

Twin Cities Dining Survey

An HRC-Managed Research Study, January 2012



Report in Brief

This report is written on behalf of Animal Rights Coalition, in fulfillment of the Grassroots Research Fund Grant from the Humane Research Council (HRC). The report summarizes results of the Twin Cities Dining Survey, examining dining behaviors, foie gras consumption, and knowledge of and attitudes toward foie gras among adults the Twin Cities area, which is comprised of the St. Paul, Minnesota and Minneapolis, Minnesota metropolitan areas.

Respondents were recruited by Survey Sampling International to take an online survey developed, administered, and maintained by HRC. The report is based on 517 surveys of adults in the Twin Cities area, completed between December 19, 2011 and December 29, 2011. Sampling quotas and statistical weights based on Census Bureau data were applied to create a representative sample of the adult population in the Twin Cities area.

The survey found a general lack of knowledge among Twin Cities residents about foie gras production and also revealed that it is rarely consumed among this population. Further, once respondents learned of foie gras production, they were likely to support a total ban on the production of foie gras in the state of Minnesota and most indicated they would also be likely to avoid dining at restaurants that serve foie gras.

HRC Information

The Humane Research Council is a nonprofit organization dedicated to maximizing the effectiveness of animal advocates by applying professional, cost-efficient, and informative consumer and market research methods.

To learn more about the Humane Research Council, please contact us:

By phone: (206) 905-9887

By e-mail: info@humanereseach.org

Online: <http://www.humanereseach.org>

By post: Post Office Box 6476
Olympia, WA 98507-6476



Overview and Discussion

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Most Twin Cities residents are unfamiliar with foie gras, indicating a need for education about foie gras production. Nearly half (44%) of respondents indicated that they had never heard of foie gras.
- Additionally, after hearing a description of foie gras production practices, 21% of respondents indicated that, although they had heard of foie gras previously, they thought it was produced differently.
- Three-quarters (74%) of Twin Cities residents support a ban on foie gras production in the state of Minnesota.
- After learning about how foie gras is produced, nearly half (45%) of respondents said they would avoid dining at restaurants that serve foie gras. Another 31% of respondents said it would depend on the circumstances.
- A small niche market for foie gras does exist. About 4% of respondents eat foie gras at least once a month, and many of them tend to pay more per meal than the average Twin Cities resident.

METHODS

Adults in the Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota metropolitan areas (aka Twin Cities area) were surveyed about their dining habits and knowledge of and attitudes toward foie gras. Survey Sampling International recruited participants for an 11-question internet survey. HRC developed and administered the survey and managed all data.

Sampling quotas and statistical weights were applied for gender, age, and income. Due to the small population of affluent residents in higher income brackets, these individuals were underrepresented in our final sample. Because foie gras is an expensive food item, it is important that this group is accurately represented; therefore, the data has also been weighted by income. All respondents who did not provide information about their income were removed from the sample, resulting in a final sample of 517 adults residing in the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan areas. See Appendix A for more information on the demographic makeup of the Twin Cities population, the sample population, and the final weighted sample.

DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

Dining out [Q1]: Most Twin Cities residents dine out fewer than three times per week. About one third (29%) of respondents eat out less than once per week, with another one-third (32%) eating out about 1 time per week, and 29% eating out about 2-3 times per week. Dining out was significantly related to age ($p \leq .001$), with those in younger age brackets generally more likely to eat out.¹

Cost of meals [Q2]: A majority of adults in the Twin Cities area spend \$15 or less on the average restaurant meal, with 22% of respondents spending less than \$10 and 43% spending between \$10 and \$15. Only 5% of respondents indicated spending more than \$30 on the typical restaurant meal. The amount of money spent on restaurant meals was significantly related to income ($p \leq .001$), but not to other demographic characteristics. Most of those spending over \$20 on an average meal have an annual income of \$50,000 or more.

Foie gras consumption [Q3]: Foie gras is a relatively unknown and unpopular food item. Nearly half (44%) of respondents had not heard of foie gras. Among those who did know what foie gras is, three-fifths (59%) indicated that they “never eat foie gras.” In all, only 18% of the respondents indicated eating foie gras and over half of these respondents eat it “less than 1 time a year.” Foie gras consumption was correlated with age ($p \leq .001$), with younger age groups having higher proportions of foie gras eaters. Foie gras consumption did not significantly vary by gender. Surprisingly, consumption was also unrelated to income.

Should foie gras be banned in Minnesota? [Q4]: When provided an explanation of how foie gras is produced, three-quarters (74%) of respondents indicated that they think that force feeding ducks and geese to produce foie gras should be banned in Minnesota. This question was asked using the same wording used in the past by Zogby International on similar polls in other cities/states, so that results can be compared. Respondents in the Twin Cities area were less likely to agree with banning the practice than were respondents in Pennsylvania (85%), Chicago (79%), and New York City (77%). Support for a ban on foie gras varied significantly by age ($p \leq .05$) and income ($p \leq .01$), however, in all age and income categories the majority of respondents agreed with a ban on the practice in Minnesota.

