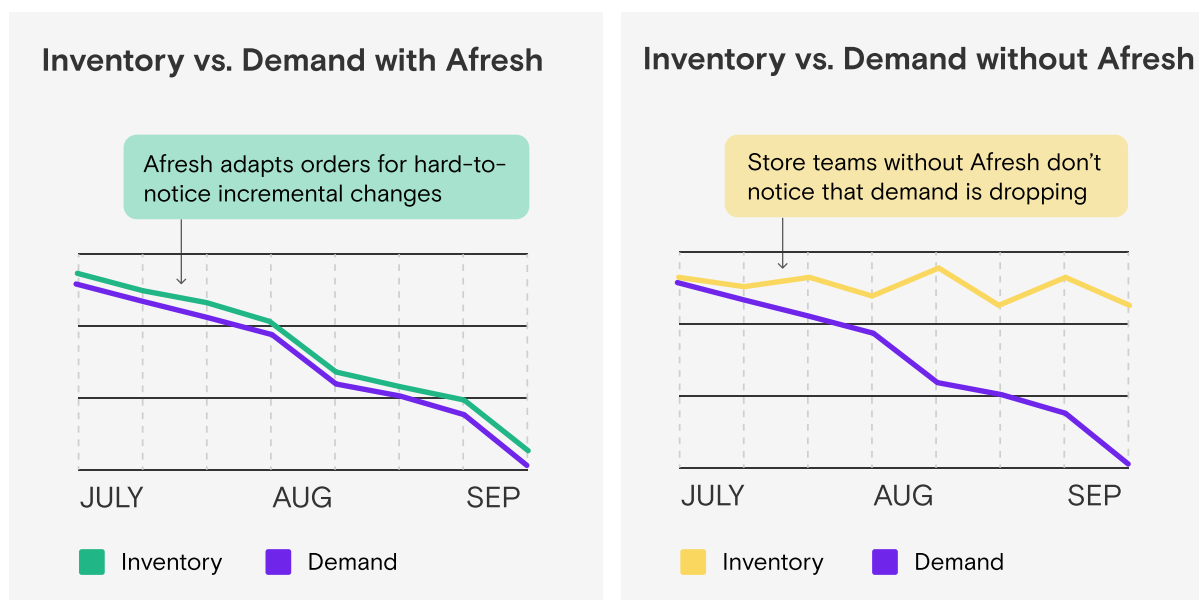
Every fresh department needs an AI-driven approach to ordering—especially during a seasonal shift

Grocers work hard to make sure that the fresh fruits and vegetables we love are available every day of the week. It's an amazing feat, and it isn't easy—especially when the summer-to-fall seasonal shift arrives. Between the last few weeks of summer and the first few of fall, fresh departments that rely on manual processes or traditional center store tech will experience a notable increase in shrink—and the inevitable profit losses that come with that. Why? We explore the reasons below.

How to Reduce Seasonal Shrink in Fresh

Store teams that order with Afresh's purpose-built, adaptable AI navigate seasonal transitions without creating excessive waste or empty shelves.

Every year between late July and early September, domestic summer produce like stone fruits, cherries, melons, grapes, and corn reach their peak. Once that happens, demand, shelf life, and quality begin to fade. Year after year, fresh produce teams end up with too much on-hand inventory, and it's because they lack insights that help them adapt and align orders with these hard-to-notice incremental changes. Even in the most tech-forward grocery stores, fresh teams often don't have tools they need to create truck-to-shelf orders that align with actual demand. As a result, customers get produce with short shelf life and fresh food ends up going to waste.



Forecasting

Predicting Declines in Demand

Especially for national stores, staying attuned to historical trends is a must because inventory needs vary from location to location. Merchandising, planograms, and strategies all need to account for historical trends and each store's unique item movement—a location in the Pacific Northwest might see stronger cherry sales while one in the heart of Georgia will likely plan for stronger peach sales.

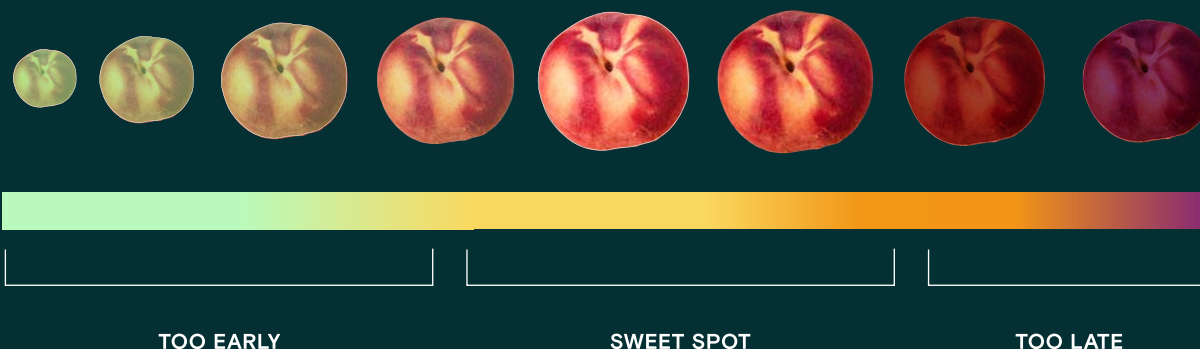
Keeping perishability and seasonality in mind, having insight into the produce personality of each store helps decision makers build more accurate forecasts and strategize merchandising, so teams know when to reset displays from end-of-season watermelon to back-to-school apples.

