Pocket Guide

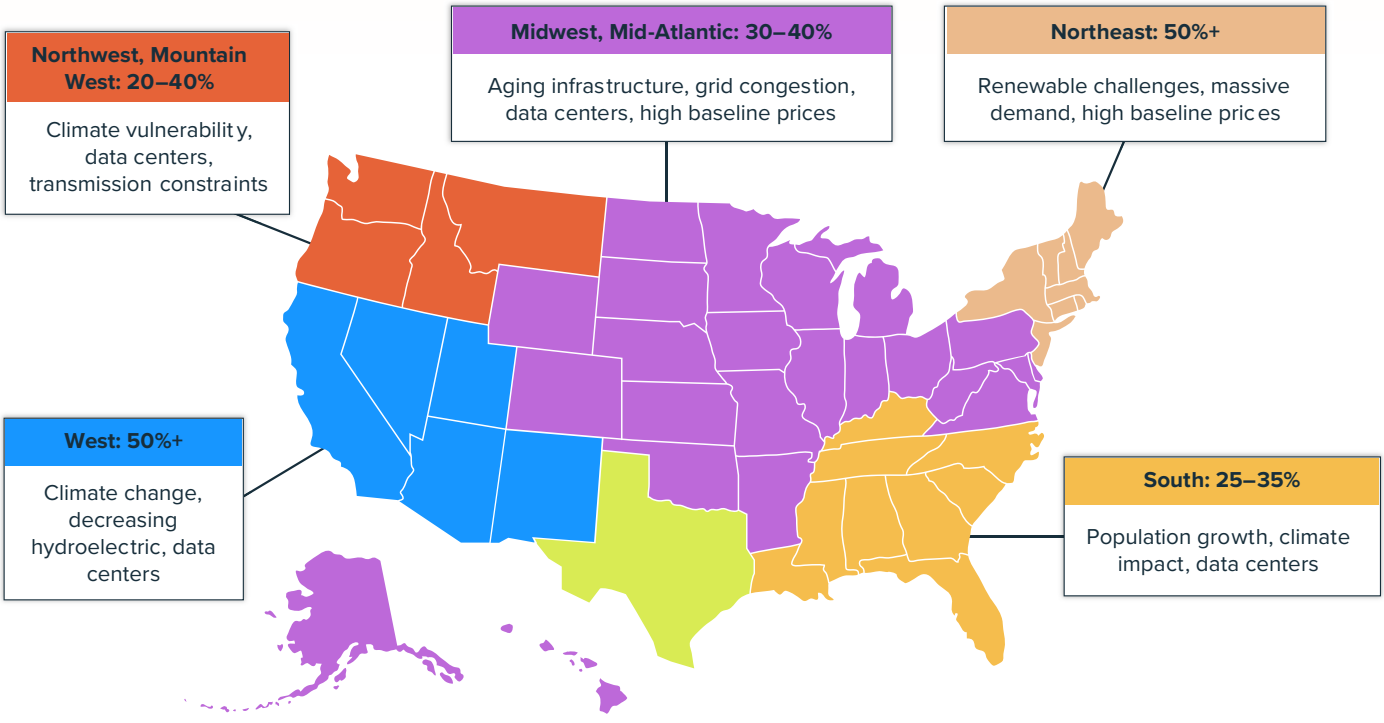
The 2026 grocery energy price survival guide

Grocery retailers are heading into 2026 with rising energy prices and sharper demand charges that punish inefficiency. Throw in new climate disclosure and refrigeration rules, slow growth projections, price-sensitive shoppers, and cost control has become the critical path for grocery chains to maintain profitability. Disciplined utility bill management is the fastest, lowest-risk lever to rein in spend and protect your bottom line.

The 2026 energy price landscape

Growth for grocery stores is expected to be slow in 2026, **with dollar sales increasing 3–5%**. Volume growth is expected to stay flat, or even shrink, anywhere from -1% to +1%. Cost pressures, tariffs, and shifting demographics are reshaping demand.

