

wga SYMPOSIUM



September 15–16, 2026

**Ecolab Schuman Research & Development Campus
Eagan, Minnesota**



Tuesday, September 15

Shuttle loop from Omni Hotel to Ecolab

10:45am – 12:45pm

8:30am – 11:00am

Optional Store Tours

Sign-up only. First come, first served

10:45am – 12:00pm



Registration Open

Sponsored by **Associated Wholesale Grocers**

12:00pm – 12:30pm / Networking Lunch

12:30pm – 12:45pm

Welcome

*Kristie Maurer, Maurer's Urban Market; Chelsea Matzen, NGA Foundation;
Patrick Garofalo, Minnesota Grocers Association*

1:45pm – 2:00pm / Break



Sponsored by **BRdata**

2:00pm – 3:00pm



Industry Trends & Food Traceability

Natalie Seymour, Ecolab; Lisa Robinson, Ecolab

Food traceability is quickly becoming a critical issue for grocers of every size, driven by changing regulations, heightened consumer expectations, and the need for greater supply chain visibility. This session will explore the industry trends making traceability a priority and offer practical insights on how grocers can prepare, strengthen data readiness, and build trust from supplier to shelf. Sponsored by **Ecolab**

3:00pm – 3:15pm / Break



3:15pm – 4:15pm

BREAKOUT A: Cyber Security 101 – It's Not If, It's When

Donna Zambo, Allegiance Retail Services; Carol Novicky, JB Group; Julie Ruane, Fareway



Cybersecurity is no longer just an IT issue—it's a business imperative. Learn the fundamentals of protecting your organization from today's most common cyber threats, including phishing, ransomware, payment fraud, and data breaches, while also understanding how to respond when an incident occurs. Attendees will explore practical steps to improve security awareness, reduce organizational risk, and effectively communicate with customers after a breach to preserve trust, provide clear guidance, and support a thoughtful recovery.

Sponsored by **JB Group**

BREAKOUT B: How to Build Sales Through Loyalty

Felice Manget Harvey, ECRS



Loyalty programs can be more than discounts—they can be powerful tools for increasing sales, strengthening customer relationships, and turning everyday shoppers into long-term advocates. This session will explore how grocers can design and use loyalty programs to encourage repeat visits, grow basket size, personalize promotions, and create more meaningful connections with customers. Attendees will gain practical ideas for using loyalty data, targeted offers, and community-focused rewards to drive measurable growth while reinforcing the trust and service that set grocers apart.

Sponsored by **ECRS**

BREAKOUT C: Ecolab Tour

Ecolab will be providing tours of their RD&E area. See where Ecolab innovation comes to life. Join us for an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the science, technology, and expertise driving solutions for food safety, water management, pest prevention, and operational excellence.

**Sign Up for
Ecolab Tours**



4:15pm – 4:30pm / Break

4:30pm – 5:30pm

Great Leaders Lead Themselves First

Joe Kiedinger, Dignify

The root of all great leaders is the willingness to explore your own humanity first. Plato once said, 'A life worth living is worth exploring.' Leaders must examine how they think and why they think that way. This is a workshop session where Joe Kiedinger, from Dignify will lead participants through a reflective exercise that examines your thoughts. Your four 'metaphorical' minds steer our thoughts and decisions. Learn where your thoughts are rooted and how you can control your negative thoughts before they activate your ego and steel your dignity.

Shuttles will take attendees back to the Omni Hotel then loop between hotel and Ecolab CLA for duration of the celebration. 5:30pm - 8:00pm

6:30pm – 8:00pm

Opening Celebration

Sponsored by



Wednesday, September 16

**Shuttle loop from Omni Hotel to
Ecolab 7:30am — 8:45am**

8:00am – 8:30am / Networking Breakfast

8:30am – 9:00am

NGA Update

Greg Ferrara, NGA

A timely update on key priorities, industry trends, and advocacy efforts shaping the independent grocery sector. This session will help attendees better understand the issues impacting grocers today and how NGA is working to support their continued success.

9:00am – 10:00am

Dignity-Based Leadership

Joe Kiedinger, Dignify

By understanding a person's dignity-code, leaders can intentionally lead and coach their teams in a way that was never available in the past. Dignity defines how an individual succeeds (how they get things done), what motivates and quickly defines their rules for engagement. Without this data, it's nearly impossible to get to the heart of the matter with another in a safe, dignified manner.