Product Quality for These Fades Fast	Demand for These Declines Slowly	
Cherries	Stone Fruits	Melons
Corn	Berries	Grapes

Rapid Shift in Flavor

Fresh stone fruits are a summer must-have for customers across the U.S., but flavor shifts throughout the season.

- Hard, flavorless, low sugar
- Flavorful, juicy, high sugar
- Mushy, dry, rapid sugar decline



Merchandising and Inventory Solutions

Planning for Perishability

Summer is the time for fresh fruit to shine, but its top sellers are also delicate and highly perishable. Once an item's peak ripeness has been reached, quality and shelf life begins to decline. Along with shelf life and flavor changes, summer seasonal produce volume also decreases and cost-per-unit rises. This means that merchandising teams need to align everything from display size and schematics to retail price and sales with historical trends and each store's unique inventory needs.

Ordering Solutions

Taking Stock of Customer Cravings

Keeping enough inventory on hand without overloading the backroom isn't easy, especially when produce managers have to rely on error-ridden data or manual calculations to inform orders. Technology built for center store operations struggles to adapt to the variability, velocity, and variety of fresh foods, and the failures of those systems becomes very clear only after the seasons change and retailers are reviewing their third-quarter margins.

Fresh produce departments need purpose-built technology that empowers every person on the team to make informed decisions rather than requiring them to create uniform orders.

Overordering Comes with High Costs

Less shelf life

Lower-quality food

Increased landfill volume

Reduced margins

Messy backrooms

Wasted resources

More in-store labor

Store Operations

Supporting Store Teams

Understanding peak season, ripeness level, and sugar brix makes a huge difference in product handling, safety, and storage. It's difficult for store teams to notice incremental shifts, especially when labor shortages create gaps in knowledge and task execution. Employees need more resources and better technology to help them get the job done. And with Afresh, knowledge doesn't leave when employees do—it sticks around and adapts to the small shifts that store teams may not notice or even know about.

During the summer-to-fall seasonal shift, an AI-driven approach is the key to a smooth transition, but employees need technology that's accurate and easy to use. Afresh enables profit-maximizing decisions with familiar workflows and reliable recommendations that make placing perfect orders that meet demand an everyday occurrence.

Afresh is the Answer

Building Foundations for Fresh Success

Investing in a solution that takes your teams from “trying their best” to “tech-enabled superstars” will pay off in dividends year after year. Orders that don't align with the cycle of freshness for seasonal fruits—especially high-cost items like cherries and berries—can be devastating to your business. Grocery retailers that use Afresh achieve consistent results that drive sales growth by 3%, minimize stockouts by 80%, and extend post-sale shelf life for customers by at least two days.

Stronger margins

3%

sales lift

Better orders

80%

fewer stockouts

Fresher food

+2 days

shelf life

Next Season: Take a Fresh-first Approach

Seasonal shrink is a huge burden for fresh departments year after year, and Afresh makes a tangible difference: less food gets thrown away, inventory turns increase, and customers get to fill their baskets with fresh food that lasts longer at home. No matter how much knowledge employees have or how comfortable they are with new tech, order writers of all skill levels love using AI from Afresh to manage forecasting, ordering, inventory, merchandising, and store operations.

So while end-of-season shifts in quality and customer demand may be challenging to navigate, Afresh is built to recognize and adjust for those changes. Instead of overordering, invest in a solution that puts profitability back on the table during this pivotal time of year.



Fresher food,
happier customers,
healthier business

afresh.com/demo

A screenshot of the Afresh web application interface, overlaid on a background of red cherries. The interface shows an "Order" page with a header bar containing navigation tabs like "FRUIT COOL", "VEG COOL", "FRUIT DRY", and "VEG DRY". Below the header, there's a search bar and a table listing items: "Red Cherries", "Melon", and "Peaches". Each item has a table with columns for inventory (BACK INV, FLOOR INV, TOTAL) and order quantities (CS, CS, CS). To the right of the item list is a sidebar with a "Full - 1 cases" section containing radio buttons for "75% - 1/2 case", "50% - 1/2 case", and "25% - 1/2 case", and an "Empty" section with checkboxes for "1/4", "1/2", and "3/4". At the bottom right, there's a numeric keypad and a "REVIEW ORDER" button. The bottom of the interface shows a summary: "CASE COUNT 74", "ORDER COST \$1,831.22", and a "REVIEW ORDER" button.