Declining immigration, fewer Hispanic households, and shrinking benefits for low-income shoppers mean the consumers most likely to cook at home **aren't showing up as often**, tightening margins even as operating costs rise.



In 2026, **grocery utility costs trend higher almost everywhere** but not equally. Prices will vary significantly by region, with:

- California and the broader West **face the steepest pressure** as wildfire mitigation, policy adders, and fuel sensitivity lift all-in rates
- The Northeast runs hot, with higher capacity and **new data centers** pushing bills up
- Midwest and Mid-Atlantic see noticeable, though smaller, increases as capacity and transmission upgrades flow through
- Localized generation and ERCOT insulate Texas from massive increases, with a trade-off of tricky demand charges that can quickly run up bills
- Northwest and Mountain West stay more moderate thanks to reliable hydropower, but anticipated data centers and higher demand will cause issues
- Hurricanes, heavy floods, and industrial growth combine to **elevate energy prices in the Southern states**

Grocery compliance to watch for

AIM Act

The hydrofluorocarbon phasedown mandated by **the AIM Act** goes into full effect on January 1, 2026. Expect stricter leak controls, more documentation, and possible price and availability swings for high-GWP gases. Be prepared to tighten maintenance schedules, log leaks, and keep detailed refrigerant data records in a centralized platform like EnergyCAP.

SB 253 and 261

2026 also brings the first year of emissions reporting for large companies doing business in California, including many grocery chains. **Learn more about SB 253 and 261** and start preparing your Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions information.

Don’t know where to start?

EnergyCAP turns the bills you already pay into audited Scope 1, Scope 2, and Scope 3 totals and offers complete, compliance-ready GHG accounting.

Learn more about EnergyCAP carbon accounting software →

5 better energy management practices

Even though 2026 forecasts for food and beverage retailers are guarded and energy prices are rising, grocery chains can still stay on budget and maximize their margins by reining in utility spend. Here are our top 5 ways to use energy management for more savings:

	Do right now	For next year
1. Centralize bills and kill the "fee leak"	Try to minimize late fees by building a simple playbook for store operations, facilities, and finance to establish a central repository, review process, and payment schedule for utility bills.	Centralize every utility bill in one system of record. You'll uncover duplicates, gaps, meter overlaps, and accounts that should be closed. These fixes often save EnergyCAP customers **1–3% on their utility bills** without making a single change to their stores.
2. Use interval data to hunt waste—daily, not monthly	Standardize HVAC setpoints and scheduling, tighten door-heater run times, and ensure lighting and holiday displays are turned off during unoccupied times.	Typical utility bills tell you what happened, but interval data shows you when and why. With **EnergyCAP Smart Analytics**, you can watch daily load profiles for morning peaks, weekend setbacks that never engage, and base loads that stay high. Implementing a centralized energy management software where you can use your interval data to catch issues before they become expensive bills is critical to achieving meaningful energy cost savings.
3. Tighten your utility budget forecast	Assess your winter utility bill forecast. Use our local rate tool to see how much your utility costs have recently changed, and combine with your bill history and local weather data to estimate how much your bills will increase in the next few months.	Implement an energy management platform that includes all the features finance needs. Accurate budgets, accruals, and forecasts are necessary for managing your energy spend.
4. Lock down refrigerant losses and maintenance drift	Enforce leak-repair SLAs, log every pound added or removed, and check case doors and gaskets monthly.	Refrigerant tracking needs to live alongside utility data for truly accurate data, tying leaks to cost impact, and documenting AIM-aligned records for audits.
5. Use AI to move faster	Use AI to speed up everyday work. Download our AI prompt guide for energy management to better utilize the AI tools you already have with improved prompts, better techniques, and sample questions.	Turn on AI across the stack. EnergyCAP's AI-powered bill ingestion delivers best-in-class bill accuracy. Trend Insights uses machine learning to send proactive alerts before unusual activity becomes a big bill. Audits surface expensive billing errors before you pay them. Our forthcoming AI agent makes insights accessible to finance, facilities, and energy without a learning curve.

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