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How Many Youth Are Vegetarian?

The Vegetarian Resource Group Asks in a 2010 National Poll

By Charles Stahler

Today we see commercials for soymilk on TV, veggie burgers in most supermarkets, and even vegetarian TV cartoon characters, such as Lisa Simpson. Vegan bakeries seem to be popping up in most major cities. National restaurant chains like Subway sell meatless sandwiches. In The Vegetarian Resource Group student scholarship contest, VRG has received entries from Texas, Kansas, and Louisiana, as well as California and New York. So what is the wave of the future? How many young vegetarians are there in the United States?

When asking about the number of vegetarians, you may obtain very varied answers, depending on how a person defines vegetarian. The word has a positive connotation, as illustrated by the many people who are not actually vegetarian, but call themselves vegetarian.

In order to find an estimate of the number of younger "true" vegetarians in the United States, VRG commissioned Harris Interactive® to conduct an online survey querying eight to eighteen year olds with the following:

*Please tell us which of the following foods, if any, do you never eat?
I never eat... Meat; Poultry; Fish/Seafood; Dairy Products; Eggs; Honey; I eat all of these foods.*

The survey results indicate that 7% of 8- to 18-year-olds never eat meat, while 12% of males ages 10 to 12 stated they don't eat meat. In a [2009 Vegetarian Resource Group Harris poll](#), a similar 8% of adults said they never eat meat. Note that other surveys which don't use the word "never," are likely to find even more people don't eat meat.

In the poll, 3% of U.S youth indicated they never eat meat, poultry, and fish/seafood. They were classified as vegetarian. About 1/3 of the vegetarians (1% of the U.S. youth population) also never eat dairy, eggs, and honey, and were classified as vegan. One-third of the vegetarians (1% of the U.S. youth population) were vegan, except for honey.

Thus, about two-thirds of vegetarians (2% of the U.S. youth population) are either vegan, or vegan except for honey. When marketing to vegetarians, these numbers make a good case for producing vegan products, as well as creating items which will appeal to youth who are not vegetarian, but don't eat meat. Remember that vegans also tend to be the "activists," who will push your product or business.

We would estimate about 1.4 million youth in the United States are vegetarian, while about three million never eat meat. This brings up the "veto factor." When going out to eat, if one individual in a group of youth is vegetarian, the whole group may "veto" a restaurant which only serves meat, and choose a restaurant with a vegetarian alternative. So for restaurants, offering meatless options has more of an impact beyond just meeting the needs of the vegetarians.

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

YOUTH (8-18) IN THE UNITED STATES WHO NEVER EAT MEAT

- 7% Total
- 8% Male
- 7% Female
- 8% Ages 8 - 12
- 7% Ages 13 - 18
- 12% Male, Ages 10 - 12
- 3% Female, Ages 10 - 12
- 5% Male, Ages 13 - 15
- 9% Female, Ages 13 - 15
- 9% East*
- 9% South
- 6% Midwest
- 6% West

VEGETARIAN YOUTH (8-18) IN THE UNITED STATES

- 3% Vegetarian (Includes vegans and vegan except honey)
- 2% One percent vegan, plus one percent vegan except for honey
- 1% Vegan, except honey (Rounded down to 1%.)
- 1% Vegan (Rounded up to 1%.)
- 3% Male Vegetarians
- 3% Female Vegetarians
- 2% Female Vegans, and vegan except honey
- 3% Male Vegans, and vegan except honey

(Note: Not all young male vegetarians are vegan. Remember that numbers aren't exact because of rounding and sampling error.)

- 4% Vegetarians Ages 8-12
- 3% Vegetarians Ages 13-18
- 4% Vegetarians in the East
- 4% Vegetarians in the South
- 2% Vegetarians in the Midwest
- 2% Vegetarians in the West

OTHER

- 22% Never eat fish
- 7% Never eat poultry
- 7% Never eat Meat
- 11% Never Eat Eggs
- 6% Never Dairy Products
- 21% Never Eat Honey

Methodology

Harris Interactive® fielded the study on behalf of The Vegetarian Resource Group from January 13 to January 19, 2010, via its YouthQuerySM online omnibus service, interviewing a nationwide sample of 1,258 U.S youth aged 8 to 18 years old. Data were weighted using propensity score weighting to be representative of the total U.S. 8- to 18-year-old 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, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of about three percentage points. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This is an online poll, using an opt-in sample. Because sampling techniques are not based on a pure probability sample, it is not possible for Harris to quantify or estimate sampling error. Nonprobability samples can still be representative of the population, but cannot depend upon the rationale of probability theory. The data is weighted to reflect the composition of the entire US population of 8-18 year olds.

* The East includes: Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia. The Midwest includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The South includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The West includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Wyoming, and Washington.

About Harris Interactive

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