

How Many Youth Are Vegetarian?

The Vegetarian Resource Group Asked in a 2005 National Poll

by Charles Stahler

Vegetarian foods seem to be everywhere. Supermarkets are now carrying soymilk, most restaurants have vegetarian options, and even fast food chains are offering or testing veggie burgers.

The market for a company producing a vegetarian product is much broader than the number of vegetarians or vegans in the country. For example, some colleges have said more than 20 percent of their students are eating vegetarian foods, though some customers may have both a vegetarian selection and a meat item on their plates.

In a 2004 nationwide survey by Aramark, nearly a quarter of college students said finding vegan meals on campus was important to them. The popularity of meatless foods has certainly created many opportunities for businesses and made life easier for vegetarians.

However, the Vegetarian Resource Group wanted to know how many young people today are actually vegetarian. As we have done with our other polls, we posed the following statement:

Please tell us which of the following foods, if any, you never eat:

- **Meat**
- **Poultry**
- **Fish/Seafood**
- **Dairy Products**
- **Eggs**
- **Honey**

Because we use the word “never” and name the foods, our tallies will be different from those in other polls that simply ask if one is a vegetarian. Those polls are more dependent on personal definitions.

In this year’s poll, 3 percent of 8- to 18-year-olds are vegetarian (that is, they say they never eat meat, poultry, or fish/seafood.) A whopping 11 percent of 13- to 15-year-old females said they never eat meat. We can see why so many companies are expanding into the meatless meals market. Even if these teens don’t remain completely vegetarian throughout life, they and their families are likely to form a sizable audience for appealing vegetarian foods.

Dietary Habits of 8- to 18-Year-Olds in the United States in 2005

100%	Total 8- to 18-year-olds
6%	Never eat meat
6%	Never eat poultry
24%	Never eat fish/seafood
3%	Never eat dairy products
8%	Never eat eggs
22%	Never eat honey
3%	Never eat meat, poultry, fish/seafood (vegetarian)
1%	Never eat meat, poultry, fish/seafood, dairy products/eggs (vegan, except for possibly honey)

The 2005 survey results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points, so the figures given in this article should *not* be taken as exact and can't be truly compared with past surveys due to a difference in question wording and in the ages of those surveyed. However, this number generally agrees with [our previous adult and teen polls](#). Therefore, we feel pretty safe estimating that 2-3 percent of young people are vegetarian. Based on this year's 3 percent and the 2000 U.S. Census, we would estimate that approximately 1.4 million American 8- to 18-year-olds are vegetarian. We also can calculate that approximately 2.7 million don't eat meat, based on the 6 percent that reported this fact. Again, keep in mind that many times that number of people consume vegetarian products.

In our 1995 and 2000 Roper Poll questions, 2 percent of 6- to 17-year-olds never ate meat, fish, or poultry. Again, polls can't be compared directly, so we don't really know if there has been an increase. Nevertheless, we feel confident that approximately 2-3 percent of young people are vegetarian, and this trend is likely to continue.

Percentage of Various Youth Groups That Never Eat Meat

6%	Total Youth Aged 8-18
4%	Male
8%	Female
5%	8- to 12-year-olds
7%	13- to 18-year-olds
11%	13- to 15-year-old females
9%	16- to 18-year-old females
6%	East
5%	South
8%	Midwest
7%	West

The vegan figure fits our past estimates of one-third to one-half of vegetarians being vegan. From our observation, this appears to have changed greatly in the last 20 years. For example, in a 1992 *Vegetarian Times* survey, the magazine stated that 4 percent of self-reported vegetarians from the general population were vegan, avoiding all animal products, including milk, cheese, and eggs. It seems surprising that today such a large number of youth are vegan, but perhaps those born in the U.S. who become “true vegetarians” (never eat meat, fish, or fowl) and who remain vegetarian tend to become vegan. Some may also add other types of animal products besides dairy and eggs, and thus they would not be in the “true vegetarian” class.

The number of vegans may have implications for food companies producing new vegetarian foods. The majority of consumers are not vegan, but the activists who will promote a product in the marketplace are. Especially if companies don’t have large advertising budgets and are dependent on word-of-mouth promotion, they may benefit more from keeping their products vegan.

For past poll information, see www.vrg.org.

Methodology

Harris Interactive® conducted the online survey on behalf of The Vegetarian Resource Group between April 14 and 18, 2005, among a nationwide sample of 1,264 U.S. youth aged 8- to 18-years-old of whom 650 were male and 614 were female. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, highest

level of education, highest level of parents' education, and region were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population.

Though this online sample is not a probability sample, in theory, with probability samples of this size, Harris Interactive estimates with 95 percent certainty that the results for the overall sample have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire population of U.S. youth aged 8-18 were polled with complete accuracy. Sampling error for the various sub-sample results is higher and varies.

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