



Sugar, Vegan Deli Slices, Whole Grains, Meat Genes – What Will Vegans and Vegetarians Eat? VRG Asks in a New National Harris Poll

Posted on April 18, 2012 by The VRG Blog Editor

By Charles Stahler

Food companies, marketers, researchers, students, and media for years have been asking The Vegetarian Resource Group about the number of vegetarians and vegans. But now that our audience is being taken much more seriously, we are being asked more in-depth questions.

Should items containing sugar whitened with bone char be labeled vegetarian? Will vegetarians eat veggie burgers cooked on a grill where meat was cooked? What about growing meat in a test tube? To help answer some of these questions, we wanted to find out what vegetarians and vegans are thinking. We did an informal survey of our *Vegetarian Journal* subscribers, booth attendees, and on-line visitors. But we also wanted to run a more scientific random poll, which can be extrapolated to the United States adult population.

First we commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a national telephone poll of a representative sample of 2,030 respondents. This gave us the number of vegetarians with a sampling error of plus or minus two percentage points. We then asked the vegetarians, vegans, and those interested in vegetarian meals:

If you're looking to buy a vegetarian product, you would purchase:

(Select all that apply.)

1. Your favorite veggie burger cooked on the same grill where meat is cooked, if the grill is cleaned first.
2. A vegetarian vegan deli slice sandwich in Subway.
3. Your favorite dessert containing sugar, if the source of sugar isn't specified.
4. A vegetarian dish containing leafy greens such as broccoli, kale, or collards.
5. A vegetarian dish containing whole foods such as lentils, chickpeas, or rice.
6. A meat alternative grown from animal cell DNA obtained ten years ago, which does not currently involve the raising of animals.
7. Your favorite dessert containing sugar whitened through a bone char filter, if bone char is not in the sugar.

8. None of the above

No answer

NUMBERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD COMPANIES, RESTAURANTS, HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, AND FOOD SERVICES

(The questions were asked of those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week.)

WOULD PURCHASE A VEGETARIAN DISH CONTAINING LEAFY GREENS SUCH AS BROCCOLI, KALE, OR COLLARDS

74% Total

77% Vegans

72% All Vegetarians including vegans

70% Vegetarians not including vegans

75% All those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week, not including vegetarians/vegans

Of note is that about three fourths of all audiences are looking for healthy greens, as your favorite dietitian and mom suggested. For restaurants, foodservices, and companies, that are only thinking meat analogs, producing items with green vegetables should seriously be taken into consideration. On the other hand since one quarter of those eating vegetarian meals may not go out of their way to purchase green vegetables, it should not be assumed that a vegetarian or someone eating vegetarian meals (or a meat eater) is automatically eating a healthy diet as suggested by health authorities. When evaluating a vegetarian (or meat eating) client's diet, a dietitian or other medical professional should specifically ask what is being consumed.

WOULD PURCHASE A VEGETARIAN DISH CONTAINING WHOLE FOODS SUCH AS LENTILS, CHICKPEAS, OR RICE

67% Total

80% Vegans

65% All Vegetarians including vegans

61% Vegetarians not including vegans

68% All those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week, not including vegetarians/vegans

This may be of concern long term that about 40% of vegetarians are not seeking whole foods. Dietitians, public health professionals, and educators may need to keep an eye on this. Vegans do appear to be looking for healthier meals.

WOULD PURCHASE YOUR FAVORITE VEGGIE BURGER COOKED ON THE SAME GRILL WHERE MEAT IS COOKED, IF THE GRILL IS CLEANED FIRST

56% Total

53% Vegans

57% All Vegetarians including vegans

58% Vegetarians not including vegans

56% All those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week, not including vegetarians/vegans

About half will purchase a veggie burger cooked on the same grill where meat is cooked, if the grill is cleaned first, and about half won't. We don't know what percentage of the non-purchasers will eat a veggie burger if the burger is cooked separately. Since people have different views, we believe this points towards labeling and disclosure so customers can make their own decisions. Even in small establishments, it may be possible to meet the needs of some vegetarians by working together. Various options include a microwave or separate pan on the grill. Education of food service staff may work to attract and keep new customers.

