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How Many Vegetarians Are There?

The Vegetarian Resource Group Asked in a 2009 National Poll

With soymilk in almost every supermarket and even Burger King carrying veggie burgers, it appears that the interest in vegetarian foods has greatly grown over the last twenty years. In a poll conducted by The Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG), when VRG asked people while eating out, if they order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl; over 50% said sometimes, often, or always (2008 VRG Poll).

However, The Vegetarian Resource Group wanted to find out how many people are actually vegetarian. You may obtain different answers, depending on how a person defines vegetarian. The word now has a positive connotation, as many people who are not actually vegetarian call themselves vegetarians.

In order to find an estimate of the number of “true” vegetarians, VRG commissioned Harris Interactive® to conduct an online survey asking U.S. adults the following question:

Which of the following foods, if any, do you never eat? Please select all that apply.

I never eat....:

- Meat
- Poultry
- Fish/Seafood
- Dairy Products
- Eggs
- Honey
- I sometimes eat all of these foods.
- Don't know.

In the survey, 3% of U.S. adults indicated they never eat meat, poultry, and fish/seafood. They were classified as vegetarian. About 1/3 to 1/4 of the vegetarians (one percent of the U.S. adult population) also never eat dairy, eggs, and honey, and were classified as vegan. Eight percent of respondents said they never eat meat. Remember, that when marketing vegetarian and vegan foods, you also need to look at the much larger number of people interested in these items, as well as those actually vegetarian. With 5% of females 18-34 being vegetarian, and 12% of females ages 18-34 not eating meat, this makes a strong statement for companies and restaurants to develop more meatless products and dishes for these consumers.

Based on this data, about 3% of the U.S. adult population is vegetarian. We can therefore estimate there are approximately 6-8 million adult vegetarians in the United States.

Also when looking at this data, we see that vegans appear to make up a high percentage of vegetarians. Vegans are often the activists who do promotion, so when developing new products, companies should keep these vegans in mind.

For additional vegetarian polls, see <http://www.vrg.org/nutshell/faq.htm#poll>.

DATA FROM THE HARRIS INTERACTIVE QUICK QUERY SM online omnibus:

ADULTS IN THE UNITED STATES
WHO ARE VEGETARIAN

- 3% Total (This was rounded from 3.4%.)
- 3% Male (Rounded from 3.3%)
- 3% Female (Rounded from 3.4%)
- 5% Female, ages 18-34 (Rounded from 5.2%)
- 3% Northeast (Rounded from 3.3%)
- 1% Midwest (Rounded from 1.3%)
- 4% South (Rounded from 3.5%)
- 5% West (Rounded from 5.4%)
- 1% Vegan (0.8% never eat meat, fish, fowl, dairy, eggs, or honey)
- 1% Would be Vegan, except for honey (Rounded from 1.3%)

ADULTS IN THE UNITED STATES
WHO NEVER EAT MEAT

- | | |
|-----|--------------------|
| 8% | Total |
| 11% | West |
| 12% | Female, ages 18-34 |
| 9% | Male, ages 18-34 |
| 15% | Student |

METHODOLOGY

Harris Interactive® fielded the study on behalf of The Vegetarian Resource Group from May 1-5, 2009 via its QuickQuery SM online omnibus service, interviewing a nationwide sample of 2,397 U.S. adults aged 18 years and older. Data were weighted using propensity score weighting to be representative of the the total U.S. adult population on the basis of region, age within gender, education, household income, race/ethnicity, and propensity to be online.

Using traditional methods, with a pure probability sample of 2,397 adults, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of 2.7% percentage points. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

Nonprobability samples can still be representative of the population, but cannot depend upon the rationale of probability theory.

ABOUT HARRIS INTERACTIVE

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