Knowledge of foie gras production [Q5]: Most adults in Minneapolis and St. Paul are unaware of how foie gras is produced. In total, only one-fifth (20%) of respondents indicated that they knew how it was produced. Fifty eight percent had never heard of foie gras before and 21% had heard of it but were unaware of how it was produced. This difference did not vary significantly by any of the demographic characteristics examined.

Interestingly, when initially asked if they had heard of foie gras (see Q3), 44% of respondents said that they had never heard of foie gras. After reading a paragraph describing foie gras,

¹ Pearson’s Chi square was used to test for correlations.

58% (a 14% increase) indicated they had never heard of it. Though the reason for this discrepancy is unclear, it is reasonable that a number of respondents realized that they were wrong in their initial thoughts about what foie gras was, further indicating a general lack of knowledge about foie gras.

Eating at restaurants that serve foie gras [Q6 and Q7]: Respondents who indicated in the previous question that they were aware of how foie gras was produced (N=94) were also asked if they have ever decided not to eat at a restaurant in the past because it served foie gras. Over one-fifth (22%) of respondents answered that they had decided not to eat at a restaurant because they served this item. This finding varied significantly by age group ($p \leq .05$), but in no linear pattern.

All respondents were then asked if they thought that, in the future, knowing that a restaurant served foie gras would impact their decision to eat there. A minority (18%) of respondents said it would have *no* effect, while a plurality of nearly half (45%) of those surveyed said that they would “avoid dining at that restaurant.” About one-third (31%) indicated it might have an effect, depending on the circumstances, and 7% were unsure. Women were much more likely to indicate they would not dine at a restaurant that serves foie gras when compared with men (52% versus 37%; $p \leq .01$).

The decision not to dine at restaurants serving foie gras also varied significantly by income ($p \leq .05$); the proportion of those making less than \$30,000 who responded that they would not dine at a restaurant serving foie gras was greater than in the other income brackets. Among those in the \$50,000-\$99,999 income bracket, about 40% indicated they would not dine at a restaurant serving foie gras, while another 40% said they may refuse to eat at a restaurant, depending on the circumstances. The split was more even among those in the \$100,000-\$149,999 income bracket, with about a third of those in this income bracket responding in each category—34% would refuse to eat at a restaurant that served foie gras, 30% said it would have no effect, and 36% said it would depend on the circumstance. Among the highest earners ($\geq \$150,000$ in annual income), most (75%) indicated they might refuse to eat at a restaurant serving foie gras, depending on the circumstances, while another 25% said it would make no difference. Interestingly, no one in this highest income bracket said they would refuse to eat at a restaurant that serves foie gras.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this survey show that foie gras is an unpopular food item among adults in the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan areas. Not only do few people eat foie gras, there is support for banning foie gras production. It is also important to note that, while there is generally little knowledge about foie gras, once they are informed most people would choose not to eat foie gras and many are even willing to avoid dining at a restaurant that serves foie gras. This highlights a need among advocates to make education a part of their campaigns against both the sale and production of foie gras.

Because foie gras tends to be eaten in restaurants rather than at home, to fully understand the impact of humane education on foie gras consumption, patterns in attitudes and behaviors should be examined in light of respondents' dining behavior. Foie gras is also an expensive food item that tends to be sold as a delicacy in restaurants with higher entrée prices, so the amount of money people spend eating out is also important to address when evaluating these findings. As such, HRC analyzed the relationship between foie gras consumption, frequency of eating out, and income. Frequency of foie gras consumption was *not* significantly related to income, but it was correlated with the amount of money spent on the average meal and the frequency with which people eat out.

Among those who eat out the most (i.e. six or more times per week), 27% indicate that they eat foie gras at least once a month. While this is a greater proportion than any other group, 29% of respondents in this category also indicate they never eat foie gras and 26% have never heard of foie gras. Among those who indicate eating foie gras at least once a month, only 8% eat out with great frequency—43% eat out 3-4 times per week and about one-quarter (23%) of them eat out only once per week. What this means is that those who do eat foie gras frequently are not the most frequent diners, and so they are likely not the primary target audience for most restaurants.

There does appear to be a small niche market for foie gras among a minority of people who are willing to pay more for restaurant meals. Twenty-seven percent of those who spend \$31-\$40 on an average restaurant meal as well as 26% of those who spend more than \$40 eat foie gras at least once per month. Though these percentages may seem large, it is only about 2% of the overall population. However, it does indicate that there is a niche market for the item. Also noteworthy is that within the younger cohorts there are comparatively larger proportions of regular foie gras eaters (though the total percentage of regular foie gras consumers remains low). This may suggest that foie gras is currently a trendy item and its popularity among this group may wane.

