

How Many Vegetarians Are There?

A 2000 National Zogby Poll sponsored by the Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG).

In order to get a clearer sense of vegetarianism/veganism in the US, the VRG asked this question in its recent National Zogby poll: "Please tell me which of the following foods, if any, you never eat? Meat, Poultry, Fish/Seafood, Dairy Products, Eggs, Honey."

Defining vegetarians as those who never eat meat, poultry, or fish, Zogby arrived at the figure 2.5% of the statistical population who can be considered vegetarian. About three in four people (72%) responded that they eat all of the foods on the list, and those who eschew meat numbered 4.5%. (Note that this figure includes the 2.5% whom we have already defined as vegetarian).

The Vegetarian Resource Group Zogby poll surveyed 968 adults, 18 and older. A random sample of listed telephone numbers was used, which probably excludes military barracks, nursing homes, and hospitals since those phone numbers are generally unlisted. The population of the United States in January of 2000 was about 274 million, according to the US Census Bureau website. The number of non-institutionalized adults is closer to 190 million. (Zogby found a 1994 figure that estimates that there are more than 193 million eligible voters.) So we can extrapolate to say there are about 4.8 million non-institutionalized vegetarian adults in the United States. Of course the market for vegetarian products is much higher than this since so many meat eaters are now buying veggie foods. For example, in a poll The Vegetarian Resource Group did in 1999, we found that 57% of the population sometimes, often, or always orders a vegetarian item when eating out. We are currently polling teens and children and will furnish these figures in a future issue of the Vegetarian Journal.

In [1994](#) and [1997](#), the VRG asked the same question in a Roper Poll. The number of vegetarians then was about one percent, and the number of non-meat-eaters was between five and six percent. We were told then that in future surveys, we could only be sure of a definite statistical movement if the percentages changed by 3 or more percentage points. Therefore, a jump from 1% to 2.5% could be great news, but we can't be sure.

Whenever you consider poll results such as these, be sure to remember the margin of error, which can make a great deal of difference, especially in subgroups. For the full statistical population (total of those surveyed results), you may assume a margin of error of +/- 3%. The margin of error grows as the subgroup size shrinks, changing to +/- 9% for subgroups of 100. For much smaller groups, such as the Latino population listed below, you can assume an even more generous margin of +/- 11%. What we can be sure of is a 95% confidence level in the survey, meaning that if the same survey were repeated 100 times, 95 times the same responses would be returned. Zogby tells us that we can also be 95% certain about the number of vegetarians and vegans.

According to this poll, the people most likely to never eat meat, poultry, or fish are those living on both coasts, residents of large cities, and women working outside the home. Interestingly, the split between male and female vegans is about equal, while twice as many women are vegetarian as men. About six percent of 18-29 year olds said they never eat meat, poultry, or fish.

If these numbers hold up in future surveys, then we see that there is certainly a quiet revolution going on. No wonder so many major companies are positioning themselves for the future by buying natural foods companies! The question is whether these big companies can navigate through the niche markets and develop their vegetarian, vegan, and organic product lines in the future. Although we perceive this trend of a strong demand for vegetarian items, a product won't succeed just because it is vegetarian; it has to taste good to the mass market, including non-vegan/vegetarians, in order to survive on grocery store shelves.

Those who responded that they don't eat any of the foods on the list amounted to about 0.9% of the statistical population. This is consistent with our results from previous surveys. However, you should note that this means that 9 people out of 968 surveyed are considered true vegans. Ask your local statistician whether she or he would feel comfortable making conclusions about how many vegans there are in the country based upon these group populations. Stay tuned to the [Vegetarian Journal](#) for the youth poll results and other reports that help to track the evident demand for organic, vegetarian, and vegan products in the US.

THE VEGETARIAN RESOURCE GROUP ZOGBY POLL RESULTS

(January, 2000 nationwide United States survey of non-institutionalized adults)

Note: The margin of sampling error is +/- 3.3%. Per Zogby, there would be a +/- 9% margin of sampling error when looking at subgroups of 100 people.

Please tell me which of the following foods, if any, you never eat?

2.5% Meat, poultry, fish
4.5% Meat
4.5% Poultry
9.0% Fish/Seafood
3.7% Dairy Products
6.7% Eggs
15.4% Honey
0.9% Don't eat any of the foods on the list (vegans)

NEVER EAT MEAT

4.5% Total of those surveyed
7.5% East
3.5% South
1.9% Central Great Lakes
6.1% West
10.4% Ages 18-29
3.4% Ages 30-49
6.4% Ages 18-24
8.6% Ages 25-34

8.8% Large City
1.2% Small City
4.5% Suburbs
2.3% Male
6.6% Female

NEVER EAT MEAT, POULTRY, OR FISH (Vegetarians)

2.5% Total of those surveyed
3.5% East
1.8% South
1.3% Central Great Lakes
4.2% West
6.0% Ages 18-29
2.3% Ages 30-49
0.7% Ages 50-64
1.6% Ages 65 plus
3.7% Ages 18-24
5.6% Ages 25-34
1.8% Ages 35-54
1.6% Ages 55-69
1.4% Ages 70 plus
5.4% Large City
0.4% Small City
2.0% Suburb
2.2% Rural
1.6% White
9.4% Latino (we suspect this is a statistical error)
3.5% Afro-American
8.1% Asian
1.7% Male
3.2% Female

NEVER EAT ANY FOODS LISTED(Vegan)

0.9% Total of those surveyed
1.9% East
1.9% Large City