



**AI Pulse Today** — 9 in 10 retailers plan to increase AI budgets in 2026 per NVIDIA's annual survey; 71% of CPG executives now use AI (up from 42% in 2024). WHSmith is rolling out AI-powered Electronic Shelf Labels across stores. Meanwhile, CPG brands are being urged to prepare strategies for AI-driven shopping agents that could soon shortlist and reorder products autonomously.

## The Grocer

thegrocer.co.uk 2 stories

### CONSUMER TRENDS

#### Own-label sales exceed 50% of UK grocery volumes for the first time

Private label share by volume has risen above 52% across the UK, driven by sustained cost-of-living pressure and the growing strength of retailers' value and premium own-brand ranges. Both Sainsbury's and Tesco reported record volumes of their premium own-label tiers, with Tesco's Finest range logging 12% year-on-year growth following a March relaunch that added 400 new SKUs.

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### GENERAL

#### Deadline extended for The Grocer New Product Awards 2026

The Grocer has extended the entry deadline for its New Product Awards 2026 to 15 June, with a more rigorous judging method introduced for household and personal care categories. The awards recognise the best innovation across UK grocery.

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## Food Navigator Europe

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### REGULATION

#### EU extends BPA restrictions to most food packaging — rules apply from July 2026

The European Food Safety Authority's review triggered extended restrictions on Bisphenol A (BPA) that will cover the majority of food contact packaging from July 2026. The move broadens earlier restrictions and requires significant reformulation and material switches across the packaging supply chain, with compliance timelines now imminent.

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### REGULATION

#### How regulation will reshape the UK food and drink sector in 2026

New food labelling rules, precision-breeding legislation, and HFSS advertising restrictions are converging to create one of the most complex compliance years for UK food manufacturers. Companies are urged to audit portfolios now, as the first precision-bred foods could reach shelves in 2026 under the new regulatory framework.

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### TECH & AI

#### Why CPG brands must prepare for AI shopping agents

AI-powered shopping agents that autonomously browse, compare, and reorder products on behalf of consumers are moving from concept to commercial reality. Brands that fail to optimise their digital data — product descriptions, nutritional info, imagery, reviews — risk being systematically deprioritised by these agents, with profound implications for shelf presence and market share.

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## Just Food

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### **M&A** Food M&A set for health kick in 2026 — wellness deals dominate pipeline

M&A activity in the global food sector is rebounding with a pronounced tilt towards health, nutrition, and functional food brands. Analysts note that major CPG players are divesting low-growth legacy SKUs and using proceeds to acquire high-margin health assets, accelerating portfolio transformation across the sector.

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### **WORKFORCE** Valio to close two Finland plants as production consolidates to Riihimäki

Finnish dairy cooperative Valio announced it will shut two manufacturing sites in Finland and transfer operations to its plant in Riihimäki in the south of the country, as the company restructures to improve efficiency amid challenging dairy market conditions across Northern Europe.

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### **FINANCIAL** JBS agrees \$25m compensation to commercial beef buyers over price-fixing claims

Brazilian meat giant JBS has agreed to pay \$25 million in compensation to commercial beef buyers following accusations of conspiring to fix prices. The settlement is the latest in a series of legal challenges facing the world's largest meat processor as it navigates regulatory scrutiny in multiple markets.

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## Grocery Gazette

grocerygazette.co.uk 3 stories

### **FINANCIAL** Iceland's price hike headache: cost-of-living tsar's supermarket outpaces rivals on inflation

Iceland raised prices faster than almost every major UK supermarket in April — up 5.8% in the four weeks to 19 April — despite its chairman Richard Walker serving as Labour's cost-of-living tsar. More recent Worldpanel data for May shows Iceland's grocery inflation fell back to 2.6%, below the market average, but the earlier spike drew political scrutiny and consumer backlash.

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### **CONSUMER TRENDS** Private label hits record 50% unit share across Europe's six biggest grocery markets

Market research firm Circana confirmed that private label now accounts for 50% of unit volumes across the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands — a historic milestone. The UK and Germany lead at 52% each. The structural shift is being driven by price sensitivity, improved own-label quality, and aggressive premium own-brand investment by the major multiples.

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**RETAIL & DISTRIBUTION****Lidl marks 35 consecutive months as UK's fastest-growing supermarket with new 360° campaign**

Lidl GB launched a new multi-channel campaign celebrating the breadth of its range as it enters its 35th consecutive month as the UK's fastest-growing supermarket. The campaign, running for four weeks from 28 May, aims to cement Lidl's positioning as a destination for the full weekly shop — not just a discounter for staples.

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**Retail Gazette**

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**M&A****Frasers Group launches £1.7bn takeover bid for Hugo Boss**

Mike Ashley's Frasers Group launched a €1.98bn (~£1.7bn) cash takeover offer for Hugo Boss on 11 June, offering €38 per share — a ~4% premium to the prior closing price. Frasers already holds ~26% of the German fashion house. Hugo Boss said it would "thoroughly examine" the unsolicited offer. Completion is expected H2 2026 subject to regulatory clearances.

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**M&A****Sigma Healthcare confirms early-stage talks to acquire Boots**

Australian healthcare group Sigma Healthcare confirmed it is in preliminary talks to acquire Boots, the UK's largest pharmacy and health & beauty retailer. Any deal would represent one of the largest retail transactions in recent UK history and would reshape the health & beauty sector considerably.

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**RETAIL & DISTRIBUTION****ASOS plots its first permanent physical store in London**

Online fashion giant ASOS is planning its first-ever permanent bricks-and-mortar store in London, marking a significant strategic pivot. The move reflects a broader re-evaluation by pure-play e-commerce retailers of the role physical retail plays in brand-building, customer acquisition, and returns management.

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**FINANCIAL****UK retail sales rebound as warm weather lifts May spending**

UK retail sales recovered in May after a subdued April, with warmer weather boosting clothing, garden, and outdoor categories. The uptick provides a degree of relief for retailers navigating persistent inflation headwinds, though the Food and Drink Federation has warned food inflation could reach 10% in H2 2026 if energy costs remain elevated.

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**TECH & AI****WHSmith partners with Solum to roll out Electronic Shelf Labels 🤖**

WHSmith signed a partnership with Solum to deploy AI-enabled Electronic Shelf Labels (ESLs) across its store estate. ESLs allow real-time, automated price and product information updates, reducing labour costs and improving pricing accuracy — a technology increasingly adopted by UK retailers as part of broader store automation programmes.

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** Sustainability & Regulation Spotlight**

EU/UK Policy

**SUSTAINABILITY****PPWR compliance deadline for SMEs: 30 June 2026 — one week away**

The EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) requires small and micro companies to conform by 30 June 2026, with full market application from 12 August 2026. The European Commission published implementation guidance in March to support businesses. Requirements cover reuse targets, recyclability thresholds, and mandatory labelling on packaging sustainability.

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**REGULATION****UK FSA unveils plan to modernise food regulation system**

The Food Standards Agency Board has approved a new framework to build an effective, sustainable, and trusted regulatory system "fit for the future." The plan includes a pioneering regulatory sandbox for cell-cultivated products and a new Healthier Food Targets and Reporting approach. A detailed work plan is due to be published in June 2026.

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