

PMA Research Reveals Snapshot of Vegetarians, New Flexitarians

Consumers who report they eat a produce-centered diet are occupying an increasingly significant place at today's dining table, according to new research from the Produce Marketing Association (PMA).

PMA commissioned Opinion Dynamics Corporation this summer to survey 1,000 consumers to assess the status of vegetarianism in America and vegetarians' attitudes about fruits and vegetables in particular. A "vegetarian" was defined as someone whose diet excludes all beef, pork, poultry, fish, shellfish and animal products of any kind. The survey also studied "flexitarian" consumers who eat a mostly vegetarian diet that allows occasional meat.



Respondents reported at least one flexitarian in 14 percent of households and at least one vegetarian in 3 percent. Notably, 32 percent of respondents in flexitarian households reported the level of flexitarian eating had increased in the last few years, while 29 percent of respondents in vegetarian households reported vegetarian eating had increased.

"About one in five households has at least one person who is putting fruits and vegetables center of the plate, and this interest in fruits and vegetables is increasing," said PMA President Bryan Silbermann.

Vegetarians and flexitarians also report that better health is an especially important dietary motivation, classifying fruits and vegetables as "extremely important" to a healthy diet much more so than non-flexitarians/vegetarians (respectively, 87, 83 and 62 percent).

Nonetheless, vegetarians' and flexitarians' fruit and vegetable repertoire isn't particularly adventurous, according to PMA research. For example, berries were absent from the list of foods consumers most often reported as most important to their diets.

"Our industry has a tremendous opportunity to increase these key customers' consumption even more," said Silbermann. "Our collective mouths should be watering at that prospect, as well as our customers'."

Silbermann stressed the need to provide tasty fruits and vegetables everywhere flexitarian and vegetarian consumers shop for food, including retail and foodservice.

Most respondents believe that a mostly fruit and vegetable diet is a good bargain; 59 percent reported they thought a diet with meat, fish and animal products would cost more over the course of a year.

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