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Albertsons Tests Hemp-Derived THC Drinks in Chicago Stores

The trial at Jewel supermarkets signals a push by mainstream grocers into a fast-growing category with unsettled rules

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Albertsons is testing hemp-derived THC drinks in Chicago, according to a report by Brewbound that cited a photo posted on LinkedIn and later confirmation from industry executive Ted Whitney.

The reported rollout is taking place at Jewel stores, the Albertsons-owned supermarket chain in the Chicago market. Brewbound said the stores have introduced a dedicated THC beverage set that includes several of the category's best-known brands. Whitney, who is chief beverage officer at Cheech & Chong Holdings Co. and chairman of the Hemp Beverage Alliance, first shared the image online and later confirmed the move to Beverage Business Insights, according to the report.

Albertsons has not publicly detailed the scope of the test, including how many stores are involved, how long it will run or which products are included. But the move is notable because Albertsons is the country's second-largest grocery retailer, and any trial in its stores is likely to be watched closely by beverage companies, distributors and regulators.

The test points to a broader shift in retail as hemp-derived THC drinks move beyond specialty shops and cannabis-adjacent channels into mainstream grocery settings. That matters for the beverage business because these products could begin competing more directly for shelf space and consumer spending with beer, flavored malt beverages, ready-to-drink cocktails and other adult beverages. It could also add pressure on regulators and retailers to clarify how intoxicating hemp drinks should be sold, merchandised and controlled.

The category has expanded quickly in parts of the United States by relying on hemp provisions created after the 2018 federal farm bill, though state rules vary widely and remain unsettled in many markets. That legal gray area has helped fuel growth while also creating concern among alcohol industry groups, public health advocates and some state officials over product standards, age restrictions, labeling and enforcement.

A grocery test in a major city such as Chicago may become an early signal of how far large retailers are willing to go with these beverages while lawmakers continue to debate where they fit. For alcohol producers and wholesalers, the development may offer another sign that consumer demand for alternative relaxation and social drinking products is reshaping the competitive landscape in stores.