10:00am – 10:15am / Break

10:15am – 11:15am

Flashfood **LIPARI**

BREAKOUT A: Solving Shrink One Nickel at a Time

Nick Lenzi, Lipari

According to research, operational shrink amounts to \$210,000 per store per year. The good news is that more than 50% of that is controllable. With more than 40 years of retail experience and collaborative work with many Asset Protection and Loss Prevention teams, Nick will share 20 'Nickels' which when added up will equal the shrink dollars many retailers are looking for. The topics, pictures, as well as the financial impact of each 'nickel' come from hands on work done at store level to help improve operational shrink. Join us in this fast paced presentation as we present 20 'nickels' each one designed to minimize shrink and improve your profitability.

Sponsored by **Flashfood & Lipari**



**Take
Assessment**

BREAKOUT B: Customers Are Changing. Are We?

Samantha Johnston, Clark's Market; Jamie Collins, Dierbergs Markets; Melissa Carrick, AR Marketing



Discovery has moved off the shelf and onto the phone. From AI meal planners to GLP-1 shoppers to TikTok-driven trends, today's shopper is rewriting the rules faster than most retailers can react. This session breaks down a simple framework for spotting what matters, deciding fast, and executing — with real examples from independents already doing it. Sponsored by **Ink'd Greetings**

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11:15am – 11:30am / Break

11:30am – 12:30pm

BREAKOUT A: Winning Together – Building Partnerships

Sammi Wassing, Complete Fixture Solutions; Justyne Uribe, Certco; Laura Farr, Leever's Supermarkets; Emily Detwiler, AWG

Strong partnerships are the foundation of a healthy independent grocery industry. This panel explores how retailers, wholesalers, and suppliers can build deeper collaboration through transparency, trust, shared goals, and creative problem-solving. Learn what each sector needs from the others to drive innovation, strengthen relationships, and achieve mutual success.

BREAKOUT B: The People Puzzle: Emotional Intelligence in a Multigenerational Workplace

Karla Ash, Gelson's Markets; Kelly Pearse, Sendik's Food Markets

Today's workplace brings together multiple generations, each with different experiences, expectations, and communication styles. This interactive breakout will explore how emotional intelligence can help us move beyond generational stereotypes, navigate differences, and build stronger workplace relationships. Participants will leave with practical strategies for communicating, collaborating, and leading more effectively across generations.

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12:30pm – 1:45pm / Lunch

1:45pm – 2:45pm

Strategy Isn't a Title, It's a Behavior

Kelly Zehfuss, Analytical Storytelling

Women are often told to “be more strategic”—but what does that actually mean, and how do you do it? In this session, we'll answer that question. Whether you're managing a single department or overseeing multiple stores, you'll walk away with practical ideas to think beyond your day-to-day and position yourself as someone who doesn't just execute—but leads. Perfect for women grocers at any career stage who want to stand out as someone who sees the bigger picture and knows how to tie her work into key business drivers.

2:45pm – 3:45pm

Real World Scenarios—What Would You Do?

Kelly Zehfuss, Analytical Storytelling

This interactive session will bring real-world challenges facing women grocers into a confidential, collaborative group setting. A selected number of anonymous scenarios will be shared with attendees, who will be invited to brainstorm responses, offer practical perspective, and explore how they might navigate similar situations in their own careers or organizations. Through candid discussion and peer insight, participants will gain new ideas, validation, and actionable takeaways for addressing the complex issues women encounter across the grocery industry.

3:45pm – 4:00pm / Break

empowerfresh

Sponsored by **EmpowerFresh**

4:00pm – 5:00pm

 **instacart**

Executive Perspectives: Women Leading Grocery Forward

Stephanie Becker, AWG; Katie Paul, KeHE; Justyne Uribe, Certco; Donna Zambo, Allegiance Retail Services

Hear from accomplished women executives who are helping shape the future of grocery through innovation, resilience, and strategic leadership. This session will explore the trends, challenges, and opportunities influencing the industry today, while offering candid insights on leadership, career growth, and what it takes to drive meaningful progress across the grocery sector. Sponsored by **Instacart**

5:00pm – 5:15pm

Closing and Next Steps

Shuttle loop to Omni Hotel begins at 5:15pm.

6:30pm – 8:00pm

**Sign Up for Dinner Rounds
with the WGA Board
at Mall of America**



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