Importantly, even among foie gras eaters there is a lack of support for foie gras once educated about its production. Attitudes toward foie gras were examined after removing everyone who said they have never eaten foie gras, never heard of it, or were not sure of their consumption. Looking only at those who responded that they have eaten foie gras (N=86), there remains an overwhelming lack of support. Once foie gras production was described for them, 70% of respondents agreed that the production of foie gras should be banned in Minnesota. Further, 31% indicated that in the future they would avoid dining at restaurants that serve foie gras and 42% said they *might* avoid dining at such places. Only 25% of those who eat foie gras said that a restaurant serving foie gras would have no effect on whether they would dine at a restaurant. This means that even among the minority of Twin Cities residents who eat foie gras (18%), most are at least willing to consider a ban on restaurants that serve the item, once they are educated about how it is produced.

These findings have implications for both restaurants and animal advocates. Most important for animal advocates is to recognize that there is little knowledge about how foie gras is produced, but that once people learn about the process they are not only likely to oppose it, but also likely to support making foie gras production illegal and are even willing to avoid restaurants that serve it. This latter point, that the typical Twin Cities diner will avoid restaurants that serve foie gras, is also important for restaurant managers and owners to understand. These managers/owners should note that foie gras is not a popular menu item. So few people eat it regularly, and so many more people find it a distasteful product, that it is in the best interest of restaurants to take it off of their menus.

Survey Results

NOTE: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Q1. About how often in an average week do you eat a meal at any restaurant?

	%
Never	4
Less than weekly	29
1 time a week	32
2-3 times a week	29
4-5 times a week	5
6 or more times a week	1
Not Sure	<1

Q2. When eating at a restaurant, how much do you spend on an average meal, not including food for other people?

	%
< \$10	22
\$10- \$15	43
\$16- \$20	19
\$21- \$30	11
\$31- \$40	2
> \$40	3
Not sure	1

Q3. How often do you eat foie gras?

	%
At least 1 time a month	4
At least 1 time a year	5
Less than 1 time a year	9
I never eat foie gras	33
I have never heard of foie gras	44
Not sure	4

Q4. Foie gras is an expensive food item served in some upscale restaurants. It is produced by force-feeding geese and ducks large quantities of food, causing the animals' livers to swell up to ten times their normal size. A long metal pipe is inserted into the animals' esophagus several times a day. The process can cause the animals' internal organs to rupture. Several European countries and the state of California have outlawed the practice as cruel.

Do you agree or disagree that force-feeding geese and ducks to produce foie gras should be banned in Minnesota?

	%
Agree	74
Disagree	12
Not Sure	14

Q5. The previous question described how foie gras is produced. Were you aware that this is how it is produced?

	%
No, I had never of heard of it before	58
No, I have heard of foie gras but thought it was produced differently	21
Yes, I was aware that this is how foie gras is produced	20

Q6. In the past, have you ever decided not to eat at a restaurant because they serve foie gras?

Note: This question was only asked to those who responded "Yes" to the previous question.
N=94

	%
Yes	22
No	78

Q7. In the future, if you learn that a restaurant serves foie gras, will that impact your decision to dine at that restaurant?

	%
Yes, I would avoid dining at that restaurant	45
No, it would have no effect	18
Maybe, it depends on the circumstances	31
Not Sure	7

APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS

NOTE: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Gender

	% in popula- tion	% in weighted sample	% in sample
Female	51	53	53
Male	49	47	47
Prefer not to say		0	1

Age

	% in popula- tion	% in weighted sample	% in sample
18- 24	12	11	12
25- 34	19	19	20
35- 44	18	22	20
45- 54	21	22	21
55- 64	15	17	16
65- 74	8	7	8
≥ 75	7	3	3
Prefer not to say		<1	<1

Ethnicity

	% in popula- tion*	% in weighted sample	% in sample
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	< 1	<1
Asian	5.7	3	3
Black or African American	7.3	3	4
Hispanic or Latino	5.4	2	2
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	<1	<1
White or Caucasian	78.6	88	88
2 or more races/ ethnicities	2.3	3	2
Other	.1	<1	<1
Prefer not to say		1	1

* The race/ ethnic breakup of the population includes individuals under the age of 18, as well as adults. The values for the sample population only include adults. These numbers were not used to generate quotas or to set weights.

[NOTE: Though data on ethnicity was collected, we did not set quotas for this and we did not discuss these findings in detail in this report. Even though ethnicity was significantly correlated with many of the survey questions, we are not focusing on these results due to the large number of ethnicity categories, the small number of people in a number of ethnic groups, and the fact that this survey is not necessarily representative of the racial and ethnic makeup of the Twin Cities area.]

What is your average annual household income?

	% in popula- tion	% in weighted sample	% in sample
< \$30,000	21	21	26
\$30,000- \$49,999	17	17	24
\$50,000- \$99,999	35	36	36
\$100,000- \$149,999	16	14	12
≥ \$150,000	11	11	3