

# Dietitians are on latest front in grocery battles

🔑 SUBSCRIBER CONTENT: Mar 15, 2013, 6:00am EDT




★ Save   📄 Order Reprints   🖨️ Print



**Pam Allen**  
Reporter-  
*Albany Business Review*  
[Email](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Google+](#)



 [Enlarge Photo](#)

*Donna Abbott-Vlahos*

ShopRite's Alisha Strianese, left, Hannaford's Marianne Romano, center, and Price Chopper's Ellie Wilson, right.

*Grocery stores nationwide are employing more dietitians to help consumers make healthier choices—and to stand out from the competition. Also see: [Q&A with 3 dietitians](#).*

A shopper in a grocery store was recently diagnosed with celiac disease, or maybe high blood pressure, and needs help sorting through the more than 20,000 foods stocked on the shelves of the average store.

Enter ShopRite's Alisha Strianese, Hannaford's Marianne Romano and Price Chopper's Ellie Wilson—three registered dietitians based in the region whose jobs involve everything from counseling customers to making appearances at health fairs to leading in-store cooking demonstrations.

While grocery stores can operate without them, more chains are viewing dietitians as serving essential roles. In this market alone, consumers have more choices than they did just five years ago as Trader Joe's and Fresh Market—and soon Whole Foods—have entered the fray. The competition among grocery stores, call it a food war, is driving them to find new ways to stand out and build customer loyalty.

Meanwhile, the dietitian has a role in an era of food allergies and obesity.

"Grocery retailers see hiring dietitians as a way to impact health, increase sales, develop consumer loyalty and differentiate themselves," said Annette Maggi, executive director of the Retail Dietitians Business Alliance, a 700-member trade group for registered dietitians based in Santa Monica, California. Maggi also owns Annette Maggi & Associates in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a consulting firm that focuses on nutrition marketing.

Distinguishing dietitians as a "go-to" source is critical to promoting the Hannaford brand and creating customer loyalty, said Julie Greene, the Maine-based grocery chain's manager of healthy living.