WOULD PURCHASE YOUR FAVORITE DESSERT CONTAINING SUGAR, IF THE SOURCE OF THE SUGAR ISN'T SPECIFIED

47% Total

25% Vegans

37% All Vegetarians including vegans

40% Vegetarians not including vegans

49% All those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week, not including vegetarians/vegans

Some vegetarians or vegans won't eat products with white sugar because of concern of the sugar being processed through bone char. See http://www.vrg.org/journal/vj2007issue4/2007_issue4_sugar.php

And some individuals don't want to consume added sugar at all, or only certain types of sugar for health or political reasons. Just over half of the people eating one or more vegetarian meals once a week are not choosing to buy a dessert if the source of sugar isn't specified. This is a very strong case for labeling.

Manufacturers, restaurants, and foodservices should label the source of their sugar so that consumers can make their own choices. This information should also be easy to find on product and restaurant websites. It makes sense that vegans would be most concerned about the sugar, but it is fascinating there was also a high level of concern among all those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week. If

a manufacturer or restaurant has a doubt about any ingredient being suitable, they certainly should label and disclose.

WOULD PURCHASE A VEGETARIAN VEGAN DELI SLICE SANDWICH IN SUBWAY

47% Total

54% Vegans

54% All Vegetarians including vegans

54% Vegetarians not including vegans

47% All those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week, not including vegetarians/vegans

Most chains and restaurants have added vegetarian burgers. About a half of those eating vegetarian meals and thus at least one quarter of the whole population would also buy vegan deli slices. It makes sense for restaurants and food services offering veggie burgers to take this next step and add and promote another convenient sandwich product.

WOULD PURCHASE YOUR FAVORITE DESSERT CONTAINING SUGAR WHITENED THROUGH A BONE CHAR FILTER, IF BONE CHAR IS NOT IN THE SUGAR

21% Total

3% Vegans

21% All Vegetarians including vegans

26% Vegetarians not including vegans

21% All those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week, not including vegetarians/vegans.

We were surprised that 80% of the people who eat vegetarian meals, but are not vegetarian, wouldn't purchase the sugar processed through bone char. Since they already eat meat, why would they care? Possibly many of these people didn't want a product with sugar, and bone char wasn't the issue. Or maybe the words "bone char" just sounded bad to them, and they don't care that it's an animal product. But it was striking that twice as many people would eat sugar if they didn't know the source as people who would eat the sugar processed through bone char if they knew this happened. There's no question that to meet the needs of consumers, companies should be labeling the sources of their ingredients so customers can make their own decisions. This question appears to be the only place where there was a truly large difference between vegans and vegetarians. But this issue still seems like it matters to many vegetarians and those eating vegetarian meals, who are not vegan.

WOULD PURCHASE A MEAT ALTERNATIVE GROWN FROM ANIMAL CELL DNA OBTAINED TEN YEARS AGO, WHICH DOES NOT CURRENTLY INVOLVE THE RAISING OF ANIMALS

11% Total

2% Vegans

4% All Vegetarians including vegans

5% Vegetarians not including vegans

12% All those that eat one or more vegetarian meals per week, not including vegetarians/vegans.

Some advocacy groups, individuals, researchers, and businesses see meat grown in a factory as the answer to numerous environmental and animal welfare issues. As of now, almost every vegetarian-interested consumer segment seems not to be ready for this product. It is to be expected that vegans wouldn't want to eat the product, but it's fascinating how many of the non-vegetarians are not ready for this development. These types of products should be labeled and disclosed so consumers will be able to make their own decisions in the marketplace.

METHODOLOGY

Harris Interactive conducted a survey within the United States by telephone on behalf of The Vegetarian Resource Group between March 15-18, 2012 and March 22-25, 2012, among a nationwide cross section of 2,030 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race, education, region, number of adults in household, and number of telephone lines were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the U.S. population.

For those that ate one or more vegetarian meals per week, we asked follow-up questions.

For the vegetarians, in theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results for the overall sample have a sampling error of plus or minus 10 percentage points. For those that ate one or more vegetarian meals per week, the sampling error would be approximately three percentage points. From our first question, we determined that forty seven percent or 982 respondents ate one or more vegetarian meals per week and asked the follow-up questions of these individuals.

Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys, including refusals to be interviewed (i.e., non-response), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors.

The data above are from the Harris Interactive telephone poll. The interpretation and analysis above are those of The Vegetarian Resource Group, and not directly a result of the poll. The thoughts are based on these numbers and other polls, as well as our other experience and research in the vegetarian

movement. These results and our conclusions can drastically change, especially as there are more vegetarians and vegetarians are more knowledgeable.

For more information on Vegetarian Resource Group polls, see

<http://www.vrg.org/nutshell/faq.htm#poll>

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